

Running Head: CULTURAL CLIQUES AND CONNECTORS

CULTURAL CLIQUES AND CONNECTORS: THE UTILIZATION OF PARTICIPATORY
ACTION RESEARCH AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION TO ENHANCE A
DIVERSITY-FOCUSED PEER LEADERSHIP POSITION AND ITS IMPACT

DISSERTATION

by

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CULTURAL CLIQUES AND CONNECTORS

Accepted by the Graduate Faculty, Texas Christian University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my amazing family; to my incredible wife, Annie, an inspiration who provides love, drive, strength and support for me while carrying a heavy load herself; to my boys, Noah and Emmett, who continue to give me joy and laughter daily and provide my greatest drive towards this research; to my mom and dad, Jim and Judy, who raised me to care, to do what is right, and love others kindly; to my additional loving parents, Teri, Jeff, and my father and mother-in-law Hui Qing and Hui Yaun, who love me and my family so well and bless us with wisdom and fun; to my grandparents, Jim, Pat, Peter, and Ruth, whose legacy and lessons of love permeate through our family and ethos; to my brother Aaron, who continues to love and support me in my most difficult times; to my incredible additional siblings, Wendy, Debbie, Albert, Katie, Alex, and Peter, who continue to be incredible sources of adventure and care; and to my nieces and nephews, A.J., Katherine, Ethan, Joey, and the ones on the way, who further my motivation to make this world a place that allows historically marginalized people to gain power and provide leadership and agency. I also want to acknowledge my remarkable professors and colleagues; to Dr. Huddleston, my dissertation chair who is a mentor, a motivator, and an incredible teacher of critical thought; to Dr. Fran Huckaby, my advisor whose empathetic teaching reshaped my mind and allowed me so much space for growth in my head and my heart; to Dr. Sarah Quebec Fuentes, who introduced me to PAR in a way that spoke to my ethos and gave me the tools to utilize it well; to Alex St. Louis, a wise friend and phenomenal co-conspirator whose care and support is her super power; to the entire Housing team at UNI, who supported me professionally so I could grow academically; and to the Cultural Connector Research Team, who engaged willingly, taught me so much, and are already making this world a better place.

ABSTRACT

CULTURAL CLIQUES AND CONNECTORS: THE UTILIZATION OF PARTICIPATORY
ACTION RESEARCH AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION TO ENHANCE A
DIVERSITY-FOCUSED PEER LEADERSHIP POSITION AND ITS IMPACT

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This study utilizes participatory action research (PAR) at a predominantly white institution to empower student peer leaders in diversity-focused positions to make collective programmatic changes to improve the Cultural Connector (CC) position and the impact it creates. Through a two-month PAR study, the voices of diversity-focused student leaders and their supervisors work collaboratively in determining actions that will improve the positions' impact on the CC as well as the students it engages. The Cultural Connector Research Team (CCRT), consisting of CCs, their supervisors, and myself, provide perspective, analyze data through participatory analysis and determine actions to elicit positive change. We work collaboratively to identify barriers hindering CCs in effort to create eight identifiable actions to produce impact to improve the position. In addition to initiating programmatic changes to the CC position, this study examines the use of PAR as a method to understand better the hegemonic and cultural barriers preventing actions that address institutional intercultural learning in students in a neoliberal university setting. Emerging findings, such as *cultural cliques* and *privileged apathy*, present barriers for the CCs and the institution itself. The applications of criticality towards a quasi-connected curriculum of *intercultural competency*

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learning in a university and the spatial implications within residence halls further troubles the hegemonic structures at play in a university and questions the degree actions like the ones produced in this study can impact the cultural hierarchy within the university.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The cultural hierarchy in American universities, reflecting the hegemony of the United States (Berg, 2012), guides the university as a cultural learning site and a marketplace of culture. Cultural hegemony (Gay, 2018) assumes that conventions, expectations, protocols, and practices based on one ethnic group's cultural standards are normative and universal to all present within the prescribed culture. At predominantly white and historically white universities such as the institution in this study (UNI), values held by the white students, white parents, white alumni, and white donors operate as a norming cultural standard. This cultural standard does not experience replacing, refreshing, or an end each year; instead, it builds into the institution's learning, economy, and space and place. The cultural standard then dominates through everyday exertions of power, oppressing those who do not hold power. Cultural hegemony creates the maximum amount of control with the minimum amount of conflict through material and social conditions (Gay, 2018). It reaffirms the meritocracy in universities by affirming that marginalized students will find success with enough effort and conformity to norming cultural standards (Warikoo, 2016). It strips away structural oppression and exclusion as legitimate barriers for marginalized students.

To address issues related to cultural hegemony, universities create and establish cultural learning mechanisms. Cultural learning mechanisms, such as efforts of diversity, equity, and inclusion, often find themselves adjacent to the academic curriculum at a university in core curriculum standards, study abroad programs, academic colleges, courses, and other co-curricular structured cultural learning requirements or offices at the university. This conglomerate of cultural opportunities places the action of learning about how to engage across cultures, or cultural lessons, alongside the culturally focused core curriculum a university may

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provide. Participating students experience intercultural lessons which can be at odds with the built curriculum and contribute to the cultural standard and hierarchy that exist within the institution. This study uses participatory action research (PAR) to amplify the student voices of those historically marginalized and articulate their voices towards increasing intercultural learning. The PAR approach of this study also aims to lessen structures of systematic power within the university's residence halls to support historically omitted students. When done well, PAR can give the students power towards learning and emancipation of systems and spaces that oppress them. This study uses PAR to learn what actions students will take when they have the power to make a change within a university. In addition, a meta-analysis of this study investigates how existing structures of the neoliberal university co-opt that power to retain social powers such as class dominance and white supremacy while keeping the marginalized students complacent and limiting their power towards emancipatory change (Giroux & Giroux, 2004; Hohle, 2015).

As neoliberalism is pervasive and encompassing in higher education as if it is in the air you breathe, and it is built into the foundation of the university itself as you walk across campus, one can find neoliberalism in almost every aspect of the college experience. This includes the *intercultural competency* learning produced by a university and the residence halls where students live. Treanor (2005) defines neoliberalism as:

a philosophy in which the existence and operation of a market are valued in themselves, separately from any previous relationship with the production of good services...and where the operation of a marker or market-like structure is seen as a substitution for all previously existing ethical beliefs (para. 17).

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Harvey (2007) and Seal (2018) argue that higher education has become corporatized and commoditized, where universities use programs like study abroad, student leadership positions, and initiatives of cultural learning to attract students to their institution to produce future marketable employees into a global market. Therefore, applying a critical lens to a neoliberal university's production of *intercultural competency* learning is necessary to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of who is teaching a particular cultural lesson and why.

Encouraging and maintaining a cultural university experience is complex. This study provides a critical look at the enacted curriculum of *intercultural competency* learning at UNI to understand better the impacts on students in peer leadership positions. UNI is producing *intercultural competency* mechanisms in intentional pockets, which are often disjointed from each other. UNI draws few distinct lines to connect *intercultural competency* learning on a student's path to graduation, and access for all students to engage is not present. The *intercultural competency* learning in residence halls does not intentionally intersect with other *intercultural competency* mechanisms in the curriculum, such as study abroad experiences. For example, participation in UNI's *intercultural competency* learning opportunities often occurs disproportionately amongst the student body, and expectations of how to treat others delivered in new student orientation do not necessarily correlate with diversity programming occurring in residence halls at UNI. A student's experience of these "pockets" of intercultural learning formulates their *intercultural competency* learning at UNI. The effect of experiencing *intercultural competency* in "pockets" at UNI is a disjointed engagement into multiple intercultural learning initiatives for students. First, intercultural learning opportunities are disjointed from one another and fail to build off the foundations of previous learning opportunities intentionally. Second, students are disjointed from each other as they do not share

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their engagement in *intercultural competency* learning as a collective curriculum. There are intended and unintended consequences of intercultural learning experiences (Leslie, 2019), and the lack of congruency and connection between learning mechanisms provides affirmations (experiences that build off of each other, even unintentionally, affirm the learning that occurs in each other) and contradictions (experiences that provide differing definitions, applications, or happening within oppressive contexts or places produce contradictions towards the value and understanding of *intercultural competency*) for the students who engage them (Terrell et al., 2018). While programs and initiatives providing these contradictions are problematic, the impact multiplies for diverse students in student peer leader positions focusing on cultural learning. The Cultural Connector (CC) position, which is the focal point of this PAR study, is a student peer leader position focusing on culture, which predominantly students from marginalized identities fill. UNI, the study site, is a university predominantly filled with white students and students of privilege. Therefore, it is essential to conduct a careful interrogation of the connection between the position and *intercultural competency* learning at UNI, the CC position's experience with residential students, and the CC position itself.

Individualized student experiences and leadership opportunities, like the CC, produce *intercultural competency* learning in the residence hall as a component of UNI Housing's *intercultural competency* learning and operate as a continuation of UNI's intercultural curriculum. Using a student peer leadership position for student education is not unusual for a university. One of the largest sects of employees within the university system are university students in peer leadership positions. Admissions, residence halls, teaching assistants, leadership programs, athletics, recreation centers, and many other university departments and programs pay and employ student positions in which students lead peers as a conduit to facilitate the overall

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community between students and administration. Research on peer leadership has shown that peer leaders directly impact increasing student "satisfaction, persistence and retention, social development, and academic performance" (Gansler & Kennedy, p. 17, 2012). University marketing initiatives and publications often display these student leaders as exemplars of the optimal student experience, detailing their impact on their fellow students and the university. Peer leaders hold a vital position for the institution's operations as a translator of the student experience and executor of the administration's policies and initiative (Ganser & Kennedy, 2012).

In diversity and inclusion initiatives, university administrators ask peer leaders to help increase the *intercultural competency* of their peers through programming and skill development. Deardoff (2011) posits that *intercultural competency* "applies to any who interact with those from different backgrounds, regardless of location", and that it is "effective and appropriate behavior and communication in intercultural situations, which again can be further detailed in terms of indicators of appropriate behavior in specific contexts" (p. 66). In order to increase *intercultural competency* in students, peer leaders must foster integral relationships and trust with students from various identities, such as race, class, religion, sexuality, gender, and age. The peer leader, often around the age of 19-22, must possess a high level of *intercultural competency* to foster these relationships and advocate for their peers. For some students, college can be the first time they encounter a different race, national origin, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic status, or another identity. Administrators expect that student peer leaders will guide these students through these different encounters while also identifying and navigating the cultural hegemony and neoliberalism the university is complicit in to provide a positive student experience. Administrators package this experience as a benefit to the student, one of learning

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and essential experiences and opportunity, which can mask the need the university has of the student peer leader in both the amount of a workforce they provide and the reduced cost of labor.

Theoretical Background

PAR refers to "an epistemology that engages research design, methods, analyses, and products through a lens of democratic participation and collective action" (Torre, 2014, para. 2). This epistemology designates space for constructivist frameworks, including the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) (Bennett, 1993) and Cultural Proficiency Essential Elements and Barriers to Cultural Proficiency (Terrell et al., 2018). Each of these frameworks recognizes the participants' prior cultural experience and knowledge in meaning-making and the ability to acquire new cultural learning and skills, which can elicit change in institutions, administrators, and students. This study utilizes these frameworks due to their current existence at UNI (Hightower, 2016) and their relationship to the *culture audit* appearing in this study (Terrell et al., 2018). This PAR study will use Cultural Proficiency Essential Elements and Barriers to Cultural Proficiency (Terrell et al., 2018) frameworks in data sorting, thematics, and decisions for action towards pragmatic change.

This study also applies critical spatial theory (Helfenbein & Huddleston, 2021) through meta-analysis to analyze how the university residence halls impact the *intercultural competency* learning within the halls. In doing so, understanding how the residence hall impacts the CCs and the opportunities of experiences within the buildings amplifies problematic aspects of UNI and PAR's impact on the experience and success of CCs and their residents. Identifying the connection between a curriculum of *intercultural competency* learning and the university, as well as the relationship those have to the impacts on larger societal structures of power from a spatial perspective, provides insight into the uphill climb towards making substantial gains towards

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intercultural competency and cultural understanding by the peer leaders in this study. It is not enough to amplify the voices of those omitted; as PAR aims to do, we must also trouble the physical structures and organizational systems that suppress those voices.

Importance of this Study

This study applies PAR to enact student-led programmatic change to a culturally focused student peer leader position (the CC), at a mid-sized private liberal arts university in the southwest United States (UNI). Peer leadership program improvement allows student voices to co-lead their pursuit of cultural understanding and cross-cultural relationship development. The inclusion of PAR also provides an apparatus for understanding the barriers culturally focused student peer leaders face, both from within and external to their position. Anderson (2017) identifies PAR as “democratic disruption” in his pursuit of utilizing PAR in the cooptation of school-based research. In discussing traits of PAR, Anderson (2017) states that PAR “is part pedagogy, part organizing, and part research” (p. 440). In a similar vein, this study also utilizes PAR for “democratic disruption” towards the understanding of hegemonic influences within the UNI residential community (Anderson, 2017). In utilizing this approach, this study applied student leadership and agency to make programmatic change, built student *intercultural competency*, and increased the understanding of barriers to the CC position to counter hegemonic and neoliberal barriers at a predominantly white institution (PWI). Afterward, this study applies a critical lens to the space and place to interrogate spatial implications (Helfenbein, 2015; Helfenbein & Huddleston, 2021) at UNI as a means to more deeply consider the merits of increasing *intercultural competency* under the backdrop of a neoliberal university.

The use of PAR incorporates a valued student perspective to pursue programmatic changes in a peer leadership position by focusing on intercultural development to increase

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intercultural competency in relationships and learning amongst residential students at UNI. Over 4,900 students live on campus at UNI, holding differing identities, experiences, and cultural worldviews (Hammer et al., 2003). Hammer et al. (2003) define *cultural worldview* as "the set of distinctions that is appropriate to a particular culture" (p. 423). Differing worldviews come into contact with each other at a high frequency at a university, especially in the residence halls. UNI, as an institution, has worked to define its culture and cultural viewpoints as well. The divergent viewpoints between individual students and between students and the university can make building a residential community on a college campus complex. For that reason, it is important to increase *intercultural competency* to build a community for learning and social connectedness. Increased *intercultural competency* does not just assist the university as a learning site; it also helps the university economically by attracting more diverse students and helping students matriculate towards graduation. Due to these benefits, the relationship between *intercultural competency* and the neoliberal university is both programmatic and pedagogical, impacting the university and its students in various ways. This study amplifies valuable student perspectives provided through PAR to produce actions to enhance the CC position and its impact on students while dampening the impacts of neoliberalism and hegemonic structures by listening to students' voices who are often unheard.

Though *intercultural competency* development through cultural learning may successfully cultivate *intercultural competency* at the individual student level, the hegemony universities exude hinder the overall pursuit of intercultural connectedness (Berrey, 2015; Warikoo, 2016). It is clear from the mission statement that UNI wants students to develop their *intercultural competency* and the education it provides regarding intercultural learning (UNI, 2020d). However, this can be problematic due to the hegemonic context that is the university.

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The university conducts itself as a site of education into *intercultural competency* learning while also operating as a site replicating the oppressive structures hindering *intercultural competency* learning. The onus of this study is rooted in applying PAR as a method of research, intervention, development, and action in an individual program to elicit change determined by those within the position. By utilizing PAR as a method for programmatic change, the experience gained by CCs conducting PAR also serves as an intervention to establish student authorship in the improvement of a leadership position to create higher intercultural learning for themselves. In addition to programmatic change, the PAR conducted in this study addresses the complexity that engaging in PAR can have on a culture-focused peer leader's view of intercultural dynamics and barriers at a PWI.

The Neoliberal University

Neoliberalism is the intentional creation, fortification, and indoctrination of free-market economic ideals and structure, established and maintained through the belief that individual freedom and the free market are bound and fused to ensure a free and just society. Neoliberalism works to free itself from the confines of state-controlled economics and limit the state in economic and individual citizen intervention. The allure of neoliberalism is palpable and charming to individual citizens, as it looks, at first glance, like an economic system that allows for individual freedom and upward socioeconomic and social class movement. However, with a deeper look, one can see how neoliberalism strengthens the current class systems and places authority in the hands “the few” who receive the majority of the economic profits. In the eyes of neoliberalism, it is individual access to the free market and the ability for an individual to participate in that market that signals freedom. As detailed by Hohle (2015), neoliberalism fuses the elite and privileged classes through the idea that economic growth is the cure for all social

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ills and provides freedom. Harvey (2007) contends that neoliberalism was sold to the public as a "utopian project" (p. 19), which would help individuals realize the money they deserved as well as the economic freedom to travel to a higher socioeconomic status. A more accurate description is a political project to fortify the economically advanced and increase capital for those citizens already in power.

Neoliberalism is embedded within higher education in several different ways. As stated earlier in this study, higher education has become corporatized and commoditized (Harvey, 2007; Seal, 2018) due to the eroding impact of corporate culture (Giroux, 2002). In the neoliberal university, the student is both a commodity of the university and a consumer at the university. Students and the university look to strengthen their brand to increase economic value, and "civil discourse has given way to the language of commercialism, privatization, and deregulation" (Giroux, 2002, p. 426). This brand development is due to the desire to build revenue and endowment and align college learning with corporate needs. The entrance of corporations into the educational sphere has also been impactful. From sponsored athletic arenas such as Texas Tech's Jones AT&T Stadium (Dosh, 2014) to Boeing Advanced Research Center at the University of Washington (Boeing, 2021) and other corporate sponsored events, offices, and experiences (Diep, 2020), neoliberalism has pervasively expanded into the student experience at the university and their trajectory beyond. Seal (2018) looks to further explore the commoditization of the college experience by tracing the path a prospective student takes towards attending and graduating from a university. In almost every aspect of the college experience, one can find neoliberalism, from the dorm where many live, the textbooks students must read, to the wage they will expect to earn once they graduate. Commoditization begins way before a student's first day on campus and can be seen in the recruiting and application process.

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As Cortes-Santiago et al. (2017) describe, "colleges and universities nationwide and internationally are increasingly using marketing slogans such as "best value for your money" and "great education and great ticket prices" to attract students, who respond to these discursive practices (p. 49). If these slogans sound familiar, it is because they are often used to sell items or commodities to the public. A vacuum cleaner box is likely to tell you that it is a great value for you to purchase it. Online event ticketing companies share their "great ticket prices" with customers as well. In these slogans, higher education has placed itself as a commodity in the eyes of the potential student, selling themselves to the student to secure their attendance and funds.

Simultaneously, as the university looks to commoditize itself (including experience and degree awarded), it also views the student as a commodity. Capturing scores and categorical information from incoming students, universities often boast about how their student's test scores compare to other universities to attract more rigorous students. The same can also be true for the intercultural learning that occurs at a university. Many universities market the initiatives at the university that promote diversity as a seemingly noble endeavor, which masks that diversity and intercultural learning are simultaneously presenting as a commodity. Diverse students who grace the cover of marketing material have their image used to promote identity representation at the university, regardless of whether it is present on campus. To white students, the commoditization of intercultural learning operates as an avenue to cater to cultural experiences while simultaneously protecting a hegemonic, white-centered experience. While it is difficult to reduce the neoliberal fingerprints on a university or the experiences it provides, this study attempts to understand if a student-centered democratic research approach, such as action research, can have a counterhegemonic impact.

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Purpose

UNI produces learning mechanisms increase the ability of students to relate and communicate across cultures through UNI core curriculum requirements (UNI, 2004), student evaluation using Mendenhall et al.'s (2008) Intercultural Effectiveness Scale (Hightower, 2016), study abroad experiences (Center for International Studies, n.d.), the Inclusive Excellence framework (Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, n.d.), diversity-focused student peer leader positions, and many other *intercultural competency* development courses, degrees, programs, departments, and initiatives. Although these mechanisms for *intercultural competency* development are not strategically connected, they create a series of developmental opportunities that form a curriculum of UNI's cultural expectations around learning across cultures. UNI's mission statement focuses on educating students towards ethical and responsible leadership and citizenship within the global community (UNI, 2019a). The diversity statement of UNI's Housing department articulates a "Vision and belief that through education on the multifaceted aspects of diversity, we can create respectful, accepting and open communities" (UNI, 2019b). *Intercultural competency* and proficiency are necessary from UNI's perspective for students integrating into the global community from a social standpoint through relationships and communication and an economic standpoint through job/degree acquisition and potential earnings. Neoliberalism heavily influences the economic integration perspective and is often at odds with *intercultural competency* learning (Collier, 2015). Impacting both the individual student and the university, the residential communities at UNI are a site where *intercultural competency* learning occurs alongside the neoliberal hegemony.

As UNI Housing hosts students from across the nation and globe in their halls, Housing's ability to communicate and relate to students with different cultural backgrounds is important. A

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student's sense of belonging and ability to be their whole cultural self helps in their retention, matriculation, and eventual graduation (Schreiner, 2012). Each student's ability to relate and communicate across cultures assists them in both finding belonging for themselves and fostering belonging for others in their residential community. UNI's competency and proficiency in facilitating *intercultural competency* learning towards cross-cultural relationships is important to the success of the student. UNI's curriculum of *intercultural competency* learning extends into the residence halls through the CC position. The results of this study will deliver improvements to the CC position, provide an understanding of the impact PAR has as an intervention to enhance *intercultural competency* in the CC position, and guide UNI Housing and Residence Life (Housing) Department towards understanding and addressing barriers that negatively impact the *intercultural competency* development of CCs and the residential students they serve.

Research Questions

Several thoughts guide this study and have helped formulate the research questions: i.e., *How do university intercultural learning and peer leadership positions change when the weight of students' voices are even to the perspective of administrators in power? What changes or actions would students take to impact student cultural learning that staff would not?* The Housing staff at UNI believes college students in the CC position will improve their *intercultural competency*. UNI's Housing office also believes the CC position is a vital part of UNI's efforts toward *intercultural competency* learning for students who live in the residence halls. UNI's Housing office conducts training and interventions designed to increase *intercultural competency* in CCs but has not seen measurable growth in the outcomes of the Housing measures.

Similarly, growth in measured outcomes of resident *intercultural competency* has also not increased. This study aims to acknowledge and give voice to the CCs as co-researchers to

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improve the CC position, increase its impact on the UNI residential community, and understand the barriers impeding the CC position. To do so, this study asks the following questions:

RQ1: What changes would Cultural Connectors make to their position to increase student *intercultural competency* learning in UNI residence halls?

RQ2: What impact does performing participatory action research have on student peer leaders' *intercultural competency*?

RQ3: What barriers exist that obstruct Cultural Connector development of peer *intercultural competency*?

Meta-Analysis

American universities "exists[] in a global, national, and social milieu that operates alongside politics, the economy, technology, and human movement" (Cortes-Santiago et al., 2017, p. 47). The defined context of the university is important to address how *intercultural competency* can exist within the hegemony of a PWI. Notably, the economic approach existing in the United States has profoundly influenced academic instruction in higher education and how higher education operates (Harvey, 2007). This approach can also be accurate in housing departments with a significant spatial and financial component at a university. For an institution such as UNI, which pursues a global focus and highlights diversity ambitions, analyzing the institution's pursuit of *intercultural competency* learning at a PWI is necessary. This study aims to understand the hegemonic implications and barriers that hinder CC development and facilitate a curriculum of *intercultural competency* learning at UNI. In order to address this dynamic, this study zooms out from the initial PAR study and analysis to examine the implications of how the

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space, place, and *intercultural competency* learning at UNI intersect and interact with the hegemony replicated at a neoliberal university.

Meta-RQ1: What is PAR's effectiveness in addressing spatial and curricular hegemonic exertions of power impacting *intercultural competency* learning within the context of a predominantly white university?

Terms and Definitions

Cultural Connector: The Cultural Connector (CC) position under the department of Housing at UNI is a part-time student leadership position. This position contributes to departmental and university missions by cultivating ethical leaders and responsible citizens in their residential communities. The CCs work to perform these contributions by assisting students in their transition and enriching their cultural development by creating dialogue and programs centered on diversity, inclusiveness, and multicultural topics.

Action Research: Action research focuses on the change in social systems through a research approach. Whyte (1989) describes action research, stating, "Action research explicitly and purposefully becomes part of the change process by engaging people in the program or organization in studying their problems in order to solve those problems" (p. 32).

Participatory Action Research (PAR): PAR is a form of action research that emphasizes the involvement of participants in the research and the actions to be taken in response to research findings. Schneider (2012) posits that in PAR, "the aim is to have ordinary community members generate new knowledge about issues and problems they care about. . . and through discussions promote personal and social change" (p.153).

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Culture: Terrell et al. (2018) synthesize that culture is "a set of practices and beliefs shared by members of a particular group that distinguish that group from other groups" (p. 21). This distinguishing includes but is not limited to forms of "human description, including age, gender, socioeconomic status, geography, ancestry, religion, language, history, sexual orientation, physical and mental level of ableness, occupation, and other affiliations" (p. 21).

Cultural Proficiency: Nuri-Robins et al. (2005) state, "Cultural proficiency is an inside-out approach that makes explicit the values and practices that enable both individuals and schools to interact effectively across cultures" (p.1). Cultural proficiency works to achieve a higher level of cultural understanding for individuals and institutions and move beyond the notion of being merely competent in cultural understanding and relationship forming. In doing so, individuals, groups, and schools will raise "awareness of and closing the gap between a person's expressed values and how he or she is actually perceived and experienced by clients, colleagues, and the community" (p.1).

Culture Audit: *Culture audits* work to "examine how diverse cultural perspectives are reflected in the values and behaviors manifested in the overall school culture" (National Center for Cultural Competence, 2005). *Culture audits* aid in the development of school-wide cultural competence (Lindsey et al., 2018), and Wagner and Madsen-Copas (2002) offer a five-step process of auditing, including interviews, observations, surveys, checklists, and a presentation to community stakeholders.

Researcher Positionality

The PAR methodological framework in this study allows for often unheard voices to amplify their experience to achieve change. This amplification is vital to me, as I am not

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voiceless nor often marginalized. As the primary researcher, my privilege within the hegemonic culture and UNI's organizational influence is a reason to add other voices into the research process and minimize the voice of another white academic speaking for marginalized students. As a straight, cisgender white male engaging this research as a doctoral candidate, while serving as the Assistant Director of Housing, I proceed cautiously. I recognize that I am both a product of the neoliberal university and a beneficiary of it. As students lean into the neoliberal notion that their human worth is tied to their university attendance, their major, and their market value when departing, the university strengthens economically.

Identifying researcher positionality to give more clarity into the complex set of roles and power administrators, such as myself, have at an institution is important (Anderson et al., 2007). I must be honest that hegemonic structures benefit me and oppress others, and my efforts to mitigate that can translate as an exertion of power instead of mitigation of privilege. As Anderson et al. (2007) state, "Carefully thinking through one's positionality within an organization is important in understanding how it may impact trustworthiness of the findings and the ethics of the research process" (p. 9). Applying critical towards my positionality, both as an insider researcher and my position in social structures of privilege and power, is also crucial to honestly engage in action research. In this way, positionality (Anderson et al., 2007) overlaps with reflexivity (Creswell, 2013) in pushing the researcher to be honest with participants and co-researchers in who they are in the study, what are their ambitions of the study, what the researcher stands to gain, and to whom we are reporting findings.

Just like any university, UNI is politically oriented and dedicates time and resources to ensuring a brand and reputation that sheds a positive light on the university. Due to the criticality of the analysis of this study and the protection of the participants, I have used a pseudonym for

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the site of this study. I found I could not be abstractly critical when using the university's real name. Even with the power and privilege I hold, I am not exempt from those with more power and their impact on my professional and academic success. I am not sure if it is my white fragility (DiAngelo, 2018) at play in this conclusion of concealment, and that is something with which I continue to wrestle. I intend to use this dissertation build towards real change for marginalized and historically omitted students, but I am also using the dissertation to graduate and retain future employment. Adjusting to a pseudonym felt a better choice in accomplishing both of those goals at once.

In this study, I work to limit additional privilege, increase marginalized voices, and hold up the valuable Black Indigenous Student of Color (BISOC) experiences in a PWI setting. As the Assistant Director of Housing at UNI, I oversee the upper-class residential student experience at UNI and supervise seven professional Hall Director (HD) staff. While I do not supervise or oversee the CC position or their leadership, I recognize the power dynamic that exists within my role in the Housing Department. Due to this dynamic, as well as the assistance of the HD and Graduate Assistant (GA) who do supervise the CC position, I have an "insider in collaboration with other insiders" (Herr & Anderson, 2014, p. 36) positionality in this PAR study. I am part of CCRT, but my primary goal differs from the other members of the team. My role and contribution are to mentor the CCRT through PAR and amplify other CCRT members' voices. Within my insider positionality, I recognize that my PAR knowledge strongly complements the CCs' knowledge of their own experiences. For this reason, I do not include my voice in CCRT data considered for actions within the study or findings included in this dissertation. However, I recognize that my presence was inextricable with the process and findings.

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Though I have worked to understand and address any bias that could impact this study, the totality of bias is never wholly known. In frameworks like the PAR framework, researchers use the process and method of conducting the study to teach and make space for participant emancipation. I have confidence that this study made an educational impact on involved co-researchers, both during and after the completion of the study. I selected the PAR framework because I accept that research experience is a learning experience. I believe the PAR approach encourages students to take an active role in their learning. When working with *intercultural competency*, it is even more important to me to seek understanding across cultural groups to foster a culture of working together to ensure the worth of all people. I believe that all parties positioning themselves as learners and co-researchers is the best approach to achieve this result.

This study works to identify best practices for enhancing *intercultural competency* learning in peer leaders through their lens by implementing findings produced by UNI students. It is essential to avoid weaponizing *intercultural competency* to produce an expectation of marginalized students teaching students of privilege about their culture, while an expectation to conform to the cultural norm remains. I do not pursue this work for everyone to get along or for cultural understanding to mean everyone adheres to an individual dominant culture. I do not want to further oppress BISOC by creating spaces where they carry the weight in teaching others about intercultural values to avoid white supremacy or discrimination. Students in this study made it clear that they often feel the burden of educating others while feeling tokenized or marginalized. I intentionally worked to ensure this study did not exacerbate that if possible.

By engaging in emancipatory research as a white man, I recognize that I am participating in the same “good whites” trust exercise detailed by Thompson (2003). It is not enough to consider my motives for entering the study. I needed to continue to ensure this work centers on

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the students participating and impacted. I needed to keep my "whiteness off-center" and refuse to be motivated by any guilt I feel or desire "to be seen as good people" (Thompson, 2003, p. 8). At UNI, students have an experience different from my own, so positionality informs a personal lens and life experience that is not equivalent to participants. Power dynamics that stack in my favor fill my relationship with students, including race, gender, ability, UNI status, and sexual orientation. It is easy to assume that many marginalized persons would be skeptical of my motivation to engage in a study meant to be emancipatory and action oriented. Considering my motives is vital, such as the "white savior industrial complex" (Cole, 2012, para. 10) and the "colonization of space" (Berg, 2012, p. 513) while entering spaces belonging to Black Indigenous students, faculty, and staff of color. PAR applies my privilege to the production of space and opportunity and ensures that the ideas and actions of it belong to marginalized students rather than myself. PAR can be a strategy to address barriers that prevent UNI and its students from increasing *intercultural competence* and amplify authentic student voices for informed social changes at UNI.

In PAR, community members generate new knowledge about issues and problems they care about to promote personal and social change. What is not as evident in the definition of PAR is how to define "community member". Within the UNI community, there are many layers to the social and spatial statuses on campus. While I often consider myself a part of the UNI community, the issues that impact me often differ, in topic and weight, from the matters affecting undergraduate students and those directly supervising them. The PAR approach concedes that only the student can fully understand their experience, thus rendering an outside perspective incomplete. If the outside perspective guides the research approach, the research can quickly turn toward a focal point that is not congruent with the students' needs.

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This study uses PAR to increase understanding and emancipation from marginalizing systematic structures as they impact the CC position. Listening to a student's social concerns, assisting them as they research, creating solutions for their interests, and supporting and co-engaging in actions and initiatives that have emerged is a good framework towards democratic, agential change. No matter how extensive my education, I will never understand the lived experience of the BISOC community, as I cannot live it. Therefore, using my platform and privilege to amplify BISOC voices is essential in disrupting the neoliberal university's hegemony. Simultaneously rooting emancipatory work in the academy and research can produce an evaluation of practice at the university and establish validity in the problems discovered. This measured approach is the same pathway I took in my work.

PAR and *intercultural competency* learning demand humility from the teacher to understand the student, as both the teacher and student hold the position of knower and learner simultaneously. The invitation of PAR towards emancipation is also an invitation towards criticality, and thus PAR demands a critical and honest approach to finding and addressing oppressive problems. In my experience with PAR, I have continuously grown in appreciation for a research approach that places power in the voices of those often told what they really said, as opposed to being given a microphone to say it themselves. While the credit for actions that PAR creates belongs with the participants, it is important to understand its limits. It is easy to believe that the amplification of historically marginalized voices in a PAR study can set forth a chain of actions that will negate the hegemonic occurrences at the neoliberal university. I believe, and this study confirms, humility and engagement from students, faculty, and administrators with privilege remain a strategy for addressing *intercultural competency* barriers to produce a more interculturally competent university. Humility allows healing for those in pain and learning for

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those in power, both individually and institutionally. However, the scope of that impact is relatively small and situational in a socio-cultural context. *Intercultural competency* is also a trait that can exist in an individual and an institution. *Intercultural competency* and honest reflection are pathways to humility and a more equipped university. Inserting them into the neoliberal university is challenging and unwelcoming if actions matriculate beyond the performative.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In participatory action research, as in all action research, the problem addressed in the study often takes a primary role in the literature review (Herr & Anderson, 2005). PAR prioritizing the “problem” allows me to build understanding through previous research and literature and apply existing research tools within the PAR study. It also permits me to remain flexible and open to new directions in response to the participatory research and analysis conducted in the study. This literature review aims to do the same and explain this study's conceptual and theoretical inclusions as a foundation of understanding while also discovering PAR's flexibility and ability to adapt.

As I began the experience of organizing and conducting research within a PAR framework, conscripting a literature review that frames foundational context in understanding the definitions, theories, research methodology, and analysis applied in this study is helpful. This literature review provides definitions and context regarding culture, the socio-cultural powers in culture, and how each plays out in a predominately and historically white university site. History and definitions of *intercultural competency*, which is central to this study's research questions and the CC position, are provided. The context of culture and the creation of relationships across cultures are then placed within the university setting. This literature review explores the current *intercultural competency* learning frameworks used at UNI and within the CC position and new cultural proficiency and *intercultural competency* frameworks this study provides.

In PAR, it is important to know the context of the research and the tools of analysis. For that reason, a review of the literature regarding culture, *intercultural competency* learning, and the tools used for *intercultural competency* research are delivered before a literature review of

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PAR. This study identifies the data collection tools in this study, the cultural proficiency continuum and the culture audit, and clarification of their use in the study. Paramount to this study, this chapter reviews action research and PAR literature better to understand participatory research, analysis, and action. This literature review concludes with curriculum and spatial analysis for the site of the PAR study to provide a foundation for the meta-analysis produced through this study.

Culture

Terrell et al. (2018) synthesizes that culture is "a set of practices and beliefs shared by members of a particular group that distinguish that group from other groups" (p. 21). This description includes but is not limited to forms of "human description, including age, gender, socioeconomic status, geography, ancestry, religion, language, history, sexual orientation, physical and mental level of ableness, occupation, and other affiliations" (p. 21). A person is not born with culture. Rather, they inherit it as they grow and develop. Cultural acquisition, as Chomsky (2015) believes, occurs by:

Observing a rather limited number of behaviors and actions, and from those constructing somehow in your mind the set of attitudes and beliefs that constitute your culture. . . it's a matter of making a great leap from scattered data to some outcome and that leap is made essentially that same way by all individuals given a relatively fixed experience.

This acquisition of culture is only possible with structures that are extensively distinctive, and hold a commonality in cultural worldviews (Hammer et al., 2003) towards the fixed experience. As cultural worldviews are being constructed through sets of distinctions, so too are the cultural groups people are in. As Centola et al. (2007) posits, homophily within cultural

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groups can greatly impact the connection with or cultural drift away from a cultural group.

Homophily is “the tendency of people with similar traits (including physical, cultural, and attitudinal characteristics) to interact with one another more than with people with dissimilar traits” (Centola et al., 2007, p. 905-905). In their study, Centola et al. (2007) discovered results similar to Popielarz and McPherson (1995) in that “the interaction of homophily and influence produces a niche structure whereby peripheral members are either absorbed into the core beliefs of the social group (by influence) or forced out of the social group (by zero overlap)” (p. 926). A person’s social group experience informs the “scattered data” from which person translates their own culture and their belonging to the culture of their social group or cultural group. But just because someone isn’t in your cultural group, doesn’t mean one cannot communicate or relate to them. A person’s ability to communicate and relate across cultural groups and *cultural worldviews* depends on their *intercultural competency*.

Hegemony

It would be insufficient to engage in an understanding of institutional cultures without considering the hegemonic systems and structures of power occurring in society and on college campuses. Hegemony refers to a "system of class rule" (Ramos, 1982, p. 4) that reproduces a status quo benefiting those in certain class positions. Most commonly associated with Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci, hegemony pertains to the way "force and consent" are balanced in such a way that consent within a dominant system reduces the need for physical or state force for a given class to maintain power (Gramsci, 2011, p. 273). Developing from Marxian radical connotations and its context within the revolutionary class struggle, Williams (1989) posits that hegemony is now understood as a broad dominant, oppressive social order held as common sense and often uncritically accepted by the general public. Examples of these oppressive social

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orders are the legacy of white supremacy, patriarchy, heterosexism, colonialism, and neoliberal economic forces.

Higher education institutions built within the neoliberal American society's economic and social constructs have inequalities and disparaging practices impacting marginalized communities. Similar to American society, American universities have operated alongside social constructions, including slavery (Kliebard, 2004), segregation (Goldstone, 2005), Jim Crow laws (Blackmon, 2009), Keynesianism, capitalism, and neoliberalism (Harvey, 2007), and other constructs which have marginalized and excluded people from educational opportunities. Integration of laws (*University of California Regents v. Bakke*, 1978), textbooks (Herman & Chomsky, 1988), commonly used higher education vernacular (Bensimon et al., 2016), admission practices (Warikoo, 2016), and funding (Giroux & Giroux, 2004) continue to build inequities in higher education. Those inequalities often replicate themselves within the on-campus culture at colleges as well. Institutions of education designate discriminatory, white supremacist, heteropatriarchal, and ableist 'common sense' language and policies that fuel administrative rationale. In doing so, universities ensure systems of oppression remain by legitimizing "a hierarchical social order based on privileged and marginalized identities" (Rawlings, 2019, p. 701). Hegemony in action can be hard to see (Lea, 2007; Lea & Sims, 2008; Griffin, 2006), and often reproduces itself as 'common sense' by the hierarchical social orders (Herman & Chomsky, 1988).

Disruptions of hegemonic structures are difficult to execute due to the prowess of the "propaganda system" (Herman and Chomsky, 1988) promoting hegemonic structures and affirming the social norms holding the structures in place. The discomfort of those in power is mitigated to maintain hegemonic structures and the comfort the highest levels in the hierarchy

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provide. Language plays a significant role in mitigating discomfort of those with privilege as well as securing power (Bensimon et al., 2016). For example, Warikoo (2016) found in their study that students identified 'diversity' as having value, as long as the improvement of thought and knowledge does not bring discomfort.

White students' desire to remain comfortable leads to an omission of recognizing the racial differences of other students within a colorblind approach (DiAngelo, 2018). Lea and Sims (2008), in their investigation of hegemonic whiteness in the university setting, identified the 'cultural scripts,' or narratives of hegemonic whiteness, that are produced on campus. Mainstream "cultural scripts" (p. 187) include 'color-blindness'—which works heavily against *intercultural competency*, as those using it seek to ignore a fundamental aspect of a person's culture. You cannot grow in your competency regarding culture if you are blind to cultural differences. Other noted 'cultural scripts' include 'High-stakes Testing', 'Standardization', 'Meritocracy', and 'Tracking'. Due to the hegemonic structure of the university, it is essential to intentionally reverse power dynamics in efforts to act, which this study acknowledges and accomplishes through PAR research. An improvement in ability for people, regardless of positionality of power, to relate and empathize across cultures through *intercultural competency* learning may also aid in the reduction of hegemonic dynamics.

Intercultural Competency

The concept of *intercultural competency* has been present for decades, but the definition of *intercultural competency* lacks a consensus (Deardorff, 2011; Fantini, 2009). Table 1 provides commonly used definitions as found in the literature.

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Table 1

Intercultural Competency Definitions

Definition	Reference
The ability to communicate effectively in cross-cultural situations and to relate appropriately in a variety of cultural contexts.	Bennet and Bennett (2004) (p. 149)
The ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes.	Deardorff (2006) (p. 247)
The appropriate and effective management of interactions between people who, to some degree or another, represent different or divergent affective, cognitive and behavioral orientations of the world.	Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) (p. 7)
The ability to recognize, respect, value and use productively cultural conditions and orientation patterns with respect to interpreting and shaping the world.	Wang and Ching (2015) (p. 16)
Cultural competence is a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency or among professionals and enable that system, agency or those professions to work effectively in cross-cultural situations.	Cross et al. (1989) (p. 13)

In 2009, Deardorff worked with other scholars to create a universal definition of *intercultural competency* (Hightower, 2016), expanding on her earlier definition of *intercultural competency*. The definition created by Deardorff has not become universal as exhibited by Wang and Ching's (2006) definition, which was constructed afterwards. Deardorff's use of the Delphi technique, which is an "iterative process used to achieve consensus among a panel of experts" (p. 66), provided generally agreed upon traits that inform *intercultural competency* as opposed to a universal definition.

Deardorff (2011) posits that *intercultural competency* "applies to any who interact with those from different backgrounds, regardless of location" (p. 66), and it is "effective and appropriate behavior and communication in intercultural situations, which again can be further

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detailed in terms of indicators of appropriate behavior in specific contexts" (p. 66). *Intercultural competency* is an ongoing process that requires "critical thinking skills. . . attitudes of respect. . . openness and curiosity. . . and the ability to see from others' perspectives" (p. 68). In 2009, Fantini captured the following terms, as well as others, in regard to *intercultural competency*: multiculturalism, global citizenship, cross-culture adaptation, cultural humility, global competence, transcultural communication, cultural intelligence, and intercultural sensitivity (p. 457). Cultural proficiency (Terrell et al., 2019) also contributes to terminology and definitions under the *intercultural competency* umbrella, which this study relies upon. Due to the fluidity of terminology and application, understanding the historical progression of *intercultural competency* is crucial.

History of Intercultural Competency

The origin of *intercultural competency* can be traced back to the Peace Corps, which created language and culture training that developed into the term used in its contemporary context (Wight, 2008). Practical cross-cultural training was essential for the Peace Corps to provide aid and protection for those individuals belonging to different cultures and countries than its volunteers. The Peace Corps, an idea born by the United Nations after World War II, was actively supported by the United States to curb communism and spread democracy (United Nations, 2015). As Hightower (2016) details, President Kennedy used an executive order early in his administration to found the organization. That order pushed the United States to pursue a cultural fluency, which would allow democracy to spread quickly and effectively across the globe. The Peace Corps's approach to understanding other cultures found a springboard toward producing mass communication training. Hymes's (1964) study of cross-cultural communication specifically looked at the competency a person has in cultural communication. Subsequent

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researchers began refining the skills and testing rubrics needed to assess a person's competence in intercultural communication. Soon, training and measuring of intercultural communication competency began, and the term evolved into *intercultural competency*. Years later, higher education would serve a role in this cultural fluency, adding degree programs and language programs to its curriculum to develop college students in these recently identified skills (Deardorff, 2011).

The pursuit of *intercultural competency* has also been a search for the utility of *intercultural competency* through quantifiable inventories. Several *intercultural competency* inventories exist (e.g. Bird & Stevens, 2013; Deardorff, 2011), and many of them focus on education. Mendenhall et al.'s (2008) Intercultural Effectiveness Scale (IES), Hammer et al.'s (2003) Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), King and Magolda's Intercultural Maturity Model (2005), Deardorff's (2006) creation of the Intercultural Competence Model, and the Terrell et al. (2018) Cultural Proficiency Continuum all address *intercultural competency* but differ on both individual and organizational focus. The utility and versatility of the inventories give more options with the aim of increasing *intercultural competency* in college students and the university itself and allow the field of *intercultural competency* to remain broad in utility. This utility is a strength in *intercultural competency's* application to other fields and industries.

Intercultural Competency Learning at UNI

The UNI Core Curriculum places academic pursuits of cultural awareness into a student's academic experience by requiring students to take courses that satisfy the Cultural Awareness Competency found in Figure 1 (UNI, 2004). The learning outcomes and actions steps of the Cultural Awareness competency are below:

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Figure 1

UNI Cultural Awareness Core Competency

Learning Outcomes	Student Action Steps
Students will demonstrate knowledge of one or more disciplinary approaches to issues of cultural differences.	Students will analyze and synthesize information and arguments related to cultural differences from a range of sources specific to a disciplinary tradition. Students will examine theoretical and methodological approaches to cultural differences specific to a disciplinary tradition.
Students will demonstrate an ability to analyze diversity within (or) across cultures.	Students will examine the role of social factors, e.g., race, gender, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, etc., in shaping cultural reality. Students will explore a range of perspectives that address the construction of differences and similarities. Students will analyze cultural assumptions, interpretations, and/or opinions relating to issues of diversity.
Students will demonstrate an understanding of the interconnectedness of society, culture and individual identity.	Students will analyze cultural and social constructions of individual identity. Students will examine the consequences for both the individual and society that arise from cultural differences. Students will examine how interaction between personal and social identities is manifested in everyday life.

These learning outcomes highlight UNI’s desire to educate students on ways to investigate cultural differences. The words “analyze,” “examine,” and “explore” work to provide students with a pathway towards understanding cultures other than their own, which is a significant aspect of *intercultural competency*.

The presence of the Cultural Awareness competency and an emerging DEI competency (UNI, 2021a) provide the foundational aspects of the curriculum of *intercultural competency* learning this study identifies at UNI. Although there is variation in the depth of content and learning in the courses a student takes to complete the competency, all UNI students must fulfill the requirement. Other aspects of the curriculum of *intercultural competency* learning at UNI are optional and operate as a ‘choose your own adventure’ of intercultural opportunities. Many students at UNI participate in study abroad, for example, which is provided by the Center for

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International Studies, but the study abroad experience is not available or affordable to all UNI students. Majors and programs that focus on cultural components are also present at UNI, such as Comparative Race and Ethnic Studies, Asian Studies, African American and Africana Studies, Women & Gender Studies, Jewish Studies, Latino/a Studies, Middle East Studies, and Spanish and Hispanic Studies (UNI, 2021b). However, a percentage majority of UNI students do not engage in these majors or programs.

Co-curricular efforts also engage in intercultural programming, provided by offices such as UNI Student Identity & Engagement, Gender Resource Office, International Services, Religious & Spiritual Life, and Housing (UNI, 2021c). While many students attend these programs, they are also avoidable by students wishing to not engage in concepts of culture or *intercultural competency*. The offices listed have both professional staff and student staff members in order to provide awareness and skills to different aspects of culture and intercultural experiences. The Department of Housing, for example, employs the CC position which is the focus of this study. The CC position is not the only peer leadership position at UNI, but it has the broadest realistic reach. The number of students engaging in residence halls and apartments is drastically more considerable than students attending co-curricular intercultural programming at UNI. Due the reach of an inclusion-oriented student peer leader position in residential housing, the Housing office at UNI was intentional in applying an intercultural model in the creation of the role. The model selected was the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) (Bennett, 1986, 1993) which was chosen for its utility and fit to UNI student development approaches and the longitudinal student data UNI already possessed.

Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

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In 2013, UNI worked to assess the *intercultural competency* impact students experience over the duration of their studies at UNI through the Intercultural Effectiveness Scale (IES) (Hightower, 2016). UNI contracted with the Kozai Group to deliver the IES instrument twice to UNI students over the duration of their academic career, as well as produce individual Personal Development Plans (PDPs) for students representing each IES subgroup (Kozai, 2009). The first administration of the IES occurred before students started classes at UNI, and the second administration of the IES was right before graduation. The pre- and post-test administrations allowed UNI to determine how students changed in their *intercultural competency* while being a UNI student. The Kozai Group sent the test to students, collected the data, and rendered individual reports and group reports to UNI. The Kozai Group also developed PDPs to enhance a student's *intercultural competency* through reflections and activities. The IES scoring and the PDP highlight the areas of positive contribution in regards to *intercultural competency* and areas of critique. The IES and PDP that accompany it allow for a better understanding of the student.

The IES (Mendenhall et al., 2008) is built off of the theoretical framework of the DMIS (Bennett, 1986, 1993). Utilizing concepts from communication theory and constructivist psychology, "the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) was created by Dr. Milton Bennett (1986, 1993, 2004, 2013) as a framework to explain how people experience and engage cultural difference" (Bennett, 2018, para. 1). The department of Housing at UNI used the DMIS in the creation and development of the Cultural Connector Program. In the creation of DMIS, in order to aid people's intercultural perspectives, Bennett (1986, 1993) used application of his concepts of intercultural adaptation and applies cybernetic constructivism concepts in order to identify "six orientations that people seem to move through in their acquisition of intercultural competence" (Hammer et al., 2003, p. 423). The DMIS operates as a framework to

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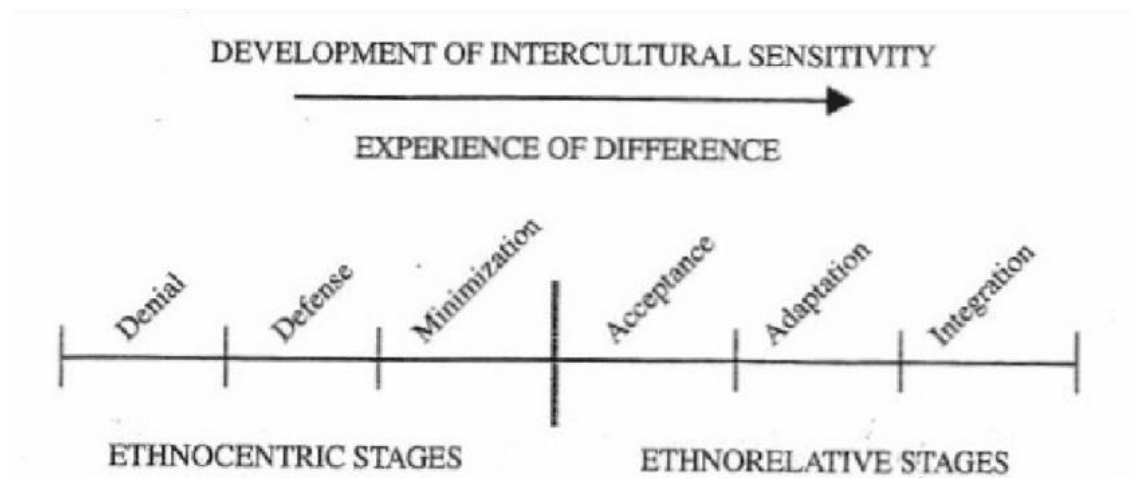
explain how people experience and engage cultural differences through a stage model of development. The stages in the DMIS model recognize the *cultural worldview* an individual possesses in relation to people or cultures around them, and their view of people or events through their *cultural worldview*. Through its constructivist design, the model accepts that “experience does not occur simply by being in the vicinity of events when they occur” (Hammer et al., 2003, p. 423). Instead, experience is a function of the imperative nature of how someone interprets the event. The accomplished complexity a person is able to experience cultural difference increases their *intercultural competency* and pushes them along the DMIS stages in their *cultural worldview*. The Cultural Connector position was created to help aid students engage in these cultural differences.

The DMIS conceptualizes two relative states of perspective, *Ethnocentric* and *Ethnorelative* (Hammer et al., 2003, p. 423). The *ethnocentric cultural worldview* places one’s personal culture as primary, inherently more important than others, and central to reality. The *ethnorelative cultural worldview* recognizes there are multiple perspectives and reality could be defined in multiple ways, including the reality provided by one’s personal culture. Bennett (1983) provides six stages in DMIS, moving left to right from the most ethnocentric view to the most ethnorelative view, as demonstrated in Figure 2 below:

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Figure 2

Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity



This progression, from a sort of blind sense of self absolutism to a recognition of the importance of others and differing perspectives, also exists in development theories in use to grow college students, such as Perry's (1999) Scheme of Intellectual and Ethical Development, Magolda's (2004) Epistemological Reflection Model, and Kohlberg's (1981) Theory of Moral Development.

In the **Denial** stage of DMIS a person believes their *cultural worldview*, and experiences, are the only real experiences. There is little to no consideration of other experiences, and acceptance is based primarily on shared and, thus approved, experiences. In the **Defense** stage, other viewpoints and experiences exist, but only in gaining superiority of the person's own *cultural worldview* and experiences. The **Minimization** stage accepts the similarities between one's own *cultural worldview* and the experiences of others, but disregards differences as the differences can threaten the heightened status of the person's own experience. **Denial, Defense, and Minimization** are all stages that fall within the Ethnocentric perspective, meaning a person's own culture remains central and primary to experiences, relationships, and decision-making.

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The first stage in the ethnorelative perspective is **Acceptance**, meaning a person will accept that other cultures exist and are curious about them, but may not agree with cultural differences and will pick and choose which aspects belong or not. The **Adaptation** stage is the first stage in which a person works to look through the cultural filters of others. In doing so, the person adapts their own behaviors and viewpoints in order to have values more congruent with those they interact. The final stage of the ethnorelative perspective of DMIS is **Integration**. In **Integration**, a person can travel multiple *cultural worldviews* with ease and common frequency. This cultural fluency exhibits not only intercultural sensitivity but also the *intercultural competency* required in developing cross-cultural relationships. As students who attend a university have differing *cultural worldviews*, it is optimal for student peer leaders to be operating in stages of **Adaptation** and **Integration**. As departments like UNI Housing work to develop students and help them move through DMIS stages, other barriers also interfere with students' cultural development.

Intercultural competency and the pursuit of cultural proficiency can be an ethos or philosophy of learning that bridges cultural differences on a college campus by fostering curiosity toward the variability of culture. As stated above, Wang and Ching (2015) focus on *intercultural competency* "shaping the world" (p. 16), and shaping the world is determined by the deliverer of *intercultural competency*. As culture is fluid and not a fixed notion, the idea of a fixed competency does not translate cleanly. With a foundation of the DMIS, the CC position works to help students move beyond the ethnocentric and towards an ethnorelative view of culture that helps students acknowledge and find value in the culture of others. The movement from ethnocentric to ethnorelative is not limited to individual people; rather, groups of people and institutions can also experience this transition. The desired transition for individuals and for

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groups is the reason the DMIS was used in shaping the CC position, and the *intercultural competency* learning it provides.

In 2019, UNI adapted the Inclusive Excellence Toolkit (Treviño et al., 2009) to assist towards the implantation of the Inclusive Excellence Framework (IEF) (UNI, 2021d). The Inclusive Excellence Toolkit provides guidance in the assessment, analysis, and direction of action regarding inclusion effort within six areas: Equity and Access, Campus Culture, Learning and Development, Community Engagement, Curriculum, and Institutional Infrastructure (UNI, 2021d). As UNI states, the “Inclusive Excellence (IE) at UNI is designed to infuse diversity and inclusion efforts into all aspects of the university, ensuring that diversity and inclusion are essential to the mission and success of every area of the university. The Inclusive Excellence Framework (IEF) allows each unit of the university to review current operations and intentionally plan a strategy to identify and support DEI initiatives within the unit” (UNI, 2021d, para. 1). The IEF is one way that UNI is working to better connect the different disjointed arenas of *intercultural competency* learning together with enhanced structure within curriculum and all other aspects of the UNI college experience. The IEF delivers a common assessment and theoretical framework for inclusive endeavors at UNI, but as many of those endeavors were already created and functioning prior to the IEF, several operate without intentional connection to the IEF.

Frameworks for this Study

Cultural Proficiency Continuum

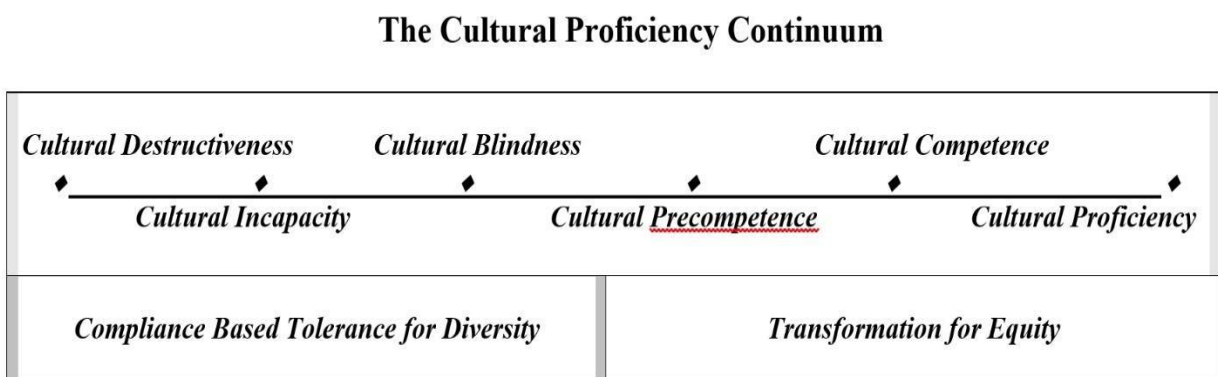
The Cultural Proficiency Continuum, initially constructed by Terry Cross (2012) and then adapted and expanded by Terrell et al. (2018), is another developmental model able to be used by

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individuals as well institutions of K-12 and higher education in order to gain *intercultural competency*. The Cultural Proficiency Continuum framework allows for an interpersonal deep dive for a person to "examine and understand your beliefs about the education of students from cultural groups different from yours" (Terrell et al., 2018, p. 30). This framework is congruent with the desired outcome of *intercultural competency*, which looks to identify one's cultural understandings and abilities across cultures. The Cultural Proficiency Continuum can serve as a useful tool of analysis in understanding the proficiency of an educator within cultural work. The framework understands the relationship between the knower and learner as individual pieces of an institutional puzzle, and the institution can also experience growth in *intercultural competency*. While competency and proficiency differ by definition, there is the inclusion of performance of the action in both, which is why Cultural Competence appears on the Cultural Proficiency Continuum (Terrell et al., 2018, p. 32 (Figure 3)).

Figure 3

The Cultural Proficiency Continuum



Cultural Proficiency, as described by Terrell et al. (2018), is a “process that begins introspectively for educators, an alteration of thoughts about culture, an educator's lens towards

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his or her position, and a guide to improved practice” (p. 26). It is not bound to individual development, as it operates *intercultural competency* growth on an institutional level as well. Terrell et al. (2018) provided specific tools to further equip educators in Cultural Proficiency. The first tool is a "Framework for Overcoming the Barriers of systematic oppression, a sense of privilege and entitlement, resistant to change, and an unawareness of the need to adapt" (p. 29). Terrell et al. provide a list of barriers that often plague the development of *intercultural competency* within a defined education system. These barriers, *Resistance to Change*, *Systems of Oppression*, *A Sense of Privilege and Entitlement*, and an *Unawareness of a Need to Adapt* (p. 34), are common indicators of institutions that lack *intercultural competency*. The second tool applied to this research is the “Essential Elements for Culturally Proficient Leadership” (p. 33). These traits, *Assessing Cultural Knowledge*, *Valuing Diversity*, *Managing the Dynamics of Difference*, *Adapting to Diversity*, and *Institutionalizing Cultural Knowledge* (p. 33), are indicators of the cultural proficiency of a leader and an institution. Each of these tools are utilized in the participatory coding process of this study in identifying the *intercultural competency* of UNI to make changes to the CC position.

Culture Audit

This study engages in a *culture audit* (Bustamente, 2006), which is a “valuable organizational assessment tool to guide strategic planning for diversity and global competence” (p. 2). The *culture audit* helps people understand the progression of cultural proficiency within an institution, which is vital for engaging in the multitudes of intersecting and parallel identities within the college community (Lindsey et al., 2006). There are 10 domains of focus provided by Bustamente (2009), which include Vision-Mission, Curriculum, Community, Staff, Teaching and Learning, Conflict Resolution, Evaluation and Assessment, Events-Celebrations-Traditions,

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Teachers-Faculty, and Student (p. 3). These domains are assessed through the School-Wide Cultural Competence Observation Checklist (SCCOC) (Nelson & Bustamante, 2008), which was used in this study to prompt members of the CCRT to think about the *intercultural competency* of UNI. In this PAR study, the SCCOC and coinciding focus group is paired with observations and presentations to community stakeholders (Bustamante, 2009) in order to complete the *culture audit*. Each of these items are able to mirror phases found in PAR, which is a key factor as to why the *culture audit* was selected for this PAR study.

Action Research

Action research, a term coined by Kurt Lewin in the 1940s, describes a "particular kind of research that united the experimental approach of social science with programs of social action to address social problems" (Schwandt, 2007, p. 3). Lewin created this research approach under the belief that "social problems. . . should serve as the impulse for social research" (Schwandt, 2007, p. 3). Whyte (1989) further describes action research by stating, "Action research explicitly and purposefully becomes part of the change process by engaging people in the program or organization in studying their problems in order to solve those problems" (p. 32). The term *action research* has grown and has been adapted since its inception, providing varying but similar definitions and research approaches. Anderson et al. (2007) state, "In the field of education, the term action research connotes 'insider' research done by practitioners with their site as the focus of their study" (p. 2). Patton (2015) clarifies further the purpose of action research, stating, "Action research aims at solving specific problems from within a program, organization, or community" (p. 221). Each of these descriptions and definitions of action research, in its general form, include participants in varying degrees in research and action in order to promote social change.

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Within the core of the action research approach are different components of action research, which represent differing researcher positionality, scope of research, and community or participant involvement. It is better to see this distinction as not dualistic but rather a continuum providing a range of different levels of involvement. Hendricks (2009, p. 11) details four primary types of action research:

Table 2

Primary Types of Action Research

Collaborative Action Research	The researchers are “outsiders” to the selected population or research site.
Critical Action Research	Consists of both insiders and outsiders, researching together to create social change within or in regards to marginalized communities.
Classroom Action Research	An insider conducts Classroom Action Research, most often a teacher of a class or teachers from similar classrooms, working together to address issues within that class.
Participatory Action Research (PAR)	An insider conducts PAR, which includes the participants as co-researchers. PAR is a "social, collaborative process. . . to investigate reality so that it can be changed

The action research process does not conclude with research and findings; rather, it moves towards particular “action” to address and make social improvements. Due to the role and scope of action research, it is not typically a linear model; instead, its representation of the methodological structure is often cyclic (Calhoun, 1994; Sagor, 2011; Stringer, 1996; Quebec

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Fuentes, 2013). Researchers often use action research cycles to tie together emerging narratives of the study and the study's overall course of action. While most action research studies provide a diagrammed cycle of methodology, it is the in-depth stories in the findings that allow others to see if the participation the researchers were hoping for occurred. The rich narrative of experience provided by the participant, alongside their analytical perspective, gives a fullness to the analysis and action taken. Which role the participants of the study play is an indicator of the type of action research conducted. Action research with students, primarily data points (Collaborative Action Research, Critical Action Research), stands in contrast to research in which participants engage in the research to co-create change (PAR).

Participatory Action Research

Schneider (2012) posits that in PAR "the aim is to have ordinary community members generate new knowledge about issues and problems they care about . . . and through discussions promote personal and social change" (p. 153). Hendricks (2009) defines participatory action research (PAR) as "A social, collaborative process of action.... This type of action research is emancipatory... critical... and transformational" (p. 11). Community members generate new knowledge about issues and problems they care about to promote personal and social change. Bradbury and Reason (2005) posit that PAR serves a primary purpose to release the body, mind, and spirit in the search for an improved, open world. Community members have "skin in the game" in order to elicit social change. Lather (1991) contends that studying social constructs is not enough. Research should have emancipatory pursuits, freeing those involved from constraining oppression or ignorance of their environment, not just bi-products of research but also the aim. However, how do researchers know what social issues to address?

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The PAR approach utilizes the researcher(s) with insider knowledge or positions within the researched topic to understand better and address the needs of a person, group, or organization. An example of this occurs in the study conducted by Ballard and Belsky (2010), in which PAR was used to better "promote environmental learning and enhance social-ecological systems of resilience" (p. 611). This approach partnered state and federal forest managers, an ecologist, and local harvesters to foster better learning and resilience through the harvesting of a non-timber forest product called *salal*. Ballard and Belsky (2010) summarize thoughts by Minkler and Wallerstein (2003), stating, "An important step in any PAR project is that of applying research findings to address the problem identified" (p. 615). The problem or aim of this study was the rate of the harvesting and production of *salal*, and disagreement and lack of communication between groups and parties involved. The researchers designed an eight-stage research process that included parties listed above, meeting and learning throughout the process as a group. In their findings, Ballard and Belsky (2010) identified that learning occurred for all groups. Notable amounts of learning for "harvester participants were ecological literacy and civics literacy" (p. 619). Within the study, harvesters also "expressed an increased understanding of the institutions involved in forest management, specifically the ways scientific research can inform policy and management" (p. 619). The harvesters were not the only group to learn, as "learning also occurred on the part of agency personnel" (p. 619). This learning was defined as ecological literacy, values awareness, increased understanding of optimal forest conditions for growing *salal*, and increased appreciation for harvesters. Chapman (2019) describes participatory action research as "research by a group, for the benefit of the group" (p. 106). Using the PAR approach, Ballard and Belsky (2010) were able to use research to enhance learning, which led to an achieved outcome in the production of *salal*.

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The most significant separation between PAR and other action research approaches is the involvement of participants and the researcher's positionality. In PAR, researchers are insiders, well versed in the social and spatial impacts around their students. The participant's voice in PAR is meaningful to the research study. Some PAR studies include students as co-researchers to varying degrees within a study, with students having the most considerable amount of ownership in Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR). Leitch et al. (2007) define the "typology of student engagement in research" into four different typologies (p. 426). The first, titled "students as data sources," treats action research in a similar way to a typical qualitative study. In this typology, students serve as data points, giving information to inform the researchers of their work.

The second typology provided is "students... as active respondents" (p. 426). In this typology, students are still offering only data, but they are authors in the data they provide. While retention rates alone would be "students as data sources," asking students to give a narrative to their retention experience would be "students... as active respondents." The third typology provided was "students... as co-researchers," which allows the students to serve in research roles through the research team's constructs. An example of this typology is in the *salal* study mentioned earlier. The *salal* PAR approach differs from the final typology, titled "student researchers" (p. 426), in the amount of ownership the student has throughout the research process. In the focus group example, if the research team created the questions and guidelines of the focus group, but the student could facilitate and ask questions, the student was not a full author of the experience. The typology of "students as researchers" would allow the student to write the questions and create the focus group's guidelines. The PAR approach allows for

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students to co-research their environment or experiences in order to add the participant's voice to more of the research process, and then to take action based on the voice.

In Herr and Anderson's (2014) internal validity, PAR posits reliable trustworthiness of what the data means and how it could be themed and coded. However, it also builds in pursuit of participant growth and education. Since co-researchers play a more prominent role in the research process in PAR, there are more moments to ensure triangulation between data sources and researchers. Anderson et al. (2007) deliver a table of "Goals of Action Research and Validity Criteria" (p. 68), which provides five goals that action research should strive for:

1. Dialogic validity; the generation of new knowledge is reviewed by others.
2. Outcome validity; the achievement of action-oriented outcomes.
3. Catalytic validity; the education of both researchers and participants.
4. Democratic validity; results that are relevant to the local setting and stakeholders.
5. Process validity; a sound and appropriate research methodology.

The generation of new knowledge and acting on the knowledge fits within the constructivism approach of the *intercultural competency* frameworks used for this study. It allows democratic disruption to be implemented by students and the cultures they hold with them as they engage in their education. The PAR approach is beneficial not just in areas of higher education, but PAR has benefits for youth as well.

The Foster-Fishman et al. (2010) study of the Youth ReACT model for social change used youth as an engagement model through a Photovoice project to better understand improved ways to promote youth engagement. This study exemplifies the three areas that Gaventa and Cornwall (2001) state as providing participant opportunities:

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- 1) Expanded the knowledge and contributed to local knowledge production.
- 2) Developed participant consciousness and critical thinking skills.
- 3) Initiated action for future change.

The intersection of Gaventa and Cornwall (2001) and Ozer et al. (2010) provides a playbook for YPAR students to have higher validity in research and a significant impact on their community. This playbook is vital for the adult researcher better to understand their role in the youth's cultivation.

The use of PAR is in hopes of emancipation from marginalizing systematic structures, and a privileged status at UNI impacts how the struggles of marginalization are perceived. Traits of PAR are positive approaches to my current position, and employment opportunities to come. Listening to students' social concerns, working to assist them as they research and creating solutions for their interests, and supporting and co-engaging in actions and initiatives that have emerged is a positive framework. No matter how extensive my education, I will never understand the lived experience of the BIPOC community as I cannot live it. Therefore, using my platform and privilege to amplify BIPOC voices is essential in disrupting the hegemony in the neoliberal university. As Cammarota (2009) explains, PAR acknowledges hegemonic power dynamics and offers a methodology for change:

The focus on power and how traditional schooling may knowingly or unwittingly generate disparities is a commonality between the two schools of thought. However, when the socio-historical and PAR perspective evoke theories of change, considerable distinctions occur. From a socio-historical perspective, change happens informally in places beyond dominant institutions, where people cultivate their cultural agency

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independent from formal processes unmoored from their traditions. In contrast, PAR posits that change emerges from formal pedagogies of scientific research, even drawing from standard disciplinary methods, such as ethnographic observations, the case study approach, and survey techniques. (p. 7)

PAR can flip "the science, as well as the "scientist," on its head by drawing from the socio-historical premise that the "everyday" is the key milieu for the development and application of scientific products (i.e., knowledge)" (Cammarota, 2009, p. 7). This amplifies PAR as a tool to create action and assist in change, but PAR is not a cure-all.

In Lather's (2017) work regarding critical pedagogical research and validity, she troubles work that claims to be critical or emancipatory but instead provides notable contradictions of oppression or power. Lather recognizes research as "praxis" (p. 13), where external influences impacting the participants are also impacting the research. There is a correlation in this study and Lather's focus on the criticality of male researchers from the male-dominated field of research entering into female-dominated teaching spaces to observe and report findings. One can find a similar dynamic in PAR studies that are not considerate of social oppression. Adults of power enter into youth or oppressed spaces to produce learning and concrete action the adults may already have in mind. Exerting an action or finding determined before a PAR study through a PAR study is not participatory. Instead, it is a misuse of power meant to serve the researcher. As Lather (2017) states, "gesturing towards the future, the "ontological turn" shifts validity from discourse practices to materialities of enfolding, enacting and tracing rhizomatic multiplicities" (p. 12). The research of Gaventa and Cornwall (2001) and Ozer et al. (2010) provides action and change towards youth emancipation, but that emancipation was of situational or circumstantial struggles. Cammarota (2009) and Anderson (2007) describe PAR as an avenue of change, but

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that change does not often impact the hegemonic oppression occurring for participants beyond the study site. Instead, the actions and changes produced by the study occur in more local and situational settings. It is crucial to accurately represent the impact of participants' chosen actions in both the known and the unknown to maintain validity and not mislead co-researchers in participatory research.

Rooting emancipatory work in the academy and in research simultaneously can produce an evaluation of practice at the university and establish validity in the problems discovered. This measured approach is the same pathway I hope to take in my work. Working with students to understand their struggles or joys by helping them find ways to impact their situation, analyzing the impact to mitigate unintended harm, and improving the student experience on a broader scale, would allow me to help guide students without assuming I know the entirety of their plight. Cultural proficiency and *intercultural competency* all demand humility from the educator and the university when endeavoring to understand the student. I believe humility from those with privilege remains a positive strategy for overcoming barriers of intercultural competence in an effort to be a more culturally responsive university. Humility allows for those in pain to heal, and those in power to learn, and is a trait that can exist in an individual and an institution. *Intercultural competency* learning and honest reflection are pathways to humility, and a more equipped university and field of higher education.

Curriculum Space and Place at UNI

Content learning can be useful to acquire knowledge, and it can be useful to oppress existing knowledge and drive the learner towards appropriated culture (Pinar, 2004). In post-Reconceptualization of curriculum studies, the curriculum is not merely methodological content. It is also the context that surrounds the transaction of knowledge sharing and knowledge

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acquisition. Through Pinar's (2004, 2012) introduction of *currere*, the curricular analysis which includes the context while investigating the content, a deeper understanding of the impact of curriculum on *intercultural competency* can emerge. As Helfenbein and Huddleston (2021) state, "invoking *currere*, or the running of the race as opposed to the focus on the racetrack" (p. 2), led scholars to require addressing of their subjectivity in the understanding of curriculum and an allowance of the complex conversations which follow. This study operates similarly in that it focuses less on the race track (the formal UNI curriculum) and more on the race (the UNI *intercultural competency* learning experience through the lens of the CCRT). As the CC position operates in residence halls and apartments on UNI's campus and uses the building, walls, and bulletin boards to reach residents, the curriculum of *intercultural competency* learning the CC provides is both content and spatial.

Understanding towards the utility of the spatial in educational settings is not new. Dewey (1906), Addams (1893), and Montessori (1971) are just a few historical figures in curriculum and education who recognized the site of the education having influence into the education. Pinar's (2004) work into the Reconceptualization of curriculum theorizing made further room for spatial considerations, as he deepened the conversation of curriculum as a dynamic relationship and exchange between teachers and students. There is a commonality in the method of *currere* (Pinar, 2004) and the work of *intercultural competency* as well. Pinar (2004) defines *currere* as a "reconceptualized curriculum from course objectives to complicated conversations with oneself (as a 'private' intellectual), an ongoing project of self-understanding in which one becomes mobilized for engaged pedagogical action — as a private-and-public intellectual — with others in the social reconstruction of the public sphere" (p. 37). Pinar (1975) frameworks a process by which participants engage educational experiences in four stages: "Regressive (with a focus on

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past experiences), progressive (with a focus on the future), analytical (with a focus on the present) and synthetical (to integrate the previous three stages" (p.2). Each of these stages is informed not only by method and content but by culture as well.

Curriculum theory is about "discovering and articulating for oneself and others, the educational significance of the school subjects for self and society in the ever-changing historical moment" (Pinar, 2004, p. 16). *Currere* allows curriculum theorists to look beyond the lesson plan, and into the learner. *Intercultural competency* addresses how the teacher, or curriculum, can better equip itself to engage with the whole learner. This engagement allows for consideration of other impacts outside of the curriculum within the curriculum. *Currere* also allows space for the knower to grow through educational moments with their student, as opposed to being a fixed deliverer of prescribed education. There is an opportunity for *intercultural competency* and *currere* to work together to deliver holistic education to students. Allowing the teacher and the student's cultures into the classroom and equipping them to better transition between cultures will present a clearer understanding of the content, which Ladson-Billings (2014) also pursues in her work towards culturally relevant pedagogy. The recognition of the space and place in *intercultural competency* definitions could not be found in the literature, which is an omission of a powerful presence in the formation of self and culture. It is important to note that just as the formation of self can impact space and place, the space and place of learning also impacts the formation of self. Through this lens, and the addition of *currere*, this paper arrives at a definition of *intercultural competency* to add to the long list of existing definitions. ***Intercultural competency is the progressive journey towards culturally empathetic engagement into difficult conversations, verbal or non-verbal, cerebral and***

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spatial, in the pursuit of a better cultural understanding and relationship with others and oneself.

At the intersection of Lather's (1998) thinking towards critical pedagogy and Pinar's (2004) curriculum studies method of *currere*, the curriculum and the school has become a space where questions are constantly moving in the formation of the self. Pinar (1975) posits, "Teaching – from the point of view of curriculum theory – is a matter of enabling students to employ academic knowledge (and popular culture, increasing via the media and the internet) to understand their self-formation within society and world..." (p. 16). The enabling teachers perform to assist the student in the formation of self is seen as a difficult conversation, which includes the curricular, personal, and social aspects of the persons involved. The lived experience for students within a school is multilayered and complex, and the space and place of learning plays an active role.

The "critical spatial analysis" (Helfenbein & Huddleston, 2021) found in this study derives from the discipline of critical geography (a theoretical addition to the discipline of geography) which "seeks to understand how the social construction of space and place interacts with and reinforces structures of power and personal and group identity" (Helfenbein, 2015, p. 400). Soja (2010) purports that "applying an assertive spatial perspective... can open up new sources of insight and innovative practical and theoretical applications" (pp. 3-4). The spaces we produce or occupy can have profound impacts on our experiences that occur within the space, and the production of space holds both intent and power. Harvey (2009) attests that "man can transform himself by constructing structures; and these structures are his own...by acting on the external world and changing it, [man] at the same time changes his own nature" (p. 298). Harvey (2009), Soja (2010), and Smith (2010) all attend to the production of space through political,

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economic, and critical geographies of power in an effort to address systems of constructed inequities in society. Education, and the schools constructed to distribute knowledge, are inseparable from these systems and constructs. A critical geography analysis of schools seeks to understand how the spatial components of a school impacts the lived experience of those within the school. From the school building to the cartography of access and funding feeding into the school, an application of spatial criticality engages the complexities of the lived experience and how space and place impact the relationships and experiences occurring at the site of school. Schools, including universities, are built to both host educational moments and to impose meaning and education onto students through meaning making (Helfenbein, 2015). The curriculum that is enacted, and the people experiencing the curriculum (both teacher and student), are interacting spatially. A lack of congruency in the curriculum does not just distort the learning occurring. It impacts the meaning derived from the space and place of the curriculum.

This study engages critical spatial analysis (Helfenbein & Huddleston, 2021) on intercultural learning and barriers within UNI's residence halls and the impact the buildings and physical structures have on the CCs and residential students. The application of spatial analysis to curricular understanding gives further context to the space and place where intercultural learning is happening, as “critical spatial theory enables curriculum scholars to explore the ways in which bodies and spaces interact with the enacted curriculum” (Helfenbein & Huddleston, 2021, p. 11). Inside a UNI residence hall constructed to house residents and their relationships, the building itself plays a role in forming the community and learning (Clemons et al., 2005). As Helfenbein and Huddleston state, "The combination of spatial theory and curriculum studies has produced a myriad of explorations to see how oppression works in everyday spaces" (2021, p. 1). In this study's exploration, the physical space of residence hall lobbies, rooms, study spaces, and

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social spaces work alongside the students within those spaces to produce the lived student experience for a student and aspects of the imposed experience that other students provide that student. Pictures of donors by entry doors, room and board fees, and building layouts give "insight into how choices are made in terms of what/whose knowledge is important and which/whose knowledge continue to be marginalized" (2021, p. 2). In order to stay in residential housing at UNI, students have to attend to a \$65,700 tuition cost through loans, scholarships, or direct payment. Economic classism plays a significant role in the hegemonic experience at UNI to gain access to residential living and within the residential communities.

The CC position does not make decisions in regards to how UNI constructs its residence halls or apartments. However, CCs impact how the space is engaged by students and the manufacturing of intercultural learning in the space. Just as the efforts of CCs are an extension of the intercultural curriculum at UNI, their efforts are also an extension of the space and place where students live. In his 2015 work, Helfenbein describes the way spaces speak, leak, and the possibility that can emerge. In the recognition and amplification of thought that "space is productive, the conduit for, and product of social relations" (p. 314), Helfenbein points to the subjective nature of our relations with space (how spaces speak) and the lack of assurance in the spatial and social production (how spaces leak).

In the case of the residential facilities at UNI, the space was built to speak to students in specific ways. Across decades UNI Housing personnel and external contractors have teamed up to build and renovate buildings to decide the number of beds, where student staff would live, where study rooms would be, and where the community could be formed for each building. As they picked the chairs, wall color, and other aspects of the residential facility, they intended for their choices to create comfort, community, belonging, or other sensations. They intended the

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lobby to speak to residents in a way that fostered togetherness or learning. The way a space speaks is the intended experience produced in the space due to the intentions of the space.

Nevertheless, not all spaces have been experienced the way they were intended.

At UNI, there is a commonality between buildings. Although not identical, each hall has a lobby, study rooms, laundry rooms, programmatic spaces, and outdoor spaces. What is uncommon is the usage of these spaces. Helfenbein (2015) states that we "impose meaning onto particular locations or spatial characteristics [and that] all people have places that hold special meaning to them" (p. 401), but the places and meanings are often variable from person to person. In some halls, the entrance lobby is the most popular destination in the building, and in others, it goes vacant a majority of the time. Each space was built for the same purpose, but the lived experience differs. This difference is due to how spaces leak or the unintended impacts of space and place (Helfenbein, 2015). These unintended impacts can be due to a miscalculation of how the space would be translated by students but could also be due to the experiences students associate with the space. If a space that holds a billiards table is filled by young men who are refusing to let women play or acting in a way that lets the women know the space is not for them, their sexism (Massey, 2013) can make the space feel sexist and unwelcoming to the women even once the men leave. Spaces with pictures of historical UNI figures who are all white, due to the historical exclusion of marginalized communities in higher education, can translate into an embodied racism (McKittrick, 2006) and a lack of representation to BISOC in the space.

Helfenbien's application of the spaces of possibility points to the criticality and agency that can be achieved in space and place. The agency highlighted by Helfenbein is echoed by McKittrick (2006), who states, "Geography is not, however, secure and unwavering; we produce space, we produce its meanings, and we work really hard to make geography what it is"

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(McKittrick, 2006, p. xi). We have the power to produce space and meaning, but we are also made powerless at times as geographies that we have constructed and found meaning in are lost or taken away. Even so, this battle for agential spatial production is experienced in UNI's residential facilities by students who are not situated in high levels of social or economic privilege and power. This study works to engage PAR in order to alter that experience for CCs, and for residential students. PAR serves as both an analysis of the CC experience, and a co-constructing the space in opposition to what and who the residential facilities were originally designed for.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Participatory Action Research Approach

This study uses an exploratory, qualitative, participatory action research approach to better understand and develop *intercultural competency* learning in student leaders and to take positive action towards evaluating and improving the Cultural Connector impact on the UNI residential community. Anderson et al. (2007) state, "In the field of education, the term *action research* connotes 'insider' research done by practitioners using their own site (classroom, institution, school district, community) as the focus of their study" (p. 2). This study follows Anderson et al.'s description, as insiders in the Housing and UNI teams form a research team to study their position and site. Hendricks (2009) defines PAR as "A social, collaborative process of action. The goal is to investigate reality so that it can be changed" (p. 1), and this understanding provides further direction for this study in congruence with the insider positionality of the researcher(s). The primary researcher's collaboration with students within this research and the pursuit of change in practice in the CC role makes the exploratory PAR methodology essential and provides an opportunity for critical and transformational experiences for student leaders. Due to the role and scope of action research, the methodological structure of PAR is not typically a linear model; instead, it is often cyclic in nature (Calhoun, 1994; Quebec Fuentes, 2013, Sagor, 2011; Stringer, 1996) as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Participatory Action Research Cycle

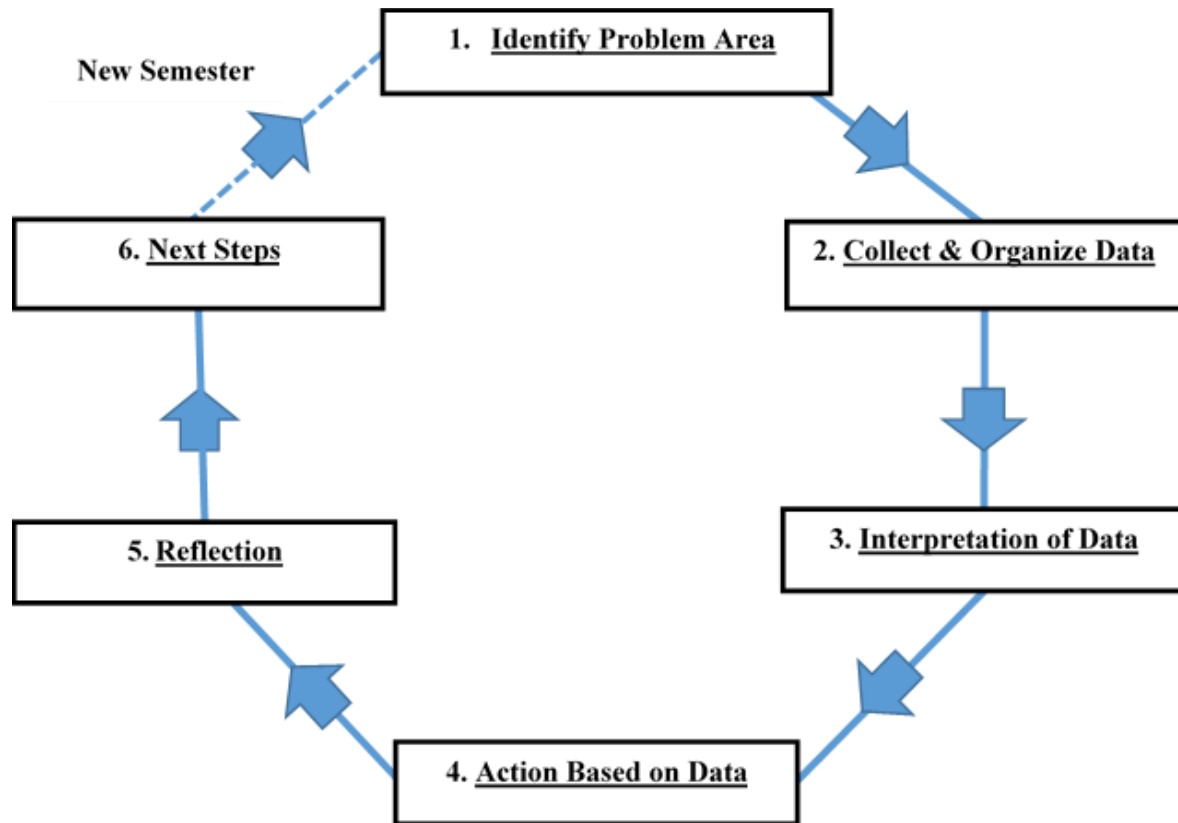


Table 3 lists the six phases of the action research cycle (Ferrance, 2000). In the case of this study, I am operating as the “teacher” referenced below.

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Table 3

Six Phases of the Action Research Cycle

Phase	Description
1	Identification of Problem Area: An important guideline in choosing a question is to ask if it is something over which the teacher has influence.
2	Collection and Organization of Data: The teacher must be sure to use several sources of information and a gathering method that is relevant to the problem.
3	Interpretations of Data: Identify and analyze major themes of the data.
4	Action Based on Data: Using the information from the data collection and review of current literature, design a plan of action that will allow you to make a change and to study that change.
5	Reflection: Assess the effects of the intervention to determine if improvement has occurred.
6	Next Steps: As a result of the action research project, identify additional questions raised by the data and plan for additional improvements, revisions, and next steps.

Setting and Sample

UNI is a private liberal arts university in the southwest United States and houses about 5000 of its 10,000 undergraduate students in on-campus residence halls and apartments. Founded in the mid-1800s by two brothers, both volunteer Confederate soldiers (UNI, 2020a), UNI was one of only a handful of co-ed Southern universities at the time. UNI is a predominately white institution (PWI), with an average tuition cost of \$51,570 and an estimated total academic year

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cost of \$65,700. While many students receive financial aid, around 25% of the students attend the university without any additional financial aid (UNI Fact Book, 2020).

Like many universities, UNI has a two-year live-on requirement for incoming first-year students and allows students to stay on campus in residence halls and apartments while attending online and in-person classes during the 2020-2021 academic year. The Princeton Review ranked UNI's residence halls and apartments fourth in the nation (Best College Dorms, n.d.), and existing Housing data reports a high level (5.8/7) of student satisfaction with UNI residential community facilities and safety measures (UNI, n.d.). As an institution addressing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), UNI has had struggles and successes. An example of a DEI struggle is that former students have filed lawsuits alleging racial discrimination, which elicited a strong student response (UNI, 2020b). An example of a success is the emergence and creation of the Inclusive Excellence Framework created at UNI (UNI, 2021e). In 2020, having won a second award for the amount of resources attributed to DEI efforts, UNI has restructured itself to engage in DEI work in the present, and acknowledge its past (UNI, 2019).

UNI recent engagement into an initiative to reconcile troubling aspects of its past through the DEI initiative titled The Race & Reconciliation Initiative (RRI), which states:

The Race & Reconciliation Initiative is an academically-based, historically-focused initiative designed to investigate and document UNI's relationship with slavery, racism, and the Confederacy. This academic endeavor will span multiple years. The focus for 2020-2021 is on Black Americans and UNI's experiences with racism, slavery and the Confederacy. Histories related to other identities will be explored in subsequent years. (UNI, n.d.)

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Much of this work addresses previously existing shortcomings on UNI's campus regarding DEI, as well as a desire from many students, staff, faculty, and administrators to create change in UNI's current culture. The efforts of the RRI are most visible on campus via signage by the statue of the founders of UNI. The signage works to provide context, such as the founders' Confederate past, to a statue that celebrates UNI's creation.

UNI Housing Department

As opposed to using an academic residential college or living-learning model, UNI Housing created and maintains a relationship-driven framework to cultivate student connectedness, sense of belonging, and empowering success within residential housing (Jordan & Titus, 2019). The Knowing, Connecting, Empowering model (Jordan & Titus, 2019) used at UNI depends on student peer leaders to help model, initiate, and facilitate student-to-student relationships. UNI employs 142 student Resident Assistants (RA) who work to foster a relationship-driven environment. RAs receive a compensation package that pays for their housing, meal plan, and training experience. Hall Directors, who are full-time professionals with Master's degrees, directly supervise RAs. UNI has a total of 14 Hall Directors, who manage on average a RA staff size of 12 and resident count of 360. Hall Directors receive supervision from the Assistant Directors (AD) of Housing, with the average supervision ratio of seven Hall Directors per AD.

In addition to the RA position, UNI Housing created a new student peer leader position in 2017 to address a lack of cultural learning, understanding, and empathy in the residential student population. Through a survey conducted by Housing in 2017, residential students scored their own ability to foster relationships across cultures much lower than their other relationship-oriented scoring. Residents also gave themselves low scores when assessing cultural empathy

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and low scores to UNI regarding the offerings of intercultural learning and interaction. To address these areas, UNI Housing created the CC position. The first implementation of this position was as a pilot program in half of the residential communities, and then expanding to all communities due to its success.

The CC position in the department of Housing is a part-time student position with a compensation of a meal plan. The CC position description reads:

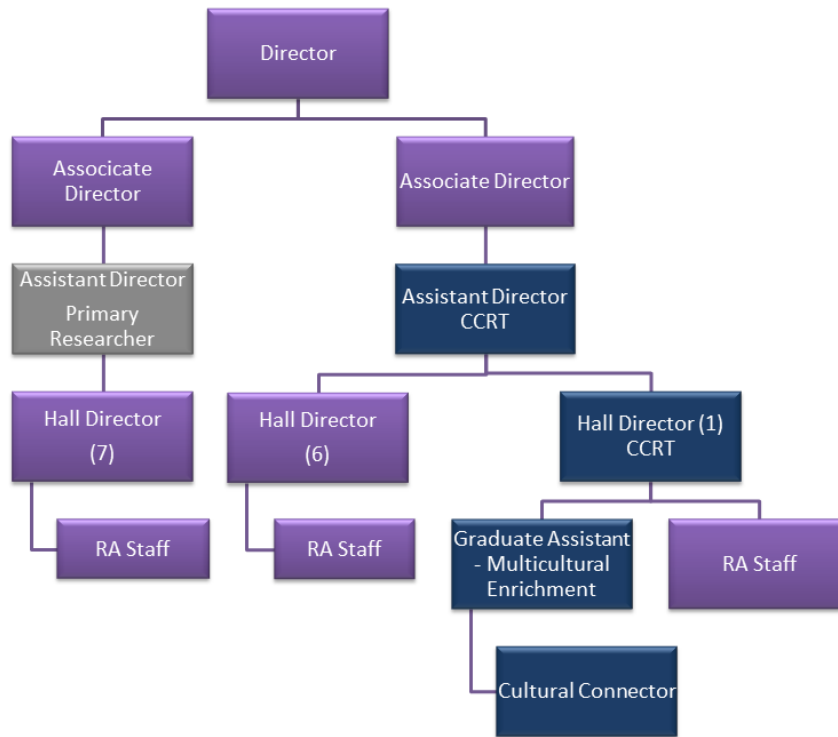
The CC position contributes to departmental and university missions by cultivating ethical leaders and responsible citizens in their residential communities. The CCs work to perform these contributions by assisting students in their transition and enriching their cultural development by creating dialogue and programs centered on diversity, inclusiveness, and multicultural topics. CCs strive to assure the residents of their building feel connected and welcomed into their residence hall community by facilitating and developing an environment that is inclusive in multicultural awareness. The CC works closely with hall staff to maintain a level of consistency within their role and with hall expectations. This student staff position requires dedication, flexibility, enthusiasm, communication, and active listening, as this staff member will actively respond to the changing needs and situations of residents. The CC is directly supervised and trained by a Hall Director and a Graduate Assistant. (Appendix A)

In the Housing departmental structure (Figure 5), the CC position works within the Inclusion Committee, of which both the Hall Director and Graduate Assistant of Multicultural Enrichment are a part.

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Figure 5

UNI Housing Department Org Chart



UNI has 14 residential communities, and each community has a CC. To qualify as CC, a person must be a full-time undergraduate student at UNI, meaning they enroll in a minimum of 12 credit hours at UNI. The demographics of the students who are CCs are far more racially diverse than the general UNI undergraduate demographic and have a larger female population percentage. Of the 14 CCs at UNI, 11 agreed to be a part of this study, as did the graduate assistant, Hall Director, and Assistant Director involved in the CC position.

CCs must carry a minimum GPA of 2.75, be in good academic and judicial standing with the university, and uphold the UNI Student Code of Conduct. This year, over 33 students applied for five vacancies, demonstrating how sought after the UNI CC position is. The Housing staff interviews candidates for the CC position, selecting successful CCs after the interview process.

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The CC selection process evaluates candidates' abilities in communication, understanding of social justice, leadership, self-awareness, passion for diversity and inclusion, willingness to learn, and relationship building. All successful candidates go through an individual interview, as well as a group interview process. All CCs participate in a one-week training at the beginning of their position and an additional one-day training between the fall and spring semesters. CCs also receive training on inclusivity, diversity, dialogue, relationship building, conflict mediation, wellness, and self-care. This training is delivered by UNI Housing to the CCs twice a year prior to each academic semester, and CC supervisors also provide additional training throughout the year. To retain employment each year, CCs receive an evaluation on their interpersonal and helping skills, community development, self-responsibility, and administrative abilities. Housing averages a loss of less than one CC a year due to a lack of abilities in the evaluated areas.

The CC position strives to enhance cultural education, experiences, and dialogue within the residence halls, which can be difficult at a PWI. The lack of diversity at UNI limits the frequency of new cultural interactions for attending students and limits the perceived understanding to increase intercultural skill-building. The CCs hope to develop intercultural skill-building, competency, and interactions. To support *intercultural competency* learning, the CCs facilitate programming, dialogue dinners, and provide relevant cultural information to students around the residential halls to help build and support student cultural awareness. At a dialogue dinner, CCs invite other students to get food and engage in conversations about identity. An example of a dinner topic is a conversation about relationship policing has with BISOC during Black History Month. CCs' acknowledgment of many cultures is an incredibly important part of their position, and this significance led the researcher to further investigate the development of cultural understanding and cross-cultural relationships.

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The GA of Multicultural Enrichment directly supervises the CC position. This graduate position consists of 20 hours per week supporting CCs and Housing diversity and inclusion work. The HD supervising the GA and CC experience does so in addition to their typical responsibilities as a HD. The Assistant Director supervises the HD and Inclusiveness Committee and supervises other HDs in residence halls. The position description for the GA of Multicultural Enrichment, Hall Director, and Assistant Director position (Appendix A) provide additional descriptions of the positions. Together, these roles oversee the selection, training, and supervision of the CC position. The organizational chart of Housing (Figure 5) displays the supervision map for all involved in the CCRT.

Participants in this study formed a Cultural Connector Research Team (CCRT), consisting of myself, 11 CCs, one Graduate Assistant, one Hall Director, and one Assistant Director of Housing. Each of these participants is a direct part of the UNI CC position or organizational structure indicated by navy blue in Figure 4. I have a considerable depth of knowledge regarding the position, having supervised it in years past, but had not done so for two years. As the primary researcher, I guided the participants through each stage of the PAR process but did not complete a *culture audit*. I do not supervise the CCs or the graduate and professional staff that supervises the position. As an Assistant Director, I supervise multiple Hall Directors and communities that partner with the CC position and Housing committees and initiatives. I have been in my role for over six years and have overseen the department's inclusiveness efforts, including the CC position in the past. Due to these duties, I have an "insider in collaboration with other insiders" (Anderson & Herr, 2014, p. 36) positionality in this study. Both I, the primary researcher, and the CCRT are stakeholders in the CC experience. Housing is investing in improving the development of *intercultural competency* learning, and is a stakeholder as well.

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Members of the CCRT identify as "co-researchers" (Leitch et al., 2007, p. 462) in the typology of participation since they served in research roles throughout the PAR study duration and had an active role in data analysis and intervention. The CCRTs insider positionality and knowledge provided adaptation for the action research cycle in order to best create action, and many CCRT members will return to the position next year in a future iteration of the PAR cycle.

The collaborative participation of the CCRT group adds *Democratic Validity* (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007, p. 43) to this study. The collaborative participation also allowed for student researchers to experience this study as an educational experience. In order to increase the *Dialogic Validity* and to ensure as little bias as possible, a *critical friend* (Anderson, Herr & Nihlen, 2007, p. 43) assisted the primary researcher on this study. With no connection to UNI Housing, the *critical friend* partnered with the researchers in the review of findings within the *cultural audit*, allowing an outsider of the department and the study to account for any biases emerging in data collection, organization, and analysis, as well as actions the CCRT pursues based on data.

The Cultural Connector Research Team

Like any job that you do, the more knowledge you have, and in the work that you do, empowers you more, and just power and I really believe in that, and I really don't know how to explain it, but just like, knowing about more about culture really empowers the job that I do. Kailyn - Group Discussion #2

The CCRT is an incredible group of people, with different ideas, identities, and aspirations as they engage in diversity-focused peer leadership. Although UNI is a PWI, the CCRT has a higher percentage of racial diversity than the institution and is primarily made up of

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students of color. UNI has a two-year live-on requirement, meaning all first- and second-year students live on campus unless they received an exemption from Housing. The demographic percentages in on-campus housing facilities resembles the overall undergraduate profile in Table 4. As noted in the table, the demographic make-up of the CCRT position does not represent the overall UNI student demographic.

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Table 4

CCRT & UNI Demographic Information

Demographic	CCRT Percentage	UNI Student Percentage
Gender		
Male	21	41
Female	79	59
Ethnicity		
White	29	66.9
Hispanic/Latino	7	15.9
Black/African American	29	5.4
Asian	35	2.8
Multi-Ethnic	0	6.9
Unknown Ethnicity	0	1.5
American Indian	0	.4
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0	.2
Age		
18-24	86	95.5
25+	14	4.5

Each of the participants in this study actively desired to improve the CC position, and to gain understanding of the barriers that push against the efforts being made. A total of 14 members of the CCRT contributed at different levels to the study. Each CCRT member was present at Zoom meetings. Each CCRT member was on their own technology device as we connected, because

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COVID-19 safety precautions restricted in-person gatherings. A brief introduction to the people who comprise the CCRT follows – all names aside from my own are pseudonyms.

Mikayla: Mikayla worked to make space in the conversation for others as often as she could. She applied her knowledge as a Social Work major and a Comparative Race and Ethnic Studies minor to provide critique and insight into structures of power and privilege at UNI. Mikayla strived to see the best in UNI and to articulate all the things UNI does to bring DEI and intercultural learning to the forefront. She really found her voice in creating actions that would positively impact the CC role, and in the conversation leading to the term *cultural clique*.

Jack: Jack was very quiet in the beginning of the study but gained a voice as the study progressed. Often surrounded by other students playing a piano while he spoke, Jack gave perspectives that intersected his international and Black identities in the UNI sphere. Jack felt he was dismissed often when giving an international perspective in programs and the classroom. He gave examples of moments when he shared what school or testing was like in his country of birth, to have professors say it wasn't applicable because it is different in the United States. This study gave Jack a chance to share his authentic experience, and although he remained quiet, he enjoyed listening to others words.

Irene: Irene attended several meetings and primarily contributed through the chat box. As a Geography major and a female student of color, her valuable perspective often affirmed the voices of others openly, building significance for others' thoughts. She attributed her silence to recognizing her peers say thoughts that she also believes to be true, but their articulation is much more formulated than her own. She assured the group that if she disagreed, she would say so. To compensate for her silence, she offered head nods and digital applause to other CCRT members' verbal contributions to the study.

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KB: KB shared wisdom and opportunities for growth with the CCRT often. Applying her experiences as an Asian Psychology student, KB articulated the barriers pushing against the CCs in a clear way. She introduced the term *cultural clique* to the group and was vital in taking the words of several others and synthesizing them. As a senior, KB held a historical knowledge that allowed her to speak in themes. She often patiently waited to hear the words of others and then carefully threaded those words together into similar themes. It was clear other CCRT members valued her perspective immensely and at times wanted her to say even more.

August: August provided powerful insight into the experience of a white woman engaging in diversity work. She spoke about her experiences in the Business School, as well as the residence hall. August wrestled often with her privilege and when to use her voice and brought concepts of cultural humility into this study. August realized her work has a ripple effect that could make change at UNI. As a white woman, she knew that students who were shut off from conversations of DEI would more likely listen to her than some of her peers. She saw her privilege as a way into conversations and as a barrier to DEI conversations.

Addy: Addy was present for many of the meetings, but she did not actively contribute to the group. I would have loved to learn more about Addy's perspective as an Asian female who is a Communication Studies major at UNI. With that said, I respect the amount of input she chose to give and was grateful to have her present even without participation.

Tomas: Tomas is a white international student from Germany, majoring in Engineering. Tomas had been in the CC position longer than any other student participant and had several ideas on how to improve the position and the standing it has in the Housing department. Tomas entered this study wanting to be seen and heard. He articulated several moments in his experience in the CC role where not enough was done to support him. He was tired of working so hard towards

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intercultural learning while other UNI staff members outside of the CC position did not. Tomas always smiled when he talked, but his words cut at the negative experiences he experiences in the CC role.

Sydney: Sydney is an Electrical Engineering major with incredible insight and wisdom. She attended every aspect of the study and brought perspective and critical thought to a lot of the conversations within the study. Sydney made space for others' voices and had great power when she used her own voice. She was honest about the fatigue she felt being always in the identity minority on UNI's campus and in the residential community. Sydney was the first to bring up how the spatial aspects of the residential community impact her efforts into residential intercultural learning. Sydney was the first to talk in this study and was also the most frequent contributor. She pushed back heavily on *intercultural competency* learning opportunities that prioritized items (like food) over content.

Kailyn: Kailyn used her voice throughout the study to articulate struggles she was having at UNI and in the CC position but also the importance she saw in it. Kailyn studies History and Comparative Race and Ethnic Studies and spoke about her exhaustion as a Hispanic woman at a PWI. Kailyn has a quiet and steady wisdom about her. She was often trying to be understanding to other students, giving grace to their journey of intercultural learning.

Jay: Jay was quiet throughout the study, and it would have been easy to think she was not engaged if not for her additions of wisdom when she did contribute. As a Black student studying Political Science and Comparative Race and Ethnic Studies, she remained selective in the amount of input she gave.

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Ekiya: Ekiya has a laughter that warms the group and an insight which focuses the group. As a Computer Science major, she applied a more technical perspective to conversations and areas of actions. Identifying as a student of color, she openly articulated her own experiences within UNI. Ekiya is inherently optimistic and saw the value in each person's perspective. As an international student, she tried to make sure the CCRT saw a global perspective even when discussing items more true to residential communities, UNI as a whole, or America in general. This approach also helped make space for Jack to enter the conversation, as Ekiya had made the space safer for him.

Camryn: Camryn is a Hall Director with an incredible passion for diversity, equity, and inclusion, and a big advocate for student development and support. As a white CCRT, Camryn uses invisible identities of marginalization to empathize with and empower students in the CC position. Camryn worked so hard to make space for others in the conversation, to the point where it was needed to remind her that her voice is also incredibly valuable. She loved cheering the words of other CCRT members on, and she was poignantly affirming when CCRT members were dancing around terms (ex. white supremacy) by naming it in the space and then letting other CCRT members know it is ok to follow in doing the same.

Michael: As an Assistant Director, Michael felt it was important to hear the students' perspective before speaking. As a Black man, he could relate to a lot of what was being said, but he still wanted the students' voices to be heard more than his own in the group meetings. Michael was present often, and he provided affirmations and head nods to other CCRT members as they found their voice in the study. He was especially engaged in Group Discussion #4, where the CCRT determined actions. He did not aim to force the actions picked one way or

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another; rather he was quick to support and amplify voices and actions that would make the biggest difference in his mind.

Shannon: As the direct supervisor for the CCs and a student in the Higher Education master's degree program herself, Shannon used her voice to invite others to speak, as well as to articulate her own struggles in assisting the CC position at UNI. She was always the first to welcome everyone into the study and to make everyone feel valued throughout the process. It was clear that she genuinely cared for the CCRT members. She would affirm others through words and emojis often, as well as provide a great deal of wisdom by adding on to the words others were speaking. Shannon straddled her role as a supervisor and graduate student well.

Jason: As previously stated, I have an "insider in collaboration with other insiders" (Anderson & Herr, 2014, p. 36) positionality during this study. Even though all CCRT members are insiders, that does not mean each person has the same role on the team. As I worked to provide the framework of the study, and educate and guide the other CCRT members along in the study, I intentionally omit myself and my words from the data being sorted and analyzed.

Critical Friend

The use of a *critical friend* adds validity and triangulation to this PAR study (Anderson et al., 2007). This study pursued efforts to maintain an ethical approach in all aspects of the process, including but not limited to a *critical friend* and use of collaboration. A *critical friend* helped the primary researcher on this study in gaining consent for the CCs to join the CCRT and reducing bias in the data analysis process. The *critical friend* for this study is a doctoral candidate at UNI in the Science Education Ph.D. program and has no connection with UNI Housing. As a classmate of the primary researcher, she is aware of the needs for validity in a

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PAR study and the impact it can have on the participants. She assisted with obtaining CCRT consent and checking thematic sorting for mistakes or bias and determining future action. These steps ensured the preparation of the questions and to avoid over-inference on participant responses. Having studied reflexivity and positionality in her own research, Alex is aware of potential biases she may have entering into this study.

Procedures

This study follows the six phases of the action research cycle (Ferrance, 2000), as shown in Table 5, utilizing qualitative data collection and analysis processes.

Table 5

Action Research Cycle Phases in the Study

Phase	Description	Use In This Study	Who is Present
Training	Training #1	Train on: Culture Audit	CCRT and Primary Researcher
1	Identify Problem Area	Group Discussion #1: SCCOC Collect: SCCOC, Group Discussion Transcript	CCRT and Primary Researcher
2	Collect & Organize Data	Group Discussion #2: CC Feedback Form, Researcher Journal Collect: CC Group Feedback Form, Group Discussion Transcript Organize: Qualtrics, Excel, Word Cloud	CCRT and Primary Researcher
Training	Training #2	Train on: Data Analysis, Intervention/Action Creation	CCRT and Primary Researcher
3	Interpretation of Data	Group Discussion #3: Participatory Data Analysis, A Priori Coding (Cultural Proficiency Traits & Barriers), Emergent Coding Collect: Group Discussion Transcript	CCRT, Primary Researcher, Critical Friend
4	Action Based on Data	Group Discussion #4: Action Collect: Group Discussion Transcript	CCRT and Primary Researcher
5	Reflection	Group Discussion #5: Reflection Collect: CC Reflection Form, Group Discussion Transcript	CCRT, Primary Researcher, Critical Friend
6	Next Steps	Presentation to Stakeholders	CCRT

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This qualitative approach aims to gain understanding of human behavior through their experiences and actions (Taylor et al., 2015). The Cultural Connector Research Team received PAR training twice in the study's duration. The first training occurred before the beginning of the study, focusing on conducting a *culture audit*. In this study, a *culture audit* (Bustamante, 2009) consisting of checklists, interviews, observations, and presentations to community stakeholders is present in the first three phases of the PAR cycle. The second training occurred after the researchers conducted the *culture audit* and focused on data analysis and intervention creation. This study uses a focus group interview approach as opposed to individual interviews within the *culture audit*, utilizing transcriptions of meetings as a primary data source in conjunction with submitted form feedback when available. Interpretation of the data has been completed by myself and the CCRT primarily through *a priori* coding established in the Cultural Proficiency Essential Elements (Terrell et al., 2018), and the Barriers to Cultural Proficiency (Terrell et al., 2018), with some emergent coding arising and identification of areas where actionable solutions would impact problem areas.

Data Collection and Organization

Of the 14 CCs at UNI, 11 CCs consented to participating in this study, as did the supervising GA, HD, and AD. The 14 members of the CCRT then completed five discussion group meetings which consisted of a *culture audit*, participatory data analysis, and the determination of actions to be provided to departmental stakeholders to improve the CC position. The primary data source in this study is the transcriptions from group discussions, and form data from an observation checklist and open-ended surveys. I also kept a research journal through the study for triangulation. Janesick (2011) notes that journal writing is a “tangible way to evaluate

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our experiences, improve and clarify our thinking, and become better writers and scholars” (p. 161). Janesick notes five benefits of journaling as a researcher (2011, p. 162):

1. Helps to focus the study
2. Helps to set the groundwork for analysis and interpretation
3. Serves as a tool for revisiting notes and transcripts
4. Serves as a tool to awaken the imagination
5. Helps keep the written record of thoughts, feelings, and facts

All participant interaction components of this study took place over the digital audio and video conferencing platform Zoom to help support and facilitate the university’s procedures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Zoom offered the ability to record and transcribe meetings, features used during the PAR process, and was available and known to all UNI students. The research journal helped me capture additional context of the experience in order to better understand thoughts and feelings articulated, and was of great use in setting and maintaining the foundation of analysis and interpretation in this study.

Culture Audit

After providing consent to participate in the study, and receiving training over PAR, the CCRT began to perform a *culture audit*. The *culture audit* first consisted of the Schoolwide Cultural Competency Observation Checklist (SCCOC) (Appendix B) in order to evaluate UNI and the residential communities where CCs work. CCRT members completed the SCCOC individually, and then brought their feedback to Group Discussion #1 to debrief their SCCOC findings with each other. CCRT members who did not complete the form still participated in Group Discussion #1, and their perspectives were captured in the transcription data. Data from

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submitted SCCOCs and the transcripts of the conversation had in Group Discussion #1, were categorized as SCCOC data. The second aspect of the *culture audit* was a CC Group Feedback Form. Having completed the SCCOC, CCRT members built off of the conversation in Group Discussion #1 to complete the CC Group Feedback Form and further audit UNI's culture in regard to the CC position. The CC Group Feedback Form (Appendix C) is a Qualtrics qualitative questionnaire with open-ended responses. The open-ended responses used for this form was useful to allow CCRT members to answer the questions using their own words and narrative and add to their answers during or after group discussion. Open-ended form responses also allowed for easier data collection for the researcher (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2009). Data from both the submitted CC Group Feedback Forms as well as the conversation in Group Discussion #2 were considered CC Group Feedback data, similar to the SCCOC. The CCRT *culture audit* concluded in this study in Group Discussion #5, during which CCRT members reflected on their experience within the PAR study, providing a frame of the *culture audit* around the picture that PAR provides. The *culture audit* allowed for intentional data collection for the CCRT, and a participatory data analysis process allowed CCRT members to further authenticate their previous thoughts, now having a greater perspective on UNI due to the *culture audit*.

Data Organization

Data was collected, organized, and analyzed after each Group Discussion utilizing the constant comparison method, which is “the data-analytic process whereby each interpretation and finding is compared with existing findings as it emerges from the data analysis” (Parry, 2011, p. 2). Having collected data from Group Discussion transcriptions, as well as submitted SCCOC and CC Group Feedback Forms, I used "categorical strategies to break down narrative data and rearrange those data to produce categories that facilitate comparisons, thus leading to a

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better understating of the research question" (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 253). In utilizing a unitization and thematic analysis categorizing process (Creswell, 2013), I worked to "divide narrative data into what we call units of information (UOI), which are the smallest pieces of meaningful information," and then "review each category for internal consistency" (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2009, p. 255). I sorted the data into *a priori* codes (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2009, p. 252) derived from the Essential Elements of Culturally Proficient Leadership and the Barriers to Cultural Proficiency (Terrell et al., 2018) for positional, departmental, institutional, or cultural findings. I presented data that did not belong to *a priori* codes to the CCRT as possible emergent themes verified or removed by the group. The *critical friend* for this study reviewed the data analysis steps separate from me to ensure higher validity and for stronger triangulation. The addition of the *critical friend* gave this study greater "Process Validity" (Anderson et al., 2007, p. 41) and "Dialogic Validity" (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007, p. 43) by including outside perspectives to the data gathering and analysis of this study.

A Priori Coding

I organized the data collected through the Qualtrics forms and transcripts through *a priori* codes and shared the process and potential outcomes with the CCRT. I used Terrell et al.'s (2018) Cultural Proficiency Essential Elements (p. 33) and Barriers to Cultural Proficiency (p. 34) in coding data collected about the CC position, Housing, UNI, and other components impacting the CCs *intercultural competency* development. I used *a priori* codes of the Essential Elements for Cultural Proficient Leadership in sorting CCRT data regarding UNI and Housing represented in the *culture audit*. The Essential Elements for Cultural Proficient Leadership are in Table 6.

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Table 6

Essential Elements for Cultural Proficient Leadership

Essential Elements for Cultural Proficient Leadership	
Assessing Cultural Knowledge	Leading the learning about others' cultures, about how educators and schools as a whole react to others' cultures, and about what you need to do to be effective in cross-cultural situations. Also, leading learning about the school and its grade levels and departments as cultural entities.
Valuing Diversity	Creating informal and formal decision-making groups inclusive of people whose viewpoints and experiences are different from yours and from those of the dominant group at the school, and that will enrich conversations, decision making, and problem solving.
Managing the Dynamics of Difference	Modeling problem-solving and conflict-resolution strategies as natural and normal processes within the organizational culture of the school and within the cultural contexts of the communities of your school.
Adapting Diversity	Being the lead learner at your school about cultural groups different from your own, and adjusting to acknowledge others' cultural experiences and backgrounds in all school settings.
Institutionalizing Cultural Knowledge	Making learning about cultural groups and their experiences and perspectives an integral part of the staff's professional development. Establishing norms for a culturally proficient educational environment.

Institutional barriers included in the *culture audit* were coded similarly using the Barriers of Cultural Proficiency. Table 7 further explains the Barriers to Cultural Proficiency.

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Table 7

Barriers to Cultural Proficiency

Barriers to Cultural Proficiency	
Resistance to Change	Many educators in schools often struggle with change that involves issues of culture. For those who are resistant, change often is experienced as an outside force that judges current practices as deficient or defective. Whether accurate or not, an adversarial relationship exists between those forcing the change and members of the staff resisting change.
Systems of Oppression	That racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, and classism exist without refute, historically and currently. Data are on the side of documenting and describing the ill effects of such systems. Being able to understand depression as a systematic issue apart from personal behavior is important.
A Sense of Privilege and Entitlement	Systems of oppression have two effects - on those who are harmed and those who benefit. Those harmed from systematic oppression respond from an emotional connection and become very knowledgeable of practices that impact them negatively. Many of those who benefit from historical and current practices are oblivious to the negative effects of systematic oppression on others, because they can choose not to see.
Unawareness of Need to Adapt	This lack of awareness is based on assumptions that the students, their communities, and their cultures must adapt to the school culture. This barrier often leads staff to view students and their cultures in deficit terms, and to fail to base school experiences on the cultural assets students bring to the school. Probing this barrier often leads educators to recognize and embrace the professional learning to which they must commit.

Interpretation of Data

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Due to time constraints of the academic semester the data organization process did not include other CCRT members, but once I concluded the data organization process the data and organizational process was shared with the CCRT. Together we performed a participatory analysis process (Patton, 2002) that entailed “working with non-researchers and non-evaluators not only in collecting data but also in analyzing it” (p. 496). Although CCRT members were present for Group Discussions during the culture audit part of the study, CCRT member names were not associated with the data used for analysis to allow members the choice to name themselves or not in data analysis. In Group Discussion #3, the CCRT viewed indexed data previously placed into *a priori* and emergent themes. The Cultural Proficiency Essential Elements themes are visible in Table 8 in the findings chapter of this dissertation.

The CCRT then analyzed and helped justify coded topics that were placed into *a priori* themes, communicated the significance of words or ideas not used often but that carry importance, authenticate emergent themes, and removed any data identified by CCRT members as misunderstood or not indexed correctly. While unitization and categorization allowed for larger themes to emerge or be placed into *a priori* codes from the study, the practical significance remained essential to the coding process. In using a similar data analysis approach provided by Mettetal (2002), who states to “Analyze your data, looking for findings with practical significance ... Practical significance, rather than statistical significance, is the goal” (p. 5), CCRT did not determine themes solely by frequency, but by practical significance. Results from themes were triangulated with complementary themes, as well as CCRT experiences, to ensure validity. Triangulation was utilized to ensure validity between the results from themes as well as CCRT experiences.

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Action Based on Data

After completing the culture audit, the CCRT began discussing possible actions to improve the CC position. The team also discussed, identified, and addressed barriers impacting the CC position and its efforts to increase *intercultural competency* in residential students. Initially, Discussion Meeting #3 provided 24 different potential actions that the CCRT identified. The CCRT consolidated actions with other similar actions, bringing the number of actions down to 11 preliminary actions. During Group Discussion #4, the CCRT identified eight of the 11 actions as the immediate actions they would like to take as the CCRT. We then took these actions to the Director of Housing and presented them as actions the CCRT would like to pursue. The Director of Housing approved these actions and was impressed with the work the CCRT accomplished.

Reflection

The CCRT finished Group Discussion #5 with a reflection, allowing the CCRT a chance to look back on the PAR process. A Reflection Feedback Form (Appendix D) was given to each CCRT member to complete, but most CCRT members used the discussion to offer their reflective words instead of the form. Reflection is essential in the PAR cycle, as it helps assess the effects of the study and the actions that emerged from the study to determine if improvement has occurred. In future iterations of this study, this moment would reflect the end of one cycle of PAR research and the beginning of another as a new cycle with new actions emerging. This study closes the PAR cycle loop to conclude and report findings while offering a macro-analysis to dive deeper into additional findings.

Validity

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As stated in the literature review of this study, Anderson et al. (2007) provide five goals for action research to strive for, to which this study adheres.

1. Dialogic validity
2. Outcome validity
3. Catalytic validity
4. Democratic validity
5. Process validity

The participatory approach in research and analysis, as well as the presence of a *critical friend* establishes the *process validity* and *dialogic validity* of this study and delivers appropriate and sound methodology. CCRT members articulated both engagement and learning about *intercultural competency* and PAR, as well as their locus of control in taking action, which is important to the *catalytic validity* and *democratic validity* of the study. The term *catalytic validity* refers to the generation of new knowledge and consciousness, which is deliverable in this study through the emergent codes, particularly *cultural cliques* and *privileged apathy*. The eight identified action items identified by the CCRT provide the beginning efforts of the action-oriented outcomes and *outcome validity*, which have not come to complete fruition yet due to a lack of time to have implemented each action. The willingness of the Director of Housing to approve each action item offers more support to the promise of *outcome validity* and also helps to establish *dialogic validity* which demands that the results of the study are relevant to the local setting. If the actions were not relevant to the local setting, then key stakeholders in this study would not have approved them.

Ethical Considerations

This study pursued efforts to maintain an ethical approach in all aspects of the process. In recognizing the researcher-to-student supervisory relationship, the *critical friend* was used to

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gain consent towards participation and limit biases that could emerge in data sorting and analysis. A collaborative approach to data analysis and intervention adaptation and framing and reframing adapted interventions worked to ensure the process's validity. As Anderson et al. (2007) posit, "Process validity or trustworthiness asks to what extent problems are framed and solved in a manner that permits ongoing learning of the individual system" (p. 41). The intervention's scope and the impact of *intercultural competency* are investigated and improved in a collaborative approach using an action research approach. PAR allows for student learning and progress as research is in process, a thorough lens with multiple perspectives of *intercultural competency* in the CC position, and a cyclical plan for ongoing learning and investigation.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) state, "If there is to be transferability, the burden of proof lies less with the original investigator than with the person seeking the application elsewhere" (p. 298). The research presented in this study aims to lessen the effort that future researchers will make to apply the study elsewhere. Many universities have a similar staff structure, so other university departments could easily apply this study's PAR framework and apply the culture audit. In PAR, generalizability comes secondary to the impact the study can have on the CCRT and the allowance of CC voices' amplification through a critical and transformational experience.

Meta-Analysis

PAR not only allowed CCRT members an avenue to make changes to the CC position, it also offered deep insight into the systems and structures that push against the efforts of the CCs. This study includes the PAR methodology detailed above, as well as an additional meta-analysis implementing a criticality towards intersecting spatial and curricular impacts of *intercultural competency* learning. The use of PAR as an intervention provided understanding towards the

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hegemonic barriers that exist and hinder CC development and facilitation of *intercultural competency* learning and cultural enhancement at UNI. The application of meta-analysis through critical spatial theory (Helfenbein & Huddleston, 2021) provides greater understanding into the role space and place play in mitigating or amplifying the CC experience delivering *intercultural competency* learning within the residence hall. Gaining understanding in PAR's effectiveness for addressing spatial and curricular hegemonic exertions of power impacting *intercultural competency* learning within the context of a predominantly white university is central to this meta-analysis. Acquired heightened awareness of the structural systematic or systemic hindrances allows for greater understanding of the role the physical residence hall plays in the CC role.

Data for the meta-analysis of this study included the data gathered from the PAR portion of the study and was conducted after the completion of the PAR study. By utilizing themes derived by constant comparative data analysis (Parry, 2011), the meta-analysis of this study used Group Discussion transcripts, CC Group Feedback Form data, responses collected in the CC Reflection Form, and the primary researcher's research journal in understanding the spatial and hegemonic aspects at play at UNI. By furthering the study to comprehend the impact of space and place on CCRT members, narratives of the CCRT in relation to institutional impact of culturally-focused peer leadership positions become essential context in understanding a more comprehensive student peer leaders' experience. This meta-analysis provides insight into the impact a university's physical structures and build places has on culturally-focused student leadership positions, as well as the impact spatial reflections of the hegemonic power at UNI have when conducting a PAR study.

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The meta-analysis of this study was conducted separate from the PAR study and without collaborative involvement from CCRT members or this study's *critical friend*. While data which had been collected through participatory approaches was included, the meta-analysis of this study was not participatory in nature. The meta-analysis of this study deployed a constant comparative data analysis (Parry, 2011) approach in order to build upon and include correlated data found in different data sources in the PAR study while analyzing the several data sources. Spatial analysis was conducted parallel to the PAR timeline but occurring beyond the conclusion of the PAR study. The steps followed in this analysis are included in Table 8:

Table 8

Steps for Meta-Analysis

Steps	Description of Steps	Research Tool Used
1	An initial revisiting of my research journal after completion of the PAR study a focus on critical spatial analysis	Research Journal
2	A continuation of my research journal with a focus on critical spatial analysis	Research Journal
3	Revisiting CCRT recordings and transcription of Group Discussions in chronological order in order to listen more intently to statements made by CCRT members regarding spatial impacts	Research Journal, Group Discussion Recordings and Transcriptions, CC Group Feedback Form data, Responses Collected in the CC Reflection Form
4	A visit to each residence to refresh my memory of the site being discussed (I already have existing knowledge of each residence hall CCs operate in)	Research Journal

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This study followed the participatory action research cycle developed by Ferrance (2000) for one complete iteration. The CCRTs' execution of the PAR cycle delivered actions that improved the CC position, provided *intercultural competency* learning, and CC awareness of the hegemonic, social, and organizational barriers impacting CCs at UNI. The applied *culture audit* operated as an intentional approach to phase one ("Identify Problem Area") and two ("Collect & Organize Data") of the PAR cycle. Identifying the problem areas impacting CCs through the Schoolwide Cultural Competence Observation Checklist (SCCOC) provided a path for common questions and a shared inquiry. The SCCOC form, CC Focus Group Feedback Form, and CC Reflection Form from the *culture audit* also served as a guide and prompt in Group Discussion Meetings. The collection of Group Discussion transcripts and forms provided for a rich collection of data organized by myself and triangulated with the *critical friend* and the CCRT. The use of participatory analysis for phase three of the PAR cycle ensured a similar understanding of the interpreted data as the CCRT began to engage in forming actions. The CCRT continued a participatory approach into phase four of the PAR cycle, creating "Actions Based on Data." Once the eight final actions had been determined, the CCRT engaged in phase five of the PAR cycle, "Reflection." Reflection by the CCRT was first conducted as a group in a Group Discussion and then again individually in the CC Reflection Form. After completing the reflection phase of the PAR cycle, the CCRT completed phase six of the PAR cycle ("Next Steps") through meeting with Housing stakeholders and receiving approval for the proposed actions. The stakeholder meeting concluded the complete cycle of the PAR cycle for this study, and signified the success of the CCRT in creating change in the CC position.

Impact of Participatory Action Research

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I organized data from the SCCOC, Group Feedback Form, and transcriptions from Group Discussions #1 and #2 into *a priori* codes found in the Cultural Proficiency Essential Element using a constant comparative method (Taylor et al., 2015). In constant comparative data coding, data analysis runs concurrently for each data source instead of a linear progression (Glaser & Strauss, 2017). By first taking data from the sources listed, which were thought to be related to an *identified a priori* code, I placed the data into an Excel spreadsheet organized by code. Once I sorted each transcript and form, I revisited the document to double-check my work for accuracy. I then further condensed the data using frequency and CCRT articulated importance (and agreeance by others to the importance) into UOI's to identify themes. The *critical friend* of the study then checked my data sorting and organization to help limit any bias which had emerged. The CCRT members were sent the themes a week before Group Discussion #3 in order for them to have time to process them. The spreadsheet was then shared with the CCRT, who, through participatory analysis, assisted me in developing the Cultural Proficiency Essential Elements themes visible in Table 9.

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Table 9

CCRT Essential Elements for Cultural Proficiency

Essential Elements for Cultural Proficiency	
Assessing Cultural Knowledge	Themes
	There are a lot of layers and perspectives that go into the definition of diversity at UNI, and how to program towards it.
	Programming, classrooms, and designated positions are how UNI works to further cultural knowledge
	There are not many ways UNI or Housing assesses student cultural knowledge
Valuing Diversity	Themes
	UNI values diversity, but the amount of value varies by the involvement the class or department has with DEI
	The Cultural Connector position is an authentic engagement into DEI work, and develops intercultural competency in CCs
	UNIs articulated value of diversity does not seem to match its' spending on diversity
Managing the Dynamics of Difference	Themes
	Knowing more about culture motivates engagement into culture and cultural differences
	Student segregation has to be addressed when managing dynamics of difference
Adapting Diversity	Themes
	The CC position should be an active learning position
	Training and education around DEI should happen more often and with more intentionality
Institutionalizing Cultural Knowledge	Themes
	The creation of positions like the CC position forces engagement into the difference of culture
	Engaging in programming and positions addressing difference can impact residents and create a chain reaction of impact

Assessing Cultural Knowledge

The CCRT identified their position in leading intercultural learning but also increased their understanding of what remains unknown. As Mikayla shared:

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It really made me think of how not only I define diversity, but how UNI tries to define that. And just really noticing how there's a lot of layers that go into that with classes and social scenes - Group Discussion #2.

Similar to Sydney's statement, the recognition of the layers present in *intercultural competency* learning and understanding at UNI was both enlightening and discouraging for CCRT members. Enlightenment occurred through the lens of what more could be learned first by the CC, and then shared with UNI residential students. A sense of discouragement emerged due to increased understanding of the complexity in diversity-oriented intercultural learning, as well as feeling a lack of support institutionally at times in CCs' efforts to deliver intercultural learning. CCRT also identified key delivery methods in UNI's intercultural curriculum for students; these methods included programming, classroom lessons, and designated culturally-focused positions. Noticeably absent were cultural competencies from the core curriculum, the IEF, and the relationship the CC position has with UNI's DEI efforts.

Housing designates the CC position as a culturally-focused peer leadership position. The CCRT realized there was a lack of comprehensive evaluation and assessment of the impact their position has on residents, Housing, and UNI as a whole. In support of additional assessment and evaluation, Ekiya shared that the *culture audit*:

...makes me think about, like, we're in residence halls, and there's so many different people from so many various walks of life coming into each of our buildings, and how are we doing what we're learning, putting it in practice with what we're doing here with the program, our position? - Group Discussion #2.

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She felt it was important to be deliverers of *intercultural competency* development and learning, but we should also ensure that development considers the impact it has on students, as opposed to only viewing the intent.

For Tomas, the collective group of CCs was also a locus of growth in developing into leading learners regarding intercultural learning.

I feel like a thing that will definitely help enhance intercultural learning is having the cultural connector group, right? So all of these different people with their different interests and passions, and being able to hear about some of the topics that interest each other, and maybe doing programming around that. So you might be introduced to another identity or another, like program programming model that you aren't necessarily familiar with before being a part of this group of cultural connectors. Tomas – Group Discussion #2

The sense of working from a place of group support and group knowledge was empowering. Tomas couldn't imagine engaging in this work by himself and felt strongly that UNI Housing department should ensure as much support for CCs as possible.

Valuing Diversity

It was clear from the beginning to the CCRT that the CC position operates as a formal decision-making group inclusive of people whose viewpoints and experiences are different from each other and divergent from the dominant group at UNI. As Michael stated:

Just thinking back to when we created the Cultural Connector position, and it reminded me why we created it. And just like really reflecting on the growth that we've had, since we started this to now, and seeing ways that we can continue to help UNI as a

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community, and within our residence halls when helping develop cultural understanding in our residents. - Group Discussion #2.

Other CCRT members highlighted how authentic the DEI engagement was from CCs, both due to their student status and to their lived embodiment or allyship of diverse identities. Although there was agreement on how the CC position valued diversity, the same was not true for CCRT perceptions of UNI. Many CCRT members had different experiences with UNI's delivery of DEI development or support. The biggest differentiated aspects were the academic majors and focus of courses of the CCRT members. If the CCRT member took classes focused around areas of diversity or identity, they saw the efforts of the professors or staff members as representation of UNI.

Our classes have deep conversations but it feels like it just stays at conversations and no action. Ekiya – Group Discussion #2

The CCRT felt unanimous about Ekiya's articulation of UNI's lack of tangible action.

CCRT members who were in other majors did not feel as though UNI delivered as highly on its articulation of the importance of diversity. As Shannon shared:

When it comes to community here at UNI my professors and my program is grounded in the teaching of a white perspective of higher education. This difference impacts some of the other differences as it relates to teaching, curriculum, and student interaction. I know that my contributions in my work and in the classroom are often counter to what is the norm of historical context both by UNI and the field of student affairs. Shannon – Group Discussion #3

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Shannon's articulation of her graduate experience resonated with the undergraduate CCRT members. Kailyn shared in the chat that she had hoped it would be different at the graduate level, but Shannon said it was not.

Although the amount CCRT members felt UNI was invested in teaching towards DEI instruction was variable, the CCRT was united in feeling as though UNI should apply more spending and budget towards diversity. Even with the presences of UNI's IEF, *intercultural competency* learning inside and outside the classroom operated in the CCRT members minds like lily pads in a pond. A student may be able to jump from one intercultural learning experience to another, but those experiences were not connected, and the quality of them varied greatly.

Managing the Dynamics of Difference

The CCRT struggled to identify ways in which Housing and UNI modeled problem-solving and conflict-resolution strategies in managing difference, so they did not see them as natural and normal processes within the organizational culture of the school and within the cultural contexts. Rather, the CCRT identified problem-solving strategies as an area of opportunity for more understanding and change from Housing. As CCRT members were thinking about ways they too could impact residents through problem-solving efforts, they began to recognize barriers keeping them from managing the dynamics of difference. The CCRT saw the CC position as an intervention but not as a structured model for problem-solving or conflict-resolution.

The CC group was an incredibly diverse group, and the conversations they engaged in were not normal to the traditional UNI student.

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I know somebody referenced this being one of the most diverse groups they've ever been a part of. But that is not something that is normal, in terms of the student experience.

August – Group Discussion #2

Due to the CCs interaction with people from difference cultural backgrounds, the idea of differing cultures is normalized.

Being a student leader in certain spheres of campus can enhance it [intercultural competency]. It [the student leader position] makes you interact with different types of people (Camp Facilitator, RA, CC, etc.) Interacting with others with intent to care for them and help them will help the student as well. Sydney - Focus Group Feedback Form

Sydney could see the benefit in the cultural interaction she and other student peer leader positions experienced. She also smartly challenged the notion that it was normal to hold this view, articulating that most of the student population is not in leadership roles with incentives to relate across difference.

Adapting with Diversity

CCRT members identified the CC position, as well as Housing, as being lead learners and sharers of knowledge at UNI in regards to cultural groups and differences. For the CC position, the DEI embedded in the position and its efforts ensured a focus on adjusting to acknowledge others' cultural experiences and backgrounds. As Sydney discussed:

In the [CC] position we intentionally talk about concerns with DEI and so we're forced to consider those aspects. Of course, like, it allows us to do that, which we perhaps would not do in a normal situation. Like the average person does not go about their day thinking about DEI, but within the CC position, you're considering this aspect in, at least

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at certain times. So, I feel like, that in itself, would enhance intercultural appreciation. -

Group Discussion #2

Due to the constant consideration of DEI through the CC position, the CCRT believed that the CC position should be treated as an active learning position.

There's so many different ways to implement it and talk about diversity. And so I think just remembering like, how many options that we have in terms of programming, like we don't have to do like the, whatever the theme is for this month, and stuff like that, there are a lot of initiatives that we can look into. Ekiya – Group Discussion #2

As new information about DEI becomes available, the instruction and development of CCs is essential for learning to be shared with residential students. Providing more training on existing and new DEI training topics and methods would allow CCs to be more aware of changes in terminology or identities, and to be a knowledge source for Housing and for UNI.

Institutionalizing Cultural Knowledge

The creation of positions like the CC position can establish norms for culturally proficient pursuits in organization. Norming culturally proficient pursuits ensures more staff members are making learning about cultural groups and their experiences and perspectives an integral part of the staff's professional development through their supervision and participation in the experiences. The Housing staff, who deliver the learning, still need to acquire the knowledge to provide development and instruction to the CC position. As Camryn shared:

By creating a collective group of people focused on, you know, cultural improvement and development, that collective coming together as a whole is what causes positive impact to your intercultural competency. And then the request for you to focus on the topics also

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enhances your intercultural competency and the departments' as well. - Group

Discussion #2

This chain reaction of impact does not just improve the knowledge and support of CCs, but it can do the same through the Housing department as well. Schein (1990) defines organizational culture as "(a) a pattern of basic assumptions, (b) invented, discovered, or developed by a given group, (c) as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, (d) that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore (e) is to be taught to new members as the (f) correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems" (p. 111). The institutionalizing of *intercultural competency* learning has the potential to follow a similar path and alter organizational culture. If enough campus leaders accept the importance of *intercultural competency*, accept *intercultural competency* as vital to the UNI residential community, and teach that perspective to incoming community members, the culture in the residence halls could change. Camryn agreed, adding:

It's important to come back to that point [intercultural competency] and understand how you can build goals around that in order to impact the CC role. Group Discussion #2

As almost half of students at UNI live in residence halls, this has the potential to impact the greater UNI community as well.

Barriers to Cultural Proficiency

The CCRT also identified barriers that push against efforts to deliver diversity-focused programming and intercultural development to residential students as seen below in Table 10. As well as verify emerging themes in Table 11. This was done through the same process as the Cultural Proficiency Essential Elements spreadsheet.

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Table 10

CCRT Barriers to Cultural Proficiency

Barriers to Cultural Proficiency	
Resistance to Change	Themes
	Pretending to change in order to avoid changing (UNI as well as Students)
	A majority still does not want to change (Apathy or in disagreement with change)
	Desire to remain comfortable without dissonance
	Students' ability to be offended by change
	Student driven social segregation/grouping by culture and/or values
	UNI financial resistance through inadequate funding
	Active student disengagement or avoidance
Systems of Oppression	Themes
	No system to desegregate social segregation in students
	Cultural dynamics between faculty/staff and students
	Financial spending support, or lack thereof
	Hegemony - White-centric view from many professors
	Selective systems (Greek Life) promoting white-centered values
	Talk without action eventually stifles ability to act
A Sense of Privilege and Entitlement	Themes
	Segregation fortifies privilege
	Active student disengagement or avoidance
Unawareness of Need to Adapt	Themes
	Lack of systems/structures built to discover other cultures
	Student driven social segregation limits interactions and awareness
	UNI is reactionary, not responsive until response is obvious
	Intentionally unaware to stay comfortable
	Hegemonic impacts have little impact on largest mass of students

Resistance to Change

Like many higher education institutions, changes to increase *intercultural competency* learning institutionally and on the student level can be complex and receive push back. CCRT members felt this resistance as a barrier to overcome and a weathering storm that chipped away at their energy and sense of belonging. There was a sense that, at times, UNI students and the university itself would pretend to change in order not to have to. As Shannon noted:

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Just because you can put on a show doesn't mean that deep embedded work is happening. And so taking a step back and thinking about, what are the cultural dynamics between staff members, between students. – Group Discussion #2

As Camryn heard others discuss the topic, she stated that:

Performative is a word that comes to mind.” - Group Discussion #2

Her offering of the word was met with agreement from the other CCRT members. Kailyn added:

UNI, as a collective community, might still be doing something that, like, you disagree with, or does not fit your cultural perspective, right? Because the mass of UNI is only worrying about things that impact them, and why, you know, predominately white institution, if they are only worried about things that are really impacting whiteness, right? - Group Discussion #2

To CCRT members, the collective mass being apathetic or unwilling to change meant that while change may be articulated, there was a repetition of promised university alteration followed by a return to the status quo. CCRT members weighted the students' responsibility at UNI heavier than that of the institution of UNI, stating that they know at times UNI wants to make a change, but the students would not allow it.

Systems of Oppression

The CCRT brought up inadequate funding several times in the *culture audit*, recognizing that financial investments were a significant contributor to a lack of motivation by UNI students to adjust typical behaviors. As Sydney articulated:

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I understand that UNI is PWI and lacks diversity. UNI often likes to appear as though they are diverse, yet minority groups are never as funded as the white groups, as well as not having the same amount of student engagement and activism. - Group Discussion #2

CCRT also identified that UNI's residential communities replicate, and at times amplify, hegemonic barriers that exist in society. Racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, and classism exist within the UNI community, but active measures are in place for UNI and Housing to address and mitigate them. Even so, CCRT members discussed moments and systems of oppression they experienced on campus. For example, the CCRT overwhelmingly appreciated the faculty at UNI. However, many had examples of professors only offering white-centered perspectives and histories, uncomfortable cultural dynamics with some faculty, and moments of teaching and talk regarding DEI without action or follow-through, which demotivated people to act. Selective systems, such as Greek Life, were also mentioned on many occasions as systematic exclusionary aspects of UNI, which further segregate students culturally and provide an additional barrier in students' willingness to hear and understand cultural and diversity areas on campus.

A Sense of Privilege and Entitlement

As Terrell et al. (2018) state, “Those harmed from systematic oppression respond from an emotional connection and become very knowledgeable of practices that impact them negatively. Many of those who benefit from historical and current practices are oblivious to the negative effects of systematic oppression on others, because they can choose not to see” (p. 34). The CCRT shared this same sentiment and saw it play out on UNI’s campus. Sydney was the first to articulate the discomfort some white students felt to an inexperience with other cultural groups or identities.

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When you talk about conversations or issues or topics that make a lot of students uncomfortable, if they aren't aware, or have not had to have those kind of conversations, it prevents presents a challenge for CCs to engage in those intergroup interactions within their whole communities. Sydney – Group Discussion #2

The CCRT members attributed the ignorance of privilege, in part, to the student segregation experienced on campus. As Ekiya suggested:

The on-campus segregation, or the segregation of students into an experience that just, you know, reproduces their own experience to them, again. - Group Discussion #2

This reproduction is not just of experience but also the privilege within the experience. As the CCRT identified, some white students are not seeing the oppression, marginalization, or tokenization of their fellow Black Indigenous Students of Color (BISOC), because they are not in proximity of oppression. Some BISOC see and experience a higher percentage of oppression, marginalization, or tokenization and see it as more normalized to UNI. The CCRT identified that while interaction amongst cultural groups would likely reduce gaps in some areas of privilege on campus, the desire of students experiencing privilege to do so seemed unlikely as the segregation also fortified their privilege and hegemonic status.

Unawareness of the Need to Adapt

The CCRT noted, similar to the awareness of privilege, the presence of cultural ignorance and lack of intercultural relationship leads to an unawareness to adapt. As August stated:

At UNI, it's really easy for you to leave with the same ideals that you had when you got here. It's very easy for you to find a group that is similar to you, especially if you are one

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of our majority identities. So I think that can be a hindrance that there aren't created structures that make people have to be in diverse groups. - Group Discussion #2

The CCRT saw the lack of intentionality from UNI and Housing to force students to get to know others from different cultural groups as a lack of awareness from UNI and Housing. In some cases, they believed UNI students, faculty, and staff were intentionally unaware of intercultural differences and experiences in order to stay comfortable in their typical routine and beliefs.

I think it is a challenge to think about [cultural] interactions you have, because we could talk about football, we could talk about UNI and sports, but when it's time to talk about like, you know, the things of hashtags, and what the history is, and what maybe even acknowledges some of the uncomfortable conversations around issues campus as a whole lot of people want to do that. That is because it requires you to kind of address [discomfort around DEI]. There's a lot more that UNI can do to grow, but we'd rather be in this, like, happy place kind of thing, a place of ignorance. Shannon – Group Discussion #3

As Shannon articulated, woeful ignorance benefits those already in power. For other CCRT team members, the CCRT attributed the lack of engagement to an intentional decision to be slow and reactionary. A reactionary approach allowed UNI to learn from other schools before making a change and also permitted UNI to be seen as unaware of a need to adapt until an unavoidable issue appeared.

Word Clouds

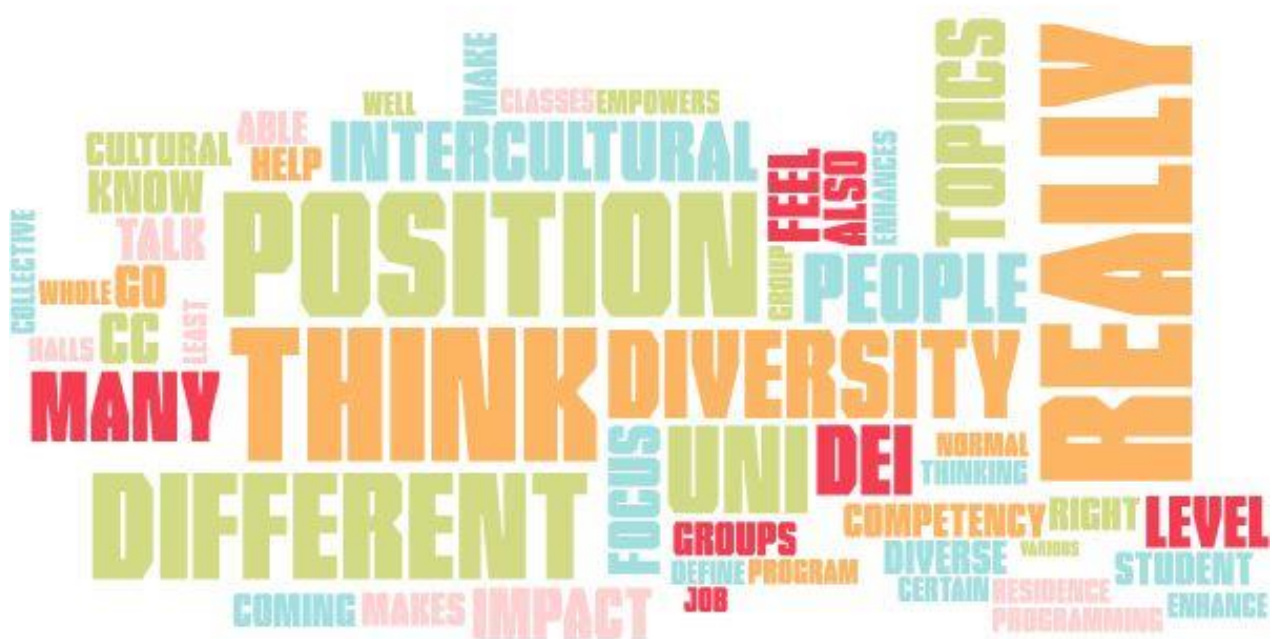
In Group Discussion #3, the CCRT discussed each table and identified areas that aligned or misaligned their thoughts. I provided two generated word clouds showing the frequency of

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words used to the CCRT within Group Discussion #3 to determine whether the frequency or significance of themes impacted their thoughts. The first word cloud captured data organized into Cultural Proficiency Essential Elements coding (Figure 6). Major words and themes expressed from the Cultural Proficiency Essential Elements word clouds include: *Really, Think, Position, Different, UNI, Diversity, and People*. A typical ordering of those words were: *Really, Think, Different*, regarding the *Position, UNI, Diversity, and People*.

Figure 6

Cultural Proficiency Essential Elements Word Cloud

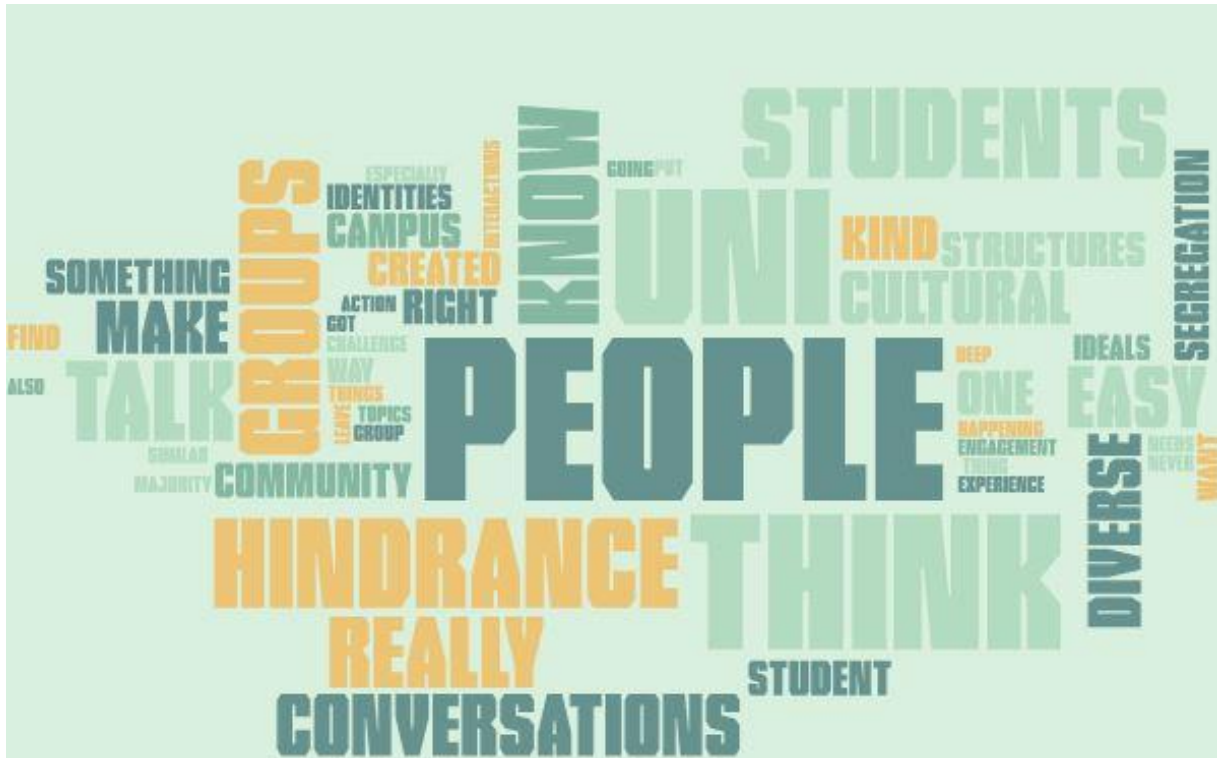


The second word cloud captured data organized into Barriers to Cultural Proficiency (Figure 7). Major words and themes expressed from the Barriers to Cultural Proficiency word clouds include: *People, Think, UNI, Know, Students, Talk, Hindrance, Groups*. A typical messaging with these words were: *UNI, People/ Students, Group* by how they *Think*, which informs what they *Know*, and that is a *Hindrance*.

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Figure 7

Barriers to Cultural Proficiency Word Cloud



After the CCRT discussed both word clouds, as well as the Cultural Proficiency Essential Elements and Barriers to Cultural Proficiency tables provided above, the CCRT engaged in a participatory analysis process proceeded to verify or question the findings on the tables. The CCRT verified the table for Cultural Proficiency Essential Elements and the table for Barriers for Cultural Proficiency. As KB articulated:

I think both of these tables capture what we said really well, and I don't have any problems with them. - Group Discussion #3

Others affirmed KB's words, and felt as though the tables were comprehensive.

Emergent Themes

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After the CCRT had confirmed themes for proficiency areas and barriers, the CCRT discussed emergent themes. The emergent themes identified in Table 11 were also sent to CCRT members before Group Discussion #3.

Table 11

CCRT Emergent Themes

Emergent Themes
Cultural Humility as a Tool
Student Engagement & Motivation to Participate and Learn as a Barrier
Privilege as a Barrier
Social Segregation/Isolation as a Barrier

While the CCRT gave full support to the *a priori* themes established, the CCRT wanted some adjustment to emergent themes which were found. The CCRTs' desire to adjust was not due to the emergent code being inaccurate, but rather the CCRT felt as though some of the codes could be captured better with a different title to give them even more significance. The CCRT articulated a great deal of significance on two particular emergent codes, "Social Segregation/Isolation as a Barrier" and "Student Engagement & Motivation to Participate and Learn as a Barrier," but felt that each term needed adjustment in the phrasing. One term which emerged from the CCRT was the term *cultural clique*. The CCRT really liked this term to describe the social segregation they were battling in residential students. As a result, the title of that emergent code was changed from "Social Segregation/Isolation as a Barrier" to "*Cultural Cliques*." The same desire was present to change the name of "Student Engagement & Motivation to Participate and Learn as a Barrier" to the more agreed upon "*Privileged Apathy*." The CCRT agreed on the last two emergent themes, "Cultural Humility as a Tool" and "Privilege as a Barrier," so those themes remained unchanged.

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Cultural Cliques

I think that we touched on this earlier in terms of our programming and like incentivizing it, and trying to get people to come. I know it's really difficult, because obviously, all of us do this, because we're really passionate about it. And we want to learn more, and we want to be at these events and talk to people. But like KB was saying earlier, like the same people, same biases. And it's like how do you get the people who really should be at those discussions to be there and want to be there. I think that's like, where our job, I feel like we, I personally, feel the most stress. It's like, I know these people care, because they're here, but it's like, how do you get people to want to come and talk about these things that need it the most, because they don't want to be there and the people that should be there don't want to be there. So, I feel like that's kind of where our job is, like the hardest on us, is trying to find a way to impact people without being too much, or like, knowing when to push back and stuff like that. August – Group Discussion #2

As the CCRT began processing tables 8, 9, and 10, and each word cloud, it was profound to the group how clearly specific barriers negatively impacting the CC position stood out. The first barrier which emerged in each table was the notion of student segregation. To maintain cultural norms within previously known social groups, students sectioned themselves off from many of the offerings that CCs provided. In the quote above, August identifies this segregation as an inducer of stress, both in getting students to care and knowing her limits to break into the segregated groups. KB identified the term *Cultural Clique* as a representation of this segregation problem. A *cultural clique*, as defined by the CCRT, is a group of students who surround themselves with people with similar cultural norms, values, and practices. In these *cultural cliques*, students who did not want to engage in conversations or programs focused on diversity

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could avoid them as a collective. The *cultural clique* was also able to maintain a lack of awareness of what other groups of students were thinking and feeling, making their own thoughts and beliefs to be affirmed by others with a similar culture as themselves. Sydney described *cultural cliques* as:

Cliques or grouping of people with similar belief systems or those belonging to the same identity. Unconscious segregation. There's a culture of cliques and "othering" on campus that is harder to break through as a person of color. - Group Discussion #3

The *cultural clique* did not just insulate the student into their group. It created a protective bubble that worked to keep the CC, who was trying to connect cultures, out.

Privileged Apathy

It was clear from the beginning of the study that the CCRT operated as a collective, a group of people who enjoy working and thinking with each other. There is joy in the work that the CCRT engages in but also a sense of weathered struggle. After a year that held a historic presidential election, multiple social justice movements, and a global pandemic, the CCRT articulated the struggle of engaging in important work that felt like an uphill climb. A large part of the CC experience causing frustration was the apathetic approach many students of privilege had towards learning about cultural differences and *intercultural competency*. Michael articulated this when he said:

Not all students care to learn or be challenged in their thoughts. There was a lot of conversation about how difficult it can be to get students to participate in programming. - Group Discussion #3

The roots of why students didn't get involved was explored by Sydney.

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A lot of the peer leadership positions tend to be taken by people who are actually passionate about certain topics. And to go back to the community that might not be as passionate can be kind of taxing, especially when it's rolled that like when it's dependent on race or ethnicity, because then you're preaching to a group of white people. But if they're not willing to listen, it's a two-way battle. You're not only fighting for yourself, but you're also fighting to make their voice heard for a lot of other people, if that makes sense. - Group Discussion #2

When Sydney finished, the other CCRT members filled the screen with nodding heads and images of thumbs up of approval. The CCRT felt that many students who did not experience marginalization remain apathetic to engaging in content that teaches them about the marginalized. This *privileged apathy*, when combined with *cultural cliques*, allowed students to disappear from and ignore the diversity-focused programming and development all together. As Kailyn had stated:

A white student can come to UNI and have an almost entirely white experience, and like, never know the other cultural aspects of UNI. - Group Discussion #2

Articulating these barriers seemed cathartic to the CCRT, who were also excited to determine actions to mitigate the barriers and improve the position.

Cultural Humility as a Tool

The CCRT was typically careful to state that each *intercultural competency* learning initiative they would like to engage should be done by CCs humbly and with care. As opposed to being seen as intercultural dictators, CCs aimed to show cultural humility and build a daring and relational understanding in students. As Mikayla stated:

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I would like to see kind of this pillar of cultural humility, like really understanding that this is an ongoing process. And while we're learning about other groups, it's also important that we take a moment to think about our own personal culture. And just to really know a lot of good amount about that, just to be more aware of how our conversations and interactions with each other and students can be more inclusive. - Group Discussion #2

August, another CCRT member affirmed Mikayla's words and added:

I don't want people to think like, oh, she thinks she knows all about what she's talking about. I don't. That's what we do for those discussions and stuff. So I think that's another part that can be a hindrance. By acting with cultural humility, I am learning about myself by learning how so many others are different from me. This position encourages me to be up to date as well as formally educating myself in a way where I can redistribute such info. - Group Discussion #2

The insertion of humility in *intercultural competency* development helped insure the notion that CCs were still learning even as they are offering education for others, which in turn gave more grace for missteps or a lack of understanding in both the CC and the residential student at times.

Privilege as a Barrier

For some CCRT members, areas of their own privilege impact their approach to addressing diversity and inclusion. As August stated:

I am seeking out more differences in my community, but my white positionality can make it hard for people to want to listen without me having a savior complex. - Group Discussion #2

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Avoiding being perceived as a person with a savior complex was something many CCRT members identified as giving them hesitancy to engage in conversation around diversity at times. For some white CCRT members, they felt this when trying to provide programming for other white students as well as BISOC. They did not want BISOC to feel as though the White CCRT member was stepping into the space because the BISOC needed to be saved, or was ill equipped. The white CCRT members also felt awkward at times programming BISOC about race and cultural norms, feeling extra pressure to not get it wrong and further harm the students they are working with. This notion was also articulated in other areas of identity besides race. Arenas of gender, ability, and religion also presented the same dynamic, with CCRT members in positions of privilege being hesitant at times due to that privilege.

Actions

Once the CCRT had agreed on the accuracy of each table in representing their thoughts and feelings and the data collection and analysis of the PAR study, the CCRT began to pivot from developing understanding to creating action. In the second half of Group Discussion #3, the CCRT shared actions they felt would cause positive change to the CC position with the proficiency and barriers identified. It was visible on their faces that while they enjoyed the data collection and analysis of this study, the study's action portion gave them enthusiasm. There were 21 initial actions identified by the CCRT, with many overlapping. For example, the CCRT identified the following actions:

- Talk with residents or just do research and completely dive into that topic in order to create programming around it. This would help the CC grow in their knowledge and also maybe seek out people who they might not have known/interacted with otherwise.

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- Create an assessment tool (pre/post) to help CCs navigate how *intercultural competency* can help the overall development of them as a student and CC.
- I think we need to take better account of assessment. Not just the position but the programs that are put on and more often include the opinions and thoughts of the residents.

These actions were consolidated into Action #1: Build an assessment cycle to understand better student knowledge, student to CC connection, and CC initiative outcomes. The process of consolidating actions allows the CCRT to reduce the initial 21 actions into 11 actions discussed in Group Discussion #4. We concluded Group Discussion #3 with 11 actions we were going to consider in moving forward, which were:

1. Build an assessment cycle to better understand student knowledge, student to CC connection, and CC initiative outcomes.
2. Increase collaborations with experts across campus in areas of DEI, and better incentivize students to attend programming.
3. Ensure CCs are a part of welcome meetings in order to meet residents and give them a better understanding of the support the position offers.
4. Look at CC position as an active learning position as opposed to a passive one, and provide education and training that will better equip the CCs throughout the year.
5. Increase the positionality of the CC within the HRL organizational chart through supervision, funding, and number of cultural connectors.
6. Create a developmental track in the position. Possible CC to Lead CC progression model for enhanced peer leadership and support.
7. Increase the number of CCs within the position for more peer support and assistance.
8. Share information and a position narrative with faculty and staff across UNI in order to increase awareness of the position on the academic side, and work to establish academic partnerships where CC initiatives happen on the academic side.

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9. Introduce a pre-CC selection process training that addresses implicit bias, microaggressions, and identity.
10. Change the title and scope of the cultural connector position to better address the need of residents to connect culture, as opposed to the CC doing it for them.
11. Increase collaborations with RA staff, having one RA on each staff be assigned to work alongside the CC for programmatic efforts.

A week later, Group Discussion #4 began, and CCRT members were engaged and curious to see what would be decided. After an initial restating of the 11 actions considered, the CCRT began voting for actions they felt would best serve the CC position. Through this process, the CCRT focused on eight actions to make changes to the CC position to increase student *intercultural competency* learning in UNI residence halls and removed three actions that did not significantly impact *intercultural competency* learning. Combining the development that the CC provides and PAR allowed the CCRT to engage in new perspectives while coming up with these actions. This perspective shift, and the actions created from it, are impactful to the CC position. The final actions that the CCRT determined were:

1. Build an assessment cycle to better understand student knowledge, student to CC connection, and CC initiative outcomes.
2. Increase collaborations with experts across campus in areas of DEI, and better incentivize students to attend programming.
3. Ensure CCs are a part of welcome meetings in order to meet residents and give them a better understanding of the support the position offers.
4. Look at CC position as an active learning position as opposed to a passive one, and provide education and training that will better equip the CCs throughout the year.
5. Increase the positionality of the CC within the HRL organizational chart through supervision, funding, and number of cultural connectors.
6. Create a developmental track in the position. Possible CC to Lead CC progression model for enhanced peer leadership and support.

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7. Increase the number of CCs within the position for more peer support and assistance.
8. Share information and a position narrative with faculty and staff across UNI in order to increase awareness of the position on the academic side, and work to establish academic partnerships where CC initiatives happen on the academic side.

Further Context on Chosen Actions

The CCRT chose to remove three actions from their proposed action list for various reasons. The CCRT removed Action #9 due to the ability of Action #4 to address it. If the CC position became a learning position, introducing a pre-CC selection process training that addresses implicit bias, microaggressions, and identity would exist. Action #10 was removed due to the belief by the CCRT that changing the name of the CC position would have less impact than any of the other proposed actions. The CCRT removed Action #11 because designating an RA staff member to collaborate with the CC might hinder the other RAs on the staff from collaborating. The RAs may feel like only one RA on staff could work with the CC to program and develop students, and the CCRT desired all RAs to work with them to improve intercultural programming and development for residents.

The eight actions which the CCRT chose to present to UNI Housing stakeholders had several traits in common. The first trait is that the CCRT felt each would have a legitimate impact on the CC position or the *intercultural learning* delivered to residential students. The second trait is that the action would increase or legitimize the CC position's standing in both organizational dynamics within Housing and social dynamics at UNI. The third trait with shared commonality is that the actions would simultaneously improve the CC position while addressing or understanding better the identified barriers negatively impacting the position. As described below, each of the final eight actions hold these traits:

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1. Build an assessment cycle to better understand student knowledge, student to CC connection, and CC initiative outcomes.

As the CCRT engaged in the *culture audit*, a more extensive understanding of unknown aspects regarding the CC position emerged. With this, a desire to build a more comprehensive assessment cycle became true for the group. To do this, the CCRT will create a cycle of assessment that captures data on the CC experience, the residential student experience concerning the CC position, and the position's impact on the residential community. To do this, the CCRT requested that the professional staff leading the position identify the intended outcomes of the CC position and measurable learning outcomes more clearly. The CCRT believed there would be a more holistic view of the value the CC provides to UNI and the resources the CC and the residential student needs.

2. Increase collaborations with experts across campus in areas of DEI, and better incentivize students to attend programming.

CCRT recognized that they had a great passion for *intercultural competency* development and diversity, equity, and inclusion, but even with that passion, they were not the content experts on campus. By increasing collaborations with staff and faculty who are practitioners or researchers in the areas they are programming towards, students would be more incentivized to attend. Furthermore, the CCRT believed this collaboration would also help further legitimize the CC position in the eyes of the residents and the university. Increasing the request for collaborations from CCs, CC leadership, and from the Housing department would bring a rise in engagement and learning.

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3. Ensure CCs are a part of welcome meetings in order to meet residents and give them a better understanding of the support the position offers.

At the beginning of each semester, the residents of each residence hall come together with the Hall Director and the RAs in order to have a welcome meeting. This meeting details many aspects of the community, from relationship building efforts to policy, to set a solid foundation for the upcoming semester. The CCRT believes by being introduced and added to the welcome meeting agenda, residents will get to know their CCs earlier and see them as a more viable resource. This introduction will allow CCs to explain their position and ask residents about different areas which the CC can focus on in the upcoming semester. The CCRT believes tailoring the semester focus to areas of resident interest would increase engagement.

4. Look at CC position as an active learning position as opposed to a passive one, and provide education and training that will better equip the CCs throughout the year.

In its current structure, the CC position receives training at the beginning of each semester. While the training is helpful to learn the position, best practices, and new concepts regarding areas of DEI and *intercultural competency*, the CCRT viewed this as a passive approach. That is because once the training had concluded, CCs were not actively learning through the semester. CCRT members felt a more beneficial approach would be to see the CC position as an active learning position. In this approach, each CC meeting would have educational components, and CCs and CC supervisors would continually share educational training and books with each other throughout the semester.

5. Increase the positionality of the CC within the HRL organizational chart through supervision, funding, and number of cultural connectors.

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The CC position is currently supervised by a graduate assistant, whom a Hall Director supervises. Due to this supervision structure, when a Hall Director from a residence hall does not assist the CC in being successful in that residence hall, either a graduate student or Hall Director would be addressing the issue with the Hall Director. The CCRT requested an increase in the positionality of the oversight of the position. In this request, a member of the Housing leadership team who supervises Hall Directors would supervise the graduate assistant who supervises CCs. In doing this, if a Hall Director is not supporting the CC, the person addressing the Hall Director would be doing it from a supervision level above. The CCRT felt strongly that this would engage Hall Directors who had not engaged in the CC position before.

6. Creating a developmental track in the position. Possible CC to Lead CC progression model for enhanced peer leadership and support.

To add the opportunity to climb to a higher position with more significant impact and knowledge, the CCRT requested for a new position to be created. This Lead CC position could help support CCs in different buildings, help reduce minoritization and tokenization in programmatic efforts, and help build better continuity in CCs between academic years. CCs who have completed a year in the position would be eligible to apply for the role, which would carry a more significant compensation package. This approach also resembles structures found in other student peer leader positions in the Housing department.

7. Increase the number of CCs within the position for more peer support and assistance.

There is one CC for each residential community, and the CCRT felt that was insufficient. Some CCs felt isolated and tokenized at times as they reduced that sensation in other students within the residence halls or apartments. By adding more CCs, UNI Housing will create

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additional avenues for support across the team. The CCRT felt that increasing the number of CCs would significantly reduce CCs' struggles. The CCRT recognized that this action overlapped with action number six, as adding a Lead CC would also add staff and help with issues listed above. The CCRT felt it was important to articulate this action step still separately if a position in a higher status was not possible to get assistance and support still.

8. Share information and a position narrative with faculty and staff across UNI to increase awareness of the position on the academic side, and work to establish academic partnerships where CC initiatives happen on the academic side.

The CCRT recognized that very few faculty know about their efforts. In order to assist with collaborations, as well as help let faculty and staff know of what CCs are doing, the CCRT wanted to market itself to academic entities. The CCRT members noted that when they tell many of their professors about their work, the professors are often impressed and want to know more. The CCRT believes a more organized approach to informing university faculty and staff would increase faculty involvement and help establish academic partnerships. The CCRT also noted that more communication with academic colleges would decrease the duplication of efforts on the academic side.

The actions presented by the CCRT represented the hard work and deep thought the CCRT put into making a change to the CC position. I concluded Group Discussion #4 by asking the CCRT to reflect on the CCRT experience and the impact the CCRT PAR had on them. I discussed the study's next steps with the CCRT, which included a meeting with stakeholders to get approval for the actions. CCRT members were then asked to complete the CCRT Reflection Form and profusely thanked for participating in the study. The completion of the CCRT Reflection Form marked the end of their active involvement in the PAR study.

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Meeting with Stakeholders

In the stakeholders meeting, I shared the CCRT's eight actions with the Director of Housing at UNI. It would have been preferable for student members of the CCRT to present the actions, but since the timing of this meeting occurred during finals week, the CCRT preferred I had the meeting instead. Kyle, the Director of Housing at UNI, appreciated the intentionality and effort provided by the CCRT and approved each action item. No additional outcomes were added. Table 12 details the action item delivered by the CCRT, and outcome of the item. Action item number seven was accepted and addressed by adding at least two Lead CCs, but Housing will not add additional CCs to the CC position.

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Table 12

Stakeholder Meeting Outcomes

#	Action	Outcome
1	Build an assessment cycle to better understand student knowledge, student to CC connection, and CC initiative outcomes.	Approved: By fall 2022 UNI Housing will help CCs create a comprehensive assessment cycle
2	Increase collaborations with experts across campus in areas of DEI, and better incentivize students to attend programming.	Approved: Starting fall 2022, Housing will assist CCs in establishing connections with DEI experts at UNI, and better incentivize students and DEI experts to attend CC events
3	Ensure CCs are a part of welcome meetings in order to meet residents and give them a better understanding of the support the position offers.	Approved: Starting fall 2022, CCs will join RAs with a role in welcome meetings
4	Look at CC position as an active learning position as opposed to a passive one, and provide education and training that will better equip the CCs throughout the year.	Approved: To be completed by fall 2022, CC training will be audited by CCs and Housing in order to create better and more active learning opportunities
5	Increase the positionality of the CC within the HRL organizational chart through supervision, funding, and number of cultural connectors.	Approved: Starting fall 2021, CCs and the graduate assistant for CCs will report to an Area Coordinator as opposed to a Hall Director
6	Create a developmental track in the position. Possible CC to Lead CC progression model for enhanced peer leadership and support.	Approved: Starting fall 2022, UNI Housing will add at least two Lead CCs which will create progression opportunities for CCs
7	Increase the number of CCs within the position for more peer support and assistance.	Approved: Starting fall 2022, UNI Housing will add at least two Lead CCs
8	Share information and a position narrative with faculty and staff across UNI in order to increase awareness of the position on the academic side, and work to establish academic partnerships where CC initiatives happen on the academic side.	Approved: Starting fall 2022, Housing will assist CCs in establishing connections with DEI experts at UNI, and will produce an annual report to be shared with DEI offices at UNI, as well as college department chairs

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In the meeting with Kyle, the PAR approach provided a platform for CCRT members' voices to be heard and legitimized by Housing stakeholders through the feedback and action items that emerged. In doing so, each action the CCRT presented was met by stakeholders with possibility and promise. UNI Housing began creating a plan to ensure these action items are in place to better support the CC position.

Impact on the CCRT

Engaging in PAR gave CCRT team members a new perspective and skill set to further increase *intercultural competency* learning. This increase in *intercultural competency* is especially important to the CC position. As Michael states:

I learned a lot about the position, and more importantly, how the current CC team sees ways it can improve. To learn about some of the struggles and challenges really brought light to what we can do to achieve the goal set out in creation of the Cultural Connector position. - Group Discussion #5

The new knowledge also increased other aspects of CCRT's intercultural understanding. KB shared that:

PAR somewhat increased my intercultural awareness in regards to UNI by being able to talk with other fellow students about the study," - Group Discussion #5

and Sydney agreed by stating:

Yes! Formulating responses to specific questions gave me time to acknowledge finer details of the position. - Group Discussion #5

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PAR served as a plan of action to elicit change, a mechanism of learning for the researchers about barriers and themselves, and a producer of actions that improve the CC position.

CCRT members developed a greater understanding of the barriers systematic and programmatic that work against the *intercultural competency* learning the CC position aims to provide. That growth in understanding barriers coincided with sensations of powerlessness. As KB stated:

It definitely did make me think about UNI. And if we were actually making an impact, or if we would be able to make any impact at all. - Group Discussion #5

While the CCRT addressed barriers hindering micro aspects of *intercultural competency* learning, macro-level actions addressing hegemony and power dynamics went relatively unmentioned within the CCRT action items even though they were present in the identification of problems facing CCs. In many ways, CCRT members could not see a mechanism within their control, or even Housing's control, shifting many of the barriers at UNI. The CCRT members hoped that actions such as Action #8 might snowball into hegemonic change later on, but not immediately. Many CCRT members highlighted the learning benefits the PAR in this study provided as a positive they experienced. However, PAR studying hegemonic barriers could not inoculate the CCRT or the study itself from the hegemony already experiencing entrenched.

Findings Related to the Meta-Research Question

The CCRT articulated the importance of space and place throughout the PAR study. There were three contributing factors to this.

Lack of Acknowledgement

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The first is a lack of acknowledgment of the spatial elements of the CC position by UNI Housing. The CC positions job responsibilities tie the CC to a residence hall which UNI articulates as a site of living and learning. Presence in the building, marketing, and programming in building and building relationships within the community are essential aspects of the CC position. Therefore, access to the building, bulletin boards, and programming supplies should be readily available for the CCs, but that was not always the case. As Tomas shares:

I had an event, a movie, which was a Rwandan genocide documentary. I created a flyer and I send it in [to the person in charge of the residence hall] a week before the event, so it can like be published in the hall, right? I also work at the front desk. I never saw my flyer posted there. Instead of my flyer I saw like and like five six other fliers of events of RA's being like posted all over the place in the doors on the bulletin board. But my flyer was nowhere to be found. And I like there are so many there are so many of these things that show us that like they don't take Cultural Connector as important. Tomas – Group Discussion Meeting #1

Aspects of Tomas' words were a shared theme for some of the CCRT. The hall director (HD) of the building gave more preference to RAs than to CCs. This preference manifested itself spatially in access to marketing spaces and room reservations. Like Tomas, other CCRT members had made fliers to advertise to their halls which did not get posted in the hall or on social media. If there was a scheduling conflict in a room used for programming, the CC often had to move. Most CCRT members stated they felt the HD of the building they worked in supported them, but the CC position was not the same priority level. The HD's lack of priority was evident to Tomas by the HD omitting Tomas's picture on the bulletin board, showing residents the staff (i.e., RA's and Lead Desk Assistant) in the building.

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They don't take Cultural Connectors into consideration as much as they take a RA's. I've asked to post one of my pictures like in the in the building that I am Cultural Connector. There is a board as you go as you enter the building where there are pictures of the RAs. And I asked to put also my picture as a Cultural Connectors so that the residents can see me and familiarize themselves with me as they go inside as they do for the RAs. My picture never went to the board. Tomas – Group Discussion Meeting #1

August had a different experience:

I am sorry that happened to you, but that hasn't been my experience. My HD and RAs have been great to me, which is why I feel so bad some other aren't getting my experience. I wish there was more consistency in how the CCs were treated... I wish you all were treated like me. Group Discussion Meeting #1

Even as August articulated her positive experiences, she noted her picture on the residence hall wall as proof of her belonging. When CCs brought their concerns forward, or when Shannon had spoken to HDs about it, some HDs minimized the importance as "just a bulletin board." To the CCs, it was more than that. The bulletin board represented their belonging and status in the hall where they worked.

Financial Access and Resources

The second spatial contributing factor in articulating the importance of space and place is financial access and resources. The presence or absence of funding permeated in several responses. CCRT members recognized that the residence halls, which were expensive and well kept, were named after wealthy donors whose painted portraits hang in the building's lobby.

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CCRT members also recognized a budget difference in RA programming funds in comparison to their own. Many, like Kailyn, felt this was a continuation of UNIs funding practices.

Building off what Sydney said about minority groups not being as funded as the white groups at UNI, I mean, we are just now getting a multicultural center on campus, and it took a student uprising to do even that. I just wish we had more cultural spaces around campus... or more culture in our spaces. Kailyn – Group Discussion Meeting #2

As a CC, Kailyn saw her task of bringing *intercultural competency* learning to residential spaces as an admission from UNI Housing that those spaces aren't currently built for cultural learning.

Authority and Belonging

The third spatial contributing factor in articulating the importance of space and place is authority and belonging. In the CCs eyes, they had very little spatial authority. Unlike the RA position who upheld the student code of conduct in the residence hall, there was no real obligation for residents to listen to their CC. This led some CCs to use food or prizes in order to get residents to get to know their CC, attend programs, or engage in the offered *intercultural competency* learning. Sydney felt as though the incentives, though effective, countered her efforts to make the topic feel important to her residents.

People just take the incentive and tend to like not give us much importance to the actual thing and learning. And so, like by incentivizing things you also sometimes lose the importance of the entire program.

The sensation of a lack of spatial authority was amplified for CCRT members who did not feel supported by the HD in the hall, which made some feel like they did not belong and didn't have

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the backing of other hall staff. CCRT members felt as though more RAs could use their spatial authority to help boost the CC position, and attract more residents to CC programming.

The meta-research questions in this study investigate the effectiveness of PAR in addressing spatial and curricular hegemonic exertions of power impacting *intercultural competency* learning within the context of a predominantly white university. Many of the actions created by the CCRT in this study attended to the aforementioned contributing factors in focus, but the degree to which the actions can shift the hegemonic tide remains an unknown. The CCRT created actions which gain enough peer support, finances, or authority to make their immediate tasks easier, but they did not address the systematic and systemic problems the CCRT articulated. There was a sense that fixing minute spatial elements could be done through determined actions, but large and structural change was outside of what the CCRT was capable of.

CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS & CONCLUSION

The PAR approach in this study provides a valuable learning mechanism towards change, allowing for students to create impact in culturally focused peer leadership positions. PAR presented the CCRT as a framework of learning, where students identified, understood, and elicited change when presented with a problem. PAR is a methodological research approach, and its utility as a tool for discovery and change was merited and appreciated by CCRT members in this study. Despite the overly democratic approach that PAR delivers in this study, PAR does not automatically dissolve hegemonic powers working against the participants. PAR effectively provides a framework for agential democratic change while succumbing to the oppression from which participants seek emancipation. Due to this, I am using a dual approach in eliciting analysis of this study. The first approach is an analysis of the CCRTs PAR experience, which retains the voices of CCRT members in articulating the experience and the impact of the study. It analyzes the study's impact and outcomes on the CC position, barriers, and the CCs' delivery of *intercultural competency* learning to residential students at UNI. My second approach of analysis is a critical spatial analysis (Helfenbein & Huddleston, 2021) of the overall PAR study. This approach allows me to zoom out to provide a meta-analysis of the implications of how the space, place, and *intercultural competency* learning at UNI intersect and interact with the hegemony replicated at a neoliberal university and bring clarity to the scope of influence the CCRT had on such barriers.

Analysis of CCRT Findings

I feel like the CC position has helped me develop my intercultural competency but I want to improve the way I can help other UNI students develop theirs. This study made me

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actively think about the macro and microscale impact I do and could have with my position. Sydney – Group Discussion #5

This study is an example of how PAR can provide knowledge creation. As a methodology and a model, PAR allows students to bring themselves to the forefront of research and educational experience. Just as Anderson (2017) articulated, PAR is "part pedagogy, part organizing, and part research" (p. 440), and learning how to conduct research and learn more about their own experiences in conjunction with others. In this way, the study became an opportunity to develop academic knowledge and self-understanding for the CCRT. Concurrently, this study's utilization of PAR showed value by providing multiple ways to simultaneously cultivate the student, department, and CC position and create action towards emancipatory change. This interaction with PAR is significant as the participants cannot create change; rather they use the PAR approach as a guidebook and learn how to create change and implement action. Providing a guidebook or a framework towards creating data-driven decision-making in the aspects of change is essential and incredibly valuable, exemplified by the stakeholder permission-given actions created by the CCRT.

CCRT members engaging in PAR did so as researchers and learners by developing research practice and investigating themselves and their CC position. The process allowed CCRT members to understand the purpose of the CC role better. By researching *intercultural competency* within the CC position, the CCs were able to critically analyze who they are culturally and what informs the *intercultural competency* knowledge they provide. This dive pushes participants to thrust beyond the understanding of culture from an ethnocentric perspective and to understand the ethnorelative side of *intercultural competency* in eliciting intentional pragmatic change in the residential community. Change creation derived from self-

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understanding, or empathy, is vastly different from a change made as an exertion of power or authority. The CCRTs' willingness to engage as researchers and learners utilized their emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2006), *intercultural competency*, and desire to learn.

In Action #4, created by the CCRT, there is a desire for Housing to look at the CC position as an active learning position instead of a passive one. The participatory analysis used by the CCRT in this study engaged in active learning and was also developmental for CCRT members. As Michael stated, an appreciation for:

The ability to hear my own words given back to me, to us, and then to member-check those words gave me the ability to solidify if those were my actual thoughts. We often speak and move on; it is nice to revisit and confirm in order to make sure we are on the same page. - Group Discussion #5

Analyzing the collected and sorted data as a collective was not efficient, but it did allow for a more comprehensive collective voice from the CCRT. Statements shifted from "I think" to "We think," and the group found power in that shift. Similarly, using a participatory approach to reach a consensus on action items and names of action items allowed for a more precise understanding of each action from the collective and typically found the CCRT in unanimous agreement.

UNI Housing Department

In conjunction with the *culture audit*, the PAR approach of this study is incredibly valuable in garnering support for implementing change at the departmental level. By having data to back up the actions offered by the CCRT to elicit change in the CC position, the Housing Department and the Director of Housing were far more receptive to the offered actions. The actions felt more legitimized and substantiated through the research process to the Director,

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making it easier for them to agree to the CCRT actions. The positionality of the professional staff researchers also allowed for a greater likelihood for approval of the actions elicited from the CCRT. The professional staff's insider positionality within the CCRT and the Housing department garnered far more trust for the accuracy of the actions suggested than if an outside researcher would have presented them. The approval of developing actions is vital for the learning and motivation of participants. While it is unlikely that all actions put forth by the CCRT will get approved every time by Housing, the affirmation and acknowledgement of the CCRT's work is an important step in the right direction.

This study garnered greater respect in Housing for the CC position due to the presence of academic research. Little research has been used to analyze other areas of UNI Housing, therefore the CC position has become a flagship for future research within the department, and because of this study, added legitimacy to Housing's view of the CC position. In turn, the increased standing garnered heightened inclusion in departmental discussions, additional opportunities involving Housing student positions, and assurances of actions derived from the study. The inclusion and assurances of actions further resourced the position and gave CCRT members a sense of recognition for their work. UNI Housing was more than willing to initiate Action #8 and share information and a position narrative with faculty and staff across UNI to increase awareness of the position on the academic side. There is also hope from UNI Housing staff that there will be increased collaborations with experts across campus in areas of DEI, requested in Action #2, due to the results of this study. With the increased legitimacy comes a concern for CCRT efforts to be coopted by the Housing department, applying credit to the department instead of the voices of the incredible CCs.

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Cultural Connector Position

The actions created by the CCRT and initiated by Housing have a tremendous impact on the CC position. By ensuring CCs are a part of welcome meetings (Action #3), the CC is identified as a primary peer leader in the residence halls immediately from residential students. The increase in the positionality of the staff member who supervises the CC position (Action #5) and adding more CCs at UNI (Action #7) also demonstrate the importance of the presence and influence of the role. As an integral position in increasing residential *intercultural competency* learning, rewarding CCs who show success in resident development with further leadership and chance agency opportunities also enhances the impact and perception of the CC position (Action #6).

The PAR in this study did not just provide learning for CCRT members. It provided a change in identified areas. CCRT members recognized that and appreciated PAR's impact as a mechanism to learn more about the position, UNI residential students, and ways to improve *intercultural competency* learning (Action #1). This study used PAR to give voice to CCs towards the improvement of the CC position, the CC position's impact on residential students, and the impact the CC position has on the students in the role. This study accomplished these aspects and rendered change towards improvements, which showed the value of PAR in creating agential change at the programmatic micro level.

CCRT Identified Barriers

This study also worked to identify the barriers which hinder the CC position. The CCRT found that these barriers were overly present and visible, but the power of the CCRT to create impactful change against the barriers was not. While the creation and implementation of action

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brought optimism to the CCRT, identifying barriers did not. It was difficult for CCRT members to separate barriers impacting them as students from barriers impacting them as a CC (i.e. UNI student's desire to remain comfortable and without dissonance). It was even more difficult to separate where those barriers occurred and if they were UNI Housing barriers or overall UNI barriers (i.e. the lack of systems/structures built to discover other cultures). In either case, CCRT members agreed most of the barriers were happening, and there was very little the CC position alone could do about them.

Cultural Cliques

Cultural cliques were the most significantly described and relevant barrier identified by the CCRT in this study. As the CCRT members articulated their awareness and frustration with the student segregation on campus, as well as the *privileged apathy* of many students in positionalities of power, it became clear to CCRT members how easy it is for a student to find themselves in the social/cultural grouping of students with homogeneity of identity or geographical location. CCRT members often articulated this grouping of students and the perceived homophily that brought these groups together. Students of similar races, home states, genders, sexual orientations, and other identities bubbled themselves together in the eyes of the CCRT. While some of these bubbles welcomed the CC position and its pursuits, others could avoid CCs or work counter against the delivery of *intercultural competency* learning. KB articulated it is:

...the segregation in UNI, which we've identified as one of the biggest barriers that that we've had. It is like social cliques, but based on identity or it being OK to talk about identity" - Group Discussion #2

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In Group Discussion #3, KB revisited this notion, as the term social segregation did not fit. KB then coined the term *cultural clique* within our study, which was met by affirmations from the other CCRT members. Afterwards, I investigated the use of the term *cultural clique* in the literature. In doing so, I came across the work of Suzanne Beech (2016) and their work on cultural cliques in the international student community. Beech (2016) articulates in her research of college students studying abroad that “international students believe that by participating in a multicultural community and/or spending a period of time living independently from family and friends they will develop a range of social and cultural capital” (p. 1). This notion is not unlike many students who leave homes and home states to attend college to meet new people and discover who they are. Beech’s research suggests that international students who travel abroad often do not immerse themselves in different cultural groupings; instead, they find other students from similar backgrounds of their own and form “*cultural cliques*” within the abroad experience. In many ways, the groupings of co-national students found in Beech’s (2016) study are similar to those of UNI students the CCRT discussed. The groupings are brought together by shared cultural experiences, worldviews, and values and begin to push away or ignore groups that do not share the same traits. The familiarity of the known is a motivator for these students, as is the sense of belonging and fear of alienation.

As Sydney, KB, August, and Camryn stated, groups of students who want to avoid the diversity-focused efforts of the CCs often felt as though diversity initiatives challenged their own beliefs. Feeling threatened by the impact these efforts would have on their experience and privilege, they continued to minimize the work the CCs are doing. With so many *cultural cliques* and some of these cliques working in concert with or against the CC position, CCs found it hard to know when to facilitate cultural immersion and *intercultural competency* interventions

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and programming. The *cultural clique* operates as a way for students to find belonging and a way for students to avoid alienation. It also pockets aspects of social and cultural norms deeper into the UNI experience and fortifies groupings. Sydney shared that it was her experience that the same groupings of students come to her programs and that these students form a *cultural clique* just as much as the pocket of students who actively avoid the programming. Sydney further stated that breaking students out of these *cultural cliques* (or breaking people into them) goes far beyond the capacity of a CC. The work of Beech (2016) cultural cliques and Centola et al.'s (2007) work with homophily produces recognition that this issue also goes beyond UNI and is socially cultural. Without the skills and desires from students to allow others into their *cultural clique*, actively participate in other *cultural cliques*, or work to dissolve *cultural cliques*, this barrier will persist at UNI and beyond.

PAR is emancipatory; thus, using PAR to do work within a PWI to understand and address the hegemony UNI replicates has merit. The PAR in this study provided valuable tools in identifying barriers impacting the CC position from a micro-scale. Actions taken by the CCRT elicited change which improved the CC position as a deliverer of *intercultural competency* learning, were created and initiated together through a participatory approach. I am a member of the CCRT who worked hard to limit aspects of my participation, and I found the voices of other CCRT members to be empowering. A democratic PAR approach that utilizes participants as co-researchers is valuable but sometimes can be limiting, as it can be hard to see the forest for the trees. For this reason, I work to zoom out to a meta-analysis of the barriers and impacts this study has on the *intercultural competency* learning in UNI residence halls and the hegemonic dynamics that work against the CCRT and PAR at a PWI neoliberal university.

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Critical Spatial Analysis

The enacted curriculum of *intercultural competency* learning, albeit quasi-connected at UNI, must be interrogated to explore its intent and impact. To understand the crucial implication of the site of learning and the delivery of learning, a critical spatial analysis questions how “oppression and resistance work curricularly *and* spatially” (Helfenbien & Huddleston, 2021, p. 10). It is not enough to implicate the curriculum’s roots of power and marginalization if we do not realize the physical space and place the curriculum is being delivered shares those roots and fortifies the oppressive powers at the educational site. Furthermore, if there is a lack of congruency between the space and place of learning and the curriculum provided, the incongruence is impactful in reaffirming replicated hegemonic powers at UNI. The curriculum of *intercultural competency* learning at UNI is not just the papers and documents containing frameworks, program instructions, and core curriculum mandates, it is also the lived experience of the people and places engaging, intentionally and unintentionally, into the learning. Interrogating the enacted curriculum of *intercultural competency* learning and the spatial history, geography, and social curriculum in the UNI residential facilities is essential, but it should not end there. Additional analysis furthers criticality regarding the curriculum as a spatial text, where the enacted curriculum and the spatial curriculum thread together towards student meaning-making.

Space and Place

Before UNI became a place of education and social/cultural interactions for current UNI students, it was a space. In this space, the construction of UNI was on indigenous grounds by former confederate soldiers. Located in the southwest United States, UNI replicated the

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exclusive social and legal practices of segregation, Jim Crow laws, white supremacy, gender oppression, sexual identity discrimination, and applied religious doctrine to pursue student conformity in acceptable behavior. As the university navigated difficult financial times, such as the great depression, it worked hard to retain a heightened social, economic, and intellectual status. These histories do not serve as moments UNI has passed; instead, they are histories UNI is built upon as it became a place for higher education. UNI is not just a space, as “place . . . is a particular form of space – one which people have imposed meaning onto particular locations of spatial characteristics” (Helfenbein, 2015, p. 401). UNI is a place with designated attributes and socio-spatial expectations often found at institutions of higher education. UNI's physical layout and buildings carry the histories, social and structural, of the critical geographies mapped locally (local and state laws and social norms) and nationally (higher education trends). As UNI students from different cultures and identities work to navigate the UNI college experience, there is an inequity in how these spaces speak to them. There is a long and rich history of representation and student success at UNI for white, affluent male students. The UNI curriculum, buildings, and resources have always considered these students because that have always occupied it as a place for intellectual growth and belonging. For students with marginalized identities, their history of representation at UNI is much shorter and has been far less accepting socially and spatially.

Helfenbein (2015) quotes Jan Nesor in *Geographical Milieu* by describing the school as a “tangled web of practices [and] multiple moving political agendas” (p. 403) that must be effectively managed by teachers. This web is currently occurring, but it is also built upon a history of spatial implications. Smith (2010) posits that as humans, we “not only produce the immediate nature of [our] existence, but produce the entire societal nature of [our] existence” (p.

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65). The UNI is humanly constructed and reproduced, as is the academic, economic, and political conveyer belt which brings students to UNI and its' residence halls.

Soja (1989) describes a socio spatial dialectic, which Soja (2014) states applies a spatial perspective to history through examining the social and spatial connections and relationships in historical contexts. Specifically, socio-spatial dialectic takes into consideration the social interactions that occurred within a specific space during a point in history. The history, geography, and social elements of UNI have centered on whiteness. UNI implements *intercultural competency* learning measures to combat this historically and predominately white space and place. It is essential to interrogate the curriculum to ensure it does not continue to fortify the discursive hegemonic powers already in place. The spatial impacts in UNI residence halls do not occur in isolation from the larger university. Each residence hall is a place upon a place, with similarities and differences to what occurs outside its doors on UNI's campus. The site of UNI, including the cartographies of buildings, green spaces, streets, and athletic fields throughout campus, occur in correlation with what occurs within the residence halls.

The Curriculum of Intercultural Competency Learning

A curriculum inquiry, such as the questions posited by Apple (2009) regarding the field of curriculum studies, can provide insight into the power dynamics at play regarding *intercultural competency* learning at UNI. In Apple's (2009) writing on the investigation of the relationship between knowledge and power, he provides five questions of inquiry by asking:

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Whose knowledge is this? How did it become “official”? What is relationship between this knowledge and who has cultural, social, and economic capital in this society? Who benefits from these definitions of legitimate knowledge and who does not? What can we do as critical educators and activists to change existing educational and social inequities and to create curricula and teaching that is more socially just? (p. 4)

These questions provide a pathway towards understanding the implications of engaging intercultural learning at a predominantly and historically white university.

Higher education is embedded within the larger cultural structure of neoliberalism, which produces the neoliberal university. In that context at UNI is a desire from seats of authority, some with good intentions and others with harmful intentions, to include *intercultural competency* learning as a significant university marker. You can find this in the mission statement, UNI advertising, and DEI awards which UNI amplifies into an articulation of its brand. The application of *intercultural competency* learning to the UNI brand can be problematic. It co-opts the production of *intercultural competency* learning to be packaged as a commodity for consumption and can further exacerbate marginalization and oppression experienced on campus. It also communicates that the place of UNI is one of acceptance and belonging for marginalized communities. However, if that were the case, there would not be such a need for the DEI efforts UNI is investing so heavily into.

The curricular and co-curricular experiences that make up the *intercultural competency* learning identified by this study have a commonality in the locus of creation and knowledge. University officials have placed intercultural components in the core curriculum, supervise the offices that administer intercultural learning at UNI and oversee the general student experience at UNI. The commonality in creation and knowledge ensures a mechanism of control in the

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distribution of cultural knowledge, as does the relationship of UNI students to the place of UNI as it forces students under the student code of conduct. The university officials making decisions in these *intercultural competency* learning mechanisms were already identified through the hiring process as agreeable to UNI skills, culture, and values and then retained to their position due to the continued production of permissible programs, initiatives, and cultural experiences. UNI's knowledge and the knowledge of those UNI has allowed to hold power, dictates who shapes *intercultural competency* learning at the university. Because of their status and power, the parts of the knowledge which become official are fortified (core curriculum), and the efforts to challenge cultural norms at UNI (DEI efforts) in a way are acceptable and limited (even if they seem countercultural).

UNI and UNI Housing have identified the need for *intercultural competency* growth in its students and residence halls in several different circumstances. In some cases, UNI identified this need to improve the experience of BISOC and marginalized students on campus. In other instances, *intercultural competency* was a known deficiency in a percentage majority of UNI students, with greater intensity in white students. This discrepancy is not due to the pigmentation of their skin, rather the power it is afforded and wields. As detailed in the emergent code of *privileged apathy*, the pathway of students, faculty, and staff to avoid *intercultural competency* learning is present, visible, and often taken. It must be said that a major utility of *intercultural competency* learning at UNI is to provide students who have high amounts of privilege and have had little to no contact with students from other cultural backgrounds with the knowledge, skills, and desire to relate across cultures. In this way, the smaller number of students from BISOC or marginalized backgrounds serve as a teaching and engagement mechanism to benefit the majority of students whose whiteness has garnered such power and

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privilege that they did not need to learn the skills or see value in intercultural learning or relationships.

UNI tries to convince these privileged students by the value *intercultural competency* holds in their job beyond the university. This effort articulates the value of the current space (UNI) due to the value given by a future place (future job). Similar to skills in public speaking or accounting, the acquisition of the ability to relate and communicate across cultures individualizes itself to a skill to be profited off of. In some ways, UNI markets the notion that by coming to UNI, white students can learn about other cultures and the *intercultural competency* skills needed to interact, which will increase their value and status in the neoliberal economy. Backhandedly, this messaging tells marginalized and BISOC students that their value at UNI correlates to the value white students find in them. It also commoditizes the identities of marginalized and BISOC students back to them, placing their bodies into the curriculum they are to deliver and consume.

While I do not wish to state that UNI's delivery of *intercultural competency* learning can directly compare to the experience of the slave experience that McKittrick's (2006) writes about, her work on the commoditizing of Black spatial embodiment does compare to the commoditizing of marginalized student identities and cultures within the *intercultural competency* learning at UNI. In McKittrick's (2006) symbolism of the slave auction block, she states that the auction block is "a table, a raised auction stage, a block...a measuring scale, a tree stump...the auction block serves to spatially position [one] to be seen and assessed" as the auctioneer and others gather around (McKittrick, 2006, p. 72). McKittrick's depiction of the emotionally damaging of slaves on an auction block may seem too severe to compare to the experience of marginalized and BISOC students at UNI. However, there are similarities found between the two. A slave

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would have their value assessed on an auction block to determine how much money their price would be. As McKittrick (2006) details, the process would strip Black women and men of aspects of their humanness to determine transactional value. In the same way, commoditizing the culture and identity of marginalized students implicitly tells them UNI does not inherently value them, but that UNI can find transactional value in what they provide to current or future white students.

Spatial Oppression

The curriculum of *intercultural competency* learning does not just occur through UNI's core curriculum, courses, and culturally focused programmatic elements. The physical location of these interactions also matters as the space and place (Helfenbein, 2015) of the *intercultural competency* learning serve as an additional aspect to the curriculum delivered. The intersection of the physical curricular elements of intercultural learning occurs within residence halls on a university campus, which also 'speaks' and 'leaks' its intercultural expectations and lessons. As previously discussed, the transaction of *intercultural competency* learning in this study takes place in the southern United States, at a private PWI, with a high student cost price tag. To attend UNI, you must meet the high expectations of grants and scholarships or have the means to cover the high cost yourself. The pipelines of UNI's branding, recruitment, and admissions create a steady flow of students into UNI. Since there is a two-year live-on requirement at UNI, over 90% of every first and second-year students live in the residential communities that Housing oversees. The socio-economic difference in UNI students can be drastic, as are the cultural differences. Nevertheless, UNI clearly articulates the economic status and expected cultural and spatial norms, a barrier to the CC position.

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Not unlike other universities, most UNI residence halls carry the name of a significant donor. As you walk into the building, a painting of that donor and their significant other are present to welcome you. These white, straight, wealthy, primarily male UNI donors within the painting speak to reverence and appreciation for charitable expressions of enormous wealth at UNI. Beyond the paintings are walls painted in university-approved colors, off-white and UNI's primary color, which communicate a belonging and primary identity of being a UNI student. Lofted ceilings, innovative architecture, gaming lounges, and big-screen TVs line the halls and lobby spaces in the community. Each of these aspects was constructed for a reason, to speak to students in a specific way. Colors for belonging, technology for entertainment, and paintings of donors are supposed to illustrate the prestige of attending UNI. By spending what you have for tuition or accomplishing what you have for grants or scholarships, you deserve a high socio-economic living experience in your residential experience. While this may sound nice to some students who find a sense of belonging in wealth, it does not translate in the same way to all students.

A 2019 survey conducted by Housing showed that white students felt a higher sense of belonging, safety, and satisfaction in UNI residence halls than students of color (Jordan & Titus, 2019). A survey two years earlier articulated the same results. The 2017 survey, which also captured a lack of intercultural learning in the residence halls, was a precipice for creating the CC position (Jordan & Titus, 2019). The CC position was not the only adjustment made by Housing. Housing started a bulletin board competition between the Resident Assistant staff. Each month, a RA for each community would make a bulletin board around diversity, equity, inclusion, or multiculturalism. The winner of the competition would get \$25 for additional meal spending in the hopes of ensuring that every hall had a staff member participate. The bulletin

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board competition and the bulletin board the CC constructs are ways UNI Housing works to deliver *intercultural competency* learning to residential students spatially. UNI may have constructed the buildings to speak to excellence and school pride, but the building leaked to marginalized students as another white-dominated white-normed location on campus. As Helfenbien & Huddleston (2021) state, "the spatial gives insight into how choices are made in terms of what/whose knowledge is important and which/whose knowledge continues to be marginalized" (p. 2). UNI built the hegemony experienced by students in society in its walls, lobbies, buildings. The lack of cultural inclusion into these spaces, onto the walls, shows apathy to cultural difference and a preference for social conformity. As CCs interact with residents, put on programs, and engage in cultural learning, it is essential to realize the counter-message sent spatially to the students in attendance, who remain apathetic and avoid intercultural learning.

The residential communities at UNI exemplify the complexity of the hegemonic interplay which occurs in a neoliberal university. Money (i.e., names on buildings) speaks louder to marginalized representation (i.e., bulletin board), and the masses can avoid disruption due to non-engagement into topics that make them uncomfortable. The CCRT's emergent theme of *privileged apathy* encapsulates this well. It is not that many students are actively combative regarding *intercultural competency* learning; it is that most students are impacted so minimally by marginalization that they can be apathetic. This notion is spatially reaffirmed in their residential communities and across UNI's campus. Small spaces reserved for the marginalized amplify notions that everything else is to remain dominated by the privileged.

Inside the residential communities, where the efforts of *intercultural competency* learning and the agenda of the neoliberal university are both spatial, it is clear which takes priority. This space and place are the backdrops that surround the CC as they engage in their

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efforts. It is not just social and curricular reifications of power that are barriers to reducing hegemonic barriers; the complexity of how the social and curricular powers amplify alongside the space and place speaks against the CCs' efforts. A critical spatial analysis provides an opportunity to "explore the ways in which bodies and spaces interact with the enacted curriculum" (Helfenbien & Huddleston, 2021, p. 11), and UNI lacks congruency between the enacted curriculum of *intercultural competency*, the hidden curriculum at UNI, and spatial interactions which unfold. The hidden curriculum is the actions, procedures, customs, norms, and implicit values often unspoken in the educational setting (Giroux & Penna, 1979; Alsubaie, 2015). At UNI, the CCRT members articulated that it was easy to know what they were not allowed to do regarding *intercultural competency* learning, as more provocative styles or topics of learning would make students or UNI uncomfortable. When KB brought up an idea she had for a sexual identity program in the residence halls, she knew it would be denied before she even requested it.

It just isn't what UNI does... [in regards to being comfortable with being uncomfortable]

Even if the program was approved, nobody would come to it. You can talk about diversity and inclusion, but it needs to be light and fluffy. That's just the culture of UNI. KB -

Group Discussion #4

For KB and for others, the hidden curriculum that ensures the comfort and power of privileged students, and the spatial elements that exalt that privilege, is far louder than the spoken curriculum provided by *intercultural competency* learning.

Spaces of Possibility

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The *intercultural competency* learning within residential communities and the site of the community will continue to exert into a space and place with oppressive historical and current powers. UNI can counter future production by establishing spaces for resistance and resilience within the residential community. These “spaces of possibility” (Helfenbein, 2006), will still hold existing histories as they work to use the site of schools to counter neoliberalism (Huckaby, 2019), sexism (Massey, 2013), ignored embodiment of the historically denied and harmed (McKittrick, 2006), geography (Helfenbein, 2015), and exclusive spatial curriculum (Helfenbein & Huddleston, 2021). A reconstruction of shared spaces within residential communities, being led by the historically excluded, harmed, and oppressed, could see an emergence of new spatial possibilities addressing the oppressive foundations of before and movement towards a more spatially just residential experience.

The CC position, the residence halls CCs operate in, and the *intercultural competency* learning CCs assist UNI in delivering failed to consider the spatial in their inception. In doing so, each remains ignorant to the magnitude that the space and place play in the position's experience and the students it engages. Soja's (1989) dive into the socio-spatial dialectic regarding urbanization and capitalism gives us a warning. How students impact the school and how the school impacts the student has changed. Some critical geographers suggest that "identity formation always happens in spaces that both construct and limit possibilities and the places that have been invested with meaning" (Helfenbein, 2015, p. 401). To ignore the spatial in our understanding of the world comes at our own peril. Doing so creates uneven geographies (Smith, 2010) in the productions of space and access to a place (Soja, 1989) and continues spatial oppression and marginalization of historically excluded students who were not considered in the construction of space. This is true for the PAR studies in general, and this

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study, as the spatial must be included in efforts of emancipation. Participatory research aims to give community members a voice to achieve action, and thus power, to improve aspects of their experience. This study contends that the experience does not merely happen within a space and place; instead, the space and place created without the marginalized in mind are often active in oppression and marginalization. Attending to the space and place through PAR studies becomes imperative, as failing to do ensures friction upon solutions towards the experience due to dominations by space and place.

The CC position is valuable at UNI, and the existing spatial barriers impacting the position are not new. Ignoring the spatial impact on the CC position and its' aims limits the opportunities that the place of a residence hall can become and allows for past oppressions to cycle in explicit and implicit exertions of power. Massey et al. (1999) identify space as a process of interrelated and interlocked relationships, stating "because relations are active practices, material and embedded, practice which have to be carried out... space is always in the process of becoming. It is always being made" (p. 283). The CCRT members, with the support of UNI housing, can work to produce new spaces and new meanings in existing spaces. Soja (2010) posits that "applying an assertive spatial perspective ...can open up new sources of insight and innovative practical and theoretical applications" (pp. 3-4). In doing so, one must be careful not to trade one oppression for another. BISOC experiences and perspectives were absent in the previous construction of UNI residential spaces, but their omission does not have to persist. Nor do we have to trade their omission for another, such as gender (Massey, 2013) or social class (Soja, 2010).

Significance of the Study

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This study answered three research questions and one meta-analysis question. The first research question investigated what changes CCs would make to their position to increase student *intercultural competency* development in UNI residence halls. The production of the eight actions the CCRT presented exemplified the changes CCs would make. The second research question inquired into the impact performing PAR has on student peer leaders' *intercultural competency*? The depth of impact experienced by CCRT members was variable, but each CCRT member articulated some form of impact. As detailed in the findings portion of this study, the most common articulation was an increase in *intercultural competency*, cultural awareness, or knowledge about barriers hindering the position. Many CCRT members also articulated value in learning about PAR and the phases that make it up. These phases provided a playbook towards action, which CCRT members felt could be helpful in the future. The third research question explored what barriers exist that obstruct Cultural Connector development of peer *intercultural competency*? Through *a priori* coding (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2009, p. 252), the CCRT identified barriers to cultural proficiency that impact their experience. This identification made them more aware of lived commonalities in experiencing and addressing these barriers. Emergent barriers, such as *cultural cliques* and privileged apathy, were identified as a weathering wind, providing barrier and energy erosion to the CCRT members. Through this weathering, the CCRT identified their significance and created pointed actions to understand them more and create change.

The meta-analysis question served as an invitation for of the impacts of the physical space and place at UNI influence on the *intercultural competency* learning and PAR at a PWI. Applying a critical spatial analysis as a meta-analysis to a PAR study is significant and novel. It gives a more holistic examination of the *intercultural competency* learning and curriculum UNI

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provides. This analysis brings the space and place of the PAR study into the view, acknowledging the spatial impact of the experiences and research achieved. As PAR is emancipatory, it is important to realize the spatial impacts occurring and identify ways that physical structures or systems increase the marginalization occurring in arenas replicating the social hegemony, such as a university.

Limitations

This study used definitions and frameworks of culture and *intercultural competency*, which are already embedded at UNI and were involved in creating the CC position and UNI assessment mechanisms of *intercultural competency*. Other definitions of culture, such as definitions produced in the field of cultural studies (Grossberg et al., 1992), might have been a better fit as they are less commoditized and recognize culture as not a thing, but a process. Culture, when considered as a collective field of struggle (Williams, 1958), political (Hall, 1992), and material (Massey, 2013), becomes a better mode of entanglement into the history, geography, and social complexities of the location replicating hegemonic expressions. Using the definitions and frameworks in place at UNI aided the transition of CCRT members into the study as co-researchers and impacted the range of criticality of the study.

Another limitation of the study was that the SCCOC used in the *culture audit* is originally intended for a K-12 educational school, so I needed to omit aspects that did not apply to UNI. Adapting it to assess aspects of higher education through conversations was mildly cumbersome and caused moments of confusion for some participants. For this reason, the SCCOC was used to prompt critical thought in the Group Discussion for the CCRT but was not a mandatory data collection tool. If the SCCOC could be edited with a more significant focus on a university's

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operations and vernacular, it would improve the SCCOC as a tool to evaluate cultural proficiency on a college campus.

Acceptance from Housing

UNI Housing did not engage in a substantial level of criticality toward this study. The approval of action items and the increased levels of legitimacy were appreciated by the CCRT, but a totality of approval shows a lack of desire to fully engage critically by stakeholders. The presence of academic research, conducted and engaged by already respected members of the Housing staff, had pre-stamped approval on the CCRT actions. This study is critical of the space, place, and *intercultural competency* curriculum at UNI and in Housing, and like any academic research, the limitation of this study should be troubled and analyzed prior to acceptance and implementation.

COVID-19

Limitations of this study include the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced all aspects of the study to be conducted online. PAR, in my opinion, is more fruitful and thorough when able to be engaged in person and having all the members of a team working and operating together. Some CCRT members did not use their voice in this study, which I attribute to the distance between CCRT members while engaging online. Those silent CCRT members remained present with attendance and physical responses (i.e., nodding or shaking head), but they did not contribute as comprehensively as other CCRT members. I cannot be sure the extent being on Zoom caused this lack of voice, but I feel certain it impacted their participation level. There were aspects of being on Zoom on a computer that made certain aspects of the study more accessible. It reduced the number of times participants talked over each other, and it also allowed for a more

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straightforward transcription process for the study. The need to be online due to the global pandemic impacted the study.

Being on Zoom also limited, at first, my realization of the spatial components of the study. Although the internet wires connecting us and the computer screens we were on are spatial (Titus, n.d.), it was not the typical space and place the CC position operates. It wasn't until the CCRT engaged into a conversation about the impacts of COVID-19 on the position did that become clear:

Zoom is great to get a lot of people to something, but, like, it is kinda fake. People hide their pictures, or leave. When we are in the halls they can't hide or leave without it being super awkward. But maybe that makes it safer too, 'cause you can hide if people walking by have changed how everything feels. Sydney - Group Discussion #5

In some ways, Zoom caused the CCRT to forget about the power exertions felt from the residence halls at UNI, and instead just focus on the connections on the screen in front of them.

Additional limitations include the timing of the study and other expectations external to the study placed on CCRT members. Being students amid a pandemic and having the CCRT experience happening later in the spring semester meant that CCRT members had limited operational capacity. Due to constraints, not every CCRT member participated in each form sent out and may have missed meetings. Every CCRT member was able to attend at least three of the offered meetings, but a few members could not make more than that because of the scheduling conflicts that emerged at the end of the semester. The CCRT also had a much different demographic makeup in ethnicity and gender than that of UNI's total undergraduate population, creating limitations to generalizing the study even on UNI's campus.

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Implications

Within PAR, the burden of replication does not lie on the study itself but on those looking to replicate the study. There is significant value in the learning, change creation, and democratic approach benefitting students in culturally focused peer leadership positions. With the presence of a *culture audit*, PAR can provide a framework and plan to explore and enhance culturally focused student leadership positions in other educational institutions. PAR presented the CCRT as a framework of learning towards identifying a problem, understanding the problem, and eliciting change to change the problem. The *culture audit* is more precisely built for the K-12 educational arena and may have more applicability there. For researchers looking to replicate this study in higher education, I would recommend further adapting the SCCOC questions to better address higher education vernacular and university operations. Subtracting questions built for K-12 when delivering using the *culture audit* in higher education would also assist in limiting confusion of participants who are trying to understand non-applicable questions. Throughout this study, emergent coding provides a powerful insight into the uphill climb towards effective culturally-focused work. *Privileged apathy* and *cultural cliques* both had a burdensome impact on the CCRT but were not known well by those overseeing the position.

Like the eight actions taken by the CCRT, programmatic action had little to no impact on the hegemonic replications at a PWI. This study aided CCRT members in understanding hegemonic barriers, but that understanding can create a greater sense of powerlessness in marginalized students. As stated before, PAR is not a silver bullet that can destroy the armor of the exertions of power on a college campus, but it can cause a dent. Giving participants an understanding of the study's scope of impact will keep the PAR study from further marginalizing

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the marginalized. The time and effort of the participants are valuable, and while PAR is emancipatory, it is not emancipation.

Future Research

Cultural cliques provide an interesting emerging code, not just in the identification of student segregation through these *cultural cliques* that occur on a college campus, but also the carryover that exists between the definition of *cultural clique* that came out of the CCRT and the identification of a previously defined definition of *cultural clique* in Beech's (2016) study. Interestingly, *intercultural competency* is frequently framed and seen on college campuses through global endeavors like studying abroad (Deardorff, 2011). This framing may provide insight into why a tendency of domestic students attending a domestic university but coming from different locations or experiencing different cultures to have their own experiences similar to that of those abroad. Because of our cultural differences and the homophily which often drives us towards connections to those culturally congruent to ourselves, even in a university that is closer to home for some students can elicit experiences that resemble those of the international experience in *intercultural competency*, communication, and cultural acquisition, but also in negative aspects of marginalization, tokenization, and either the desire to belong or the fear of being alienated from others. This seems to be a driver for students towards creating these *cultural cliques* or cultural bubbles that protect and insulate them from cultural differences.

The CCRT believes the onus of finding ways to break down some of these *cultural cliques* to further the globalization and cross-cultural understanding between students lies with the university. This pursuit may counter retention efforts that bolster a students' sense of belonging when the *cultural clique produces the* student's secure belonging. Members of the

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CCRT felt that there could be an even more profound sense of belonging if an expansion of *cultural cliques* occurred to include additional cultures or wide-ranging enough to include most of the university across differing identities or cultures held by students. This would also cause a reduction of the fear of alienation, an equal contributor to *cultural cliques* in the eyes of the CCRT.

This PAR study shows that engaging in participatory research provides a valuable tool to understand aspects of *cultural cliques*. Although the CCRT shared the common bond of the CC position, many CCs participated in different *cultural cliques* than other CCs. Engagement in PAR as a collective allowed students to increase their *intercultural competency* from their positionality as a leader and from their positionality as a student. By researching culture and *intercultural competency* together, students who belong to different *cultural cliques* can increase their *intercultural competency* and build a more cohesive cultural experience on campus and cultural skills by engaging PAR or PAR tenets. This engagement can occur in classrooms through curriculum or teaching methods and co-curricular student initiatives. It can be lived out in the Housing experience as it was in this study. The continued use of critical spatial analysis could better understand the role the curriculum and physical university play in articulating cultural understanding.

Since PAR allows for the student to engage in a study of *intercultural competency* regarding their CC position, and essentially also incorporate the study of themselves within that CC position. PAR in this setting through the *culture audit* allowed the student to bring their cultural self into the sphere as they saw fit. The ability to bring themselves into the cultural sphere aligns with aspects of culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2018) and pushes against institutional actions that underpin hegemonic power hierarchies (Bensimon, 2012). The

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utilization of culture and the cultural self, the allowance of it into the space, allowed for more authentic dialogue. The conversations in CCRT proved to be very authentic and genuine, further exemplified by revisiting previous conversations afterward Group Discussions. In this participatory analysis process, we found that people felt as though what they said was still very salient and true to themselves. Further understanding of the intersection of PAR into the curriculum, particularly a combination of PAR and cultural proficiency or pedagogy, is a potential next step of research.

Further examinations of the extent of the impact of PAR on the education of participants are needed. In this study, it was clear from what many CCRT members articulated that engaging PAR in relationship to *intercultural competency* increased the CCRT members' *intercultural competency*, but how much so remains unknown. Understanding PAR as a curricular framework and studying its potency would make for a better understanding of the education and engagement for which PAR strives. This education and engagement are not just sought after in participants, but a more curricular foothold could also ensure more buy-in from teachers, administrators, and schools.

I believe that PAR is a powerful educational tool, especially for students who have struggled to have their voices heard. What I failed to realize until I was in the study was the need to consider the spatial from the onset. As this study was conducted, it began to feel as though an entity of power regarding the meaning making of the CC role was not being considered. This study grew into the meta-analysis of critical spatial implications, meaning it did not begin with that intent in mind. How would this study be different if spatial considerations were brought to light in the beginning for CCRT members? Recognizing the juxtaposition of research which is emancipatory in nature being conducted in a space which cycles neoliberalism and replication of

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hegemonic power must be attended to at the onset. Even when PAR works to counter oppression, it still works within structures of oppression. This occurs both socially and spatially. Future research can address an early omission within this study, and see if participating researchers render different barriers and actions.

The application of PAR worked well in this study, and entities within and around the study wanted it to succeed. The presence of COVID-19 and the dependency on Zoom for this study are limitations of the study. It also presents an opportunity for future research, as conducting this study in person could render different results. The upper administration in the Housing department was excited to learn what perspectives the students would have, and they were open to the idea of student-led change from the beginning of the study. Staff who oversee the position were invested and participated in the CCRT, further articulating the Housing department's investment. Future research is needed to understand how the application of PAR might impact decisions in a less supportive environment, to see how PAR's elicited data-driven decisions can impact perceptions of stakeholders who have a more negative view of the actions determined by participant researchers.

Additional next steps of inquiry for this research are to look further into the student *cultural cliques* on campus. How is student segregation occurring? Why is it occurring, and more importantly, what are ways by utilizing *intercultural competency* to get students to break out of some of those *cultural cliques* to engage in cross-cultural understanding? The ability to relate across cultures is vital for *intercultural competency* and the development of cultural skills. Developing *intercultural competency* is incredibly important. Understanding the hegemonic barriers working against intercultural proficiency and competency helps speed the

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development of socio-cultural learning and create a more welcoming residential living environment.

This effort should not always rest on the shoulders of student peer leaders in culturally focused positions. Student peer leaders in positions of leadership who have other areas of focus should also aid in the development. By applying the framework of this study within other student leadership positions, PAR provides the potential for *intercultural competency* development within peer leadership roles outside of the CC position. The cultural site of a university, and the student housing within it, provide numerous opportunities for intercultural situations. A student with high levels of *intercultural competency* can display "effective and appropriate behavior and communication in intercultural situations" (Deardorff, 2011, p.66). The development of *intercultural competency*, and the understanding and reduction of barriers of cultural proficiency, create more potent actions in creating an accessible and inclusive experience for residential students at UNI.

Finally, the impact of the actions taken by the CCRT is an area of future research. The eight actions created by the CCRT will create change in different areas of UNI housing, and the impact the actions create should experience exploration. UNI Housing already has assessment mechanisms in place to identify the shortcoming that led to this study's problem. Utilizing those exact assessment mechanisms post-implementation of CCRT actions will give an understanding of the impact this study has had on UNI Housing, the CC position, and the UNI Housing residential student experience.

Conclusion

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PAR produced a mechanism that assisted in change agency through data-driven decision-making to improve the CC position. The actions determined by the CCRT clearly articulated the changes they would like to occur for their position to increase *intercultural competency* in residential students and CCs. Engaging in this way, we see how a cultural-focused peer leadership position at a PWI can make changes. This study used PAR to ensure that participant voices were weighted equally in the decision-making process of actions constructed to impact the CC position positively. By applying PAR, I saw the presence of *intercultural competency* learning occurring at UNI and in Housing through the lens of the CCRT and identify areas that lack proficiency. I also saw what barriers exist both through the *a priori* coding from Terrell et al.'s (2018) barriers and from emerging coding that existed and came forth throughout the study. Although this study did not seek generalizability, it provides a framework for other studies to engage in PAR through a *cultural audit* to better understand the intercultural experiences occurring through intercultural proficiency on their campus.

Through the actions created in this study, the CCRT increased its numbers, initiated more comprehensive assessment and cross-campus collaborations, incentivized resident participation in programming, increased CC visibility, and improved departmental positionality in Housing. Each of these changes improved the CC position and the view the CCRT had of the position. In doing so, the *intercultural competency* learning within the residence halls improved, and awareness of the spatial articulations working against the CCRT position became visible. As the CC position extends the *intercultural competency* learning at UNI, UNI was also impacted, albeit minimally. This study gave a greater voice to the CCs at UNI to enhance their position and increase CCs' awareness of hegemonic barriers, providing a deeper understanding of the

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magnitude of the obstacles facing student peer leaders in culturally focused positions. In doing so, the CCRT found empowerment and positive programmatic change.

The Next Cycle(s)

When PAR is conducted and published, the study becomes a snapshot of a moment in the methodological cycle, but the cycle continues (Ferrance, 2000). This study encapsulates one complete PAR cycle, but the cycle in this study continues into a new cycle. Each future PAR cycle will build upon the actions the CCRT created in previous cycles, aiming to elicit improved actions and CCRT learning with each iteration, and create new actions to address barriers further and improve the impacts of the CC position. In doing so, the impact of PAR in UNI Housing will hope to snowball towards more significant change. Adjustments made regarding this study progress to the next cycle and work to enhance the study's methods, tools, and impacts.

The first adjustment for the next PAR cycle is a lengthening of the timeline of the entire duration of the cycle by two months. By allocating more time for the PAR cycle, the CCRT will play a more prominent role in data organization and the presentation to stakeholders. These phases offer valuable learning and impact for the participants, actions, and sense of CCRT accomplishments. One additional Group Discussion will be added to the timeline to gather the CCRT for data sorting as a collective, and will be added to Phase 2 of the PAR cycle. The meeting with stakeholders will also take place prior to completing the CC Reflection Form to allow CCRT members to reflect on the experience of pitching their actions to UNI. After the cycle, an additional added Group Discussion will allow the CCRT to create a report detailing suggested changes for the next PAR cycle, and will be titled Group Discussion #7. The CCRT will develop this report in order to articulate suggested adjustments for future PAR cycles.

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A second adjustment to the PAR cycle is the inclusion of critical spatial analysis Helfenbien & Huddleston (2021) and editing of data gathering tools to improve their applicability to the location of the study and to evaluate the impact the space and place of the study have. Additional training of critical spatial perspectives should also be added to Training #1 and provided to the CCRT from the beginning of the study. Considerations of critical spatial analysis should also be added to the SCCOC to audit the site of the delivered education more clearly. Similarly, the CC Feedback Form and the CC Reflection Form should also add questions that consider the spatial impacts of the site and study. Addressing the struggles of the SCCOC application to higher education institutions, including the absence of questions of space and place, will strengthen the tool for further cycles. The SCCOC was built for K-12 primarily and should be adapted further to fit an institution of higher education.

The final adjustment made to this PAR cycle focuses on the production of actions in the study. In the PAR cycle performed in this study, CCRT members took action by identifying what UNI Housing could do to address issues of *intercultural competency* learning and barriers impacting the CC roles. Future cycles should keep the CCRTs identification of actions for UNI Housing while also asking CCRT members to create actions that they can implement themselves. In doing so, the CCRT will create both UNI Housing actions and CCRT actions, engage in implementing CCRT actions, and create a report suggesting changes for the next PAR cycle. The phases for the next iteration of the PAR cycle are below in Table 13.

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Table 13

Next CCRT PAR Cycle

Phase	Description	Use In This Study	Who is Present
Training	Training #1	Train on: Culture Audit & Critical Spatial Perspectives	CCRT and Primary Researcher
1	Identify Problem Area	Group Discussion #1: *SCCOC Collect: SCCOC, Group Discussion Transcript	CCRT and Primary Researcher
2	Collect & Organize Data	Group Discussion #2: Collecting Data: *CC Feedback Form, Researcher Journal Collect: CC Group Feedback Form, Group Discussion Transcript Group Discussion #3: Organizing Data Organize: Qualtrics, Excel, Word Cloud	CCRT and Primary Researcher
Training	Training #2	Train on: Data Analysis, Intervention/Action Creation	CCRT and Primary Researcher
3	Interpretation of Data	Group Discussion #4: Participatory Data Analysis, A Priori Coding (Cultural Proficiency Traits & Barriers), Emergent Coding Collect: Group Discussion Transcript	CCRT, Primary Researcher, Critical Friend
4	Action Based on Data for CCRT	Group Discussion #5: Action Collect: Group Discussion Transcript	CCRT and Primary Researcher
	Action Based on Data for UNI	Presentation to Stakeholders	
5	Reflection	Group Discussion #6: Reflection Collect: *CC Reflection Form, Group Discussion Transcript	CCRT, Primary Researcher, Critical Friend
6	Next Steps	Group Discussion #7: *Next Cycle Report	CCRT, Primary Researcher, Critical Friend

** Denotes this document has been edited or added from the version used in this study*

Implementing the adjustments listed above will strengthen the CCRTs future PAR cycles and better equip the CC position's impact and reduce barriers. In doing so, the likelihood that future research cycles will impact hegemonic replications at a neoliberal university increases. The inclusion of critical spatial analysis and awareness in CCRT members points to the possibility of future cycles implementing spatial actions, such as the construction of spaces and buildings. If future cycles of research get UNI to begin to use a participatory approach with CCs

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and marginalized UNI student voices in the fund development, naming, planning, and designing of buildings and spaces, the spatial replications of hegemonic power and their intersection into the spatial delivery of *intercultural competency* learning would begin to experience disruption. It will likely take three or four more PAR cycles for the CCRT to begin to take action in the construction of spaces and places on campus. Multiple cycles give time for growth in confidence of impact by the CCRT and allowance of change by UNI Housing, and also allow for CCRT involvement earlier in the development of programs and structures which take years to develop. Buildings, lobbies, corridors, wall designs, pictures, and paint historically centered on wealth and white-centric perspectives could be created with BISOC perspectives in mind if the inclusion of CCRT action occurs. The construction of spaces that historically limited students with mobility impairments could center their experience instead of privileging the able-bodied student further.

The possibility for improvement in addressing hegemonic replications at a neoliberal university exists. However, UNI Housing will have to work hard not to co-opt or shut out the student voice when it counters their own voice or gains positive recognition. Just as I troubled my positionality in this study, so too should UNI Housing staff as they embark on future cycles. PAR aims to amplify the voices of the marginalized, and the leadership in UNI Housing will need to make sure not to continue the cycle of hegemonic marginalization in producing performative measures of participatory action and change. Instead, the staff of UNI Housing must engage genuinely, be willing to follow the leadership of the CCRT and other marginalized students and the actions they produce, and embrace the participatory nature of a PAR study where students are engaging as co-researchers.

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Appendix A: Housing Position Descriptions

Hall Director Position Description

The Hall Director (HD) position at Texas Christian University (UNI) is a full-time (12-month), live-in professional position. This position is responsible for administering a comprehensive residence life program focused on empowering students to develop authentic relationships and inclusive communities within an exceptional residential experience within a hall of 150-450 students. The HD will be a part of establishing goals and objectives for the department and the residence hall. The HD will be expected and encouraged to take initiatives that are consistent with the mission of the department. The HD position requires positivity, enthusiasm, strong work ethic, a desire to be a part of the campus community, and initiative while working collaboratively with others in the department and in the Division of Student Affairs. Evening and weekend hours are required. This position reports to the Assistant Director or Associate Directors of Residence Life (ADs). UNI requires applicant to live on campus in a designated residence hall. Human Resources must complete a background check on the selected candidate and spouse. You must have or obtain a Texas Drivers' License. The primary responsibilities are:

Residence Hall Community Development/Knowing, Connecting, Empowering (KCE):

- Develop relationships with residents to aid in the holistic development of the individual student
- Implement tenets of our Knowing, Connecting, Empowering model, which is focused on intentionally building relationships and cultivating a strong sense of community within the residence halls
- Assist and supervise Resident Assistants in community development/KCE initiatives
- Utilize motivational interviewing techniques to adjudicate violations of University policy and the Code of Student Conduct in order to guide students through the educational discipline process
- Oversee the development of programming that fosters awareness of personal endeavors, academic pursuits, community wellness, civic engagement, and diversity, inclusion, and equity
- Assess the effectiveness of hall programs, department initiatives and committees through the survey software Qualtrics
- Advise student leaders and organizations, including National Residence Hall Honorary (NRHH), Hall Crew (Hall Council), Hall Crew Association (HCA), and Peer Discipline Board
- Advise a student leader through the Cultural Connector program to promote and implement diversity initiatives
- Create and promote a caring atmosphere conducive to academic pursuits through personalized academic plans for students with unsatisfactory grades
- Promote an atmosphere that emphasizes UNI's mission and values

Residence Hall Staff:

- Attend staff meetings with other HDs and the Housing and Residence Life Leadership Team
- Plan and implement a weekly staff meeting with the hall staff
- Conduct weekly or bi-weekly meetings with individual Resident Assistants
- Supervise 5-16 Resident Assistants, 1 undergraduate Assistant Hall Director, and (in some halls) an Office Assistant or Graduate Assistant

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- Evaluate the student staff performance of 5-16 Resident Assistants and 1 undergraduate Assistant Hall Director
- Co-supervise one Lead Desk Assistant with the Assistant Hall Director to promote community development within the residence hall
- Participate in and lead staff training for all residence hall personnel, including RAs, Assistant Hall Directors, Desk Assistants, Lead Desk Assistants, Cultural Connectors, and Graduate Assistants
- Develop a sense of community among staff through staff development, leadership development, and personal/professional development

Residence Hall Administration:

- Maintain daily office hours and offer a high degree of availability and visibility for all residents and staff members
- Oversee the administrative functions of the hall office operation, including Desk Assistants, timesheets, supplies, keys, etc.
- Maintain occupancy reports and resident records utilizing StarRez student housing software
- Utilize the work order system Aim to ensure that maintenance problems are reported and corrected as soon as possible
- Promote and uphold a secure environment within the residence hall
- Enforce University and departmental policies and regulations
- Maintain hall budget by preparing and carefully recording all expenditures

Departmental Responsibilities:

- Assist with student staff selection and training
- Assist with department wide and divisional programming, and move-in/move-out
- Lead and serve on HD Committees (RA/HD Training, Student Staff Selection, Inclusiveness, Assessment, KCE, Summer Camps and Conferences, Graduate Assistant Recruitment, NRHH, Hall Crew, Peer Discipline Board)
- Participate in year-round on-call rotation

Divisional Responsibilities:

- Support larger University initiatives (Frogs First, Monday@UNI, Experience UNI, Orientation, University programming, etc.)
- Serve as liaison formally and informally with other departments in Student Affairs
- Actively participate in professional development events provided by the Division of Student Affairs and Housing and Residence life
- Create collaborative relationships with other departments and university personnel

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Graduate Assistant for Multicultural Enrichment Position Description

The Graduate Assistant (GA) for Multicultural Enrichment in Housing and Residence Life (HRL) at Texas Christian University (UNI) is a part-time (10-month), 20 hours per week position. The GA will be responsible for providing relevant and timely outreach opportunities around multiculturalism, inclusion, diversity, and equity. Evening and weekend hours are periodically required. This position reports to the Chair of the Inclusiveness Committee, Hall Director, and will receive special project assignment from the Director of HRL or another member of the Leadership Team. The GA position will serve as a committee member to the HRL Inclusiveness Committee. In addition this position will supervise the Cultural Connector program. The primary responsibilities are:

Development/Knowing, Connecting, Empowering (KCE):

- Supervise “Cultural Connectors” – Undergraduate students focused on inclusive programming and dialogue within our residential communities
- Lead in Cultural Connector recruitment, training, and selection processes
- Facilitate Dialogue Dinners through the Cultural Connector position
- Participate in annual Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion programming (Tunnel of Oppression/ Human Library)
- Develop and organize engaging cultural celebrations, activities, workshops, and multicultural proficiency presentations that foster student leadership and engagement
- Assists in the coordination of inclusiveness sessions and on-going developmental opportunities related to inclusion and equity in all student staff trainings
- Attend Inclusiveness committee meetings
- Attend staff meetings for HRL professional staff

Administration:

- Research current trends and best practices related to traditionally underrepresented student populations, diversity, and social justice education
- Provide educational trainings, events, and presentations to increase student awareness of multiculturalism, diversity, social justice, and equity
- Attend Inclusiveness committee meetings
- Attend staff meetings for HRL professional staff
- Support HRL committees and working groups as requested by Leadership Team

Departmental Projects/ Division Responsibilities:

- Assist with centralized move in process
- Support larger university initiatives and programming
- Assist with staff selection and RA/DA interview process
- Actively participate in professional development events provided by the department and division
- Support HRL committees and working groups as requested by Leadership Team

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Appendix B: School-wide Cultural Competence Observation Checklist

THE SCHOOL-WIDE CULTURAL COMPETENCE OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

School:
Principal:
Name:
Review Date:

Instructions: Rate on a scale of 1 to 5 (1= Never 2= Almost Never 3=Sometimes 4= Almost Always 5=Always) the extent to which you observe each of the following criteria for cultural competence. Please note or provide evidence or documentation to support your rating.

	Observation Area/Domain and Criteria	Scale	Evidence/ Documentation
School Vision/Mission			
1	There is a school Mission Statement or Vision Statement that includes a stated commitment to diversity and/or global citizenry.	12345	
Curriculum			
2	Literature selections in the curriculum reflect a variety of cultural perspectives (classrooms and library).	12345	
3	Global perspectives are integrated into curricula at all grade levels (world history and geography, culture studies, languages).	12345	
4	Linguistic and content objectives are addressed for second language learners.	12345	

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Student Interaction and Leadership			
5	Racial/ethnic representation in advanced placement classes, honors classes, and gifted programs is balanced.	12345	
6	Youth "voice" is considered in decision-making by regularly meeting with randomly selected groups of students to obtain feedback.	12345	
7	There is a variety of student leadership opportunities for all students.	12345	
8	Students of different groups integrate socially outside of the classroom.	12345	
9	There are identified support programs to promote achievement and retention of lower achieving groups.	12345	
10	Students are involved in community service and service learning activities.	12345	
11	There is a program in place to facilitate the adaptation of NEW students into the school and classroom.	12345	

CULTURAL CLIQUES AND CONNECTORS

Teachers			
12	Teachers representing diverse groups are actively recruited by the principal and the district.	12345	
13	New teachers are formally inducted through orientations and structured mentoring and support programs.	12345	
14	Teachers team vertically and horizontally according to individual strengths, leadership abilities, and interests.	12345	
15	Efforts are made to consciously integrate diverse teacher teams.	12345	
16	Professional development is offered that addresses: race/ethnicity/nationality sexual orientation special needs language and dialect	12345 12345 12345 12345	
17	Informal teacher leadership roles are recognized.	12345	

CULTURAL CLIQUES AND CONNECTORS

18	Professional development is focused and long term.	12345	
Teaching and Learning			
19	Instruction is differentiated to address students with special needs, while challenging all students.	12345	
20	Researched strategies that account for various learning styles are used in classrooms.	12345	
21	Connections are made to students' culture and prior knowledge.	12345	
22	Teaching strategies accommodate the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse learners using a variety of grouping strategies, hands-on activities, visuals, oral language development, reading/writing workshops, etc.	12345	
Parents and Outer Community			
23	Community outreach programs regularly survey the perspectives of various local community constituency and stakeholder groups, including parents.	12345	

CULTURAL CLIQUES AND CONNECTORS

24	Parent involvement programs exist for all culture groups.	12345	
25	National and global ties are established through partnerships with similar organizations.	12345	
26	The electronic community is realized and utilized for relationship building and sourcing best practices.	12345	
Conflict Management			
27	The inevitability of intercultural conflict is recognized by peer mediation programs and/or other proactive approaches to conflict resolution.	12345	
28	Practices to ensure classroom and school safety for all are in place (e.g. including systems for addressing bullying or developing positive student relations).	12345	
Assessments			
29	Authentic student assessments are used to complement standardized tests.	12345	
30	Formative and summative program evaluations are conducted to ensure continual improvement.	12345	

CULTURAL CLIQUES AND CONNECTORS

31	Teachers and administrators are evaluated by various constituency groups (other teachers, students, colleagues, self, supervisor, etc.).	12345	
32	Organizational traditions are examined periodically to check for exclusive/inclusive practices.	12345	
33	Celebrations reflect various cultures and introduce the community to new cultures. Representation at events and celebrations is diverse.	12345	

General Observations:

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Cultural Connector Research Team Focus Group Script and Questions:

Thank you for joining us in our focus group. You recently completed your School-wide Cross-Cultural Observation Checklist (SCCOC) and we would love to hear more about that experience, as well as its impact. This conversation is being recorded for research purposes, and as stated in your consent form, any personal identifiers will not be included in any published materials.

I have handed you a list of the questions that we will ask today, as well as definitions of the word “culture” and “intercultural competency”. Please feel free to look over those as we discuss.

Are there any questions before we begin?

Definitions

Culture: Terrell et al. (2018) synthesizes that culture is "a set of practices and beliefs shared by members of a particular group that distinguish that group from other groups". This includes but is not limited to forms of “human description, including age, gender, socioeconomic status, geography, ancestry, religion, language, history, sexual orientation, physical and mental level of ableness, occupation, and other affiliations” (p. 21).

Intercultural Competency: Deardoff (2011) posits that intercultural competency "applies to any who interact with those from different backgrounds, regardless of location", and that it is "effective and appropriate behavior and communication in intercultural situations, which again can be further detailed in terms of indicators of appropriate behavior in specific contexts" (p.66).

Put simply, intercultural competency is the development of knowledge, awareness, and skills for effective intergroup interactions.

Questions:

What impact did the SCCOC have on your self-perception in regards to the CC position?

What impact did the SCCOC have on your self-perception in regards to UNI?

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Do you feel as though the SCCOC increased your intercultural awareness in regards to the CC position or UNI? What aspects of the SCCOC caused the impact?

What are some cultural differences at UNI that you discovered in the SCCOC that differ from your own cultural perspective?

What aspects of the CC position enhance your intercultural competency? What aspects hinder it?

What aspects of UNI enhance your intercultural competency? What aspects hinder it?

How does enhancing a CCs intercultural competency impact your performance as a CC?

If you were creating a tool for developing CCs intercultural competency, what would be in it and why?

What changes would you make to the CC position to increase intercultural competency development in the students this position serves?

What barriers are hindering your development in establishing relationships across cultures with other students? How is that different from other peer-leadership style positions?

What changes would you make to the CC position to reduce barriers to intercultural competency development in the position?

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What has stopped you in the approaching or addressing barriers to intercultural competency?

Appendix D: Cultural Connector Reflection Form

Cultural Connector Research Team Reflection Form:

Thank you for your participation in this study. During this study you completed a School-wide Cross-Cultural Observation Checklist (SCCOC), focus group, and this reflection form. Please use this form to reflect on your experience with the study, your position at UNI, and the impact positions like the CC position have on universities such as UNI.

Definitions:

Hegemony: Hegemony refers to a "system of class rule" (Ramos, 1982, p. 4) that reproduces a status quo benefiting those in certain class positions. Cultural hegemony assumes that conventions, expectations, protocols, and practices based on one ethnic group's cultural standards are normative and universal to all (Gay, 2018).

Intercultural Competency: Deardoff (2011) posits that intercultural competency "applies to any who interact with those from different backgrounds, regardless of location", and that it is "effective and appropriate behavior and communication in intercultural situations, which again can be further detailed in terms of indicators of appropriate behavior in specific contexts" (p.66).

Participatory Action Research (PAR): PAR is a form of action research that emphasizes the involvement of participants in the research and the actions to be taken in response to research findings. Schneider (2012) posits that in PAR, "the aim is to have ordinary community members generate new knowledge about issues and problems they care about... and through discussions promote personal and social change" (p.153).

Questions:

- 1. How did participating in a PAR study of the CC position impact your view of the position?**

- 2. To what extent do you feel like the CC position impacts the intercultural competency of students at UNI?**

CULTURAL CLIQUES AND CONNECTORS

- 3. What barriers exist in developing intercultural competency in residential students at UNI?**
- 4. How can the CC position reduce those barriers?**
- 5. Does the CC position impact the culture of UNI? If so, how?**
- 6. As a CC, do you feel as though you have the power to make an impact in the residential community?**
- 7. Do you feel as though the PAR increased your intercultural awareness in regards to the CC position or UNI? What aspects of PAR caused the impact?**
- 8. What are some cultural differences at UNI that you discovered in the SCCOC that differ from your own cultural perspective?**
- 9. What aspects of the CC position enhance your intercultural competency? What aspects hinder it?**
- 10. What aspects of UNI enhance your intercultural competency? What aspects hinder it?**
- 11. How does enhancing a CCs intercultural competency impact your performance as a CC?**

CULTURAL CLIQUES AND CONNECTORS

- 12. What changes would you make to the CC position to increase intercultural competency development in the position?**

- 13. What changes would you make to the CC position to increase intercultural competency development in the students this position serves?**

- 14. What changes would you make to UNI to increase intercultural competency in residential students?**

- 15. What barriers are hindering your development in establishing relationships across cultures with other students? How is that different from other peer-leadership style positions?**

Informed Consent to Participate in Research

Title of Research: The Utilization of Participatory Action Research as an Intercultural Competency Intervention: Impacts on Student Leaders and the University Culture

Principal Investigator: Gabriel Huddleston, Ph.D.

[Co-investigators:] Jason Titus, M.A. – Doctoral Candidate

Overview: You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be over the age of 18, a UNI student, and a part of the Cultural Connector (CC) experience within the Housing and Residence Life Office at Texas Christian University (UNI). Taking part in this research project is voluntary. All aspects of this study will be conducted via Zoom.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

Study Details: This study uses participatory action research (PAR) with a focus on intercultural competency to incorporate a valued student perspective to pursue increased intercultural competency in relationships and learning within the CC position. PAR is a form of action research that emphasizes the involvement of participants in the research and the actions to be taken in response to research findings. Researchers and participants will work collaboratively to elicit greater intercultural competency through participating in a PAR study. The aim of this study is rooted in applying PAR as a collaborative method of research, intervention, development, and action in an individual program by utilizing PAR as an intervention to increase intercultural competency. The PAR to be conducted in this study is significant for understanding the impact PAR can have on a culture-focused peer leader's intercultural competency development and enhancing peer leadership programmatic evaluation and potential for improvement at Texas Christian University (UNI).

This study is being conducted at UNI, and all aspects of this study for participants will be conducted via Zoom.

Participants: You are being asked to take part because you currently hold or supervise a student peer-leader position with a focus on culture. If you decide to be in this study, you will be one of approximately 16 participants in this research study at UNI.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to participate and may stop your participation at any time. Even if you decide to be part of the study now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. If you decide to withdraw before this study is completed, please contact Jason Titus at j.titus@UNI.edu and request your withdrawal. You will be able to withdrawal from the study until May 7th, 2021.

Confidentiality: Even if we publish the findings from this study, we will keep your information private and confidential. We cannot promise complete secrecy, as we cannot control what fellow

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participants might say outside the study, but it will be encouraged not to share the identities of other participants.

What is the purpose of the research? Using an exploratory participatory action research (PAR) approach, this study takes a deeper look into how to elicit higher amounts of intercultural competency development, as well as the extent intercultural competency impacts a student in CC position at UNI. Researchers will gain knowledge into how effective current interventions perform, and will work collaboratively with CCs to elicit greater intercultural competency through participating in a PAR study.

What is my involvement for participating in this study?

If you agree to be in the study, we will ask you to do the following things:

You will complete a training on PAR and intercultural competency. You will then complete a culture audit, consisting of:

- School Wide Cultural Competency Observation Checklist
- CC group feedback form
- CC individual reflection form
- A group presentation to Housing and Residence Life stakeholders

We expect your participation to take about 10 total hours, which are to be allocated from your CC meetings times, with the addition of adding up to two more meetings.

Audio/videotaping will be used via Zoom for this study. Participants will be informed prior to recording starting each time recording is used. Participants will be given the option to opt out of the recording. Researchers will have access to recordings, and the recordings will be transcribed and written, and will remain with Jason Titus until the remainder of the study, after which they will be deleted.

Are there any alternatives and can I withdraw?

You do not have to participate in this research study.

You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time prior to May 7th, 2021. Removing yourself from this study will not impact your CC position status or compensation.

What are the risks for participating in this study and how will they be minimized?

The use of Zoom for all meetings minimizes the spread of COVID-19.

Risks or discomforts from this research include volunteering personal information in regards to your views on UNI or intercultural competency in the presence of supervisors and peers. We don't believe there are any risks from participating in this research that are different for risk that you encounter in everyday life. We don't believe there are any risks from participating in this research that are different from risk that you encounter in everyday life.

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What are the benefits of participating in this study?

You will benefit from being in this study because future trainings on intercultural competency, as well as the CC position, will be adjusted through the findings of this study. Enhanced trainings will support improved Cultural Connector performance and student and staff satisfaction.

Will I be compensated for participating in this study?

No.

What are my costs to participate in the study?

You will not need to pay for anything to participate in this study.

How will my confidentiality be protected?

Every effort will be made to limit the use and disclosure of your personal information, including research study records, to people who have a need to review this information. We cannot promise complete secrecy. Your records may be reviewed by authorized University personnel or other individuals who will be bound by the same provisions of confidentiality. We may publish the results of this study, and will keep your information private and confidential by removing your name or identifying information when doing so. Efforts will be made to limit the use and disclosure of your personal information, including research study records, to people who have a need to review this information. Names will be redacted from records prior to the data being viewed by student researchers. We cannot promise complete secrecy, as we cannot control what fellow participants might say outside the study, but it will be encouraged not to share the identities of other participants. Your records may be reviewed by authorized University or other individuals who will be bound by the same provisions of confidentiality.

What will happen to the information collected about me after the study is over?

We will keep your research data to use for future research or other purpose. Your name and other information that can directly identify you will be kept secure and stored separately from the research data collected as part of the project. Once the project is over, your name and other information that can directly identify you will be deleted from the research data collected as part of the project.

We may share your research data with other investigators without asking for your consent again, but it will not contain information that could directly identify you.

Who should I contact if I have questions regarding the study or concerns regarding my rights as a study participant?

You can contact Jason Titus at j.titus@UNI.edu with any questions that you have about the study.

Dr. Dru Riddle, Chair, UNI Institutional Review Board, (817) 257-6811, d.riddle@UNI.edu; or
Dr. Floyd Wormley, Associate Provost of Research, research@UNI.edu

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. A copy also will be kept with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

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I understand what the study is about and my questions so far have been answered. I agree to take part in this study.

Printed Participant Name

Signature

Date

Printed Name of the person obtaining consent

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Appendix F: Participant Invitation

Dear Cultural Connector Team Member,

You are invited to participate in a research study to make programmatic changes to the Cultural Connector position and better understand the impact of participatory action research on a student intercultural competency. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

If you agree to be in the study, we will ask you to do the following things:

You will complete a training on PAR and intercultural competency. You will then complete a culture audit, consisting of:

- School Wide Cultural Competency Observation Checklist
- CC group feedback form
- CC individual reflection form
- A group presentation to Housing and Residence Life stakeholders

We expect your participation to take about 10 total hours during CC meetings times, with the possible addition of adding up to two more meeting times.

All aspects of this study will be conducted via Zoom to help minimize the spread of COVID-19. You can contact Jason Titus at j.titus@UNI.edu with any questions you may have about the study.

Please read the Student Consent Form for more information about this study. By completing the Student Consent Form and submitting it to j.titus@UNI.edu, you are consenting to participate in the study. You are able to withdraw from this study at any time until May 7th, 2021.

Thank you,
Jason

CULTURAL CLIQUES AND CONNECTORS

Appendix F: IRB Approval



*TCU Institutional Review Board
3101 Sadler Hall
Fort Worth, Texas 76129*

DATE: March 5, 2021

TO: Jason Titus and Gabriel Huddleston
FROM: TCU Institutional Review Board
RE: Approval of Protocol Number 2021-13

Dear Huddleston and study team:

In accordance with applicable federal law governing the use of human subjects in research, the TCU Institutional Review Board ("IRB") has reviewed and approved your proposed project entitled "The Utilization of Participatory Action Research as an Intercultural Competency Intervention: Impacts on Student Leaders and Diversity-Focused Student Leadership Positions." Your study is considered minimal risk and was reviewed through the expedited process, category 7. Please know that the IRB has not evaluated your project for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the risk/benefit ratio (i.e. do benefits outweigh risk). This approval does not replace any other approvals that may be required.

Your IRB approval is effective on March 5, 2021. Continuing Review is not required; however, an [Annual Check-in Report](#) is required. You must submit the Annual Check-in Report to the IRB before each anniversary of your approval date every year until this study is closed. Once your research is complete, you must submit a [Project Closure and Final Report](#) form to the IRB to close this study.

The approved consent form(s) is included as part of your research approval notice. You may only use this version of the consent form(s) to recruit research participants.

Remember that you are responsible for ensuring that your study is conducted in an ethical manner and in accordance with applicable law and TCU policies and procedures. You must submit required reports, as well as any proposed modifications to the IRB for review. No changes to your protocol may be implemented without prior IRB approval. Also, you are required to promptly report unanticipated problems and adverse events.

Your study may be selected for a Post-Approval Monitoring ("PAM"). You will be notified if your study has been chosen for a PAM. A PAM investigator may request to observe your data collection procedures, including the consent process. All active projects are subject to PAM.

Please contact Research Compliance at research@tcu.edu or (817) 257-5070, if you need any additional information.

Sincerely,
TCU Institutional Review Board

CULTURAL CLIQUES AND CONNECTORS

VITA

Jason E. Titus

EDUCATION

Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas

Doctor of Philosophy, Educational Studies: Curriculum Studies Dec. 2021
Dissertation: *Cultural Cliques and Connectors: The Utilization of Participatory Action Research at a Predominantly White Institution to Enhance a Diversity-focused Peer Leadership Position and its' Impact*
Dissertation Chair: Gabriel Huddleston, Ph.D.
Advisor: M. Francyne Huckaby, Ph.D.

Graduate Certificate: New Media Composing and Teaching 2020

University of the Pacific, Stockton, California

Master of Arts, Educational Administration: Student Affairs 2006 - 2008

Graceland University, Lamoni, Iowa

Bachelor of Arts, Business Administration 2002 - 2006

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas

Associate Director of Residential Academic Initiatives 2021 – Present
Adjunct Faculty: EDUC 41113, 55113, UNPR 10211 2016 – Present
Assistant Director, Housing and Residence Life 2015 – 2021

Texas Woman's University, Denton, Texas

Assistant Director, Student Union 2013 – 2015
Adjunct Faculty: UNIV 1011, 1231 2013 - 2015

Texas A&M University - Commerce, Commerce, Texas

Assistant Director, Residential Living and Learning 2010 – 2012

University of Richmond, Richmond, Virginia

Area Coordinator, Richmond College Dean's Office 2008 – 2010
Adjunct Faculty: EDUC 319 2008 – 2010

University of the Pacific, Stockton, California

Resident Director, Housing & Greek Life Office 2006 – 2008

Lee's Summit Parks & Recreation, Lee's Summit, Missouri

Youth Counselor 2003 – 2006

AFFILIATIONS & AWARDS

American Educational Research Association
National Association Student Personnel Administrators
Association of College and University Housing Officers – International

Texas Christian University – 2021 Outstanding Graduate Teaching Award; Nominee
Texas Christian University – 2021 Jean Giles-Sims Award for Feminist Teaching; Finalist
Texas Christian University – 2021 3 Minute Thesis (3MT) Finalist
Texas Woman's University – Outstanding New Professional Award; 2014
Texas Woman's University – Student Life - Wall of Fame; 2014