

Fall 2015

The Understanding of a Single Story: Identities Amongst Black Students at Predominately White Institutions

Jonathan A. Franklin
Wofford College

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.wofford.edu/studentpubs>

 Part of the [African American Studies Commons](#), [Higher Education Commons](#), and the [Race and Ethnicity Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Franklin, Jonathan A., "The Understanding of a Single Story: Identities Amongst Black Students at Predominately White Institutions" (2015). *Student Scholarship*. Paper 10.
<http://digitalcommons.wofford.edu/studentpubs/10>

This Capstone Project is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Wofford. It has been accepted for inclusion in Student Scholarship by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Wofford. For more information, please contact stonerp@wofford.edu.

The Understanding of a Single Story: Identities Amongst Black Students at Predominately White Institutions

Examining the Student Identity of Black Students at
Wofford College

Jonathan Franklin
Wofford College
African/African American Studies
Fall 2015

Abstract

This paper examines the structure of identities amongst Black students at predominately white institutions – particularly focusing on Wofford College. Extensive focus groups were conducted with members of the Black student body to further progress research. Racism regarding Black students and their social identity in addition to how it has structured the social identity amongst students are introduced in along with the identities of students on Wofford’s campus. Discrimination on campus has had the effect of narrowing Black students’ options for creating social identity and participating in campus community life. Black students regularly face a very confining choice to either socialize with a black community only, assimilate into a predominately white community, or float between both white and black communities, but never achieve a complete sense of belonging into either group due to their divided loyalties to these two groups. The limiting identity choices affect not only the social behavior, but also individual identities and academic performance amongst students of color.

Preface¹

O, the things that we have learned in this unkind house that we have to tell the world about!

Despair? Did someone say despair was a question in the world? Well then, listen to the sons of those who have known little else if you wish to know the resiliency of this thing you would so quickly resign to mythhood, this thing called the human spirit...

Life? Ask those who have tasted of it in pieces rationed out by enemies.

Love? Ah, ask the troubadours who come from those who have loved when all reason pointed to the uselessness and foolhardiness of love. Perhaps we shall be the teachers when it is done. Out of the depths of pain we have thought to be our sole heritage in this world-- O, we know about love!

And that is why I say to *you* that, though it be a thrilling and marvelous thing to be merely young and gifted in such times, it is doubly so, doubly dynamic-- to be young, gifted, *and black*.

Look at the work that awaits you!

Write if you will: but write about the world as it is and as you think it *ought* to be and must be-- if there is to be a world.

Write about all the things that men have written about since the beginning of writing and talking-- but write *to a point*. Work hard at it, *care* about it.

Write about *our people*: tell their story. You have something glorious to draw on begging for attention. Don't pass it up. *Use* it.

Good luck to you. This Nation needs your gifts.

Perfect them!

Growing up in grade school, I was one of the many Black students in my classes. Being placed in honors and accelerated programs beginning in Kindergarten and continuing into my high school career, it was something that I learned to get acclimated

¹ Excerpt from the play *To Be Young, Gifted, and Black* by Lorraine Hansberry.

to over time. At a younger age, I did not pay close attention to race in terms of an academia setting and was used to my surroundings, teachers, and the lessons I learned throughout school. Before going into high school, my mother always told me about there being racism and discrimination in the world and that by being an intelligent young Black male, that I should always be cautious and aware of my surroundings. I decided not to listen to my mother because I knew that I would easily pass by and would not have to worry about a thing as such. My views, however, changed in my freshman year of high school as I was one of the few students of color in a majority White academic honors and advanced placement magnet program at a predominately African-American high school.

Looking around me and seeing familiar faces that I have grown up with since as early as first grade, my perspective of my peers and my teachers in this program had changed when I witnessed my first count of discrimination within an academic setting, as one of teachers voiced their opinion that I was not capable of completing the four year program due to my level of intelligence in comparison to my peers in the program. Although I did not speak out about this issue, little did I realize that I would be facing similar, but different reactions later on as a student of color at a predominately White institution.

I am now midway through my senior year at Wofford College, one of the South Carolina's top institutions, which thrives on its pristine reputation, rigorous academics, and its high retention rate over a four-year period. Coming into Wofford, I believed that I would be able to handle the challenging course load, succeed in not only the classroom, but outside the classroom, and would make the best of my four year experience. While I have 'conquered and prevailed' in all aspects of my Wofford experience, I too, like many

Black students and other students of color on campus, have had setbacks as a result of campus discrimination and its impact on social identities within the student body. From my experiences in regards to racism, discrimination, and prejudice, I began to turn to other students of color within the student body who also have faced similar situations and did not know who to voice their concerns to. Their stories and experiences throughout their time at Wofford began to interest me, hence my interest in pursuing this topic for my African/African American Studies capstone. By listening to what they have gone through in comparison to my own personal experience has shaped the direction in which I decided to navigate this project to ensure that the voices that are not heard on campus are felt included and to take a stance on an important issue affecting our campus community.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank everyone who has put forth the time, energy, and dedication into helping me complete my capstone. This project was truly a product of several hands and minds and I could not have made this possible without their help. I would like to first thank my capstone advisor, Dr. Kim Rostan, and the African/African American Studies committee: Dr. Jim Neighbors, Dr. Gerald Ginocchio, Dr. Kenneth Banks, and Mr. Ibrahim Hanif. Your direction, inspiration, and support have been nothing but helpful throughout this process and with such a sensitive topic to discuss. Thank you to Ms. Jennifer Gutierrez and the Office of Diversity and Inclusion for helping construct the focus group portion of my project (along with sponsoring the food for the group, as well) to insure the direction of the focus group was moving in the right direction. Thank you to Dr. Camille Bethea for helping me keep my faith throughout this semester, it being one of the most difficult semesters I have had at Wofford. Thank you also to my academic advisors: Dr. Carol Wilson and Dr. Anne Rodrick for being flexible and helping me navigate this capstone in addition to keeping me on track with my courses in both my English and humanities majors. Finally, I would like to thank my peers – the students at Wofford – for your willingness and participation in all aspects of this project, whether it was participation in the focus group, sharing your experiences for motivation, or being there for support throughout this process. Without your participation, none of this would be possible.

Literature Review

Several academic studies in higher education prove that there is an issue with the lack of diversity present within predominately White institutions (PWIs). Scholars who continuously produce and present research in this field state that the lack of diversity and lack of support for students of color – focusing on Black students – is indeed a problem that needs to be addressed by PWIs. Within the research concerning Black students and their successes and challenges at predominately White institutions, there are a variety of factors and points-of-view on the origins of this problem.

Many scholars within the field of higher education have established that minority students encounter barriers to their success at a predominately White institution. Scholars Kelly Rodgers and Jessica Summers in their article entitled "African American Students at Predominantly White Institutions: A Motivational and Self-Systems Approach to Understanding Retention" present to its readers that predominately White institutions (PWIs) have not been as effective in retaining and conferring bachelor's degrees upon Black college students; their research compares statistical data of PWIs to historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Both scholars seek to investigate the psychological aspects of the retention process while displaying a culturally sensitive framework to consider how Black students attending predominately White institutions may experience processes in retention. Experiences within the process of retention may include factors such as: withdrawal from social activities, feelings of exclusion, lack of engagement within academics, etc.

To demonstrate that these unsatisfactory results indicate a failure on the part of PWIs, and not individual students, Walter Allen's article "The Color of Success"

compares data from a national sample of freshmen Black students at predominately White institutions to those at historically Black institutions (otherwise known as HBCUs); Allen analyzes Black students' academic and social achievements and their occupational goals at these two types of institutions. Allen's studies additionally show that Black students at historically Black colleges tend to have higher academic achievements, higher levels of social involvement, in addition to having favorable and long lasting relationships with their professors. The absence of this engagement is one of the many origins of the problem at hand.

Similarly, Lorenzo Dubois Baber, focuses on the gaps in retention and completion at four-year institutions in his article "A Qualitative Inquiry on the Multidimensional Racial Development among First-Year African American College Students Attending a Predominately White Institution". Baber reports that while persistence and completion rates within the postsecondary education are generally on the rise, gaps determined by the racial/ethnic demographics still remain. These gaps in retention rates are prominent at predominately White institutions (PWIs) and not at historically Black colleges and universities, despite the influx of African Americans at PWIs.

In addition to establishing qualitative data from students at predominately White institutions, Baber's article takes the important step of examining the specific influence of racial identity development on African American students' educational experiences. Baber introduces his Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI)—five themes which represent the influence of both internal reconceptualization of racial identity and external sources of support.

To begin to understand the issue of racism and discrimination on campuses, it is necessary first to establish that the problem begins long before students are enrolled within the institution. Alberto Cabrera, Nora Amaury, Patrick T. Terenzini, Ernest Pascarella, and Linda Serra Hagedorn in their article entitled "Campus Racial Climate and the Adjustment of Students to College: A Comparison between White Students and African-American Students" research and use data presented from the National Study on Student Learning, comparing how perceptions of discrimination affected 1,139 White first year students' and 315 Black students' college experience. Black students, however, hold different perceptions of discrimination; having these perceptions negatively affect their social experience. White students represented in this article have a lack of understanding, which leads to denial in the white community that there is a problem when it comes to race-related issues on campus. The group of researchers suggests that, to combat this lack of understanding, having parental encouragement positively affected students' success within their first year at college because it familiarized students with the climate of higher education.

Additional factors such as microaggressions also play a role on how minority students are less engaged in campus life and feel disrespected in general while enrolled at a predominately White institution. Tara Yosso, William Smith, Miguel Ceja, and Daniel Solórzano, in the article "Critical Race Theory, Racial Microaggressions, and Campus Racial Climate for Latina/o Undergraduates," use focus groups investigating 132 students from four different institutions; two of them were predominately White institutions and the other two were historically Black colleges or universities. The group of researchers also investigated the differences among students as well as the importance of

acknowledging these experiences – experiences ranging from both inside and outside of the classroom and relationships amongst faculty, staff, and their peers.

Denise Frazier boldly explores institutional denial and responsibility for the specific problems at PWIs. Her article "They Only Talk to Me When They're Drunk: The African American Experience at Small Predominately White Institutions" challenges the effectiveness of diversity programming and social identification for Black students at predominately White institutions. Frazier's article is particularly useful for this capstone, because she was writing about Wofford College. Frazier offers distinct solutions and ways of understanding and educating when it comes to diversity education in a majority-White setting; specifically, her article proposes ways to mentor Black students while looking for solutions to find White administrative and faculty/staff support in terms of diversity programming.

Importantly, Frazier adds to the discourse the statement that students of *all* races at predominately White institutions should understand the need for diversity education and the importance it plays with the community amongst the specific institution. Both Rodgers and Summers in their article also study and suggest that the retention factor for black students in predominately White institutions is potentially a result of the lack of diversity—and the lack of *desire* for more diversity.

Like Frazier, Rodgers and Summers' review also seeks to explore the psychological aspects of the retention process, proposed by both Bean and Eaton, in addition to displaying a culturally-sensitive framework and consider how Black students attending PWIs may experience the processes in retention. Additionally, both authors address the attitudes of students towards their specific institution, academic self-efficacy,

motivation, attributions, and several other identities that are associated with the students; Frazier agrees with Rodgers and Summers in her article that diversity programming, education, and awareness are urgently needed on predominately White college campuses.

The most significant insight in these articles is not about the way the institutions can fix support systems for students, but the ways that they can improve the institutional culture of diversity at predominately White institutions. Most of articles researched target the administration as the origin of the problem, while leaving out other prominent offices on campus such as the office of admissions that could potentially be one of the factoring causes of the problem, since admissions representatives (e.g. students, staff, marketing materials, etc.) are recruiting and admitting students into the colleges. Instead placing all of our emphasis on the campus as whole responsible for the actions of racism, discrimination, prejudice, and segregation, those who are in favor of change should want to draw their attention to investigate specific factors or individuals who are the overlying cause of the problem.

Research/Findings

Methodology

For the research and data portion of this paper, I conducted a focus group where ten students across the four classes (i.e. first-year, sophomore, junior, senior) answered a series of questions regarding their experience at a predominately White institution while elaborating on their experience(s) at Wofford College. The focus group method was used to gather participants' experiences in a group setting versus pursuing the individual interview route; solely to listen and examine the participants' responses and interactions with other students of color on campus. Focus groups are a way to allow others to learn about diverse opinions on a designated topic and to guide future action on the topic of interest.

Participants

The focus group consisted of the follow demographic breakdown. Students that participated in the focus group identified as being Black/African-American – whether they just identify with being Black/African-American or biracial/multiracial with Black being one of the racial groups:

Five (5) students who identified as first-year students

Four (4) students who identified as sophomores

One (1) who identified as a junior

One (1) who identified as a senior

Eight (8) females

Three (3) males

Five (5) in-state (SC) residents

Six (6) out-of-state (non-SC) residents

Four (4) first generation college students

Five (5) Bachelor of Arts candidates

Five (5) Bachelor of Science candidates

One (1) Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science candidate

Eleven (11) receiving scholarships, federal aid, or any type of financial assistance to attend Wofford.

Instrumentation

The focus group covered a variety of areas to help support the research for this paper while allowing students to express items of concern regarding the Black-student population on Wofford's campus. The focus group touched several areas of inquiry and asked the following questions to students:

1. Why did you choose to enroll at Wofford?
2. What were your first impressions of Wofford upon applying, attending, and experiencing some of the everyday culture on campus?
3. What would you like to see more of on campus that caters to students of color, particularly aiming to Black students?
4. In your opinion, do you believe that Wofford is taking the initiative to increase the diversity on campus?
5. Please describe some of the setbacks that you have faced while at Wofford in terms of racism and discrimination.
6. What are your impressions when it comes to diversity at predominately White institution, specifically looking at Wofford?
7. Can you please describe the subtle and not so subtle instances of racism that happens daily on campus?
8. Please describe your views on how you believe the college shows its support in terms of students of color and diversity?

Procedures

The focus group did not necessarily represent a random student sample, but rather gathered a group of students who were willing and able to speak out about issues of prevalence on Wofford's campus that they experienced throughout their collegiate career. Participants in the focus group were recruited based off random selection and experiences expressed to me personally throughout their time enrolled at the College. All of the conversations that took place in the focus group were recorded via Voice Memo app, with the permission of the participants prior to the meeting. The audio recording was later documented and transcribed for data input regarding the final presentation.

Results

The following describe some of the challenges that students of color on Wofford's campus face – most of the time on a day-to-day basis while other times on occasion, depending on certain social or academic environments as well as the factors that led the participants to enroll at the College. Participants and their experiences that are shared in this paper will be referred to as 'Participant #' to keep the confidentiality of their identity.

Institution in a Position of Power

All of the participants when asked the first question, “*Why did you choose to enroll at Wofford?*” gave similar responses regarding the academic environment that the College has to offer in addition to its prestige and reputation amongst the southeast and across the state of South Carolina. One participant – who we will identify as ‘Participant 1’ – stated that she did not want to attend Wofford prior to enrolling due to her desire to attend college outside of South Carolina, but chose to attend Wofford due to the financial responsibilities that comes along with out-of-state schools; eventually stating that Wofford gave her a better financial aid package than her competitor institutions.

I had my intentions on going to Emory University and was set on going after graduating from high school. I felt kind of hesitant about going due to it being a bigger campus and it being so expensive, so I wanted to settle on something smaller, that would offer my major and would meet my goals in terms of on campus involvement and the expectancy of landing a job after graduation.

However, I did not know what I would be getting myself into by coming here to Wofford. – Participant 1.

Another participant, Participant 2, felt similarly to Participant 1 in terms of enrolling at Wofford. Participant 2 chose to attend Wofford solely on a whim, not having

previous knowledge about the institution. But after hearing positive remarks about the College and the prestige behind it, chose to apply and accepted her admission decision once offered. Other participants (Participants 3-10) stated that the reason of enrolling at Wofford was because of financial aid in comparison to other institutions they applied to, but when trying to pursue the opportunity to transfer, could not do so based off of credit hours and financial aid at the school of their choice. Participant 2 elaborated on this, stating that:

“I found out that Wofford isn’t the place for me simply within the first two weeks of my freshman year and unfortunately, have no other choice but to stay [here] and finish out because of my parents’ financial situation and their lack of helping me pay for college for various reasons”. – Participant 2.

As sad as this seems to have heard Participant 2 make this claim, students are often times faced this challenge while enrolled at Wofford and are displeased or are coping with their unhappiness of their Wofford experience differently than others would have. Gathered from this, the claim that can be made is that students of color on campus are attracted to the campus mainly by the financial aid/assistance given by the college, but not because of other benefactors unlike other students. While the College does an excellent job at obtaining students of color – e.g. financial assistance – it lacks the resources and tools needed to retain the students while on campus throughout a four-year period. Being in debt to the College over a four-year period, so to speak, and to a prestigious institution too, sets students of color up a difficult barrier for any sort of critique or protest pertaining to issues of importance that they may wish to support. Given so, it establishes the culture of denial and silence, the beginning of many Black students’ single stories.

Issues that need to be heard

Alongside this capstone project, I also had the privilege of creating a project for my New Media Theory course entitled “Its Not My World, Wofford”, focusing and channeling these same exact issues and more that Black students are constantly facing on Wofford’s campus. “Its Not My World, Wofford” is a photo campaign inspired by similar campaigns showcased at various predominately White institutions across the country – such as Harvard University, Davidson College, University of California at Berkeley, and College of Charleston. Highlighting the experiences of students of color at Wofford, the campaign’s overall intent is to grab the attention of the campus community regarding issues that Black students often face on a daily basis. The photographs that are shown throughout the project speak for themselves and hopefully will guide those who are passionate about diversity to fight for the appropriate change our campus needs.

With the financial assistance attracting students to the College, once they arrive on campus it begins to develop into a different story in regards to retaining students of color – whether it may be the campus culture, lack of clubs and organizations of interest, or the constant battles of racism and discrimination that one faces. When asked the second question, “*What were your first impressions of Wofford upon applying, attending, and experiencing some of the everyday culture on campus?*” all participants had different responses pertaining to their experience while at Wofford – having some positive, but majority being negative reflections shared with the group. One participant shared this positive outcome with the group when reflecting on their experience at Wofford:

I was prepared coming into Wofford. I went on a tour and I knew what it was like; I knew it was an all White school and by my experiences that I had in high school being one of the few students of color in my Advanced Placement (AP)

and honors courses along with being a student of color in a majority White school. I expected Wofford to be just like what I experienced in high school in terms of the classroom. However, what I didn't expect is to meet 'similar types' of Black people at Wofford – Black people that are determined to meet their end goal by the time of graduation: obtaining their degree(s) and landing a job or into a post graduate program. Participant 7.

Participant 7 addresses a good point as far as the perceptions and backgrounds of certain students of color on campus. A majority of Black students – whether surveyed for this project or just holding casual conversation – have had a similar experience in terms of their classroom dynamics prior to coming to Wofford; some attending private school or others being one of the few minority students in their advanced placement or honors classes. No matter the situation that these students were placed in, they have had some type of exposure to this culture, and have faced different obstacles along the way. While some students have had exposure to the campus culture in some way shape or form prior to attending Wofford, others however, were not as prepared in when it comes to this exposure and have faced different challenges *since* they started at Wofford:

In comparison to Participant 3's experience, we come from the same hometown but different high schools. My high school was around 70% Black/African-American and the remainder 30% being composed of other racial/ethnic backgrounds, including White/Caucasian, Asian, Native American, and Latino/Hispanic. My college experience so far has made me appreciate my high school experience in terms of the people I've met and encountered, particularly referring to the White students on campus. Just some of the ignorance I've experienced and the discrimination towards my peers, the limited Black faculty

we have, and the staff makes you appreciate your Black culture more. –

Participant 3.

A majority of participants reflected and shared with the group of instances where they have been mistaken for members of various athletic teams on campus, regardless of their acceptance to the College based off of academics and extra/co-curricular activities and achievements prior to Wofford. Although there were no Division I athletes that participated in the focus group, the invitation was extended for some to partake in the dialogue with their peers.

There was once instance where I was trying to drop a class due to my lack of interest in the subject and the way the professor was teaching the course. I went to speak with my professor so I can get my drop form signed and he stated “Shouldn’t you discuss this with your coach first before you do this?” I mentioned to him that I am not apart of a sports team here and he replied back “Oh, I thought you were. I mean, considering the majority of the athletic population on campus”. I felt very disrespected and embarrassed. – Participant 11.

Several students replied back with their experiences with professors or staff mistaking them for members of Division I sports teams.

I had a friend who was having mixed feelings about staying at Wofford due to the lack of support and racism happening. I was speaking with my advisor about this and he mentioned “Why doesn’t she talk to her coach about this?” I thought to myself, “Why would he assume that she is an athlete just because she’s black?” – Participant 6.

It happens outside of campus, too. I had an instance last semester where I was off campus and I was talking about how I still had to go to class in the snow last year and other colleges were delayed or canceled classes. The man behind the counter at the store stated “Oh, so you must go to USC Upstate, huh?” ...Even though my dad had on a ‘Wofford Dad’ t-shirt. I felt offended and replied back abruptly saying that I go to Wofford, on a full scholarship. – Participant 8.

Whether the experiences may occur inside of outside of the classroom, the lack of support for students of color – mainly Black students – is not supported by the Wofford campus community and is often overlooked by campus support staff in terms of programming and implementation for student retention.

Sometimes, I don’t feel comfortable here. Last year, I didn’t get the discrimination and racism as much as others have expressed in the group. But this year is a different story; it’s pretty much thrown in my face. This is not what I wanted for college and having to put up with it for four years is ridiculous. However, my experiences that I am learning and encountering while at Wofford are only going to prepare me for life after graduation, so I have to learn how to be indifferent and how to exactly handle myself in certain situations. Wofford is what the real world is going to be like, unfortunately. I just wish the College had a better way of supporting students of color in situations like this. – Participant 5².

² Participant 5 is involved in one of Wofford’s four Panhellenic sororities on campus, being the only Black female student in this organization and one of the first to do so.

Denial and Silencing

As students of color on Wofford's campus, often times our voices are overlooked and our needs that are of importance to us and for the future of the College are not listened to. When students have suggestions and feedback for how to make things better in terms of the student of color experience, they are silenced – mainly due to the fact that suggestions brought on by students are accused of dividing or segregating the campus. Participants in the focus group in relation to the question, *“What would you like to see more of on campus that caters to students of color, particularly aiming to Black students?”* responded likewise suggesting several factors that would help students of color succeed and stay enrolled at a predominately White institution such as Wofford.

One thing that I hope that Wofford can improve on is the amount of Black faculty teaching courses across the liberal arts disciplines. So far I've only had one Black professor out of the three that teach at the College, and a lot of White students have told me to not take her class because she's “hard and doesn't care about the subject she's teaching” – even though she is the department head and is an alumna of the College. The students of color that have had her told me that she is very passionate and wants students to succeed in the classroom. The White students that have had her said that she couldn't teach is a bitch. It is ridiculous how many White students have said this about her. – Participant 1.

Another participant states how depending on the seriousness of the event, there is a certain type of music that is always played, which often times offends students.

I've noticed that whenever Wofford does something that's a joke, rap or hip-hop music is being played. But when it is something serious or is trying to gauge student interest, country or alternative music; I think that's not cool at all. If we

could have more events, programs, or organizations that cater to Black people, then it would most definitely want to keep people around campus not only on the weekends, but also enrolled at the College. – Participant 4.

Most of all students feel as though things on campus are centered on Greek Life, which often times do not include students of color due to the lack of Black Greek letter organizations (BGLOs) – otherwise referred to as the NPHC (National Pan-Hellenic Council).

I had to explain to a few White students when they got upset about the reinstatement of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, a historically Black Greek letter organization that is coming back to campus and why Black students are wanting the presence of NPHC organizations when IFC and Panhellenic organizations are already established on campus. They basically think that Black students are trying to make the campus ‘more segregated’ by bringing these organizations to campus when we can already join the organizations that are already on campus. They just want us to conform to what they want us to do when I already know that I won’t feel accepted if I were even given the opportunity to join a sorority on campus. – Participant 2.

To elaborate on Participant 2 and their response, individuals within the Wofford community believe that by establishing and revitalizing the presence of Black Greek letter organizations (BGLOs) on campus would not increase diversity, but would ultimately segregate the campus – dividing it even more than what Greek life has already done so. Being a member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Incorporated, one of the revitalized organizations brought back to Wofford’s campus, I can attest to the fact that having an outlet in terms of Greek life has shaped the last bit of my Wofford experience

while allowing me to build a bond in terms of brotherhood that I would not have been able to experience if I chose to go through IFC (Interfraternity Council) fraternity recruitment back in my first-year of college. For female students, the desire to revitalize BGLO sororities on campus is at high demand and is something that would also shape and enhance the Black female student experience.

In relation to the question, *“In your opinion, do you believe that Wofford is taking the initiative to increase the diversity on campus?”* students had various opinions and concerns that involved campus administration and specific individuals who are involved in diversity initiatives on campus.

I feel like there are certain people who are working on trying to make the campus more diverse and inclusive for all students, but then again I feel like there are some who are putting a damper in this plan and are making it extremely difficult to get things accomplished for the greater good. I must say, they are doing better admitting students of color in comparison to years past. The rate of students of color has gone up since my time at Wofford and looking at the sophomore and first-year classes is a true testament to that. – Participant 9.

Other students agreed with the participant’s statement when it comes to increasing diversity and making social issues more aware on Wofford’s campus.

There are people here who are trying to increase diversity and to make it more of a comfortable setting for minority students. But it is hard when you notice that people who you work or interact with may not feel the same towards this subject, mainly talking about those who are in authority or who have specific titles and power to stop all things related to diversity. I feel like we are only moving two

steps forward only to be pushed three steps back. When is it going to change? –

Participant 10.

Additionally, another participant reflected on her time talking to the spouses of the Board of Trustees and how the lack of support when it comes to diversity is shown in other parts of campus culture.

Last spring a few students and I had the opportunity to sit and talk with the wives – not that actual Board of Trustees, which was kind of strange – about diversity matters on campus and what they can do to support this movement that we are trying to bring to campus. The feedback that some of the spouses of the board members gave is the same *stupid* stuff that some of the students on campus are saying, like “How would a Black culture center help campus and not divide it?” – to me that is a stupid statement. Just because its called a “Black culture center” doesn’t mean that nobody outside of the Black race cannot walk in it. I felt like I was begging for things to change when it shouldn’t have to be like that. –

Participant 6.

Conclusion

Overall, the focus group was successful and brought forth several issues to the table when it comes to our campus culture and how certain issues or situations are handled. The students that participated anticipated the focus group to be a segment where ‘cookie cutter’ questions were to be asked and to give the stereotypical response to questions regarding their Wofford experience. However, students felt different post-focus group and felt like they had another person to vent to, seeing as though their opinions would be heard and beneficial for the research and data of my project.

This study also brought forth suggestions as to how exactly Wofford’s campus should move forward in terms of where to incorporate diversity and how exactly certain situations should be handled regarding racism and discrimination on the campus. Indeed, racism, discrimination, and prejudice happen everywhere and not just on Wofford’s campus, however if educating students during their time at the College will only justify some of the blatant and disrespectful actions given to students of color at Wofford.

Moving Forward

Being a student of color on Wofford's campus, it is not easy to relate to students who are not already acquainted to diverse backgrounds and racial groups. At predominately White institutions, students of color continue to struggle with their identity as a minority student and having to try and fit in a particular social group while facing other issues (e.g. racism, discrimination, prejudice, lack of programming) on a daily basis. The White community at Wofford – both faculty/staff and students – must realize the position that students of color are often times placed in when it comes to the academic and social environments brought on by the College and the liberal arts experience. While many still believe that racism doesn't exist solely because of Wofford's integration back in the 1960s and the nonexistence of the Civil Rights Era, those same individuals have yet realize the way Wofford's campus culture is designed due to the history that took place at the College.

The idea that racism no longer exists at predominately White institutions does nothing but reinforce the stereotypes given to both White and Black racial groups and does not allow room for growth and improvement as an individual or for the College, itself. Denise Frazier writes in her article "They Only Talk to Me When They're Drunk: The African American Experience at Small Predominately White Institutions" (2012) "Diversity is not an issue to solve. It is something to be examined. White Americans need to be participants and not just observers of 'diversity' ... 'Diversity education' will not work unless White people actively participate and see themselves as a part of the process" (p. 8). White groups must learn to participate in the fight for diversity and while educating themselves on this particular social issue, must be willing to go forth and

advocate to others about why diversity is an important factor not just in the classroom, but in other parts of life, as well.

While the emphasis is mainly placed on White people when it comes to being advocates for diversity, we as Black people must also do our fair share when it comes to this issue. Non-White groups as well as Black people need to use diversity education as a means to study closely how diversity has impacted our race and how the Black community has not yet fully analyzed this issue along with other prevalent issues that affect racial groups – sexism, homophobia, colorism – that need attention just as much as racism and discrimination.

It is a privilege to attend an institution of higher education that prides itself on its liberal arts experience, its rigorous and nationally recognized academics, award winning athletics, and change to make our experience the way we want it. My hope for the future Wofford is that students of color are able to feel welcomed, accepted, and included throughout campus and the culture that our institution seeks to provide year after year. In order to allow change for the better, we as a campus must provide outlets of safe spaces and the ability to discuss such important issues inside and outside of the classroom. It is with this collective effort, we are able to recognize the differences and challenges to prosper and transform our society.

Works Cited

- Terenzini, Patrick T., Laura I. Rendon, and M. Lee Upcraft. "The Transition to College: Diverse Students, Diverse Stories." *Research in Higher Education Res High Educ* 35.1 (1994): 57-73. Web.
- Yosso, Tara, William Smith, Miguel Ceja, and Daniel Solórzano. "Critical Race Theory, Racial Microaggressions, and Campus Racial Climate for Latina/o Undergraduates." *Harvard Educational Review* 79.4 (2009): 659-91. Web.
- Baber, Lorenzo Dubois. "A Qualitative Inquiry on the Multidimensional Racial Development among First-Year African American College Students Attending a Predominately White Institution." *The Journal of Negro Education* 81.1, Special Focus: Adolescent Discipline, Cultural Compatibility, and Academic Achievement in Education (2012): 67-81. JSTOR. Web. 26 Oct. 2015.
- Cabrera, Alberto F., Amaury Nora, Patrick T. Terenzini, Ernest Pascarella, and Linda Serra Hagedorn. "Campus Racial Climate and the Adjustment of Students to College: A Comparison between White Students and African-American Students." *The Journal of Higher Education* 70.2 (1999): 134. Web.
- Allen, Walter. "The Color of Success: African-American College Student Outcomes at Predominantly White and Historically Black Public Colleges and Universities." *Harvard Educational Review* 62.1 (1992): 26-45. Web.
- Rodgers, Kelly A., and Jessica J. Summers. "African American Students at Predominantly White Institutions: A Motivational and Self-Systems Approach to Understanding Retention." Springer Science and Business Media, LLC, 8 Mar. 2008. Web. 26 Oct. 2015. <<http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs10648-008-9072-9>>.
- Frazier, D. "They Only Talk to Me When They're Drunk: The African American Experience at Small Predominately White Institutions." *SAGE Open* 2.2 (2012): n. pag. Web.
- Richeson, Jennifer A., and Clemlyn-Ann Pollydore. "Affective Reactions of African American Students to Stereotypical and Counterstereotypical Images of Blacks in the Media." *Journal Of Black Psychology* 28.3 (2002): 261-75. Web.
- Holmes, Sharon L (01/01/2001). "Validating African American Students at Predominately White Institutions". *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice (1521-0251)*, 2 (1), p. 41.
- Gregory, Sheila T (01/01/2000). "Strategies for Improving the Racial Climate for Students of Color in Predominately White Institutions". *Equity & Excellence in Education (1066-5684)*, 33 (3), p. 39.

Hunn, V. "African American Students, Retention, and Team-Based Learning: A Review of the Literature and Recommendations for Retention at Predominately White Institutions." *Journal of Black Studies* 45.4 (2014): 301-14. Web.

Bentley-Edwards, Keisha L., and Collette Chapman-Hilliard. "Doing Race in Different Places: Black Racial Cohesion on Black and White College Campuses." *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* 8.1 (2015): 43-60. Web.

Dahlvig, Jolyn. "Mentoring of African American Students at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI)." *Christian Higher Education* 9.5 (2010): 369-95. Web.

Butner, B. K., H. Burley, and A. F. Marbley. "Coping with the Unexpected: Black Faculty at Predominately White Institutions." *Journal of Black Studies* 30.3 (2000): 453-62. Web.