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This study investigates the implementation and outcomes of the Activism Growth Model (AGM) (2021), conceptualized by Dr. Gyasmine George-Williams. The AGM is an instructive paradigm that nurtures student activism, emphasizing self-awareness, relationship building, and proactive engagement in social change. This study explores the model's efficacy across four interdisciplinary courses: Black Experience in the United States, Social Justice in Higher Education, Social Justice in Sport and Culture, and Inequalities in Health and Human Movement. Employing qualitative methodologies, the research assembles data from course evaluations, student assignments, and reflective exercises to assess the AGM's impact on students' learning outcomes, engagement levels, and personal and activist development. The study reveals the dynamics of student encounters with the AGM, detailing both the hurdles encountered and the progress achieved. The findings aim to illuminate the model's potential in fostering empowered, informed, and active student advocates within diverse academic landscapes.

INTRODUCTION

The Activism Growth Model (AGM), created by George-Williams (2021), represents an innovative framework in educational pedagogy specifically tailored to encourage student engagement with activism. At its core, the AGM encourages a profound journey of self-discovery, fostering a robust understanding of personal identity, which is crucial for effective activism. Further, it emphasizes cultivating meaningful relationships and advocates for actionable steps toward engendering societal transformation. Given the pivotal role of education in shaping future activists, this study aims to evaluate the AGM's application and outcomes within the context of interdisciplinary undergraduate courses, thereby offering a multifaceted view of its influence on student development. The selected courses—each addressing critical societal issues from distinct perspectives—provide a rich terrain for examining how the AGM informs and transforms student engagement and activism. The study employs a qualitative methodology, gathering data through various reflective and student exercises within the Black Experience in the United States, Social Justice in Higher Education, Social Justice in Sport and Culture, and Inequalities in Health and Human Movement courses. By analyzing the AGM's application across different academic settings, this study contributes valuable insights into the pedagogical strategies that can effectively nurture student activism. It addresses a significant gap in the literature, offering evidence-based perspectives on the AGM's role in cultivating informed, empowered, and proactive student activists who are poised to contribute meaningfully to societal progress. This approach facilitates a nuanced understanding of the students' experiences with the AGM, shedding light on the model's effectiveness in enhancing their academic performance, engagement with social justice issues, and overall activist identity.

George-Williams, G., Villa, M., Thomas, J., Jauregui, E., & Johnson, D. (2025). Voices of activism and transformative journeys: Student's lived experiences with the activism growth model. Journal of Campus Activities Practice and Scholarship, 7(1), 7-20. https://doi.org/10.52499/2024015

STUDENT ACTIVISM: A CATALYST FOR SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATION

Historical Significance of Student Activism

Student activism has been instrumental in catalyzing social change, with its roots deeply embedded in the pursuit of justice, equality, and progress (Jones, 2018). Through concerted efforts, students have historically utilized their collective voice and action to address injustices, advocate for marginalized communities, and advocate for systemic reform. This narrative explores the multifaceted dimensions of student activism, encompassing organized demonstrations, advocacy for policy amendments, and educational and community outreach endeavors to elevate awareness and mobilize support for pivotal causes. The Vietnam War era exemplified the potent influence of student activism, with significant mobilization against the conflict and associated military draft, impacting education and life loss (Taylor, 1990). The Kent State University incident, where students tragically lost their lives during an anti-war protest, underscored the era's heightened activism intensity (Scott, 2004). Concurrently, the Free Speech Movement (FSM) at the University of California, Berkeley, emerged as a pivotal chapter in student activism, advocating for political freedoms and catalyzing national discourse on student rights and academic liberty (Cohen, 1985). During the 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement witnessed substantial student contributions, notably through the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee's (SNCC) establishment and active engagement in sit-ins, freedom rides, and voter registration drives (Carson, 1987). The Greensboro sit-ins represent a landmark in combating racial segregation, triggering nationwide demonstrations and significantly contributing to subsequent civil rights advancements (Williams, 1987). The Women's Liberation Movement on campuses in the 1960s and 1970s marked a critical era for student-driven gender equality advocacy, challenging prevailing norms and advocating for substantial policy transformations (Freedman, 2002). During this period, they witnessed the proliferation of women's groups and initiatives, culminating in significant educational reforms and contributing to the foundational principles of Title IX (Faludi, 1999). Internationally, student activism was pivotal in the anti-apartheid movement, exemplified by the Soweto Uprising and global campus-led divestment campaigns, instrumental in amplifying pressure against the apartheid regime and heralding a new era of racial equality in South Africa (Cochrane, 2016).

Contemporary Movements and Intersectional Activism

In recent years, movements like Black Lives Matter have become emblematic of the power and dynamism inherent in contemporary student activism, showcasing a deep commitment to addressing and dismantling systemic inequalities. The emphasis on intersectionality within these movements, as highlighted by Cullors and Bandele (2018), underscores the recognition of how various forms of discrimination—such as race, gender, class, and more—are interlinked and compound each other, necessitating a comprehensive approach to advocacy and reform. The tragic death of George Floyd acted as a catalyst, intensifying the urgency of the call for racial justice and highlighting the pivotal role of student activists in spearheading campaigns aimed at dismantling systemic racism. As Ransby (2018) notes, these young activists have been at the forefront, demanding substantive changes to entrenched structures of inequality, thus playing a critical role in the broader racial justice movement. Similarly, the activism ignited by the Parkland shooting demonstrates the significant impact that young people, particularly students, can have on public policy and societal attitudes. In the wake of this tragedy, student survivors mobilized to demand action on gun control, showcasing an exceptional level of engagement and advocacy that has challenged longstanding norms and sparked a nationwide conversation about gun laws and safety. As detailed by Smith (2019), these students have advocated for change and embodied a new form of civic engagement, inspiring their peers and redefining what it means to be an activist today. These examples of modern student activism illustrate a broader shift toward more inclusive, interconnected, and impactful advocacy. By embracing intersectionality and leveraging their unique positions and perspectives, student activists are not just participants in the fight for social justice—they are reshaping the landscape of activism and demonstrating the potential for collective action to catalyze meaningful change in society.

Resilience and Innovation Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, student activists faced and overcame unprecedented challenges, demonstrating remarkable resilience and ingenuity. The transition to a largely digital world during this period necessitated innovative approaches to advocacy, with student activists spearheading initiatives in areas like racial justice and educational equity, even amidst such global upheaval (Hafner, 2021). The pandemic catalyzed a significant evolution in student activism, marked by an increased reliance on digital platforms for mobilization and advocacy, highlighting the potential for a more interconnected and versatile approach to activism moving forward (Smith, 2021). This shift toward digital activism during the pandemic underscores a broader transformation within student advocacy, suggesting a move towards a future where activism can be local and global, immediate and sustained, through the adept use of technology. The capacity of student activists to adapt and innovate in the face of adversity suggests a robust potential for shaping future public policy and societal norms, affirming the significant role of student activism in societal evolution and reform. The COVID-19 era has thus not only tested the resilience of student activists but also enhanced their strategic approaches, potentially offering new paradigms for advocacy and mobilization in an increasingly digital world. These insights indicate that student activism, resilient and adaptable, continues to be a vital force for societal change, adept at overcoming the challenges posed by rapidly changing societal landscapes

Digital Activism Historical Context

Trayvon Martin and Mike Brown

The foundation of modern digital activism can be traced back to significant events such as the murders of Trayvon Martin and Mike Brown, which catalyzed the #BlackLivesMatter movement. In 2012, Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old unarmed Black teenager, was fatally shot by George Zimmerman, a neighborhood watch volunteer in Sanford, Florida. Martin was returning home after purchasing snacks when Zimmerman, finding him suspicious, pursued and eventually shot him. The incident sparked outrage, particularly after Zimmerman was acquitted of all charges. The acquittal underscored the systemic racial biases within the justice system and highlighted the vulnerability of Black lives in America (Cobb, 2016). The widespread public outcry led to the creation of the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi. This hashtag became a symbol of a broader movement against systemic racism and violence against Black people. The founders envisioned a decentralized movement that could unite people against racial injustice and create a platform for Black voices to be heard (Garza, 2014).

The 2014 shooting of Mike Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, further propelled the #BlackLivesMatter movement into the national and international spotlight. Mike Brown, an 18-year-old unarmed Black teenager, was shot and killed by Darren Wilson, a white police officer. Brown's body was left in the street for hours, igniting outrage within the Ferguson community and beyond. Protests erupted, calling for justice and an end to police brutality. The lack of indictment for Officer Wilson, despite substantial public pressure, highlighted the deep-rooted issues of racial bias and lack of accountability within law enforcement. Social media, particularly Twitter, played a crucial role in organizing protests, spreading information, and documenting police responses. The hashtag #Ferguson trended globally, drawing attention to the systemic issues of police brutality and racial discrimination (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015).

The Role of Twitter in Digital Activism

Twitter's real-time communication capabilities and extensive reach have shaped digital activism. During the Ferguson protests, Twitter was used to share live updates, organize demonstrations, and document instances of police violence. The platform's hashtag feature, exemplified by #Ferguson, allowed users to consolidate information and create a unified narrative around the events, making it easier for people to follow and participate in the movement (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015). Twitter democratized information dissemination, allowing marginalized voices to challenge traditional media narratives and provide a more comprehensive and inclusive

view of social justice issues. Activists and citizens on the ground could share their experiences and perspectives directly, bypassing traditional media gatekeepers and reaching a global audience (Cohen & Kahne, 2012).

The Evolution of TikTok and Present-Day Digital Activism

As digital platforms evolved, so did methods of digital activism. TikTok, known for its short-form video content, has become a significant tool for activism. Its algorithm promotes viral content and allows activists to reach a large audience quickly. The platform's predominantly young user base is particularly receptive to social justice messages, making TikTok an effective medium for raising awareness and mobilizing action (Jenkins et al., 2016). In the wake of George Floyd's murder in 2020, TikTok saw a surge in BLM-related content. Users created videos to educate others about systemic racism, share personal stories, and call for action. Hashtags like #BlackLivesMatter and #JusticeForGeorgeFloyd trended, amplifying the movement's reach. TikTok's features, such as duets and stitching, enable users to collaborate and build on each other's content, fostering community and collective action (Zhang, 2020).

The Evolution of Digital Activism: From #BLM to Present-Day Platforms

Digital activism represents a transformative force, redefining the paradigms of engagement and advocacy in the digital era (Smith & Graham, 2022). As an emergent form of mobilization, it transcends traditional boundaries, leveraging technology to foster inclusivity and amplify diverse voices. This section contextualizes the ascendancy of digital activism, elucidating its role in reshaping student-driven movements and its broader implications for societal change (Johnson, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic catalyzed a paradigm shift, propelling student activism into the digital sphere as conventional avenues became untenable (Diaz & Carter, 2020). This segment explores the adaptive strategies employed by activists who embraced digital platforms to sustain and invigorate their campaigns. By examining case studies, we highlight how virtual platforms facilitated a continuum of advocacy, enabling students to maintain momentum and foster solidarity during unprecedented times (Lee & James, 2021).

Navigating the Challenges of Digital Activism

Digital activism, while potent, is not immune to criticism and inherent challenges, including concerns of "slacktivism" and information veracity (Karpf, 2020). In this section, we dissect these critiques, drawing on empirical studies to contextualize their significance and explore the mitigation strategies deployed by activists. Engaging with the discourse on digital activism's limitations and potential pitfalls provides a balanced perspective on its efficacy and resilience (Thompson & Kinne, 2022). Here, we chronicle the triumphant narratives of digital campaigns that have galvanized public attention and instigated change (Roberts & Parks, 2023). Analyzing milestones achieved by movements like #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo, we underscore the instrumental role of digital platforms in elevating these causes. By synthesizing statistical evidence and qualitative insights, we delineate the transformative power of digital activism in driving social and political advancements (Hansen & Jenkins, 2021).

Empowering the Next Generation: Youth at the Forefront of Digital Change

Youth engagement is critical in the digital activism ecosystem, with students often leading and innovating in this space (Clark & Reddick, 2022). Digital activism equips young activists with vital skills and platforms for advocacy, fostering critical thinking, civic engagement, and social responsibility. Spanning diverse causes—from racial justice and climate action to gender equality and educational reform—activism catalyzes meaningful change. However, to maximize their impact, young activists need structured guidance. The Activism Growth Model (AGM) (George-Williams, 2021) provides a research-based framework for integrating activism into interdisciplinary courses, empowering students to explore social justice issues and develop practical skills.

Digital activism has transformed social movements by offering new tools and platforms for raising awareness and amplifying marginalized voices. From the early days of the #BlackLivesMatter movement on Twitter to today's activism on TikTok, digital platforms continue to drive collective action. As digital activism evolves, harnessing its potential while addressing its challenges is crucial. Integrating digital strategies with grassroots activism can foster inclusive communities and work toward a more equitable society.

The Activism Growth Model and The Growth Mindset Relationship

What Is the Growth Mindset?

The growth mindset is the belief that one's abilities and intelligence can be developed and improved over time through hard work, dedication, and perseverance. This concept was developed by psychologist Carol Dweck (2006) and has been widely embraced in education and personal development contexts to promote resilience and achievement. This mindset encourages individuals to embrace challenges, learn from their mistakes, and view failures as opportunities for growth rather than setbacks (Dweck, 2006). This concept contrasts a fixed mindset, where abilities are seen as static and unchangeable. The central premise of the growth mindset is that embracing challenges, persisting in the face of setbacks, and seeing effort as a path to mastery are all critical for fostering a love of learning and resilience necessary for great accomplishment.

How Can Students Use the Growth Mindset in Activism?

A growth mindset and activism are closely linked, as both demand resilience, adaptability, and a commitment to learning. Activism often involves long-term efforts toward social change, requiring individuals to embrace challenges and persist despite setbacks. A growth mindset helps activists view obstacles as opportunities for learning and development rather than insurmountable barriers, fostering perseverance and sustaining motivation over time. Activists can better handle setbacks and maintain a long-term commitment to their goals by cultivating this mindset. Additionally, the growth mindset promotes self-reflection and critical thinking, essential in activism. Activists must analyze complex social issues and consider diverse perspectives. A growth mindset encourages them to reflect on their biases, think critically about potential solutions, and remain open to new ideas, deepening their understanding of the issues they address.

Origins of the Activism Growth Model

As an illustration of present-day activism, each new generation of student activists creates new and divergent ways to change the landscape of higher education and how decision-makers must address student activism and advocacy. Without creativity, innovation, and against-the-norm approaches, campus activism efforts may be halted by the administration, staff, and those opposed to such public tactics before the efforts can take hold and launch (George-Williams, 2019). The increased activism and advocacy on college campuses and in communities has led to a surge of individuals desiring to step boldly into their activist and advocate identities. As exciting as this epiphany can be, it can also lead to a feeling of fear, trepidation, and the "imposter syndrome," which is defined as the feeling that you aren't worthy of contributing, that your voice and experiences are fraudulent (George-Williams, 2021). With this epiphany, some have also experienced not knowing exactly how, when, where, or with whom to engage and develop their advocate or activist identity. This can lead to despair or a lack of direction, with so much passion and uncertainty about which path to take to fuel your fire (George-Williams, 2021). The Activism Growth Model is a robust framework that can be applied to individuals from all walks of life - from community organizers to high school students.

The theories that inspired the foundation of the Activist Growth Model were Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993), Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005), Black Feminist Thought (BFT) (Collins, 2000), and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. The Activism Growth Model draws upon a rich tapestry of theoretical frameworks, each contributing distinct perspectives and insights to inform its structure and objectives.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) originated in the early 1990s by scholars interrogating the interplay of race, law, and power, revealing how systemic racism is ingrained in legal frameworks and societal structures (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Its influence on the Activism Growth Model lies in its emphasis on identifying and contesting racial injustices and understanding how racial hierarchies impact marginalized communities, providing a critical lens through which activism is contextualized and strategized. Community Cultural Wealth, articulated by Tara Yosso in 2005, expands the concept of capital beyond economic parameters to include various cultural know-how, skills, abilities, and networks possessed by culturally marginalized groups (Yosso, 2005). This theory illuminates the assets and strengths that marginalized communities inherently possess, suggesting that these resources can be leveraged for activism and empowerment, thus informing the Activism Growth Model's approach to harnessing communal strengths for social change. Lastly, Black Feminist Thought (BFT), as expounded by Patricia Hill Collins, provides a framework for understanding the intersections of race, gender, and class, emphasizing Black women's unique experiences and struggles (Collins, 2000). BFT's contribution to the Activism Growth Model is its nuanced perspective on intersectionality and the importance of considering multiple, intersecting forms of oppression when engaging in activism. This ensures that the model is inclusive and attuned to the complexities of identity and experience.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Cultural Appropriation

The intersection of Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs and the Blackfoot nation's influence invites an essential discussion about cross-cultural contributions to psychological frameworks. The Blackfoot Nation, historically prominent in North America for its rich cultural heritage and significant ties to the northern Great Plains (Dempsey, 1978), is often credited as a potential inspiration for Maslow's model. Maslow's time on a Blackfoot reserve gave him insights into communal and spiritual aspects of Blackfoot life. However, the extent to which he authentically integrated these teachings into his hierarchy remains debated (Hoffman, 1988). Maslow's hierarchy, traditionally depicted as a pyramid with physiological needs at the base ascending toward self-actualization, contrasts with Blackfoot teachings, emphasizing collective welfare and interconnectedness over individual progression (Peat, 2002). This philosophical divergence highlights critical differences in conceptualizing human needs, underscoring the importance of communal harmony in Blackfoot culture versus Maslow's focus on personal fulfillment. Scholars advocate for more accurate recognition of Indigenous intellectual contributions, urging ethical consideration when incorporating cross-cultural knowledge into academic paradigms (Cajete, 2000; Kimmerer, 2013).

Disconnecting The Activism Growth Model with Maslow: Grounding in Blackfoot

Reevaluating Maslow's hierarchy with awareness of its possible Blackfoot philosophical roots provides a valuable lens for enhancing the Activism Growth Model. It is essential to acknowledge the Blackfoot Nation's influence on Maslow's concept of self-actualization and the hierarchy of needs, widely regarded as a foundational theory in humanistic psychology (Cajete, 2000). Maslow's motivational theory, which emphasizes building a solid foundation before advancing toward self-actualization, mirrors the Blackfoot's holistic worldview (LittleBear, 2000). Recognizing these influences highlights the interconnected nature of personal well-being, community welfare, and environmental balance—key elements of Blackfoot philosophy. Honoring the Blackfoot Nation's contributions underscores the importance of cultural acknowledgment in maintaining academic integrity and ethical research practices (Peat, 2002). Revisiting the Activism Growth Model with this perspective enriches its theoretical framework, making it more inclusive, culturally grounded, and relevant across diverse activist contexts. While Maslow's hierarchy remains a prominent psychological model, engaging with its potential Blackfoot connections emphasizes critical considerations of cultural appropriation and the importance of recognizing Indigenous intellectual contributions (Cajete, 2000; LittleBear, 2000; Peat, 2002).

The Activism Growth Model (AGM) benefits from an integrative approach that incorporates the rich philosophical foundations and cultural insights of the Blackfoot Nation, emphasizing holistic well-being and communal interconnectedness. This integration deepens the model's theoretical base, aligning it with Indigenous perspectives that view activism as an interconnected, community-centric pursuit. Below are the tenets of the AGM in Table 1 and how those tenets align with the cultural and strengths-based understandings of the Blackfoot.

Table 1
Integration of Blackfoot Philosophies into the Activism Growth Model (AGM)

AGM Tenet	Corresponding Blackfoot Philosophy	Description
Do your soul work	**Spiritual balance and introspection** (Bastien, 2004; George-Williams, 2021)	Emphasizes internal coherence and spiritual alignment as foundational for effective activism.
Know your roles	**Understanding societal and cosmic roles** (HeavyRunner & Marshall, 2003; George-Williams, 2021)	Highlights the importance of discovering personal roles within the activism framework and contributing to collective well-being.
Choose your activism vehicles	**Utilizing gifts and position to serve the community** (WeaselHead, 2015; George-Williams, 2021)	Encourages leveraging personal strengths and resources for communal advocacy.
Find your people	**Relationality and community ties** (Yellow Bird, 2013; George-Williams, 2021)	Stresses the importance of seeking a supportive community and emphasizes that activism thrives when rooted in strong communal relationships.
Locate the barriers	**Recognizing and navigating life's challenges** (LittleBear, 2000; George-Williams, 2021)	Encourages awareness of obstacles and emphasizes resilience, reflecting the value of perseverance in the face of challenges.
Prioritize radical self-care	**Linking individual health to community well-being** (Cross, 1997; George-Williams, 2021)	Promotes self-care as essential for sustaining activism and maintaining collective vitality.

Note. This table aligns Blackfoot Philosophies with the AGM.

Integrating these Blackfoot philsophies into the Activism Growth Model (AGM) enhances its cultural depth, ethical grounding, and practical applicability. This approach acknowledges activism's holistic and interconnected nature, recognizing the interdependence of personal well-being and collective action. By aligning key AGM tenets with indigenous teachings, the model becomes more inclusive and adaptable, offering a framework that resonates across diverse cultural contexts. The following section outlines the methodology employed in this study. It aimed to capture students' lived experiences engaging with the AGM, ensuring their voices and narratives are central to understanding the model's real-world application.

Methodology

This study utilized a qualitative research design, focusing on autoethnography to collate and analyze data from a reflective paper assignment and subsequent exercises. This approach aligns with Chang's (2008) description of autoethnography as a method that combines autobiographical narratives with ethnographical inquiry, allowing individuals to explore their personal experiences within broader cultural and social contexts. Incorporating autoethnographic methods, mainly through reflection paper assignments and reflective exercises, provided a nuanced lens to examine students' individual and shared narratives at the two institutions. These institutions implemented the AGM within four undergraduate courses—Black Experience in the United States, Social Justice in Sport and Culture, Inequalities in Health and Human Movement, Contemporary Issues in Health and Human Movement—and Social Justice in Higher Education and Collaboration and Consultation in Counseling graduate courses. Thematic analysis, a critical tool in qualitative research, facilitated the extraction and examination of vital themes and patterns concerning student engagement and the practical application of activism within these educational contexts.

Three hundred and twenty students participated in this study. Participants were recruited through the submitted course assignment at both institutions, ensuring representation from various campus organizations, activities, backgrounds, and academic disciplines. These students represented both undergraduate and graduate levels, offering a broad spectrum of perspectives on activism within collegiate settings, as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2
Student Participant Information

Institution	Course Name	Semester/Term	Number of Students
Institution 1	Black Experience in the United States (2 undergraduate courses)	Spring 2021 Spring 2022	56
Institution 1	Social Justice in Higher Education (2 Graduate courses)	Spring 2021 Spring 2022	18
Institution 2	Collaboration and Consulting in Counseling (1 class)	Winter 2020	14
Institution 2	Social Justice in Sport and Culture (1 undergraduate courses)	Spring 2023	12
Institution 2	Inequalities in Sport and Physical Activity (2 undergraduate courses)	Fall 2023	60
Institution 2	Contemporary Issues in Health and Human Movement (2 undergraduate courses)	Spring 2024 Fall 2024	160
Total			320 Students

Note. The table identifies the total number and courses of student participants.

Activism Growth Model Autoethnography Paper Assignment

The data collection mechanism, an ethnographic paper called the Activism Growth Model Autoethnography Reflection Paper Assignment, was pivotal in this methodology. Students engaged in autoethnographic reflection that facilitates deep introspective analysis and connection with broader societal and cultural dynamics (Ellis et al., 2011). Through this reflective process, students interpreted their experiences with the AGM, linking personal insights to broader societal activism and advocacy. In engaging with the AGM's framework, students were prompted to delve into their missions and visions, aligning their narratives with societal change paradigms through the lens of the AGM tenets. This aspect was crucial for understanding how individual experiences resonate with collective activism frameworks, echoing Reed-Danahay's (1997) insights into autoethnography's utility in bridging personal narratives with more extensive social phenomena. The instructional design for the Activism Growth Model Autoethnography Reflection Paper emphasized several core learning objectives to foster a rich, engaging environment for exploring social justice activism. These components are displayed in Table 3 below:

Table 3

Activism Growth Model Autoethnography Assignment Core Learning Objectives

Component	Description
Core Learning Objectives	**Developing Critical Thinking:** Students enhanced their ability to critically examine societal constructs, aligning with Brookfield's (2012) emphasis on critical thinking in understanding social injustices.
	Fostering Empathy and Understanding: Students reflected on personal and societal narratives to foster empathy toward marginalized groups, aligning with the AGM's intersectionality and inclusivity goals (Crenshaw, 1989).
	Building Community Engagement: Students were encouraged to apply their learning in real-world community action, resonating with Zimmerman's (2000) work on community engagement and empowerment.
	Facilitating Self-Reflection: The AGM framework encouraged introspection, in line with Schön's (1983) advocacy for reflective practice in personal and professional growth.
	Experiential Learning: Students engaged directly with activism within and beyond academic settings, supporting Kolb's (1984) theories on the significance of experiential learning.
Outcome	The use of autoethnography provided personal narratives that were contextualized within broader activist and societal frameworks, highlighting the interaction between individual agency and collective action in driving social change.

Note. This table shows the AGM paper assignment core learning objectives and desired outcome.

Results

The results of this study underscore the Activism Growth Model's (AGM) substantial influence on fostering student engagement and promoting a robust inclination toward activism within academic settings. To illustrate the diverse ways students engaged with activism through the Activism Growth Model (AGM), their experiences have been organized into key thematic groupings. These groupings highlight distinct aspects of their activism, from various forms of advocacy to personal challenges and growth. The themes are grouped into four categories in Table 4 below.

Table 4
Forms of Activism

Theme	Student Narratives
Dynamic Activism in Practice	"In my community service and on social media, I stand for justice, earning recognition for my steadfast commitment."
	"I find my voice on social media, advocating for justice and connecting with allies."
	"Through diversity committees and public marches, I assert my stance, driving change both within institutions and publicly."
Art as Advocacy	"Art is my political voice, challenging norms and inspiring change through visual narrative."
	"My political cartoons are my activism tools, critiquing injustices while engaging viewers."
Passionate Advocacy and Issue Engagement	"Addressing systemic racism and advocating for educational equity motivates my activism."
	"I focus my advocacy efforts on disability rights, particularly for minority voices."
	"Combating gender disparities, especially in sports, fuels my passion for activism."

Note. This table displays the common forms of activism students share and engage in.

Table 5
Advocacy Approaches

Theme	Student Narratives
Nuanced Advocacy	"Understanding when to lead and when to support is crucial in activism. My role is to elevate, not dominate."
	"I strive to amplify necessary voices, especially when my presence should support rather than lead."
	"Collaboration and backing are my activism approaches, ensuring the spotlight remains on those who should lead."
Intersectionality and Diversity	"I champion intersectional activism, confronting various injustices to advocate for broad societal change."
	"At my workplace and school, I champion diversity, ensuring that we address a spectrum of injustices."
	"My activism intertwines various causes on social media, illustrating our interconnected struggles."

Note. This table highlights how students approach advocacy.

Discussion

The findings highlight the effectiveness of the AGM in fostering student activism. By offering interdisciplinary perspectives and promoting hands-on experiences, the AGM allowed students to operationalize their activism skills beyond the academic setting. Tables 6, Table 7, and Table 8 illustrate how the Activism Growth Model (AGM) can be strategically integrated into various aspects of campus life to foster a culture of social justice and student empowerment. By tailoring applications to specific practitioner roles, institutions can create more inclusive and dynamic environments that encourage students to engage meaningfully with activism

Table 6
AGM's Impact on Campus Activities and Student Development

Impact Area	Description
Leadership Development	Promotes leadership skills through reflective practices and activism engagement.
Critical Thinking	Encourages students to critically analyze social justice issues.
Empathy and Community Engagement	Fosters empathy and collaboration across diverse student groups.
Intersectionality and Diversity	"I champion intersectional activism, confronting various injustices to advocate for broad societal change."
Social Consciousness	Cultivates an environment of social responsibility and civic engagement.

Note. This table highlights the AGM's impact on campus activities and student development.

Table 7
Applications of the AGM for Campus Practitioners

Practitioner Role	Applications of the AGM
Student Organization Advisors	Facilitate reflective workshops to explore activist identities and roles.
Programming Board Coordinators	Organize social justice-themed events and programs.
Orientation Professionals	Integrate activism-focused sessions into orientation programs.
Policy-Level Administrators	Revise policies to support student activism and promote equity.

Note. This table highlights the applications of the AGM for Campus Practitioners.

Table 8
Examples of AGM-Driven Initiatives by Practitioner Role

Practitioner Role	Example Initiative
Student Organization Advisors	Workshops on identifying activism vehicles and barriers.
Programming Board Coordinators	Hosting panel discussions and film series on social justice topics.
Orientation Professionals	Interactive workshops on role exploration and community building.
Policy-Level Administrators	Creating advisory councils of student activists to influence policies.

Note. These tables share AGM-Driven Initiatives by Practitioner Role.
The AGM offers a versatile framework for enhancing student development and community engagement.

Implications for Education and Activism

The AGM model offers a robust framework for campus activities practitioners to support and enhance student activism. Its application across various roles and settings can cultivate a campus environment that prioritizes social justice, encourages student agency, and equips students with the skills to become lifelong advocates for change. Table 9 lists the Implications for Education and Activism utilizing the AGM.

Table 9

Implications for Education and Activism

Key Area	Description
For Educational Institutions	Educational institutions play a critical role in nurturing future leaders and change-makers. Adopting the AGM enables institutions to offer transformative learning experiences, encouraging students to engage critically with social issues.
Curricular Integration	Embedding social justice and activism into core curricula ensures students across all disciplines are exposed to these essential topics. Courses can focus on social issues, activism history, theory, and practical skills for civic engagement.
Faculty Support and Training	Institutions must support faculty by offering resources, training, and professional development opportunities to help integrate activism into their teaching. Building a community of practice among educators ensures sustained engagement with activism in education.
For Educators	Educators hold a unique position to inspire and guide students in understanding social justice. Through the AGM, they can foster informed, active participation in societal issues.
Pedagogical Approaches	Using active learning strategies like project-based learning, service-learning, and discussion-based classrooms promotes critical thinking, self-reflection, and active civic engagement.

Note. This table lists implications for education and activism and key areas.

Conclusion

This study emphasizes student activism's dynamic and multifaceted character, illustrating a collective dedication to social advocacy and the utilization of varied strategies to drive societal transformation. Integrating the Activism Growth Model (AGM) into interdisciplinary courses enriches academic experiences by merging activism with scholarly inquiry, empowering students to become proactive societal change-makers. Student activists engage in direct actions like protests, leverage digital platforms to spread awareness, and engage in educational endeavors to mobilize community engagement, playing a crucial role in addressing critical social issues and cultivating a supportive, unified culture.

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JCAPS

PERSPECTIVES AND PRACTICES OF PEER ACCOUNTABILITY AMONG COLLEGE MEN

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Concepts of student peer accountability and intervention have largely focused on high-risk behaviors (i.e., substance use, sexual misconduct, hazing, etc.) or the institutional practices of conduct investigation. This study extends student involvement literature to explore how undergraduate men understand and engage in peer accountability behaviors. Further, this study examines the role involvement experiences play in how undergraduate men learn and practice peer accountability through a comparison of social fraternity members and unaffiliated students. To do so, a multi-institutional survey was conducted to gather insights from undergraduate students and draw comparisons through their involvement experiences.

Introduction

College serves as a pivotal stage for students' academic and professional development. The postsecondary setting also provides an environment to create and sustain interpersonal relationship skills with peers. While academic pursuits often are a priority focus, there are several ways campus involvement opportunities positively contribute to a student's developmental experience. Astin's seminal theory suggests that the level of student involvement in activities contributes to the level of developmental growth a student might experience while in college (1984). Therefore, the more time and energy devoted to an activity, the greater levels of developmental growth a student is likely to experience. Engagement in campus activities beyond the classroom creates opportunities for students to grow in several developmental dimensions beyond their academic and intellectual pursuits associated with the formal classroom environment.

One area of potential growth is moral development, which Kohlberg (1984) positions as the process by which individuals develop a conception of what is right and wrong and their reasoning for these determinations. Within the developmental phase of college, Kohlberg suggests that those in their adolescence and young adulthood are in the second stage of moral development, which focuses on fostering interpersonal relationships and maintaining social order. Pascarella and Terranzini (1991) further this theory to suggest that social, intellectual, and cultural experiences in college facilitate higher stage thinking environments necessary to progress through cognitive stages to develop moral and ethical decision-making. This perspective positions campus involvement as a means for social, intellectual, and cultural experiences that serve as environments to build interpersonal relationships and develop intellectual decision-making.

One involvement path deeply focused on the development of social connections is membership within a fraternal organization. Created with the purpose of bringing together individuals of similar values and ideals, fraternal organizations have existed as distinct spaces for members to gather, interact, and develop alongside one another. Pike and Wiese's (2024) study on the impacts of fraternity and sorority involvement found that members of fraternal organizations are more engaged in the college experience, more satisfied with their college experience, and more likely to experience learning gains compared to unaffiliated students. Fraternity membership is a campus activity that can serve as an opportunity for student development through peer interactions.

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Beyond creating relationships with peers and expanding one's social network, college allows students to explore and practice critical interpersonal skills, including the ability to engage in accountability-oriented behaviors and discussions. Kohlberg's (1984) and Pascarella and Terranzini's (1991) theories on moral development suggest the quantity, frequency, and depth of the social experiences students have in college present opportunities to learn how to apply moral development principles to practice accountability. Further, engaging in socially-responsible leadership is positively influenced by participation in group-based campus activities, such as clubs and organizations (Dugan & Komives, 2010). However, ethical and moral practices, such as peer accountability and intervention, are not automatically applied. A study of first-year undergraduate students related to incidents with risk of sexual violence (Yule & Grych, 2017) found the most cited barrier to engaging in intervention behaviors included not believing it was their responsibility to do so. Diffusion of responsibility was found to be more prominent among first-year undergraduate men than their women counterparts (Yule & Grych, 2017).

Much of the research on intervention and accountability is situated around sexual violence prevention or academic accountability, leaving a gap in understanding of how undergraduate students learn and practice accountability and intervention beyond instances of sexual violence prevention or academic accountability. This also creates a narrow focus of how students might engage in accountability behaviors in proactive and productive manners to more robustly support the health, safety, and growth of their peers.

While much of the existing research and literature focuses on student conduct and institutional accountability provisions, this study investigates the perspectives, knowledge, and experiences of undergraduate men related to peer accountability. This study aims to:

1. Gain greater awareness of how undergraduate men understand peer accountability;
2. Identify the ways in which undergraduate men engage in behaviors associated with peer accountability;
3. Develop insight into how undergraduate men develop competence and motivation to engage in behaviors related to peer accountability;
4. Draw comparisons between the peer accountability experiences and behaviors of undergraduate men involved in fraternal organizations and their unaffiliated peers.

To achieve this aim, this study will answer the following research questions:

- What are the perspectives, knowledge, and experiences of undergraduate men related to peer a ccountability?
- How do undergraduate men understand and engage in behaviors related to peer-to-peer accountability?
- What differences exist, if any, in the experiences and perspectives of undergraduate men who are members of fraternities and their peers who are not affiliated with a fraternal organization?

Methodology

This study employed an electronic survey methodology with a target audience of current undergraduate men studying at institutions of higher education in the United States in the Fall 2022 semester. The survey included 21 questions, of which nine questions focused on the characteristics and background of the respondent. The remaining questions focused on students' perspectives and experiences related to peer accountability and intervention. Five institutions of higher education in the United States participated in this study and met the following criteria:

- A fraternity/sorority community with strong engagement, which considered 11% or more of the undergraduate population involved in a fraternity or sorority organization;
- Fraternity residential facilities available;
- Diverse institutional geographical representation; and,
- A medium or larger undergraduate student population (i.e., larger than 5,000 students) based on the Carnegie Classifications of Institutions of Higher Education (2023).

To protect the privacy of the participating institutions and undergraduate students, this study will refer to the institutions with numerical pseudonyms. Institutions 1, 3, 4, and 5 are public institutions. Institution 2 is a private institution. Institutions 1, 3, and 4 have large undergraduate student populations, classified as greater

than 20,000. Institution 2 is a small institution with fewer than 5,000 undergraduate students and Institution 5 is a medium-sized institution with roughly 14,000 undergraduate students. Institutions 1, 2, 4, and 5 are situated in the Southeast region of the United States and Institution 3 is located in the Southwest region.

Participants in this study were recruited through collaboration with campus professionals at the participating institutions. Campus professionals provided randomly selected samples of students who met the following criteria:

- Identified their gender as a man; and,
- Current undergraduate enrollment status with an academic year rank of Sophomore/Second-year, Junior/Third-year, or Senior/Fourth-year or Fifth-year.

Participating institutions provided random samples that included roughly an equal number of undergraduate men currently involved in a social fraternity and undergraduate men who did not hold current membership with a fraternity. Samples provided by participating institutions did not specify to which organization or council fraternity members belonged but was solely inclusive of men who are members of social fraternities.

Students were engaged via email to encourage participation in the study. Invitation and reminder messages were sent to contact lists of undergraduate men either by a campus administrator using an anonymous link or by a third-party organizational development firm through an electronic survey platform. Data was collected on a rolling basis throughout the Fall 2022 semester concluding prior to the Thanksgiving holiday. Invitation and reminder messages were sent based on guidance from campus professionals on appropriate engagement points due to campus programming, events, or academic breaks that would potentially impact response rates.

In total, 524 current undergraduate men responded to the survey. 203 students (38%) indicated current membership with a social fraternity, with 307 indicating they had never sought membership and an additional 14 who were former members. Those indicating former membership were included in the non-member population for analysis, which equated to 62% of respondents. Table 1 provides the detailed demographics, characteristics, and backgrounds of the study's respondents.

Table 1
Respondent Demographics

	Fraternity Members (n=203)	Unaffiliated Men (n=321)
	%	%
Academic Year		
First-Year	8	28
Sophomore	21	25
Junior	32	27
Senior or older	38	20
Racial/Ethnic Identity		
American Indian/Alaska Native	3	3
Hispanic or Latino	9	6
Asian	2	3
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1	0
Middle Eastern or North African	0	2
White (non-Hispanic)	82	75
Black (non-Hispanic)	3	8
Another race or ethnicity	0	1
Prefer not to respond	1	3
Residence Location		
On-Campus	44	55
Off-Campus	56	45

Type of Residence		
House, apartment, condo, etc.	63	51
Residence hall	14	47
Fraternity facility	22	-
Another residence type	1	2
Living Situation		
With roommate(s)	91	75
With parent(s)/guardian(s)	3	9
With spouse/partner	1	6
Alone	4	8
Other	1	1

There are noteworthy distinctions in the background characteristics of participants. First, fraternity-affiliated students reported being further in their academic career with 70% in their junior/third-year or senior/fourth-year of enrollment compared to unaffiliated participants in which only 47% indicated in their junior/third-year or senior/fourth-year of enrollment. The fraternity members in this study had a longer tenure in college, in which they have likely had more opportunity to interact with peers. Additionally, fraternity members were also more likely to report living off campus (56%) and with a roommate (91%) compared to unaffiliated men who were more likely to be living on campus (55%) and had greater diversity in their situation of either living alone, with their family, or with a partner/spouse.

Among fraternity members, most reported being members of their organization for at least one year with the majority (55%) being members of their chapters for at least two years. The remaining 45% of fraternity members indicated being their first semester or first year of membership.

Campus involvement was examined due to the opportunities that exist for peer interactions within involvement activities (Table 2).

Table 2
Campus Involvement, by Affiliation

	Fraternity Members (n=183)	Unaffiliated Men (n=285)
	%	%
Club or organization related to major or minor	56	44
Intramural or club sports	80	34
Religious or interfaith group	32	19
Residence life or housing	14	15
Intercollegiate athletics	21	13
Professional fraternity	51	5
Political or social action groups	17	11

Membership with a club or organization related to a major or minor and participation in intramural or club sports were the most common forms of involvement. A greater percentage of fraternity-affiliated respondents report being involved in other organizations and activities on campus. Intramural or club sport participation was much higher among fraternity members (80%) compared to unaffiliated students (34%) as was participation in a professional fraternity (51% of fraternity members vs. 5% of unaffiliated students). Participating in a club or organization associated with an academic program was the most cited form of involvement among unaffiliated men (44%), but there was still a larger portion of fraternity members who indicated being involved in academically associated clubs and organizations (56%).

Measures

Background Information of the Respondent

To understand respondent characteristics, this study included categorical variables related to race/ethnicity, fraternity membership, campus involvement, location of residence while enrolled in school, residence type, and living situation. Academic year, age, and tenure in fraternity membership were constructed as ordinal variables.

Understanding and Perspective of Peer Accountability

Definitions for the concepts of accountability (i.e., "the state of being accountable, liable, or answerable" or "acceptance of responsibility for one's own actions") and intervention (i.e., "the act or fact of taking action about something in order to have an effect on its outcome") were provided within the survey to ensure participants had foundational knowledge of these two concepts and the differences between the two. To measure understanding and perspective on peer accountability, respondents were provided with a 7-point Likert scale to indicate their level of agreement with two statements:

- I know how to hold my friend(s)/peer(s) accountable.

- Practicing accountability with my friend(s)/peer(s) sometimes involves intervention.

The scale used to measure agreement ranged from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree" with a neutral middle point of "Neither agree or disagree." Responses of "Strongly disagree" were labeled as one and "Strongly agree" were labeled as seven. The Cronbach's Alpha for the scale used to measure understanding and perspective of peer accountability was $\alpha = .73$.

Comfort and Confidence in Engaging in Peer Accountability

To examine the level of comfort and confidence that undergraduate men hold related to providing accountability and intervening with friends and peers, participants provided a rating for a variety of topics using a scale from zero through ten. A rating of ten indicated the highest self-rating of "Very comfortable" or "Very confident." The scale also presented a middle point at five with help text indicating this rating would communicate being "Somewhat comfortable" or "Somewhat confident." Help text was also provided for a rating of zero, which would communicate the respondent is "Not at all comfortable" or "Not at all confident" in holding their peers accountable in the given area. A higher rating on the 10-point scale indicates a greater sense of comfort or confidence in engaging in peer accountability behaviors. Respondents used this rating scale to indicate their level of comfort and confidence in holding their peers accountable in the following areas:

- Academics
- Alcohol or substance use
- Dating or romantic relationships
- Sexual relationships
- Professional/career
- Personal goals
- Hazing

Inclusion of the topics of academics, professional/career, and personal goals is intended to provide a more robust depiction of the settings that students may interact with their peers to provide accountability or intervene. This intended to acknowledge areas outside of substance use or other risky scenarios that benefit from peer accountability and allow for students to practice these skills beyond high-risk or unsafe settings. The Cronbach's Alpha for the scale used to measure Comfort Level was $\alpha = .78$ and was $\alpha = .86$ measuring Confidence Level.

Prior Experiences with Peer Accountability

This study also investigated how students engaged in peer accountability and intervention behaviors, including their past experiences providing accountability to peers. To understand their history of accountability behaviors, respondents were asked to what extent they had engaged in a variety of behaviors while in college. Participants were able to indicate their experiences using a scale with options such as "I have not engaged in this activity," "I have to some extent," or "I have engaged in this activity." This intended to frame accountability as an everyday behavior beyond formal conduct environments or education/training. The Cronbach's Alpha for the scale used to measure Confidence Level was $\alpha = .91$.

Participants were asked about the specific actions and behaviors they have taken to provide accountability or engage in intervention. These findings are reported as a categorical variable sharing the percentage of respondents who had engaged in various accountability/intervention

related actions.

Training and Awareness of Accountability Policies
Training was measured by whether a respondent indicated they had received or participated in a prior educational experience related to peer accountability or intervention (i.e., yes or no). Those who indicated participation in prior training were asked to specify all of the settings or organizations they previously received training related to accountability. These findings are reported as a binary variable sharing the percentage of respondents who had engaged in previous training related to accountability in various settings or environments.

Motivations and Barriers for Accountability
This study explored factors that serve as motivation as well as barriers or challenges to intervening. Barriers or challenges were measured using a 4-point scale in which respondents indicated if various perceived outcomes would serve as a barrier to engaging in peer accountability or intervening in a situation. This 4-point scale included responses such as "Not at all a barrier/challenge," "Somewhat of a barrier/challenge," "Moderate barrier/challenge," or "Extreme barrier/challenge." The Cronbach's Alpha for the scale used to measure barriers/challenges was $\alpha = .88$.

Participants were asked to rate various forms of motivation as to why they would engage in peer accountability or intervention activities on a 3-point scale. These scale options included "Does not motivate me," "Somewhat motivates me," and "Greatly motivates me." The Cronbach's Alpha for the scale used to measure motivation was $\alpha = .87$.

Perspectives of Belongingness and Community
The concepts of belongingness and commitment to a community on campus were measured by asking participants to select answers that best describe their agreement with five statements. These statements focused on feeling of belongingness on campus, feeling valued as a member of the campus community, and feeling responsible to support the health and safety, personal development, and professional development of their friends/peers. The 7-point Likert scale used to measure agreement mirrored that which was previously used to measure understanding of accountability concepts. The Cronbach's Alpha for this set of variables was $\alpha = .91$.

Analysis
Demographic variables were analyzed using descriptive methods to determine frequency. Independent t-tests were used to analyze reported means to draw comparisons between fraternity members and unaffiliated men. Cross-tabulation analysis was used to determine differences between fraternity affiliated men and unaffiliated men related to categorical variables. A significance level of 95% ($p>.05$) was utilized to conduct analyses.

Results

Understanding of Accountability and Intervention

On average, the undergraduate men in this study reported agreement that they know how to hold their friends/peers accountable (M=5.77, SD=1.37). They also reported agreeing with the statement that practicing peer accountability sometimes involves intervention (M=5.70, SD=1.26).

of these independent t-tests conducted on both items are outlined in Table 3. Fraternity members report a mean higher level of agreement in their belief that they know how to hold their friends/peers accountable compared to unaffiliated undergraduate men. Additionally, fraternity members report a higher level of agreement in the belief that practicing accountability with friends/peers sometimes involves intervention compared to unaffiliated undergraduate men.

Table 3
Perceived Understanding of Accountability, by Affiliation

	Fraternity members			Unaffiliated men					
	n	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*p*	*df*	*t*
I know how to hold my friend(s)/peer(s) accountable.*	181	5.97	1.18	279	5.65	1.90	0.0012	457	2.5483
Practicing accountability with friend(s)/peer(s) sometimes involves intervention.*	181	5.88	1.19	279	5.59	1.70	0.022	457	2.2977

**Indicates statistically significant difference observed in means.*

Comfort and Confidence in Engaging in Peer Accountability

Comfort Levels

Related to their level of comfort in engaging in peer accountability, undergraduate men reported being most comfortable holding their friends/peers accountable regarding their personal goals (M=7.29, SD=2.5) followed by academics (M=7.08, SD=2.22) and alcohol or substance use (M=7.00, SD=2.67). They reported lower aggregate mean comfort levels for providing accountability related to hazing (M=6.84, SD=3.49), professional/career (M=6.72, SD=2.55), and dating or romantic relationships (M=6.27, SD=2.66), but feel the least comfortable providing accountability related to sexual relationships (M=5.70, SD=3.02).

When factoring the role of fraternity membership, statistically significant differences were found in the mean comfort levels between fraternity members and unaffiliated undergraduate men (Table 4).

Table 4
T-test Analysis for Reported Mean Comfort Level in Engaging in Peer Accountability, by Affiliation

	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*p*	*df*	*t*
Academics*	7.54	2.00	6.77	2.30	0.0005	433	3.5351
Alcohol or Substance Use	7.24	2.57	6.83	2,72	0.117	433	1.5671
Dating/romantic relationships	6.49	2.36	6.12	2.82	0.156	433	1.4209
Sexual relationships*	6.05	2.71	5.46	3.18	0.046	433	1.9979
Professional/career*	7.06	2.39	6.50	2.63	0.025	433	2.2445
Personal goals*	7.65	2.15	7.06	2.67	0.015	433	2.421
Hazing*	7.84	3.15	6.19	3.55	0.0001	433	4.9394

**Indicates statistically significant difference observed in means.*

The following statistically significant differences between fraternity members and unaffiliated undergraduate men were observed:

- Fraternity members reported a higher mean in their comfort level in providing accountability to their peers related to academics.
- Fraternity members reported a higher mean in their comfort level in providing accountability to their peers related to sexual relationships.
- Fraternity members reported a higher mean in their comfort level in providing accountability to their peers related to professional/career-related topics.
- Fraternity members reported a higher mean in their comfort level in providing accountability to their peers related to personal goals.
- Fraternity members reported a higher mean in their comfort level in providing accountability to their peers related to hazing.

Confidence Levels

As an aggregate group, undergraduate men reported confidence levels of holding their peers accountable to that of their comfort levels. Undergraduate men report being most comfortable in holding their peers accountable related to academics (M=7.14, SD=2.35), personal goals (M=7.13, SD=2.50), and alcohol and substance use (M=6.88, SD=2.70). They report lower confidence in holding their peers accountable related to hazing (M=6.70, SD=3.40), professional/career (M=6.68, SD=2.57), and dating or romantic relationships (M=6.35, SD=2.79). Similar to their comfort levels, undergraduate men feel least confident in their ability to hold their peers accountable related to sexual relationships (M=5.78, SD=3.07).

Through examining respondents based on their affiliation with a fraternity, independent t-tests indicated statistically significant differences in means confidence levels of undergraduate men to provide accountability in all areas studied (Table 5). Fraternity members reported higher levels of confidence in holding their peers accountable related to academics, personal goals, alcohol and substance use, hazing, professional/career, dating or romantic relationships, and sexual relationships compared to their unaffiliated peers.

Table 5

T-test Analysis for Reported Mean Confidence Level in Engaging in Peer Accountability, by Affiliation

	Members (n=170)		Non-Members (n=265)				
	M	SD	M	SD	*p*	df	t
Academics*	7.60	2.13	6.85	2.67	0.015	433	3.2843
Alcohol or Substance Use*	7.42	2.42	6.52	3.55	0.0001	433	3.4373
Dating/romantic relationships*	6.73	2.53	6.11	2.44	0.001	433	2.2743
Sexual relationships*	6.34	2.82	5.42	2.81	0.0006	433	3.0816
Professional/career*	7.11	2.36	6.40	2.92	0.023	433	2.8367
Personal goals*	7.59	2.15	6.83	3.17	0.002	433	2.3727
Hazing*	7.90	3.01	5.92	2.66	0.004	433	6.1814

**Indicates statistically significant difference observed in means.*

Prior Experiences & Methods Used in Peer Accountability Behaviors

Prior Experiences with Peer Accountability

As an aggregate group, nearly half (44%) of the undergraduate men reported providing accountability to a friend/peer related to academics. Further, roughly one in three undergraduate men have intervened when a friend/peer was behaving unsafely (39%) or provided accountability related to health and safety (37%), professional goals (33%), alcohol or substance use (33%), and dating or romantic relationships (32%). Undergraduate men reported lower rates of prior engagement in accountability behaviors related to a friend/peer engaging in hazing (18%), when a friend/peer was violating a campus policy (18%), a friend breaking the law (24%), and a friend/peer's sexual relationships (25%). These findings align with those related to the comfort and confidence levels reported by undergraduate men, in which they feel most comfortable and

confident to engage in peer accountability related to academics, alcohol and substance use, and personal goals.

A greater portion of fraternity members indicate having engaged in peer accountability-related behaviors at some point while in college across all categories included in the study (Table 6).

Table 6
Previous Engagement in Accountability Behaviors, by Affiliation

	Fraternity Members (n=164)	Unaffiliated Men (n=257)
	%	%
A friend/peer was behaving in an unsafe manner.	45	35
A friend/peer was violating a campus policy.	26	13
A friend/peer was breaking a law.	30	20
A friend/peer was engaging in hazing behaviors.	28	11
A friend/peer was using or misusing alcohol or other substances.	38	28
Related to a friend/peer's health and safety.	43	34
Related to a friend/peer's use of alcohol or other substances.	40	28
Related to a friend/peer's professional goals.	40	29
Related to a friend/peer's academics.	56	37
Related to a friend/peer's dating or romantic relationships.	37	29
Related to a friend/peer's to sexual relationships.	29	22

Cross-tabulation analysis using chi-square tests garnered significant differences in the reported engagement in peer accountability behaviors between fraternity members and unaffiliated undergraduate men. A statistically significantly greater portion of fraternity members reported having engaged in peer accountability compared to unaffiliated undergraduate men in the following areas:

- A friend/peer was behaving in an unsafe manner, X^2 (2, N=422)=15.64, p<.001.
- A friend/peer was violating campus policy, X^2 (2, N=422)=26.27, p.001.
- A friend/peer was breaking the law, X^2 (2, N=422)=17.16, p<.001
- A friend/peer was engaging in hazing behaviors, X^2 (2, N=422)=26.69, p<.001.
- Related to a friend/peer's health and safety, X^2 (2, N=422)=16.11, p<.001.
- Related to a friend/peer's use of alcohol or other substances, X^2 (2, N=422)=19.35, p<.001.

- Related to a friend/peer's professional goals, X^2 (2, N=422)=14.62, p<.001.
- Related to a friend/peer's academics, X^2 (2, N=422)=24.68, p<.001.
- Related to a friend/peer's dating or romantic relationships, X^2 (2, N=422)=14.39, p<.001.
- Related to a friend/peer's sexual relationships, X^2 (2, N=422)=19.75, p<.001.

Accountability/Intervention Methods

Among those who reported prior experiences of engaging in peer accountability, there are some common methods that undergraduate men employ to engage in to do so. Having a one-on-one, in-person conversation is the top-rated method used by undergraduate men with 93% of those with prior experience in providing accountability having used this method. Next, undergraduate men gravitate towards sending an electronic message (i.e., text, social media, email, etc.) with 79% of respondents having used this method. The third most common method of providing accountability includes engaging the help of another friend/peer to have a conversation with the friend/peer in need of accountability. This method has been used by 63% of respondents who have provided accountability to a friend/peer.

In comparing the experiences of fraternity members and their unaffiliated peers, significant differences were not observed. This indicates that fraternity members and their peers go about practicing peer accountability by using similar methods or behaviors.

Accountability Training Experiences

Forty percent of respondents indicated prior participation in training or educational experiences related to providing accountability to friends or peers. When factoring in fraternity membership, there is a notable difference in the portion of students who have participated in prior training related accountability (Table 7).

Table 7

Past Training Experience Related to Peer Accountability or Intervention, by Affiliation

	Fraternity Members (n=162)	Unaffiliated Men (n=252)
	%	%
Engaged in prior training or education	57	29
Had not engaged in prior training or education	43	71

More than half of fraternity members (56%) indicate having participated in some form of training related to peer accountability or intervention compared to the fewer than one in three unaffiliated men (29%). Through cross-tabulation analysis, there is a significant difference in the portion of fraternity members and unaffiliated men who have participated in some form of training related to peer accountability or intervention (X^2 (1, N=415)=32.9, p<.001).

When examining the types of training and education experiences of respondents, those with past training experiences most reported predominantly receiving training through their college or university (77%), with no observable significant difference between fraternity members and

unaffiliated undergraduate men. However, slightly more fraternity members have participated in a training experience within their fraternity experience (78%) than those who have participated in a training program sponsored by their college or university (74%) (Table 8).

Table 8
Types of Past Training Experiences, by Affiliation

	Fraternity Members (n=92)	Unaffiliated Men (n=74)
	%	%
Program sponsored by college or university	74	74
Program sponsored by fraternity chapter or national organization	78	-
Program sponsored by campus club or organization	17	22
Program as a part of an academic course	18	23
Program sponsored by a community organization	12	19

Drivers and Barriers to Practicing Peer Accountability

Both fraternity members and unaffiliated students identified many similar barriers or challenges related to providing accountability to peers. For both groups, fear of the friendship ending was the greatest barrier or challenge cited with one in three undergraduate men indicating this would be a barrier to hold them back from engaging in peer accountability.

Where differences lie is in the prioritization of the organization among fraternity members and the fear of interpersonal fall out among unaffiliated undergraduate men. Table 9 outlines the portion of respondents who identified barriers as either a moderate or extreme barrier or challenge to practicing peer accountability.

Table 9

Identified Barriers or Challenges in Practicing Peer Accountability, by Affiliation

	Fraternity Members (n=153)	Non-Members (n=242)
	%	%
Fear of retaliation by my friend(s)/peer(s)	17	28
Fear of rejection by my friend(s)/peer(s)	24	31
Fear of the friendship ending	26	36
Fear of being kicked out of a club/organization	13	17
Fear of a club/organization being closed or banned on campus	24	11
Fear of involvement of campus administration	25	19
Fear of bullying or being made fun of	13	17
Not knowing how to properly hold someone accountable	18	26
Fear of getting in trouble with my college/university	23	23
Fear of getting in trouble with law enforcement	24	26

A statistically significant difference was observed among fraternity members who cited a fear of their club or organization being shut down or banned compared to their unaffiliated peers (X^2 (3, N=396)=16.8, p<.001). And, a significant difference was observed in which more unaffiliated undergraduate men cited a fear of bullying or being made fun of as a barrier or challenge to providing accountability to their peers (X^2 (1, N=415)=9.77, p=.021). These differences illuminate a deeper difference that emerges between fraternity members and unaffiliated undergraduate men. Fraternity members prioritize maintaining their organization as it serves as a means and structure that promotes social connection. Through these organizations, fraternity members engage in relationships and practice interpersonal skills to grow confidence to engage in peer accountability. From this lens, fraternal organizations serve as a guardrail for young men in college to develop the skills they need to practice peer accountability without fear of a relationship ending. Whereas unaffiliated undergraduate men, who may not have similarly structured social interactions through organizations, are concerned about the interpersonal fallout that could occur through engaging in accountability-oriented behaviors with their friends or peers.

Motivations for Practicing Peer Accountability

For both fraternity members and unaffiliated men, acting in alignment with values, keeping friends safe and healthy, and encouraging personal growth of friends/peers serve as the top sources of motivation to engage in peer accountability. Table 10 outlines the percentage of respondents who

indicated various types of motivation would greatly motivate them to engage in accountability or intervention behaviors with their friends/peers.

Table 10
Identified as Greatly Motivating for Engaging in Peer Accountability, by Affiliation

	Fraternity Members (n=156)	Non-Members (n=242)
	%	%
Keeping my friend(s)/peer(s) healthy and safe	79	76
Encouraging the personal growth of my friend(s)/peer(s)	75	65
Encouraging the professional growth of my friend(s)/peer(s)	67	61
Encouraging the academic success of my friend(s)/peer(s)	72	62
Following campus policies	32	33
Obeying the law	51	47
Someone may repay the favor for me in the future	33	32
Following the policies/rules of a club/organization I am a part of*	49	34
Protecting a club/organization I am a part of*	65	37
Being accepted by my friend(s)/peer(s)	38	42
Acting in alignment with my values	80	72

When factoring in affiliation, variations emerge between the motivations of members of fraternities and unaffiliated men. First, there is a significant difference in the motivations between fraternity members and unaffiliated men related to involvement with a club or organization. Fraternity members are more motivated by following the policies and rules for a club or organization than their unaffiliated peers (X^2 (2, N=400)=16.8, p<.001). Additionally, fraternity members are more likely to be motivated to engage in peer accountability to protect a club or organization of which they are a member (X^2 (2, N=415)=36.9, p<.001). In connection to the previously cited barriers by fraternity members, their motivation to engage in peer accountability is also derived from the structure that exists and is provided by their organizational involvement.

Perspectives on Belonging and Community

Undergraduate men collectively report agreement in feeling a sense of belonging on their campus. Roughly two-thirds (65%) of undergraduate men agreed they feel as though they belong on campus. Additionally, sixty-one percent of undergraduate men feel a sense of responsibility for

the health and safety of their friends and peers. However, just over half of undergraduate men feel responsible to support the professional development of their friends and peers (53%) and as though they are a valued member of their campus community (54%).

While aggregate results indicate that many undergraduate men feel a sense of belonging and commitment to others, there are observed differences in reported mean levels of agreement between fraternity member and unaffiliated undergraduate men in the following areas (Table 11).

Table 11
T-test Analysis for Perspectives on Belonging and Campus Community, by Affiliation

	Members (n=158)		Non-Members (n=241)				
	M	SD	M	SD	*p*	df	t
I feel as though I belong on my campus*	5.90	1.35	5.18	1.62	0.0001	396	4.7561
I feel as though I am a valued member of my campus community*	5.66	1.53	4.86	1.72	0.0001	394	4.7271
I feel responsible to support the health and safety of my friends/peers	5.67	1.43	5.42	1.45	0.112	357	1.5906
I feel responsible to support the personal development of my friends/peers*	5.72	1.35	5.34	1.44	0.01	382	2.5882
I feel responsible to support the personal development of my friends/peers*	5.61	1.34	5.13	1.58	0.001	395	3.1388

**Indicates statistically significant difference observed in means.*

T-test analyses indicate statistically significant differences exist between these two groups in the following areas:

- Fraternity members feel a greater sense of belonging on campus.
- Fraternity members feel a greater sense of being a valued member of the campus community.
- Fraternity members report a greater sense of responsibility to support personal development.
- Fraternity members feel more responsible to support the professional development of their friends/peers.

Discussion

Understanding accountability and intervention is a key step in being able to effectively engage in behaviors that promote accountability. The results of this study garner insights that provide greater awareness of how undergraduate men understand and practice peer accountability. First, this study establishes supporting evidence that fraternity members report higher levels of understanding of how to practice accountability and the role intervention plays in practicing accountability. Fraternity members also report being more comfortable and confident in practicing peer accountability related to various topics. Given the information shared about their living situation and other involvement experiences, one explanation for these differences could be the heightened social experiences that fraternity members have through increased peer interactions within their fraternity, with whom they live, and their other avenues of extracurricular involvement. The gaps that exist between fraternity members and unaffiliated peers points to an opportunity to develop greater understanding and competency to practice peer accountability among undergraduate men regardless of affiliation.

This study also identifies the ways in which undergraduate men engage in behaviors associated with peer accountability. A greater portion of fraternity members have prior experiences of engaging in peer accountability behaviors compared to unaffiliated undergraduate men, especially regarding academics, hazing, alcohol or substance misuse, campus policy violation, professional goals, and when friends are engaging in an unsafe manner. Elevated levels of past experiences among fraternity members can again likely be attributed to the increased peer interactions through their fraternity, living situation, and other involvement opportunities.

An additional aim of this study was to develop insight into how undergraduate men develop competence and motivation to engage in behaviors related to peer accountability. With just under half of students indicating any formal prior training related to accountability or intervention, this presents a great opportunity for further development that can be provided by institutions of higher education. Those with prior accountability training predominantly cite experiences sponsored or organized by a college or university or fraternity program among affiliated members. The predominance of formal training programs sponsored by an institution or organization showcases a practice that can be further implemented by practitioners who aim to increase the knowledge and competence of students to practice peer accountability.

Understanding motivation to engage in peer accountability is imperative to encouraging behavior in these areas. This study illuminates the differences in motivation that exist among undergraduate men based on their affiliation with a fraternity. In addition to acting by their values and supporting their peers, fraternity members are uniquely motivated by following the rules or policies of an organization and the preservation of an organization of which they are a member. The motivation of fraternity members should be noted, as it showcases a distinct role that organizational membership plays as motivation to use peer accountability behaviors. While not every undergraduate man will seek membership in a fraternity, providing involvement opportunities that inspire organizational commitment can promote motivation towards practicing peer accountability, regardless of affiliation.

Finally, this study sought to draw comparisons of the peer accountability experiences and perspectives on campus belonging between undergraduate fraternity members with their

unaffiliated peers. This comparison found fraternity members have greater sense of belonging, feeling valued on campus, and greater sense of responsibility to support the personal and professional growth of friends and peers. These increased levels of agreement with commitment to others and belonging on campus among fraternity members is likely once again supported by the heightened peer interactions fraternity members have through their involvement and living situations.

Implications

The findings of this study present key implications to inform and guide campus involvement experiences. First, those with higher levels of involvement on campus (i.e., fraternity members) reported greater confidence, competence, and experience in engaging in accountability related behaviors. Those who advise and support campus organizations have opportunity to position involvement, with fraternities as well as other organizations, as spaces for undergraduate men to learn interpersonal skills related to peer accountability.

However, these findings also point out the gap that exists for training experiences to help students understand and practice accountability behaviors, which can serve to increase their confidence to engage in these behaviors in real-life situations. Those supporting campus involvement can grow this competency area among students by providing robust learning experiences that promote student safety and frame accountability as a practice of care for others. This training would not only benefit those who are involved in campus organizations but can include the student population more broadly to inspire positive behaviors across the campus community.

Finally, this study points out the increased levels of knowledge, confidence, ability, and past experiences of fraternity members and link to the increased levels of involvement of these members, even beyond their chapter. Fraternity members have more frequent opportunities to witness and engage in accountability behaviors. And, these situations may not be related to high-risk situations like substance misuse, sexual misconduct, or hazing. Historically, accountability within fraternities is framed in punitive or consequence-oriented measures under the notion that these organizations inspire and reproduce negative or risky behaviors that require accountability. Accountability has also taken the form of campus-wide moratoriums or ceasing operations of entire fraternity/sorority life communities in response to an incident. Consistent with literature related to campus-wide moratoriums (Fleischer et al, 2021) and studies related to system-wide shutdowns (Dickson, 2007), this study affirms that collective punishment may be counter-productive and not lend itself toward the desired behavior of encouraging students to practice peer intervention. If protecting an organization and supporting peers serve as key sources of motivation to engage in peer accountability, collective punishment may erode the motivation to engage in peer accountability and diminish the very environments that encourage ethical and moral skill development. Professionals who support student involvement can evolve this narrative by recognizing the multi-faceted nature of fraternity members and accountability. This includes integrating advising practices that acknowledge how fraternity members engage in accountability behaviors with their peers beyond high-risk settings and encouraging continued practice of accountability interactions related to academic goals, personal goals, professional pursuits, and other interpersonal relationships. A balanced approach to advising student organizations, including fraternities, should involve support for situations that require punitive processes while also

celebrating and promoting when students appropriately and proactively engage in peer accountability to self-regulate situations within their campus community.

Limitations

This study presents important findings to the higher education field related to student engagement and the practice of peer accountability. However, this study is not without its limitations.

First, many concepts studied are reliant on self-reported knowledge or understanding by undergraduate students. This methodology provides convenience while recognizing the potential for some level of response bias or over-inflation of reported behaviors. To mitigate this, the study was positioned as anonymous and confidential in which participants' responses would not be used for investigative or punitive purposes. It is not anticipated that response bias would render the results of this study invalid or non-generalizable, but it is important to note the nature of how data were collected, and insights were generated.

While the multi-institutional approach garnered a diverse sample of student participants, geographical locations of those institutions is limited. The participating institutions were situated predominantly in the Southeast or Southwest regions of the United States. Greater geographic diversity among the participating institutions would further extend the generalizability of these findings to the larger student population.

Finally, this study solely focused on students at four-year institutions, at which fraternal organizations predominantly operate. This does not invalidate the findings but limits the application of the comparative findings between fraternity men and unaffiliated men to those who are enrolled at four-year institutions at the undergraduate level. This reduces the generalizability of the findings to undergraduate men enrolled at two-year institutions or at the graduate level.

Conclusion

While numerous student involvement opportunities exist at institutions of higher education, this study finds that fraternity involvement is a positively impactful opportunity for undergraduate men to interact with their peers and develop and practice interpersonal skills related to accountability. The significant findings of this study point to the ways fraternity membership can provide undergraduate men with an elevated campus experience that allows them to develop interpersonal skills that are critical to applying accountability and intervention behaviors. Fraternity members indicate greater understanding of peer accountability concepts, greater confidence and comfort in practicing peer accountability, and a greater sense of belonging and sense of responsibility for the development of their peers.

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JCAPS

DISTANCE MAY VARY: A PORTRAITURE STUDY ON INTERNATIONAL ALUMNI REFLECTIONS

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International students play a significant role in U.S. higher education; however, these students' perspectives are rarely explored following graduation. Much of the literature centers issues related to persistence and retention with an emphasis on first year undergraduate students, missing the breadth of international student experience. This qualitative portraiture study presents the authentic reflections of alumni (n = 4) on their tenure as international undergraduate students in U.S. higher education. Participants' reported experiences indicated marginalization and disempowerment affirming the value of further including international alumni perspectives in discussions on student services and support.

Introduction

The process of becoming an international student in the United States is complicated, but it is only the first stage in an international student's academic and cocurricular journey (Madden-Dent et al., 2019). Throughout their academic careers, international students may navigate unfamiliar academic practices, acculturative stress, communicative misalignments, unpredictable visa processes, financial concerns, and health-related issues, often with limited family and social support (Heng, 2017; Horne et al., 2018; Jean-Francois, 2019; Kim et al., 2019; Ohorodnik, 2019; Thomas, 2017). However, it is rare to find deep explorations of international students' perceived experiences, outcomes, and benefits gained (Khanal & Gaulee, 2019; Krsmanovic, 2021; Page & Chahboun, 2019).

Conversations about international students in U.S. higher education institutions (HEIs) often emphasize the benefits derived from and challenges faced by international students (Jones, 2017; Lee et al., 2019). However, discussions that include international students' reflections uncover a student and learning community. Situating student experiences within the framework of separation, transition, and connectedness can uncover contextual factors allowing for a deeper understanding of the individual's higher education journey (Guiffrida, 2006; Tinto, 1993).

As part of the third wave of student development theory, the RMMDI is intended for use in better understanding the individual through the lens of the self as an alternative to impinging a defined identity upon individuals (Abes et al., 2007; Jones & Stewart, 2016). Using the RMMDI, researchers can explore how individuals develop, express, and perceive their social identities in various contexts (Abes et al., 2007). The model is nonlinear, meaning there is no normative progression for individuals to follow in defining their identities; it is possible for an individual to engage with one, some, or every social identity to varying degrees in an interlinked or intersectional manner (Abes et al., 2007; Jones & Stewart, 2016). These theories support this study by reifying the agency of the individual in presenting their reflections, centering their unique lived experiences and their multiple self-defined, authentic, fluid identities at various stages of their undergraduate careers (Abes et al., 2007; Guiffrida, 2006; Tinto, 1993).

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As part of the third wave of student development theory, the RMMDI is intended for use in better understanding the individual through the lens of the self as an alternative to impinging a defined identity upon individuals (Abes et al., 2007; Jones & Stewart, 2016). Using the RMMDI, researchers can explore how individuals develop, express, and perceive their social identities in various contexts (Abes et al., 2007). The model is nonlinear, meaning there is no normative progression for individuals to follow in defining their identities; it is possible for an individual to engage with one, some, or every social identity to varying degrees in an interlinked or intersectional manner (Abes et al., 2007; Jones & Stewart, 2016). These theories support this study by reifying the agency of the individual in presenting their reflections, centering their unique lived experiences and their multiple self-defined, authentic, fluid identities at various stages of their undergraduate careers (Abes et al., 2007; Guiffrida, 2006; Tinto, 1993).

Literature Review

International students face unique challenges in U.S. higher education relating to acculturative stress, campus engagement, and being perceived as agents in their academic careers. This section explores how these issues impact international students while framing opportunities present in the literature.

Acculturative Stress

Acculturative stress, or culture shock, is a state often experienced by individuals living in a foreign country or community with unfamiliar cultural norms or habits, a state which can cause acute stress and other mental health issues (Kim et al., 2019; McLachlan & Justice, 2009). For international students, studying at U.S. HEIs may be their first immersive interaction with a culture and way of life differing from their home community (Bardhan & Zhang, 2017; He & Hutson, 2018).

Campus Experience

Many undergraduate students experience true independence for the first time on their HEI campus; however, international students may experience this independence differently (Heng, 2017; Horne et al., 2018; Oh & Butler, 2019; Tsevi, 2018). Students from other countries may experience more acute isolation due to cultural, linguistic, and other differences (Kim et al., 2019). Having access to mentors who share a similar cultural background with international student mentees can mitigate issues faced by students navigating an unfamiliar system and environment (Georges & Chen, 2018; McLachlan & Justice, 2009; Oh & Butler, 2019; Rabia & Karkouti, 2017). Such mentors, whether peers or faculty members, can assist international students in avoiding academic and cocurricular pitfalls which could otherwise negatively impact student persistence (Fass-Holmes, 2016; Glass et al., 2017; McLachlan & Justice, 2009).

Student Agency: Professional Perspectives and Impact

Higher education professionals often perceive international students through a lens of deficits, emphasizing students' lack of academic preparedness or capacity for integration into the U.S. campus community (Anandavalli, 2021; Jones, 2017; Page & Chahboun, 2019). This deficit perspective frames international students as ill-suited to the U.S. higher education context and passive victims of issues, such as racism, cultural discrimination, and academic misalignment, which they are helpless to overcome (Lee, 2006; Shaheen, 2019). Through the deficit perspective, international students may also be viewed as reactive subjects who have not met an arbitrary and unknowable set of standards prior to arrival (Page & Chahboun, 2019, p. 880). Instead of envisioning international students as wholly unprepared outsiders, it is reasonable to consider international students as active participants variably aware of the challenges they will face with a measured desire to learn and grow (Heng, 2017; Jones, 2017; Lee et al., 2019). By incorporating the voices of international students in discussions about challenges, opportunities, and supports, it is possible for HEIs to become more inclusive, equitable, and effective, and for international

students to achieve greater agency in their education and development (Heng, 2017; Jean-Francois, 2019; Madden-Dent et al., 2019; Martirosyan et al., 2019; Page & Chahboun, 2019; Shaheen, 2019).

Methodology

Research Design

This study used portraiture methodology as formalized by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot and Jessica Hoffman Davis (1997). Portraiture was best suited to this study as it offers the potential for deep exploration of underexplored populations, centralizing the participants and their perspectives, while encouraging the generation of research accessible to an inclusive audience (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2016; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). As a qualitative methodological approach portraiture incorporates aspects of phenomenology and narrative inquiry but with certain distinguishing properties (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2016). The portraiture process, as exegesis in hermeneutics, works from an exterior viewing of the participant being researched – a classifying or defining process reliant on the participant's context, social positioning, and other extrinsic features – toward a point of interpretation and deeper meaning-making connected to the research participant's position in and impact upon reality. Within the context of this study, portraiture offers a deeper exploration of each participant and their experiences framed in the shared context of U.S. higher education. This qualitative study also expands how portraiture has been historically applied in academic research.

The broader central question of this study is this: What are the shared lived experiences of international alumni who completed an undergraduate degree at higher education institutions in the United States? Two supporting subquestions were also addressed in this analysis:

Q1: How do international alumni describe their social identities in relation to their undergraduate experiences in the United States?

Q2: What are the connecting cocurricular experiences of international alumni in relation to their undergraduate experiences in the United States?

Participants

Sampling strategies for this study included snowball and purposive sampling. The researchers shared recruitment information via email, social media posts, and professional networks to engage independent prospective participants. Due to snowball sampling's potential to draw ineligible individuals, the study incorporated purposive sampling to confirm prospective participants' eligibility (Andrade, 2021; Geddes et al., 2018). Following submission of signed informed consent, prospective participants were asked to share a brief autobiographical statement. To confirm participant eligibility, the first author reviewed each autobiographical statement to confirm all eligibility criteria, and no exclusionary criteria, were met.

This study was comprised of international student alumni ($n = 4$) with diverse social identities and backgrounds (see Table 1). All participants successfully completed at least one undergraduate program at a U.S. HEI resulting in conferment of a four-year undergraduate degree. Participants were enrolled with international student status for a minimum of two academic years during their relevant program.

Predominantly white institutions (PWIs) are HEIs where more than 50% of the total student population identifies as white (John & Stage, 2014). Minority-serving institutions (MSIs) are HEIs that enroll a significant percentage of students with underrepresented or marginalized racial or ethnic backgrounds, often aimed at serving a specific student demographic, with white students making up less than 50% of the institution's total enrollment (Bourke, 2016; Flores & Park, 2015). Background relates to major national and cultural influences, such as participant's home country; no nationalities or cultural influences were inferred by the authors. All descriptors are self-descriptors using language employed by participants included in the data. Avi did not indicate his home country, nationality, or major national influences during data collection.

Table 1

Participant Information

Pseudonym	Background	Descriptors	HEI Type
Anne	Austria	cisgender white woman; global citizen; mother; passionate about social justice; wife	public; medium; PWI
Avi	N/A	hardworking; passionate and excited about data	public; large; MSI
Gabriel	Honduras Germany	adapts easily; Catholic; family person; hardworking; honest; organized	private; non-profit; religious-affiliated; large; PWI
Michael	Syria	Arab; creature of habit; emotionally unavailable; gay; interfaith advocate; Muslim family; quirky	private; non-profit; large; MSI

Data Collection

Data for this study included four autobiographical statements and eight deidentified transcripts from in-depth semi-structured individual interviews. Autobiographical statements included self-selected relevant information shared by participants prior to interviews to inform the interview process. The first author conducted two 45-minute interviews with each participant. Interviews were conducted over Zoom and recorded to support the transcription process. All identifying data were anonymized using self-selected pseudonyms.

Data Analysis

Following data collection, the researchers engaged in an iterative analytical process using MAXQDA version 22.2.1 for analysis and coding. Analyses of novel data in portraiture studies are formally begun through the Impressionistic Record, the daily documentation of potential insights, challenges, and reflections to support analysis and identify biases impacting analysis (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Throughout the analysis, the researchers systematically reviewed the autobiographical statements and interview transcripts to uncover shared themes and individually impactful experiences, using the Impressionistic Record to document avenues for further analyses and bring attention to indications of possible researcher biases. After the first complete review of the data, initial codes were inductively generated (Saldaña, 2013). The researchers iteratively reviewed all data creating relevant child codes and renegotiating parent codes when appropriate in line with portraiture's flexible approach to uncovering emergent themes (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Saldaña, 2013).

Positionality

Internalizing and expressing how one's background and perceptions may influence one as a researcher is vital (Holmes, 2020). Due to the influential position and potential of the authorial voice in portraiture, a limited exploration of the authors' biases and backgrounds is necessary and appropriate (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). The first author recognizes as a cisgender white-passing heterosexual male his social identities confer unmerited privilege. The second author is a mixed-heritage cisgender heterosexual Latino male. They collectively believe that privilege must be leveraged toward dismantling systemically inequitable social structures particularly in relation to structures oppressing individuals based on race, gender, sex, sexuality, disability, socioeconomic status (SES), and other characteristics. The first author exists as a partial insider among the research population; after more than a decade living, working, and studying outside the United States, he has developed a transcultural perspective on U.S. higher education (Franzenburg, 2020). Regardless, the researchers aim to convey participants' authentic reflections to further the various causes of social justice relating to equity and inclusion, and to amplify voices which have been historically deemphasized.

Findings

Data collected for this study were organized into individual micro-portraits. The depth and breadth of available data allowed for a thorough explication of participant reflections. Each micro-portrait incorporates a given participant's authentic reflections interwoven with that participant's corresponding quoted statements.

Anne

Prior to her undergraduate studies, Anne had travelled extensively across the United States and spent a year of high school as an exchange student in the Midwest. These experiences motivated Anne to pursue an undergraduate degree in the United States hoping for an American university experience akin to her domestic counterparts. Anne regularly discussed herself through a lens of relative privilege with her reflections touching on social justice issues, the importance of inclusivity, and the occasionally bittersweet reality of achieving one's dreams.

"The International Student"

Coming into orientation, Anne, "didn't want to be grouped in with other international students." Even before classes began, Anne chafed against her perceived status as, "the international student," when first meeting other students and staff. Having completed a year of high school in the Midwest, Anne felt confident she, "would fit in with a lot of the domestic students," better than with Cypress University's international students. However, there being, "four of us who were international students at that school that year… we were always kind of grouped together. And I- to be honest, like, I hated it."

International student orientation was brief, lasting one and a half days. Anne felt it, "didn't set us [international students] up in the same way to build community," being focused primarily on paperwork and regulations. "It didn't really allow us to do any of the bonding that the other undergraduate students did in their orientation." Following orientation, Anne, "quickly… met a group of friends," within her residence hall. Through these early social connections, Anne was able to establish relationships and feel involved in campus life almost immediately.

Socializing on campus was mostly positive, but Anne faced challenges regarding her international identity daily. One domestic student asserted Austria, the country of Anne's birth, was merely a region of Germany; the student refused to listen to Anne's rebuttal. Others voiced surprise when Anne stated how, "[Austria] is not that different," from the United States. She explained, "I don't want to have to tell people everything about my home country… Even if they were nice questions or good questions, it just got tiring to always have to talk about that part of your identity." This sense of constant pressure led Anne to avoid such conversations, even denying her international identity. When her accent belied her international status, she would reply, "Well, I've lived all over."

Enrolled in a writing-related major, Anne came to Cypress eager to improve as a writer. She planned to enroll in a general first-year English course hoping to better understand the program's expectations before her major courses started the following year. Anne's academic advisor, an advisor with an international student focus, decided Anne's international status was reason enough to enroll her in a remedial English course. Anne protested, but her advisor held firm. After only a few classes, the instructor noted the quality, accuracy, and fluency present in Anne's compositions. The instructor asked Anne why she chose that class; Anne explained there was no choice. Unsolicited, the instructor wrote a note giving Anne permission to enroll in a general education English course. Though grateful, Anne posited, "Why do they keep treating me differently? Because I'm an international student; I just kinda wanna do the thing everyone else is doing." After a mixed academic year, Anne chose to spend her first undergraduate summer in Austria.

"Why We Fit Together"

Starting her second year, Anne became deeply involved with campus activities and student leadership as editor of the university's student newspaper and as an RA. Prior to taking on these roles, Anne said, "There was always a little bit that sense of I don't 100% fit in." However, through working with the other RAs and professional staff at Cypress, Anne found a community she connected with deeply. "We were a super diverse staff in many ways, and so there was that sense of like none of us fit in, and that's why we fit together."

Besides her RA duties, editing Cypress's student newspaper was enriching for Anne, though exhausting. Instructors took note of this but were generally sympathetic. Most instructors would gently wake Anne if she started to doze in class, knowing she would come to them after to apologize. Still, one professor voiced disapproval of the newspaper feeling it did not meet a high enough journalistic standard. This professor interrupted lessons to admonish Anne and others involved with the newspaper when they seemed sleepy or inattentive. Despite this, Anne remained drawn to her extracurricular roles.

Anne felt a sense of pride in her university but found few opportunities to express this feeling on campus. Instead, school spirit was displayed at multi-institutional academic and leadership conferences. Preparing for these gatherings, Anne worked with other student leaders creating signs and posters to bring to these events. Sometimes these activities became an outlet for expressing unabashed enthusiasm for their shared institutional identity. On one occasion, Anne, "even dyed [her] hair… [Cypress's] school colors."

In her waning semesters, Anne looked into graduate programs centering education instead of writing. Discussing her experiences at Cypress, particularly working in student support roles, Anne says, "It definitely kind of changed my life trajectory." Working with the staff was her, "first introduction to really thinking about diversity and social justice," issues, which she, "became very passionate about." After completing her studies at Cypress, Anne was accepted into a graduate program focused on student support.

Avi

Prior to studying in the United States, Avi had never travelled to North America. However, he had studied as an international student in several countries throughout his youth. Avi seemed reticent to speak about himself, but he spoke enthusiastically about his shared experiences with peers and professionals at his undergraduate institution.

"What's Going on"

On his first day at Towers University, Avi was excited about meeting students from across the globe. With his limited knowledge of the campus, Avi was surprised at the diversity within the student body. Though he was already beginning to make friends, Avi knew little about Towers and spent, "the first few days… just trying to figure out what's going on."

During his first two years, Avi lived in a shared campus residence with three other international students. Though they all had different cultural and national backgrounds, having English as a bridge language allowed them to bond right away. After attending international student orientation together, Avi and two of his roommates were feeling overwhelmed and nervous about navigating their undergraduate experience; however, their transition was made easier through the support of their roommate Bart.

"A Friend to Help Me"

Bart had enrolled at Towers a year before Avi. Throughout Avi's first year, Bart was always there supporting Avi and their roommates. Discussing Bart, Avi states, "He was introducing me to his friends, and I was in the language school. He was even introducing me to the teachers that we had." For Avi, Bart was both a guide and, "a friend to help me," but also representative of Avi's reflections on Towers.

The positive interactions Avi experienced with students, staff, and faculty at Towers encouraged him to engage more deeply with the campus community. After participating in several organizations, Avi discovered a deep passion for working with Towers' international student organization. For one of the organization's biggest events, the international community festival, Avi reached out to the international student services (ISS) office seeking financial and logistical support. Speaking with the ISS team, Avi said, "We have a vision. We want to bring all the international students and the communities in town, in the city, together." The office regretted only being able to offer support in advertising the event as they lacked additional resources.

That year's festival broke attendance and revenue records with hundreds of attendees. Avi and the other international student organization leaders intentionally networked with business owners, community leaders, and others within and beyond campus to make the event more inclusive and community focused. Following that record year, the college took an official role managing and funding the international community festival, an outcome Avi was proud to have facilitated.

"Be Supportive"

During the latter half of Avi's undergraduate studies, the Covid pandemic spread across the United States. Though Towers was more home for Avi than nearly anywhere else, he felt, "campus is not safe anymore." Seeing the headlines, Avi wondered if the president of the United States wanted to, "just sacrifice all the international students in this country." Though able to stay, Avi felt the campus had become less secure.

One day while walking to class, Avi was handed a flyer by someone on campus. Avi read through the leaflet, shocked to find himself reading a racist message claiming, "you cannot replace us." Once campus officials were informed, the flyers were quickly removed from campus. Regardless, Avi felt unsettled recognizing himself as a possible target. After this incident, nothing similar occurred while Avi studied at Towers and, "everyone acted like it didn't happen." Even having experienced this, Avi maintains, "No matter who you are in this country [the United States] … if you're smart and a hard worker, everyone will appreciate you sooner or later."

Self-advocacy and continuous effort helped Avi get the support he required. The ISS office was, "the first destination," Avi went to with, "a problem or a question about the paperwork." Help was not always forthcoming, so Avi started, "pushing them to be supportive." Avi hoped by, "trying to be more active… I can show them the importance of my things that I need to complete." This paid off for Avi, but he recognized many of his friends in the international student community never received the support they needed.

Rex, another international student and friend of Avi's, afraid mental health counselors at Towers might share privileged information publicly, avoided seeking counseling services. At the time, Avi was concerned how cultural differences regarding patient confidentiality might be discouraging some students from pursuing counseling services at Towers. International students including Avi brought this concern before the international education committee at Towers. Staff members assured Avi directly that information received by counselors was treated with the utmost confidentiality yet did nothing more with his concern at the time. Then Rex died from a suspected suicide. Leadership at Towers then broadly promoted their policy on confidential information management related to mental health services. Avi grieved the loss of his friend, troubled that Towers had not addressed a valid cultural concern before this loss.

Through this series of challenges, victories, and heartbreaks, Avi remained optimistic, focusing on gaining recognition for his academic and professional efforts. When a major tragedy occurred in his home country, he received an email of support from an office at Towers. "Don't feel alone," he read. "If you need anything, let us know." Avi remained at Towers to pursue a graduate program after earning his bachelor's degree.

Gabriel

When discussing identity, Gabriel noted his Catholic faith and familial bonds were and continue to be central to how he perceives himself. Gabriel was raised in Honduras yet shared deep connections with European cultural influences through his German heritage. Among this study's participants, Gabriel was the only one to pursue an undergraduate degree in the United States as a student athlete.

"All This Freedom"

"I didn't really know a lot about [Dayspring]. I knew they had a soccer team because I got a soccer scholarship there, but academic-wise, I didn't know anything." Walking around Dayspring University after arriving on campus, Gabriel reflected on his new environment. "I thought it was pretty cool, you know, like, all this freedom; you could do whatever you want with all your time and it's definitely different I think than like high school." That first day, Gabriel chose to attend a welcome party hosted by Iota Delta Beta (IDB), one of the few fraternities on campus, in part because of his interest in joining a fraternity.

Late in the evening, campus security arrived at the party prompting most attendees to retreat behind residence hall doors or vanish into the wintery night. Confused but certain he had done nothing wrong, Gabriel stood in the hallway chatting with another international student. When asked for

his student identification, Gabriel provided it to security and thought nothing more of it.

The following day, Gabriel received a phone call and was told to report immediately to campus security. Once there, Gabriel was flatly told, "Okay, you're out," by the head of campus security, indicating Gabriel's expulsion from Dayspring. Though the officer was aware Gabriel had not technically broken any rules, he was considered, "guilty by association." As a private formerly religious institution situated in the midwestern United States, Dayspring maintained zero-tolerance policies on alcohol and mixed-sex gatherings in residence halls. Though there had been no hearing or official meeting, Gabriel was required to write a letter of appeal to the dean of admissions. Before classes began, Dayspring's dean of admissions accepted Gabriel's appeal provided Gabriel complete 20 hours of outdoor campus service in the dead of winter.

"An Actual Community"

After being granted an appeal, Gabriel reached out to members of IDB again. "It can get lonely sometimes at college, especially if you're not from the local area." It was not long before he joined IDB, establishing connections on campus. "I had a solid group of friends. I had friends that were from the area; they showed me around." Living on campus fostered and sustained deep connections between Gabriel and Dayspring's student community. "It's an actual community… basically living in a small town apart from everyone." While the individual members of IDB were an important part of Gabriel's cocurricular experience of Dayspring, he stated the fraternity experience, "underperformed my expectations." Although the fraternity experience was underwhelming, Gabriel remained friends with many members of IDB throughout his undergraduate studies.

Growing up, Gabriel loved playing soccer and played on teams continually throughout his youth. Playing soccer at Dayspring, a sense of "dirty competition" and lack of communication within the team discouraged Gabriel. He found the head coach disrespectful, undermining students' efforts toward teambuilding. After his first semester, Gabriel left the soccer team to focus on his studies leaving behind more than a decade of consecutive team play.

In classes, he felt his instructors lacked real-world experience in their fields. "[I]f you take a class from someone who- an engineer who builds bridges, but he's never built a bridge before…. You have to have that kind of experience behind it, you know… books don't teach you everything; experience does." Outside the classroom, Gabriel became disillusioned with how he viewed Dayspring's operations. "My first university [Dayspring], they weren't really- I think they were more of a profit driven university." Although his experience at Dayspring, "was a lot of fun," Gabriel transferred midway through his studies to IIIU, a university with a more prestigious academic reputation.

"The Opportunity I Had"

Before finalizing enrollment at IIIU, Gabriel met with his soon-to-be academic advisor Ladonna. "My advisor was a lot of help there. She gave me a lot of good advice on which classes to take… She was very, very helpful with everything, basically, even places to go in the city." Throughout his two years at IIIU, Gabriel continued to seek Ladonna's support. Rather than aiming for expedience in the advising process, Gabriel indicated, "[Ladonna] was genuinely interested in the wellbeing of each of her assigned students."

Living off campus in a rented apartment, Gabriel felt disconnected from the IIIU community. He stated, “the people that went there were more… more focused on themselves or more selfish and they didn't really care much about the university, but they just focused on themselves.” Further, he found his perspectives clashed with the domestic students at IIIU. “They were focused on finding out if you had money, or if you did not.” While Gabriel was raised in relative affluence, he dismissed wealth as being a prerequisite for social value. “At the end of the day, it doesn't really matter. If you have money, or if you don't have money, you're still this- you're a college kid, you know.” Since Dayspring was only a few towns over, Gabriel continued engaging socially with his friends there on the weekends. Concurrently, he began developing close relationships at IIIU with other Honduran international students. “I had friends that were from my country, so I didn't feel so homesick.”

About his experiences in the United States, Gabriel wrote, “Had it not been for the opportunity I had to study abroad, I believe that my world view, level of cultural knowledge and maturity would not be where it is at today.” Although he was glad for his time in the United States, he elected not to stay following graduation.

Michael

Art, science, and a “fresh start” were at the core of Michael’s goals when he came to the United States. Born and raised in Syria, Michael spent his youth studying the sciences hoping to become a doctor like his parent. He found comfort in music, and his recollections of playing piano throughout his studies speak to music’s restorative potential.

“My Way Around”

Michael arrived at Birch University’s orientation hoping to connect with others. “I was trying to tell my orientation leader faculty, ‘You know, I still wake up and I look out the window...’ I was trying to describe how it still feels surreal.” The faculty leader interrupted Michael, saying, “‘We're not interested in the things you do in the morning.’ And making a little bit of a sexual innuendo joke there.” Overall, Michael’s orientation experience was isolating, “‘Okay. Well, cool, then I won't talk about this….’ So it didn't require much for me to decide to shut down and just put on a face and, like, fake it ‘til you make it....” Though Michael sought community at Birch, “As when it comes to fitting in on campus, I don't… part of me wants to say I don't think I ever felt like I fit in as much as I found my way around fitting in.”

“Get a Lamp?”

Despite some fear, Michael still tried to share part of his identity by hanging a poster on his suite’s outward-facing front door. The poster promoted a campus “coming out” event an RA had asked Michael to speak at; Michael, “was really happy about it.” Michael’s roommate Thurston was affronted and requested a room transfer. After confronting Thurston, meeting with their RA, and meeting with the area coordinator, Michael took down the poster. Such experiences undermined Michael’s desire to establish roots. “I'm going to move, so why would I get a lamp? So might as well just live out of a suitcase.”

Around the same time, an advisor recommended attending Birch’s activities fair. “I think everyone should step out of their comfort zone.” Michael signed up for everything but felt most drawn to Birch’s interfaith council. “Perhaps it was because I, you know, I was dealing with a lot of tension

with religion, religiosity, and spirituality myself." Participating in interfaith discussion groups helped Michael in several ways. "We like had some very open conversations, about what I believed and why, that… slowly made me more aware of who I am and become more able to articulate what I- what I believe in." This supported Michael's reflections on how the convergence of past and present impacted his social identities. "I was born and raised in Syria. My family is Muslim. And I'm gay."

Although the interfaith council provided enrichment, Michael still struggled to find the holistic support he desired. "In general, I had things I need to figure out, and it would've been nice to have something that could've helped, but I don't know what that would've looked like, you know, because it wasn't there." By the end of his first academic year, Michael was suffering the ill effects of transition related stress. "It was the end of the summer of my freshman year when a system broke down [and] really realized that I was- it was not as easy as I thought."

"The Idea"

"I was so obsessed with the idea of a fresh start. That was the whole goal, like starting as a freshman again even though I have two years of university... no, nothing from the past is coming with me." Midway through his second academic year, Michael volunteered for Birch's Pride Festival through the university's LGBTQ+ center. "It was, it was where we found a little bit of solace, you know, a little bit of encouragement." Though he never took on a leadership role at the LGBTQ+ center, Michael found himself drawn to the space and the people there. "The physical space, it was a building, it was a place where you went, it was the couch where you slept, it was the dining room where you ate, you know."

The more time he spent at the center, the more Michael began connecting with the center's staff, particularly the director, a postgraduate named Louis. "[Louis] understood what I was doing and also I think he understood the social... you know, tension that I might be experiencing." For Michael, the support he received through the LGBTQ+ center helped him succeed at Birch. "So it's an office and a person…. It was a lot of things that made it not just this person in this random office…. It had a, a physical feeling of being with people that was pretty helpful."

Michael faced another major hurdle in his final year of study: his final piano recital. Though an accomplished musician, and one who performed regularly in his residence hall, Michael was nervous. "[U]sually there's like a reception afterwards, like the parents or their family usually bring snacks or whatever and they set it out." Thoughts on his family and the community he had grown up with were complicated. "I think the hardest thing about being away from home is this sense of distance that is created not just in where we are physically but also in how we think and what we believe." Without his family around to help, Quirky Hall's faculty-in-residence, Dr. Shukran, stepped in to support Michael following his performance. "[S]he made these little napkins that have… the date, and I still have a stack of them that are just it's a- it's a very lovely memory… other than the nerves of like trying to play for 45 minutes." After four years at Birch reflecting, connecting with varied communities, and gaining perspective on the wider world, Michael eventually pursued his graduate studies in the United States.

Discussion

The deficit perspective, wherein international students are delivered programming and viewed in light of what they may lack over what they bring to an HEI context, persisted throughout the data as the default perspective of various HEI stakeholders (Anandavalli, 2021; Fass-Holmes, 2016; Jones, 2017; Lee, 2006; Page & Chahboun, 2019; Shaheen, 2019). Anne and Michael faced notable challenges during orientation, impacting their immediate perceptions of their universities and themselves. Anne's academic advisor, the counselors Avi addressed, Gabriel's coach, Michael's orientation leader, and others were all reported as presuming the support needed by international students. This led to perceived inequities and deficiencies in the support and services available to themselves and other international students (Burel et al., 2019; Madden-Dent et al., 2019).

Unlike the deficit perspective, perceiving international students as active agents means recognizing the skills, knowledge, and background of each international student as valuable to the community, the individual, and the institution (Jean-Francois, 2019; Jones, 2017; Page & Chahboun, 2019; Shaheen, 2019). Anne, Gabriel, and Michael found recognition and a sense of purpose through a variety of campus organizations and roles; only Avi found his deepest connections through an internationally focused group. Throughout this study, participants leveraged their strengths to navigate their institutional contexts. When their self-actualization was unimpeded, participants made decisions about their academic, professional, and residential circumstances that, while sometimes challenging, led to personal growth and intrapersonal reflection. This was exemplified in Anne's pursuing a residential leadership role, Avi supporting a major campus event, Gabriel changing universities, and Michael's participation in multiple campus organizations. By participating in campus organizations and support roles, international students in this study found community, institutional connectedness, deeper connections with their social identities, and a greater sense of purpose and direction (He & Hutson, 2018; Horne et al., 2018; Jean-Francois, 2019; Tsevi, 2018; Wu et al., 2015). Further, participants selected mentors, friends, and professional contacts who exhibited interaction patterns aligned with an agency perspective indicated through perceived equitable mutual support.

Data indicated participants experienced varying degrees of vulnerability as well as limited support and agency early in their undergraduate careers often impacting their social identities. For Anne, Gabriel, and Michael, early negative experiences with staff, students, and faculty negatively impacted how they perceived and shared their identities. Even Anne who had studied in the United States prior to her undergraduate studies faced challenges related to establishing community, navigating institutional policies, being apart from family, and more (Wu et al., 2015). Over time, acculturative stress was mitigated for all participants by engaging with campus-based activities and establishing interpersonal connections and friendships on campus (Horne et al., 2018; Jean-Francois, 2019; Khanal & Gaulee, 2019; Tsevi, 2018). Participants also reported more positive associations with many of their salient social identities through these relationships (Abes et al., 2007; Graham-Bailey et al., 2019).

Limitations

As a qualitative study focused on the unique reflections of a small sample, data and findings from this study have limited transferability. Further research needs to be conducted to determine the degree to which these data are representative or generalizable in relation to other international students or alumni. Data from this study do not reflect experiences of international students who did not complete their degree program in the United States. Research involving students who pursued yet did not complete a degree in the United States may be of particular interest.

Implications for Practice

Student activities and support professionals can have an outsized impact on international students' institutional connectedness, social identities, and academic and professional pursuits (Anandavalli, 2021; Martirosyan et al., 2019). To support international students, these professionals might start from a position of active listening to better understand international students' goals, abilities, social identities, and potential challenges (Anandavalli, 2021; Jones, 2017; Page & Chahboun, 2019; Shaheen, 2019). International students may require more personalized support as an alternative to centering logistical concerns and homogenized programming (Fass-Holmes & Vaughn, 2015; Jean-Francois, 2019; Tsevi, 2018). While this may be challenging, there are several ways this can be achieved.

When developing policies or programming exclusive to international students, student activities and support professionals should include international student voices and perspectives from the outset (Burel et al., 2019; Madden-Dent et al., 2019). Without input from international students, programming may be developed that international students perceive as ineffective, unnecessary, redundant, or actively demotivating (Di Maria, 2020; Fass-Holmes & Vaughn, 2015; Madden-Dent et al., 2019; Rosenzweig & Meade, 2017). By including international students, HEIs can offer more effective, targeted programming for individual international students while limiting unnecessary resource expenditures.

To expand campus connectedness, ISS professionals can operate as the nexus for international student support efforts. At regular intervals, international students are required to engage with ISS professionals, most notably during matriculation (U. S. Department of Homeland Security, n.d.). ISS and other professionals could coordinate, developing methods for gathering voluntarily shared information on individual international students prior to scheduled meetings allowing for more targeted support and information sharing (Burel et al., 2019; Madden-Dent et al., 2019). Rather than focusing primarily on logistics, ISS professionals could engage with international students to better understand the opportunities they might need or prefer and share personalized information about campus activities and advising (Burel et al., 2019; Fass-Holmes & Vaughn, 2015; Jean-Francois, 2019; Madden-Dent et al., 2019). With relevant information, ISS and other staff could position themselves to readily offer personalized targeted support and recommendations to each international student.

Trustworthiness

For this study, a voluntary member checking process supported the credibility of the findings, allowing for greater assurance. Data were authentic and derived from participants while establishing greater equity between the participants and researchers (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Liu, 2020; Motulsky, 2021; Stahl & King, 2020). Dependability was achieved in this study through thorough analyses of each autobiographical statement and transcript (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Dependability, confirmability, and reflexivity were also supported through the researcher's notes present in the Impressionistic Record (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Conclusion

Within U.S. higher education, international students are an important source of diversity, cultural insight, and community growth. How HEI stakeholders discuss, support, and engage with international students actively reflects the values, culture, and goals of a given institution. Literature and data on international alumni are currently limited. However, by listening and amplifying their voices, researchers and practitioners can uncover opportunities for fostering community and connectedness for current and future international students.

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JCAPS

A STUDY OF A LIVING LEARNING COMMUNITY PROGRAM IN A MIDWEST UNIVERSITY: THROUGH A SENSEMAKING LENS

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Using a qualitative case study approach informed by sensemaking and sensegiving theories, student program leaders, and Living Learning Community (LLC) coordinators' perceptions of an LLC program in a first-year student residence hall at a mid-sized public university are presented. LLCs are staffed by a dedicated live-in student program leader and supported by an LLC coordinator connected to the academic college or student affairs department which serves as the LLC's thematic element. Findings indicated student program leaders had a strong sense of identity and purpose while LLC coordinators struggled to fully understand their role within the overall Housing and Residence Life (HRL) framework. Both groups shared frustration with logistical issues, lack of resident engagement and accountability, and communication. LLC programs could benefit from stronger coupling with LLC coordinator's home colleges or departments, clearly defined roles and expectations, and consistent multi-directional communication.

Introduction

Housing, meals, and custodial services were once the main priorities for university housing standards. Today, residence halls no longer simply provide housing, they are measures to enhance and monitor student social and learning experiences (Whitcher-Skinner et al., 2017). Residence halls are now viewed as integral to students' university experience. In other words, "these spaces function as communities that advance scholarship and character among their members" (Whitcher-Skinner et al., p. 1). Residence life has a critical role to play in not only determining overall student satisfaction, but with their social integration, academic success, and eventual degree completion.

A renewed focus on residence life can be seen in the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U, 2023) eleven standards known as high impact practices (HIPs). HIPs are curricular and co-curricular structures that employ high quality pedagogies and practices; they are widely tested teaching and learning practices with demonstrated benefits for college students. Learning communities are one example of a HIP, others include first-year seminars, capstone courses, internships, diversity and global learning, ePortfolios, and service-learning. Learning communities encourage students to more deeply examine the themes and concepts related to the subject matter they are studying (Inkelas & Soldner, 2011; Kuh, 2008). Learning communities can take different forms, but as a curriculum structure, students with common attributes, interests, or majors generally take two or more linked courses together as a group (Tinto, 2003).

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As a subset of the high impact practice of Learning Communities, residential Living Learning Communities (LLCs) have become a popular option to increase student retention and satisfaction (Bonet & Walters, 2016; Brower & Inkelas, 2010). LLCs are intentional groupings of students living together in a residence hall with shared academic and/or non-academic interests (Brower & Inkelas, 2010; Inkelas & Weisman, 2003; Luna & Gahagan, 2008). Most, but not all, LLCs focus on students in their first year of college, and they have benefited students who are most at risk of not completing, such as first generation, underrepresented minorities, and academically underprepared students (Inkelas et al., 2007). Documented positive student outcomes are higher GPA and overall increased academic achievement, elevated academic self-confidence, and a smoother transition to college (Brower & Inkelas, 2010; Caviglia-Harris, 2022; Inkelas et al., 2018; Stassen, 2003).

LLCs have three things in common intended to facilitate social interactions and assist in the transition to college life: (a) curriculum experiences, (b) social and intellectual engagement, and (c) shared responsibilities (Tinto, 2003). Constructing a curriculum experience is intended to promote shared knowledge among the learners. Involving students in social and intellectual programs allows them to get to know each other and bond. Shared responsibility leads to students becoming mutually dependent. Adding "living" to the learning communities allows students to combine housing with shared learning. Engagement is facilitated with ongoing interactions when students live in created communities with a shared content or thematic focus (Zhao & Kuh, 2004).

LLCs are commonly staffed with full-time university personnel who provide administrative oversight and supervise the student program leader who lives with and plans activities for the student members (Inkelas & Weisman, 2003). The many different forms, goals, and unrestricting design of LLCs give HRL professional staff the ability to tailor them specifically for their school (Wawrzynski & Jessup-Anger, 2010). However, despite their popularity and flexible options, LLCs can be too loosely designed with ambiguous goals and abstract purposes (Dunn & Dean, 2013). Thus, the strength of the LLC design, its flexibility and adaptability for the specific university context, can make implementation complex and challenging. Without intentional plans or full commitment and involvement from faculty and staff, authentic implementation may be difficult to achieve (Frazier & Eighmy, 2012). Furthermore, lacking a clearly defined or understood framework, LLCs may not produce the desired results university HRL personnel intend. An LLC with clearly defined program components and goals is more likely to result in successful student outcomes (Wawrzynski & Jessup-Anger, 2010). Moreover, much of the extant research focuses on the student experience and academic outcomes as well as normative expectations for how the LLC should function. Yet, how LLCs are structured and operate in practice has not been fully examined.

Our objectives are to (a) present findings from a qualitative case study of the implementation of LLCs in a residence hall at a mid-sized public university, (b) demonstrate how sensemaking and sensegiving theories were used to inform the findings, and (c) provide evidence-based research that can assist HRL practitioners who wish to implement and/or refine their university LLC programs. The overarching research question was how do LLC staff coordinators and student program leaders make sense of the LLC program?

Theoretical Framework: Sensemaking and Sensegiving

Sensemaking and sensegiving were used as a lens for interpreting how LLC coordinators and student program leaders expressed their perspectives about the practices of the LLC program at one university. Sensemaking is a well-established organizational theory that has been used to understand the social construction of education and other organizations (Astuto & Clark, 1986; Weick, 1979, 1995, 2001). Sensegiving occurs through the direction and cues provided by HRL leadership. Sensemaking involves the LLC coordinators and student program leaders continually placing their experience and practice within a frame of reference.

Weick (1995) illustrated sensemaking as being comprised of seven properties. *Identity construction* describes how people perceive themselves in their organization. Sensemaking is always *retrospective*, that is, individuals are looking back to make sense of what occurred. *Enactive of sensible environments* is the process of translating knowledge to actions. Sensemaking expresses an *ongoing* and *social process* whereby people continuously communicate and discuss ideas and thoughts, both individually and collectively. *Extraction of cues* assists organizational participants in deciding what information they should pay attention to and where to focus. Sensemaking is driven by *plausibility rather than accuracy***.** In other words, sensemaking "is not about truth and getting it right," (Weick et al., 2005, p. 415). Instead, it is about the continued telling of an emerging story so that it becomes more elaborate and convincing and therefore more difficult to criticize. The sensemaking process assists members with addressing uncertainty and ambiguity in their environment. Organizational changes often create sensemaking opportunities that drive organizational leaders and member expectations (Maitlis, 2005), which in this study was the introduction of LLCs to one of the residence halls.

Maitlis (2005) articulated a microanalysis of the sensemaking process and identified four critical forms that shape the characteristics of leaders and stakeholders' sensegiving. *Guided sensemaking* occurs when the level of sensegiving of leaders and stakeholders is high, meaning the sensemaking process was controlled and animated. Highly controlled sensegiving occurs in an organized, systematic fashion, with processes dominated by scheduled meetings, formal committees, and planned events. Leaders use their formal authority to organize occasions for sensegiving whereby issues are discussed through formal channels. Highly animated sensegiving occurs among stakeholders when there is an intense flow of information and stakeholders are actively engaged in shaping interpretations of events and issues. The outcomes of guided sensemaking are rich accounts and emerging consistent actions as leaders and stakeholders collectively make sense of the initiative.

When the process of sensemaking is animated but not controlled, the second form, *fragmented sensemaking***,** is produced. In the absence of controlled sensegiving, stakeholders are left to their own devices to make meaning of the initiative, which results in multiple narrow accounts and emergent series of inconsistent actions. Organizational sensemaking is *restricted* when the process of sensemaking is controlled and not animated. In this form of sensemaking, the result is a single, narrow understanding of the initiative, which then becomes difficult to change because stakeholders' understanding is so proscribed. The restricted form of sensemaking also limits outcomes to a planned set of actions. The last form is *minimal sensemaking*, which is shaped when the process of sensemaking is neither controlled nor animated. This form is associated with low levels of sensegiving from both leaders and stakeholders, who each wait on the other's

interpretation of the initiative. Figure 1 contains a graphic depiction of the four critical forms of sensemaking.

Figure 1
Maitlis' Four Forms of Organizational Sensemaking

High Leader Sensegiving	*Guided Organizational Sensemaking* Process Characteristics ● High animation ● High Control Outcomes ● Unitary, rich account ● Emergent series of consistent actions	*Restricted Organizational Sensemaking* Process Characteristics ● Low animation ● High Control Outcomes ● Unitary, narrow account ● One-time action or planned set of consistent actions
Low Leader Sensegiving	*Fragmented Organizational Sensemaking* Process Characteristics ● High animation ● Low Control Outcomes ● Multiple, narrow accounts ● Emergent series of inconsistent actions	*Minimal Organizational Sensemaking* Process Characteristics ● Low animation ● Low Control Outcomes ● Nominal account ● One-time, compromise action
	High Stakeholder Sensegiving	*Low Stakeholder Sensegiving*

NOTE: Adapted from Maitlis, S. (2005). The social processes of organizational sensemaking. *Academy of Management, 48*(1), 21-49. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2005.15993111

Framing the study with the sensemaking and sensegiving process helped us to understand and interpret how LLC coordinators and student program leaders made sense of their decisions, what factors influenced sensemaking, and how the findings could be used to further the strategic goals of the program (Degn, 2015).

Methodology

A qualitative case study design was employed to conduct the study, which took place during the 2017-18 academic year (Merriam, 2010; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Merriam defines a qualitative case study as an in-depth analysis of a bounded system which serves as the unit of analysis. In this

study, the bounded system was the LLC program at one mid-sized, Midwest university. At the time of the study, HRL professional staff was offering ten LLCs serving 300 first year students and were housed in the university's newly constructed residence hall. Seven LLCs were associated with academic colleges: Business, Education, Engineering, Women in Engineering, Health Professions, Honors, and Fine Arts. Three LLCs were affiliated with campus departments: Career Ready with the Office of Career Development, Recreation and Wellness with Campus Recreation, and Social Justice with the Office of Diversity and Inclusion. Data consisted of individual interviews and documents.

Through the process of purposeful sampling (Patton, 2014), we invited all 19 of the university professional staff LLC coordinators and student program leaders to participate in an interview, which allowed for an in-depth understanding of their perspectives. A total of 16 individuals participated in a personal interview, including all nine professional staff LLC coordinators who are housed in the sponsoring academic college or department and responsible for building the connection between the college/department and HRL. Seven of the 10 student program leaders also participated in an interview. Student program leaders served in RA-like roles with direct responsibility for LLC programming. They lived on the residence hall floors and were charged with building community, providing academic support and resources, and planning and implementing LLC specific programs. To ensure confidentiality, participants' names have been replaced with pseudonyms, which are included in Table 1.

Table 1
LLC Coordinator and Student Program Leader Pseudonyms

LLC Coordinator	Student Program Leader
Maria	Zachary
Camille	Ashley
Ava	Kristin
Beth	David
Joanne	Grace
Katrina	Sophie
Tracy	Sarah
Melinda	
Kevin	

Each interview took 45-60 minutes, was audio-recorded, and then transcribed verbatim to ensure accurate data. After transcription, the data were unitized by reading and breaking them down into smaller segments and entered into an Excel spreadsheet for the purpose of identifying codes and eventual themes (Meyer & Avery, 2009). Study data were then examined continually to facilitate analysis using the constant comparative method (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The systematic process of document analysis started with identifying and finding documents relevant to the study, which included student handbooks, position descriptions, marketing materials, and program assessment materials. All data gathered from the documents were

compared with interview transcripts and used to confirm or identify additional categories. The constant comparative method was used to integrate data from document sources and the interviews in order to identify study findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

By selecting a qualitative case study design, the research methods used to collect, analyze, make meaning of the data, and to present the data were informed by the use of established qualitative case study practices (Lapan et al., 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The methodology of the overall research design embedded strategies which include clearly outlined, systematic and consistent data collection and analysis procedures and the disclosure of researcher positionality. Furthermore, IRB approval was granted for this study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) outlined a framework of credibility, dependability, and transferability to ensure the trustworthiness of a study. This framework served as a standard for this study.

Credibility establishes the truth value or veracity of a study. Triangulation was one technique used in which different data sources and types were compared such as official websites, documents, and participants' interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Another technique used was member checking, which involved sending an individual transcript of interviews to each participant for their review, clarification, and to confirm the content of the transcript. Additionally, the LLC Coordinators and student program leaders were provided a summary of findings specific to their group for their review.

Dependability establishes the consistency of a study. We established an audit trail via the use of interview protocols and transcripts, document and artifact review protocols and an archive of documents reviewed, and finally a log of emails and other communication. We also compared the established findings back to the raw data to ensure the confirmability of the data collected throughout the audit trail. This allowed us to confirm the data were linked and useful, that is, the data were connected to the methodological procedures and evident to the raw data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Transferability ensures the study is applicable to other settings via thick, rich description of the phenomenon. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that for transferability to be achieved a study must first establish its credibility and dependability, as outlined above. It is then up to the reader to determine how the descriptive data might be used to inform their practice. The implications provided can also aid the reader in determining transferability (Creswell, 2015; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

In qualitative research, the author becomes the primary instrument for data collection, thus it is important to identify our positionality so the reader can understand the influences we brought to the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Both authors work in higher education, lived in shared housing during their college experience, including one year in a residence hall and in off-campus shared housing (sorority chapter house). The second author is a former LLC coordinator. Neither author serves in the capacity of the HRL department, however we were invited to conduct the study by HRL administration. Throughout the study we took steps to minimize our positionality with the goal of maintaining neutrality which helped to ensure the trustworthiness of the study.

Findings: Implementing LLCs

Putting the idea of LLCs into practice at the university has been fraught with both good efforts and complications related to how the LLCs are organized and structured. What was working along with issues and concerns participants identified when it came to implementing LLCs were often related to the roles and responsibilities of the people involved. These included the HRL staff, LLC coordinators, and student program leaders. Other issues raised that either facilitated or made implementation of LLCs difficult were the reporting structure and logistical issues. Each of these will be discussed in this section, with direct quotes from participants supporting the theme.

Student Program Leader and LLC Coordinator Roles and Responsibilities

Student program leader and LLC coordinator roles and relationships are critical to the successful implementation of the LLC. In this section, we talk about the how the individuals in these positions described their roles and responsibilities. Student program leaders clearly articulated their roles and responsibilities whereas the LLC coordinators were less clear regarding the understanding of their roles. The reporting structure was complicated and messy with student program leaders directly reporting to HRL but also required to closely collaborate with LLC coordinators who reported to their individual colleges or departments.

Student Program Leader Roles and Responsibilities

Student program leader job descriptions outlined in their Handbook were consistent with what students in those roles shared with us. Student program leaders also received three weeks of intensive training prior to assuming their duties, which further cemented their shared understanding. Student program leader roles and responsibilities came across clearly and consistently throughout the interviews. Common themes about their roles were building community, planning programming, and connecting residents with campus services and resources. For example, when asked what the job entails, student program leader David shared, “My main job description is programming and community building for the special interest group of the LLC.” Grace explained that she was repeatedly reminded, “your job is about community building.” Kristin described her role in these terms, that is, to plan “educational programs and social programs” and “making sure students are getting the resources that they need.” Zachary extended his definition further sharing, “I make sure that the students in the LLC are succeeding academically, they’re making connections in the engineering field, whether that be with other students or faculty or with outside connections within the engineering field.” This commonality in definition of roles and responsibilities was further supported in documents provided by HRL and LLC coordinators as they describe their roles in the next section.

LLC Coordinator Roles and Responsibilities

While documents provided by HRL professional staff included descriptions of the LLC coordinator role and responsibilities, it was not clear when these documents were created, whether they were ever distributed, or if LLC coordinators were aware of them. During interviews, LLC coordinators generally expressed being unsure about what it meant to be a “coordinator” and were unclear as to the parameters of their actual responsibilities. Most indicated being given little guidance about what the role would comprise. When asked what she was told about the role, LLC coordinator Ava responded, “At first not much, not much at all.” Nonetheless, most coordinators saw their role as working with the student program leaders and providing support as needed. David’s response was typical, “I'm the staff advisor… Just to really, just keep things in check and

make sure things are going well with the program." Katrina made a similar comment, "I just see myself as a person who they (student program leader) can turn to ask questions and ask for resources." Kevin shared, "I'm going to be more like a supervisor to our (student program leader), just to make sure that everything's going smoothy, going correctly just to make sure events, you know events are being planned." As will be seen in the next section, most LLC coordinators depended on the student program leaders to execute the planned programming.

LLC Coordinators as Advisors and Student Program Leaders as Executors

What became clear from both LLC coordinators and student program leaders is they saw the coordinators in an advisory-type role, and the student program leaders as the executors of the programs. This meant the student program leaders were given the major responsibilities for community building, student relationships, and engagement. As Melinda explained, "So my role as the coordinator really is to work with the student program leader," because "the student lives on the floor, he is the leader of those students." David made a similar observation, "The student program leader … should be the main person who's going to be in charge of the programming aspect, planning educational events. … And she's also going to be primarily involved with just interacting with the residents." LLC coordinators consistently shared they did not feel they were truly the coordinator, that the student program leader took on that role. The confusion about roles seemed to be exacerbated to some degree by having the people in each role report to different departments, which is explored in the next section.

Complicated Reporting Structure

The reporting structure among the individuals involved with supporting the LLCs was complicated and at times confusing. While the LLC coordinators reported to their academic colleges or departments, the student program leaders indicated they reported directly to HRL staff. They were hired and directly supervised by HRL professional staff. When asked who they go to if they have questions or concerns, student program leader Ashley responded:

> Really just my [HRL] supervisors. We have weekly one-on-ones with our boss so either you could like tell them everything there or you could just like call them. We always have like a pro staff person on duty if there's something we need to talk about.

The students seemed to agree overall that they reported to HRL staff insofar as job performance and for questions or concerns, although they met and made programming plans with their LLC coordinators.

While most student program leaders agreed on their working relationship and chain of command with each other, differences arose about who had the final say in LLC decisions. When asked about reporting procedures regarding communication, LLC coordinator Camille said, "It's depending on what the question and concern is. My experience with Housing in the past has been very messy. And the communication has not been the best." Ava summed it up best regarding the confusion around who the student program leader should communicate with regarding the LLC's activities, "There was a lot of miscommunication. … Our meetings were getting moved around all of the time… So there wasn't a good chain of command for that process… I think [student program leader] was getting instructions from too many people." Nevertheless, most LLC coordinators had limited communications with HRL professional staff, and the student program leaders were often put in the position of the go-between. The LLC coordinators then turned to their fellow coordinators or to their academic college or departments for information and clarification.

The LLC coordinators and student program leaders were expected to meet at least once a month to plan educational activities and social events. Beyond this required minimum meeting, LLC coordinators at times found it difficult to effectively communicate with their student program leader. LLC coordinator Joanne shared that her student program leader was "not particularly responsive to email." Joanne explained she emailed the student program leader, and "I have heard nothing. And that's not the first time that we have struggled a little bit in terms of that kind of thing." Effective communication did happen, however, as reported by the LLC coordinators. The most positive experience in communicating with each other seemed to happen when all interested parties could come together on a regular basis to discuss the day-to-day happenings of the LLC and plan future events.

Encountering Logistical Issues

Any time a new service is implemented in an organization, logistics will play a part. The LLC program at this university is no exception. In our data, we discovered issues involving the selection process of both students and student program leaders, LCC student expectations and accountability, and scheduling conflicts that interfered with LLC implementation. These issues are often behind the scenes but are nonetheless important to the successful implementation of an LLC program.

Selection Processes

For the LLC program to be created on a given campus, several people are identified to accomplish different tasks. Selections included coordinators for each LLC who represent their college or department, student program leaders, and student residents in the LLC through room selection process. Some logistical problems arose around these selection processes.

LLC coordinators were often "voluntold" about their participation in LLCs, that is, the responsibility for coordinating the LLC was added to an already long list of duties. Whereas the student program leaders had to apply for their positions and then were interviewed by HRL staff before being hired. Often, the LLC coordinator was not an integral part of the entire interview process and did not have a say in making the final decision in the hiring of their student program leader. For example, LLC coordinator Camille explained,

> I would say a very big frustration for probably all of the coordinators … is that we've asked over and over to be involved in that selection process because we're the ones who have to work with them to make this work. … Because not having that input in the final decision is just like "well why was I even involved in the process in the first place?" It's kind of like "well, you guys just wasted our time."

The lack of being involved consistently and not having any real input into hiring their student program leader were issues brought up by multiple LLC coordinators. None of the student program leaders mentioned any issues with the selection process into their positions.

LLC Student Selection and Room Assignment

Another logistical issue centered around how the students were chosen to be part of the LLC and assigning rooms to them. Many research participants indicated a frustration in students applying for LLCs for the sole purpose of obtaining desirable housing assignments in the new residence hall. Students in LLCs are given first choice in the room selection process, thereby ensuring they

get what they deem as the "good rooms." For example, coordinator Joanne said, "What I found out later was that some of them chose to be part of this LLC because they wanted housing space in [new residence hall] and so it was not a motive to be part of the LLC." This belief was also supported by coordinator Maria who said, "I would say at least three-quarters of our community selected the LLC because of the room and not because of the community."

Along with the room selection issue is the question of how the LLCs were marketed to the students. Maria went on to share, "I wouldn't say they know what they're signing up for, honestly. A lot of our parents signed them up for it." Desirable housing options are a serious consideration when applying to colleges. Many students were signing up for LLCs simply for the first choice in room assignments, which led to their minimal engagement in the LLC's programming.

LLC Student Expectations and Accountability

Because many students chose the LLC for reasons other than a desire to be part of a living learning community, they minimally participated in LLC programming. LLC coordinators and student program leaders expected that students should desire to participate in LLC events and activities since they signed up for the LLC. Nonetheless, students did not feel obligated to participate in anything LLC-related even after signing up. This created stress and frustration for those charged with implementing the LLC programming. Student program leader Sophie shared, "Participation on my floor is a challenge. It's not fully there." LLC coordinator Katrina further lamented, "I just want to show them that there are resources here on campus. so, you know, all I really would want them to do is just to show up."

Residents' unwillingness to fully participate in the LLC was attributed to students' motivation for choosing the LLC for choice housing or their parents signing them up without their knowledge. Lack of formal expectations and accountability allowed LLC residents to skirt around any expected participation in LLC programming. General expectations for student participation in the LLC are listed on the website, but no expectations are included in the LLC promotional materials provided for our review. Student program leaders consistently identified LLC member participation as something they would like to see change about their LLCs, as Sarah noted, "I want them to be involved." Concomitantly, there was no mechanism for holding students accountable for non-participation in LLC events and activities. LLC coordinator Maria told us, "If they don't participate, there's no penalty. So, we can plan events, and no one comes to them. And that makes it a little difficult." This year, LLC residents were required to pay a $25 program fee with their application, but as LLC coordinator Tracy noted, "still some students have not been to a single event. So that just makes me wonder what their intention was of being in a living learning community." Another coordinator, Beth noted "I wish they would be required to participate so much, because you know some don't participate hardly at all." Frustration about the lack of participation and lack of accountability was palpable among most LLC coordinators and student program leaders.

Event Scheduling

A college campus the size of this university has many activities going on at any given moment and trying to find a free time when a particular LLC could meet was an obstacle most student program leaders and some LLC coordinators encountered. Finding a common time for the LLC participants

to have regular meetings and events to get the students engaged was difficult, as student program leader Ashley shared, "I guess I just wish my residents were all free at the same time."

Scheduling was compounded by students' work schedules and class periods, as LLC coordinator Joanne told us, "I know scheduling for anything for students is a challenge, just by their class schedules and everything else." Maria explained the scheduling issue, "Some of the things in terms of timeframes for students and their availability didn't work, so that presented challenges in trying to coordinate schedules for everyone. Because it was like, 'we can't do anything until 9 pm at night.'" The issue of consistent schedules throughout the semester was an obstacle mentioned by multiple student program leaders and LLC coordinators. Moreover, student schedules changed throughout the semester and what worked early in the semester often did not work later in the semester.

Discussion

The HRL staff has the responsibility of being the chief sensegivers for the overall LLC initiative. As a result, LLC coordinators and student program leaders take cues from HRL personnel when constructing their identities in terms of their formal roles within the initiative. Using Weick's (1995) sensemaking theory as a guide, individuals will always strive to "make sense" of their environment and construct their personal identity within their social context. In an organization, leaders can use sensegiving to help this process. Figure 1 provides a graphic display of the four types of organizational sensemaking: Guided, Fragmented, Restricted, and Minimal, each of which came into play in this case study (Maitlis, 2005).

Fragmented Sensemaking Occurred Among LLC Coordinators

LLC coordinators reside in the Fragmented Sensemaking quadrant, which results in a multitude of individualized accounts, a lack of shared meaning, and inconsistent action. An inclination for direction from HRL staff in terms of mission, common purpose, more uniform practices, and effective communication were desired. Moreover, when an LLC coordinator did not receive direction from HRL staff, they often turned to their college or department administrator or to one another for cues on how to enact their role. LLC coordinators felt a stronger connection to their individual college or department than to the overall initiative. LLC coordinator was not their primary identity and most did not see themselves as coordinators at all. The coordinator role was thrust on them and added to an already large menu of responsibilities to the college or department. They were essentially outsiders to the HRL staff and student program leader work arrangement and were trying to make sense of a lot of information over which they had little control.

Restricted Sensemaking Occurred Among Student Program Leaders

Student program leaders fell in the Restricted sensemaking quadrant, which results in a common narrative and consistent actions among them. Unitary sensemaking occurred for student program leaders specific to their identity construction related to their role of building community within the LLCs, connecting students with resources, and providing programming efforts for members. This mantra is the result of consistent messaging provided by the HRL staff through meetings and training. It further reinforces that the student program leaders see themselves as a part of the HRL staff team and have clear loyalties to the HRL department over and above the LLC's college or department. While restricted sensemaking might sound appealing due to the consistency of the

message, lack of animation on the part of the student program leaders could lead to difficulties with adapting to new circumstances as the LLCs evolve and change over time. Restricted sensemaking also does not encourage two-way communication with student program leaders or for them to make sense with HRL staff, instead they are merely recipients of the message.

Minimal Sensemaking at the LLC Program Level

At the LLC program level, the initiative is operating in the Minimal Organizational Sensemaking quadrant. Ineffective communication, ongoing logistical issues, and lack of student engagement resulted in one-time actions that were responsive in nature. Responses only occur when external issues triggered a necessary response. For example, the prevalent perception that students joined the LLC for preferable housing options knowing they would have no repercussions for lack of engagement. These responses are common when logistical issues or a lack of understanding on how to respond occur. This resulted in stakeholders enacting plausible responses in each situation rather than what HRL staff might have wanted to take place.

Implications for Practice

These implications for practice use the sensemaking-sensegiving framework to outline specific strategies for creating effective LLC programs. Discussed in this section are the need to implement a system of accountability, create a unifying curriculum, and then steps to move toward guided sensemaking.

Develop and Implement a System of Accountability

University leaders, in particular HRL professionals need to develop and implement a system of accountability across many different aspects of an overall LLC program. Doing so will help provide clearer expectations for all stakeholders (Keup, 2013; Kuh, 2008). Student learning outcomes were not clearly articulated nor were expectations for student engagement in the LLC. Thus, there is a need for those administrators responsible for the LLCs to establish and enforce student resident participation and engagement. Moreover, university HRL staff should create a system for the housing application and assignment process, dissemination of roster information, and hiring of student program leaders.

Findings related to students' choice in engagement within the LLC communities are another area for HRL staff to be mindful of regarding student autonomy and development, particularly as this generation of students, known as Generation Z (students born between 1995 and 2015[1]) have been characterized as being vastly different from previous generations (Seemiller & Grace, 2015). Gen Z college students tend to engage in constant communication with their parents, often using multiple forms of communication to stay connected to their family units (Seemiller & Grace, 2015; Trevino, 2018). Furthermore, many Gen Z parents "step in to minimize their children's failure. In doing so, Gen Z children miss some of life's biggest learning moments; as a result, they are not prone to demonstrate resilience" (Zarra, 2017, p. 1). One common form of Gen Z parents is the "helicopter-bulldozer" parents that are heavily involved in their children's lives, and in this case, making the decision for their young adult to participate in the LLC program. This is consistent with Gen Z parents being "heavy-handed in the selection of their children's teachers, classes, clubs, and

[1] There is not agreement among scholars regarding the exact date range that comprises Generation Z.

sports" (Zarra, 2017, p. 5). It is important to remember that this form of parenting has been present in all generations, however with the increase in technology, constant communication is more prevalent. One approach might be for HRL staff to create parent or family communication specific to student accountability and expectations for engagement in an LLC community.

Create Unifying Curriculum or Theme

Another implication for strengthening LLCs is creating a unifying curriculum or theme that is adopted LLC wide (Keup, 2013; Lenning & Ebbers, 1999; Lenning et al., 2013; Love & Tokuno, 1999). Doing so could provide a framework for LLC cross-collaboration, promote student engagement, serve as a guide toward articulating a universal purpose for the LLCs, and create a basis for training. LLCs where students have a shared academic interest and a common curricular experience are more likely to retain students after the first year (Purdie & Rosser, 2011). An option is a required orientation or first year seminar for the LLC members during the Fall semester, which could lead to greater motivation and commitment on the students' part, as they would not be able to opt out of the course or manipulate the system to their advantage. Moreover, a semester long orientation for LLC students has been shown to improve retention and graduation rates (Cambridge-Williams et al., 2013).

Moving Toward Guided Sensemaking

The first step in moving an LLC toward a guided state of sensemaking would be for university administrators in both Student Affairs and Academic Affairs divisions to clearly define the mission and purpose of their LLCs, including student learning outcomes (Tinto, 2003; Waiwaiole et al., 2016). Guided sensemaking requires Student Affairs and Academic Affairs leaders to continuously construct and promote understandings and explanations of processes and events (Maitlis, 2005). Academic Affairs and Student Affairs divisions have historically operated in separate spheres with delineated parameters of responsibility. Effective LLCs require a collaborative effort across these often-siloed divisions. Some steps to consider would be striving to define roles at all levels, working toward consistent multidirectional communication, and streamlining the reporting structure. These LLCs would benefit from tighter linkages among and between the LLC home college or campus department, HRL professional staff, and student program leaders to ensure resident learning outcomes are achieved.

University HRL administrators need to consider how LLC coordinators and student program leaders are formally involved within the program (Keup, 2013). The student program leaders are currently the linchpin in overall program implementation and resident engagement and understood their roles and responsibilities, although their sensemaking was restricted. However, without clear expectations or job descriptions, the LLC coordinators varied in their commitment and hands-on work in the LLCs, with their fragmented sensemaking seeing that as the student program leader's responsibility. University HRL staff should consider how the LLC coordinators are selected, what their job duties consist of, what an appropriate term of service might be, and how LLC coordinators are compensated, whether financially or through a reduced workload. These efforts could move an LLC program toward the desired guided state of sensemaking.

Universities are typically large, complex systems with divisions, units, and departments that tend to operate in isolation of each other. Thus, guided sensemaking will require university HRL administrators to engage in high levels of sensegiving with both the LLC coordinators and student

program leaders, in which dialogue and discussion are multidirectional. All stakeholders are involved and actively engaged in shaping interpretations of the meaning of the LLC program with the goal of developing shared understanding.

Conclusion

The findings from this study contribute to a deeper understanding of how LLCs function beyond what is articulated on an organizational chart or in written policies or procedures. This case illustrates how the sensemaking of good intentions and plans for the LLC was fragmented or restricted due to minimal sensegiving, which made implementation difficult. Because the sensegiving for implementing the LLC was often minimal and ambiguous (e.g. job descriptions, assignment of residents to the LLC, expectations for student participation), LLC coordinators and student program leaders made sense of the LLC program in different ways. Student program leaders had a better, albeit restricted, understanding of the LLC program whereas LLC coordinators sensemaking was fragmented, which in both cases resulted in confusion and frustration. Although organizational sensemaking is a theoretical construct, HRL professionals can use the forms of sensegiving to understand what might be happening in their programs and work toward achieving guided sensemaking.

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JCAPS

ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF AN ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE PROGRAM ON COLLEGE STUDENTS IN ARTS, SOCIAL SCIENCE AND STEM FIELDS

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This study[1] examines the impact of Artist-in-Residence (AiR) programs on college students' creative behaviors. By surveying undergraduates, we found that art majors, compared to nonmajors, exhibited greater intentions to engage in creative behaviors following interactions with the AiR. These students also felt more social pressure to be creative, valued leadership for creativity, and identified professional behaviors influenced by AiR interactions. Participants reported several areas where the AiR is helpful, such as understanding how to create artwork that makes difficult topics accessible to the public. This study addresses a literature gap by documenting how an AiR program affects college students and found multiple significant positive impacts on creative behaviors and intentions. These beyond-the-classroom experiences highlight the importance of campus activities in connecting and engaging students. The study underscores the significance of intentional participation and sustained interactions in promoting personal development and a supportive university environment. Limitations and future research are discussed.

[1]This article is based on the research project "Letting the AiR Out: Assessing the Impact of an Artist-in-Residence Program on College Students in Arts, Social Science and STEM fields" (PI: Dr. Elizabeth Payne Tofte). The project was supported by an award from the *Research: Art Works* program at the National Endowment for the Arts: Grant# 1891800-38-22, from the pilot "Impact on Students Cognitive Behaviors from an Artist-in-Residence (AiR) Program in Higher Education: Baseline Data for the 2020 National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Research: Art Works application" (PI: Dr. Pat Crawford).

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Introduction and Literature Review

This brief literature review begins by emphasizing recent attempts to define creativity. The primary focus on preschool and later phases of life indicates a research gap in the college years. The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) identified the need to bring the arts into K-12 classrooms since the 1960s. Artist-in-Residence (AiR) programs were introduced as a pedagogical method to enhance creative cognition in STEAM college students starting in the late1980s. Efforts to assess the influence of the arts on students' cognitive development began in the early 2000s.

Creativity: Recent Attempts to Redefine a Notion Eluding a Universal Definition

One of the challenges facing the scholarship around creativity is the lack of a unified and universally accepted definition. In 2012, *Creativity Research Journal* dedicated its first issue to define creativity from multiple perspectives. Among the contributors, Runco and Jaeger (2012) try to bring back studies from the 1930s by claiming that creativity involves "originality" (referring to something that is "unusual, novel, or unique") and must be paired up with "effectiveness", which is defined as "usefulness, fit, or appropriateness" (p. 92). Both originality and effectiveness need to be present, for something to be defined as creative. In the same year, Batey (2012) referred to a previous 2006 study co-authored with Furnham, lamenting the "lack of a clear and widely accepted definition for creativity, which, in turn, has impeded efforts to measure the construct" (p.55); against the confusion within the many definitions proposed over the years, Batey offered "a novel heuristic framework with which to understand how creativity may be assessed," aiming to integrate different perspectives (p.55). Batey claims that the predominant definition of creativity as "originality and utility" is a Western construct that originated as divine intervention in the Genesis, and then progressively morphed into the fruit of human achievement (think about Humanism, which informed most of the Renaissance and subsequent eras); such definition contrasts with the notion, predominant in Eastern culture, of creativity as "self-growth" (p.56). An understanding of creativity as the achievement of the human genius under divine intervention (think of Michelangelo) makes framing the concept in more specific terms all the more elusive. Batey (2012) also surveyed several studies in psychology since the second half of the XX century, which focused on personality, or on problem-solving, or in the context that promotes creativity (p.56). Batey added that most of the consensus has coalesced around the identification of creativity as involving the "new and useful" (p.56), as well as on four conditions that enable creative behaviors, which Batey illustrates in his essay by using a three-dimensional diagram. This expansion of the notion of creativity, to which Batey refers, was first theorized by Mel Rhodes in an essay published in 1961, referring to four areas as "the 4Ps of creativity":

> One of these strands pertains essentially to the person as a human being. Another strand pertains to the mental processes that are operative in creating ideas. A third strand pertains to the influence of the ecological press on the person and upon his mental processes. And the fourth strand pertains to ideas. Ideas are usually expressed in the form of either language or craft and this is what we call product. Hereafter, I shall refer to these strands as the four P's of creativity, i.e., (1) person, (2) process, (3) press, (4) products (Rhodes, 1961, p.307).

A review of the available research and literature on creativity reveals a primary focus on creativity development on preschool groups (Dere, 2019) and in a later phase of life (Alpaugh et al., 1982;

Simonton, 1990; Marsiske & Willis, 1995; Hickson & Housley, 1997; Haanstra,1999; Edelson, 1999; Sierpina & Cole, 2004; Chacur et al., 2022). This exploratory research fills a gap in knowledge at the higher education level by focusing on the college experience through the examination of the relationship between students' everyday creative behaviors and interactions with an AiR program in higher education. When creativity is seen through the lens of student engagement in campus activities, it becomes evident that fostering creativity in higher education requires a holistic approach. By integrating out-of-the classroom experiences that contribute to students' personal development and by encouraging students from all majors to become more vested in their education through participation, higher education institutions can create an environment that not only nurtures creativity but also supports the overall growth and well-being of students.

The Introduction of Arts and Artist-in-Residence (AiR) Programs as Educational Tools into the Classroom

In the 1960s, with a baby boom generation increasingly hungrier for culture and education (Bauerlein & Grantham, 2009, p. 10), the newly founded National Endowment for the Arts identified the need to bring the arts into classrooms from kindergarten through high school (K-12), with a focus on "the effectiveness of the arts as an educational tool" (Sautter, 1994, p. 434).

During the 1970s, as education enrollments expanded and the endowment budget for Artists in the Schools increased, NEA "sent more than 300 artists into elementary and secondary schools in 31 states" (Bauerlein & Grantham, 2009, p. 36). However, the overall impact on students was limited. In 1977, Peter Lipman-Wulf lamented that "the importance of art in primary and secondary schools is stressed, but how to go about it is treated very vaguely" (Lipman-Wulf, 1977, p. 46). Rather than having students observe an artist at work, Lipman-Wulf introduced a system of pedagogical interactions between the artist, students, and teachers, thus fostering a more engaging learning environment.

More recently, Artist-in-Residence (AiR) programs have garnered growing interest across the STEAM disciplines (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics) as a pedagogical method to enhance students' creative cognition. In 1988, Pennsylvania State University College of Engineering introduced an AiR program titled "Interdisciplinary Projects in Art and Technology," open to seniors in engineering and the visual arts. The aim was to help engineering students grow their awareness of the impacts technology has on individuals and societies based on the products that they produce (Mathews et al., 1990, pp. 229).

During the 1990s, awareness grew regarding the limitations of prior descriptive assessment measures in the AiR programs, especially when correlating the arts and student learning through discovery, integration, or application. It is interesting to note that this concept paralleled the 1990 publication of Boyer's theory of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). Bumgarter wrote in 1994, that, "even the most fundamental questions about the outcomes associated with the residency program have never been adequately addressed-either by the National Endowment for the Arts or by the arts education community" (Bumgarter, 1994, n.p.), including how students benefit and what they learn from the AiR programs. Sautter (1994) observes that "This body of research does not demonstrate firm, cause-and-effect conclusions about the effectiveness of the

arts in stimulating learning. Indeed, not enough questions have been asked and not enough research data have been collected" (p. 435).

In the early 2000s, NEA partnered with the U.S. Department of Education (DoE) and other entities to sponsor two critical reports issued by the Arts Education Partnership (AEP), to assess the influence of the arts in students' cognitive development in K-12 education: *Critical Links: Learning in the Arts and Student Academic and Social Development*, 2002, and *Critical Evidence: How the ARTS Benefit Student Achievement*, 2005 (Bauerlein & Grantham, 2009, p. 122). In particular, the 2002 study focused on helping K-12 students learn cognitive and creative thinking skills through a wide variety of arts including dance, poetry, theater and the visual arts. The study found that "artistically talented students engaged in more self-regulatory behaviors during classes in which the arts were integrated into the lesson (Deasy, 2002 p. 64), but suggested a need to define more specifically the concept of "arts integration program" (Deasy, 2002, p. 65). Data provided in the 2006 study by Ruppert correlates the number of years of arts courses with a steady increase in verbal and math SAT scores (Ruppert, 2006, p. 9). Ruppert claims that "children's ability to draw inferences about artwork transferred to their reasoning about images in science" (Ruppert, 2006, p. 13), thus underscoring the positive impact that exposure to the arts has on the learners' intellectual development in other fields.

In the 2010s, the lens of cognitive psychology was used to examine the impact of AiR programs. Sanders (2014) studied a 2011-2013 AiR established by the Corcoran Gallery of Art within an after-school art program. He found a correlation with the development of life skills in students, such as "critical thinking, collaboration, and peer-interaction," and adds that "After-school art programs provide an environment suited for embracing these skills that are commonly outweighed by the need to raise test scores in traditional public school" (Sanders, 2014, p. 3).

Methods

The Goals of This 2022 NEA-Sponsored Study

Our 2022 NEA-sponsored exploratory study aimed at investigating college students' enhanced creative behaviors following participation in the Stuart Artist-in-Residence program, hosted by the School of Design at our institution. Each year, one artist is selected from a national pool of applicants to be in residence during the month of September and make art at the Ritz Gallery, located in the visual arts building. During this period, the artist interacts with students through various forms that include a public lecture, invited class reviews, daily studio hours, and an open studio event at the end of the AiR residency.

Our team combined the use of Batey's Biographical Inventory of Creative Behaviors (BICB) and Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) within an interdisciplinary research framework. This approach merged methods from theories of creativity, social sciences, and Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), extracting both qualitative and quantitative data. The goal was to provide a comprehensive analysis of the AiR program's impact on STEAM students by measuring students' self-reported awareness of creative behaviors and their intentions to engage in these behaviors.

This study included undergraduate students from science, social science, and art disciplines. We have added social science students to further enhance the experiment by Furnham et. al., in the UK

(2011), which was limited to art and science students. By taking on a broader approach, we aim to build on previous research and offer new insights into the role of interdisciplinary on-campus interactions in fostering creativity, thus filling the identified knowledge gap on the impact of AiR within higher education.

Batey's Biographical Inventory of Creative Behaviors (BICB)

In 2007, following his Doctoral dissertation, Mark Batey formulated the Biographical Inventory of Creative Behaviors (BIBC). This inventory consists of 34 selected behaviors: some of them align with a general understanding of creativity, like writing a novel or making a sculpture; some others, such as organizing an event, are not commonly perceived as creative, but they produce outcomes whose processes require a deeper integration of creativity with soft skills, such as leadership, communication, organization, and problem-solving. The criteria adopted to select these specific behaviors among innumerable possibilities remain unclear in current scholarship; however, the inventory itself has been tested for reliability with successful outcomes by Silvia et al. in 2021. In general, "self-report assessments, such as rating scales and behavior checklist, to measure engagement in everyday creativity," can potentially be less accurate, but they are applicable to numerous populations (Silvia et al., 2021, n.p.). The authors identified large umbrella themes within Batey's inventory activities related to creativity in writing and in the visual arts, "intellectual and scientific activities," and "interpersonal activities," which include leadership. (Silvia et al., 2021, n.p.). Batey's BICB was chosen for this study because it limits the measurement of creative behaviors to activities done within the last 12-month period. This approach is more accurate for testing a smaller record of accomplishments from undergraduate students, who are forming behavioral habits, as opposed to other scales that focus on creative accomplishments over a lifetime. Dollinger's CBI Creative Behavior Inventory is limited to activities of arts and crafts nature (Silvia et al., 2021), making it suitable only for studio art students.

Batey illustrated Rhode's 4Ps heuristic framework to measure creativity by considering three levels of approach: 1) The level "at which creativity may be measured": individual, team, organization, culture. 2) The "facet of creativity": trait (person), process, press (environmental context), product; 3) The measurement that is used, whether objective (hard data from output), subjective (individual's or team's self-perception), or other ratings such as cultural (involving experts in assessing the value of a culture's creativity) (Batey, 2012, pp. 59-60).

Our study considers the subjective individual level of students' self-rating as the approach to measure the process facet of creativity through those actions listed in Batey's 2007 Biographical inventory of Creative Behaviors. This approach emphasizes the AiR as a campus activity that provides opportunities for experiences beyond the classroom for majors within and outside of the visual arts. Students can choose their level of investment in the university experience. The sustained and shared interactions within a creative environment foster personal meaning-making, engagement, and personal growth.

Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

Scholars have found that an individual's "level of intrinsic motivation" (Choi 2012, p. 682), which includes finding "opportunities for improvement", or "willingness to try risky options", and confidence in one's ability to achieve a goal, defined by Choi as "self-efficacy" (p. 683), enables

them to react more favorably to "creativity-enhancing contextual factors" (p. 683). In this study, these factors correspond to the Stuart Artist-in-Residence program. Choi used the TPB-Theory of Planned Behavior to explain the correlation between creative behavior and context, which in our case corresponds to our students vs. the artist-in-residence program.

The TPB or Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1985) is a widely used model to predict people's behavior based on multiple factors. It is used by health professionals to predict a person's likelihood of texting while driving, engaging in pro-environmental behavior, or adhering to a prescription regimen. The theory assumes that a person's behavior is correlated to their intentions to engage in the behavior. Intentions can be traced back to the person's attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms about the behavior, and perceived behavioral control.

According to Ajzen (2002), the combination of "attitude toward the behavior," (attitudes) beliefs about other people's expectations ("subjective norm") and perceptions about their ability to control their engagement in the target behavior ("perceived behavioral control") shape the individual's intention to engage in a behavior. In this way, intentions to engage in a target behavior can precede the target behavior (p. 665).

In August 2022, the research team prepared and uploaded Batey's 34 questions, which in the pilot study were administered on paper, into QuestionPro, to be accessed online by the student participants. Several classes were identified as part of the study and consensus from the respective course instructors was sought. These classes included music, studio art, design, biology, psychology, math, and civil engineering. However, most of these were general education classes, therefore including students from any majors. For this reason, it made more sense to look at the demographic data and categorize students by major. The total number of students surveyed in the pre-phase was 390, and 309 in the post-phase.

The Batey survey asks about having engaged in creative behaviors within the past twelve months; therefore, the instrument was used to measure all the involved students' self-perception of creative behaviors prior to the intervention of the AiR, irrespective of their choice on whether or not to become engaged in interactions with the artist in the following weeks of the AiR program. In addition to asking individuals to self-report their creative behaviors using the BICB, we have examined people's intentions to engage in creative behavior.

Francis et al. (2004) suggest the target behavior should be defined with careful consideration of "its Target, Action, Context, and Time (TACT)" (p. 8). The overarching goal for the NEA-sponsored AiR study was to gauge students' intention to engage in behaviors considered creative in the three months following interactions with the AiR. The outcome for the NEA AiR grant will be "In the next 3 months, I intend to engage in behaviors that are considered creative." In this example, the Target is the required student, the Action is increased creative behavior, the Context is the AiR program exposure (or control), and the Time is the next 3 months following interactions with the Artist-in-Residence. For the outcome above the following items would measure intentions, attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. The contextual limitations of this study will be discussed in the appropriate section.

In all cases, participants responded to questions based on the theory of planned behavior on a scale from 1 to 7. Following best practices for survey construction to limit "lazy" responding, we varied the judgment associated with the ends of the scale. For example, for some questions, a response of "1" indicated strong agreement and "7" indicated strong disagreement. Finally, participants' responses were re-coded so that higher numbers always represented more positive attitudes, higher intentions, greater perceived subjective norms, and behavioral control.

To measure attitudes toward engaging in the target behavior we asked participants to respond to the question: "Increasing my creative behaviors in the next three months is..." harmful (1) to beneficial (7), good (1) to bad (7), pleasant for me (1) to unpleasant for me (7), worthless (1) to useful (7). To measure intentions, we asked participants to respond to three similar questions (e.g., "I expect to engage in behaviors that are considered creative in the next 3 months."). To measure perceived social norms, participants responded to three similar questions (e.g., "It is expected of me that I increase my creative behaviors in the next 3 months."). To measure perceived behavioral control, participants responded to four questions in total, made up by two questions to evaluate self-efficacy (e.g., "I am confident that I could increase my creative behaviors in the next 3 months.") and two questions to evaluate controllability ("Whether I increase my creative behaviors in the next three months is entirely up to me"). The team chose to set the timeline for measuring self-reported future interactions to three months, before the winter break started and students would disperse. Both questionnaires were submitted to the students in the classroom setting electronically through QuestionPro as a pre-test before their interactions with AiR (planned during the period of September 6-30, 2022), and then as a post-test in December (see Table 1).

Results and Discussion

By using participants' self-reported academic majors, we categorized students into a Major Condition consisting of an Arts group (e.g., Graphic Design & Studio Art), a Social Sciences group (Psychology, Education) and a STEM (Animal Science, Exercise Science, Nursing) group. Note, although Music Education, English, and Architecture could reasonably be considered "Arts" majors, they were not included as such here because the Artist-in-Residence program was more so targeting studio arts majors. Students in graphic design and studio arts had the most contact with the Artist-in-Residence.

Participants also reported several demographic characteristics regarding their gender identity, race, academic year, and first-generation college student status Participants in the final sample consisted of 68.8% female gender identity, 28.3% male, and 1.5% gender non-conforming. Options for "different gender identity and those preferring not to say constituted less than 1%. Nearly 90% of the sample reported Caucasian or white racial/ethnic identity. The remaining 10% of the sample reported Hispanic or Latino (2.4%), Asian (2.4%), African American or black (2.0%), Multiracial (2.0%), American Indian or Alaska Native (1.0%), and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, Other, or preferred not to say (0.5%, 0.5%, and 0.5% respectively). The majority of students in the final sample were freshman (55.1%) followed by sophomore, junior, senior and other (20.0%, 12.7%, 9.8%, and 2.0% respectively). Finally, 11.7% of the sample reported being a first-generation college student.

We employed a mixed randomized repeated-measures research design to assess the impact of the Artist-in-Resident program. The independent variables in this research design were students' Major Condition (Arts, Social Sciences, or STEM) and the Time Period participants responded to the survey (Pre or Post)—either before or after their potential interactions with the AiR. Survey responses encompassing Batey's Multiple dependent variables were assessed.

Comparisons between the Arts, Social Sciences, and STEM groups were robust. In the final analysis, we examined responses from 193 individuals (n = 48 in the Arts condition, n = 73 in the Social Sciences condition, and n = 68 in the STEM condition). Using analysis of variance (ANOVA) statistical procedures, several effects that are important to the research questions were uncovered, leading to multiple conclusions about the impact of the arts curriculum during one semester (Fall 2022). With the current research design and analysis, three types of statistical effects can be evaluated. The first statistical effect is a *main effect* of Major Condition. Related to this main effect, the analysis reveals whether there were differences in Major Condition on the BICB or TPB survey questions regardless of Time Period. The second statistical effect is a *main effect* of Time Period. Here, the analysis reveals any differences on the BICB or TPB survey questions regardless of Major Condition. The third and most important statistical effect is the *interaction effect* between Major Condition and Time Period. Statistical interactions consider the simultaneous effect of Major Condition and Time Period. Statistical interactions in this study reveal whether the Artist-in-Residence program had an impact on the students that had the most contact with the artist. In other words, significant interaction effects reveal whether the Artist-in-Residence intervention was successful in encouraging more creative behaviors among respondents.

Results are presented below in the order of Theory of Planned Behavior, Batey's Inventory of Creative Behaviors, changes in conceptions about what creativity involves, and professional behaviors. Given the research was designed to measure changes in intentions, attitudes, behaviors, etc. from before the AiR events to after the AiR events, we devote special attention to pre- and post-survey responses in addition to differences between groups.

Theory of Planned Behavior

Analysis of the results for the theory of planned behavior questions reveal a significant *main effect* of Major condition on intentions to engage in creative behaviors in the next 3 months. This means there are differences between students based on their academic major ($F(2, 186) = 17.71$, $p = .007$, $\eta^2_p = .16$) regardless of the Time Period the responses were given. Follow-up post-hoc tests reveal that participants in the Arts Major Condition have significantly greater intentions to engage in creative behaviors overall ($p < .001$). There is also a significant main effect of Time Period whereby participants' intentions to engage in creative activities significantly decrease, albeit slightly, from pre- to post-survey ($F(1, 186) = 7.38$, $p = .007$, $\eta^2_p = .04$). The *interaction effect* is not significant.

For attitudes, there was a significant *interaction effect.* Specifically, respondents from in the Arts Major Condition have more positive attitudes about engaging in creative behaviors on the post-test survey compared to the pre-test survey ($F(2, 184) = 4.73$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2_p = .049$). In contrast, respondents in the Social Sciences and STEM Major Conditions have more negative attitudes about engaging in creative behaviors at post-test compared to pre-test surveys.

In the area of perceived subjective norms, participants in the Arts condition feel significantly more social pressure to engage in creative behaviors compared to the other participant groups ($F(2, 182) = 15.63$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .147$). The *main effect* of Time Period and *interaction effect* are not statistically significant. Lastly, the *main effects* of Major Condition and Time period and the *interaction* effect are not statistically significant in the area of perceived behavioral control.

Batey's Inventory of Creative Behavior (BICB)

The results indicated that, on average, participants in this study report engaging in approximately 8 of the 34 creative behaviors included on the BICB at both pre-test ($M = 7.9$, $SD = 5.63$) and post-test ($M = 7.7$, $SD = 5.94$). Overall, participants in the Arts Major Condition endorse significantly more creative behaviors, approximately 10 out of 34 creative behaviors, compared to the other participant groups ($F(2, 187) = 4.59$, $p = .011$, $\eta^2_p = .047$). However, there are minimal changes over time, specifically the *main effect* of Time Period and the *interaction effect* are not significant.

What is Involved in Creativity?

Commonly accepted definitions of creativity include characteristics such as originality and usefulness. In this study, we explored additional descriptive characteristics that students may endorse as being important for creative behaviors. Not only did we ask participants to indicate to what extent originality and problem-solving were involved in creativity, we also asked participants to indicate the extent to which mentorship, imitation, research, iterations, and other facets were involved in creativity. Because of the pre- and post-survey research design, we also examined change over time.

Responses from participants in the Arts condition indicated a significant positive change about leadership and imitation. Specifically, a significant interaction ($F(2, 179) = 5.09$, $p = .007$, $\eta^2_p = .054$). Follow-up post-hoc tests reveal that participants in the Arts condition endorse leadership as being more important for creativity from pre- to post-survey whereas participants with Social Science majors decrease and participants with STEM majors increase minimally. The value that art students place on leadership as part of creativity is an encouraging result of the AiR interactions tested in this study: it is a sign of art students' awareness of a crucial life skill, which carries positive repercussions in students' lives beyond the art major and corroborates the aforementioned correlation made by Sanders between extracurricular art programs and the development of soft skills.

The connection between creativity and leadership has been revealed by Guo, Gonzales, and Dilley (2016) through extensive literature review. The key findings point at the vital role creative thinking plays in developing effective leadership that enables complex problem-solving and opportunity identification as necessary skills to compete and thrive in an uncertain and ever-changing world (pp.127-128). Secondly, participants' responses to the questions about the extent to which imitation is involved in creativity reveal an interesting pattern of data—all three statistical effects are significant. Overall, participants believe that imitation was more involved in creativity from pre- to post-survey ($F(2, 175) = 5.24$, $p = .02$, $\eta^2_p = .029$) and Art major participants in particular believe that imitation was involved in creativity ($F(2, 178) = 3.19$, $p = .04$, $\eta^2p = .035$). There is also a significant interaction such that participants with Arts and STEM majors believe that imitation is more involved in creativity from pre- to post-survey and participants with Social

Science majors believe imitation is less involved from pre- to post-survey ($F(2, 178) = 3.68$, $p = .03$, $\eta^2_p = .040$).

Interestingly, imitation in the context of the AiR Ali Hval's work was clearly present when the Graphic Design/Studio Art Club leadership planned and executed an "Ali Hval Day," where students engaged in creative behaviors reminiscent of the Artist-in-Residence's work. Specifically, in March one of the co-authors saw those twenty students, who were engaged with the AiR, gathering on Friday nights to make clay sculptures in the style of the AiR Ali Hval. In an email communication months later, a student explained that the executive team of the AIGA local chapter organized four events over one month, where the AiR work was presented and then displayed on the walls, while students made ceramics work, some inspired by the AiR and some influenced by their own style. The student, a studio art major, felt that the visit of the AiR had an influence in their artistic direction (email communication to NEA grant PI and co-author, July 4, 2023). A largely student-run event series inspired by an AiR demonstrates the program's ability to nurture creative intentions extending several months following the actual AiR visit on campus. Differently than the AiR program, which is led by faculty, the AIGA event was conceptualized and run by students, thus empowering participants to take ownership of their involvement. The sustained interactions during the AiR program with Ali Hval created experiences for further personal growth: the students' choice of displaying her art throughout the duration of an event following the AiR program provided additional sources of inspiration and encouragement for participants. The AiR program's ability to create a supportive artistic community, to provide opportunities for direct engagement, and to inspire personal and artistic growth underscores its significant impact on students' university experience.

Professional Behaviors among Arts Majors

Within the Arts major condition, it is also possible to examine the myriad effects of participating in AiR programming. In the current sample, approximately 69% of individuals in the Arts Condition ($n = 34$) attended at least one Artist-in-Residence event compared to 3% and 7% of students in the Social Sciences and STEM majors respectively. The Artist-in-resident events individuals could have attended included an artist lecture, open-studio hours and a final gallery show and reception. On average, students participated in over 4 events ($M = 4.47$, $SD = 2.78$).

For those individuals that attended AiR events, it was also possible to determine how this engagement affected the students' professional development. We identified multiple professional behaviors that could be influenced by AiR interactions, including finding inspiration, identifying funding opportunities, teamwork, and leadership among others.

Out of the nine professional behaviors and processes we asked participants about, participants who interacted with the AiR reported some benefits and found the greatest help with tolerating ambiguity—specifically understanding that it is "okay" to not know the end product when beginning a piece. This aligns with the aforementioned findings of Guo, Gonzales, and Dilley (2016), which highlight the importance of creative thinking in developing effective leadership skills necessary for navigating uncertainty. Respondents also reported gaining the most in terms of understanding how to explain creative work to others, finding inspiration through new

experiences, and understanding how to create artwork that makes difficult topics accessible to the general public (TABLE 1).

Table 1
How the AiR "helped"

Of the professional development skills below, how did the AiR help you?	*Mean*	*SD*
Ambiguity	5.59	1.12
Understanding how to explain your own creative work	5.41	1.12
Finding inspiration through new experiences	5.39	1.14
Making difficult topics accessible to the general public	5.27	1.27
Process to create a gallery show	4.93	1.27
Presentation style	4.77	1.11
Identifying funding opportunities to support your work	4.68	1.25
Participating in funded competitions	4.32	1.46
Professional attire	4.00	1.50

Note. Participants responded on a scale from 1 (not at all helpful) to 7 (extremely helpful).

Discussion

Limitations

The results from the BICB instrument, which endorses a wide range of creative behaviors beyond artmaking, indicate no statistically significant changes over time in students' self-reported identification of creative behaviors after interacting with the AiR, although art students endorsed more creative behaviors. The survey designed by our research team using principles guided by the Theory of Planned Behavior reveals that art majors have significantly greater intention, feel significantly more pressure, and have more positive attitude towards engaging in creative behaviors, while non-art majors are far less motivated to interact with the AiR. Participation of STEM and social science majors – the control group – to AiR-related events and interactions was negligible.

Although our team's original intent was to capture creative behaviors of students from the creative and design disciplines, from the sciences, and from the social sciences, the students who got engaged the most were from the creative arts including studio art and graphic design. One of the reasons for this limitation could be the physical proximity on campus: the AiR artist had an allocated space for work and open hours at the Ritz Gallery in Grove Hall, the building that hosts the creative arts. There seems to be a correlation between physical proximity and engagement: besides discipline affinity, students in the creative arts had the distinctive advantage of seeing the artist's open door every day moving from one studio class to another and had plenty of opportunities for informal interactions that were not limited to structured events but extended to everyday encounters, in all likelihood nurturing students' desire to be engaged in creative endeavors culminating with the student-led AIGA event several months later. The open-door policy of the AiR and the continuous presence in the creative arts building provided students with ample opportunities for engagement. These interactions were not merely transactional but contributed to the students' personal and artistic growth. The data suggests that students in the

creative arts, who had more frequent and spontaneous interactions with the AiR, were more engaged and motivated to pursue creative behaviors. This highlights the importance of sustained engagement in fostering a deeper connection to the creative process and personal development.

Students from the other majors had their classes farther away from the AiR working space; therefore, their interactions with the AiR were less spontaneously occurring and had to be proactively sought. The AiR program embraced diversity by involving students from various STEAM disciplines, although the resulting engagement was higher among art majors.

Potential Future Direction

In future studies, it would be interesting to observe what happens if the AiR is allocated a working space in closer proximity to disciplines other than studio art and graphic design: for instance, whether a hypothetical allocation of the AiR in the architecture building would increase interactions from architecture students, and so on. Allocating AiR working spaces closer to other academic buildings could potentially enhance interactions and engagement from a broader student population. A follow-up study of this kind would help find out whether physical proximity or having a similar background in the creative arts (which includes students in the studio art and graphic design majors) plays a major role in student engagement with AiR. The data seems to speculatively suggest that most of the undergraduate students may not yet understand the significance of engagements outside of their discipline area for their professional career development; exception is made for art students, who led initiatives continuing beyond the AiR period. Future studies could further examine the reasons behind the observed discrepancy in the number of interactions with the AiR between art students and students from the STEM and social sciences, by identifying whether proximity of the AiR open studio space to their classes plays a role in engagement. Understanding the factors that influence student engagement with the AiR program will be crucial for designing initiatives that promote creative behaviors and enrich the university experience for all students.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the evolving definitions of creativity and the importance of integrating arts and AiR programs into educational settings. The findings suggest that physical proximity and discipline affinity significantly influence student engagement with AiR programs. Art majors showed greater intention and positive attitudes towards creative behaviors, while non-art majors were less motivated. Future research should explore strategies to enhance engagement across diverse disciplines, such as reallocating AiR working spaces to be closer to other academic buildings. This approach could foster a more holistic and creative educational experience for all students, ultimately supporting their personal and professional development. Understanding these dynamics will be crucial for designing effective campus initiatives that promote creative behaviors and enrich the university experience.

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