Racial Justice Inc.: Deconstructing the Enactment of Racial Justice in DEI/Social Justice-Focused Higher Education and Student Affairs (HESA) Graduate Programs

Lorena Fuentes López
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RACIAL JUSTICE INC.: DECONSTRUCTING THE ENACTMENT OF RACIAL JUSTICE IN DEI/SOCIAL JUSTICE-FOCUSED HIGHER EDUCATION AND STUDENT AFFAIRS (HESA) GRADUATE PROGRAMS

A Dissertation Presented

by

LORENA FUENTES LÓPEZ

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies,
University of Massachusetts Boston,
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August 2023

Higher Education Program
RACIAL JUSTICE INC.: DECONSTRUCTING THE ENACTMENT OF RACIAL
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ABSTRACT

RACIAL JUSTICE INC.: DECONSTRUCTING THE ENACTMENT OF RACIAL JUSTICE IN DEI/SOCIAL JUSTICE-FOCUSED HIGHER EDUCATION AND STUDENT AFFAIRS (HESA) GRADUATE PROGRAMS

August 2023

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Despite efforts of faculty in Higher Education and Student Affairs (HESA) programs focused on social justice/Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) to provide equitable educational experiences for their students, studies on these programs have shown that students of color continue to face racialized experiences in the classroom (Harris & Linder, 2018; Linder et al., 2015). This dissertation employed a multiple case study to examine two HESA master's programs with a specific social justice/DEI mission and integrated the voices of both faculty and students. Using intensive interviewing, document analysis, and class observations, the goal of this study centered on understanding the extent to which faculty and students in these programs perceived the centrality of racial justice as an integral component
of their espoused commitments to deliver tangible practices and experiences connected with
the realization of the mission. The conceptual foundations of this study were informed by
Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Harper’s (2009) question-based Anti-Deficit Achievement
framework for Studying students of color in STEM. The results of the study provide a
nuanced and practical framework to understand classroom dynamics, effective anti-racist
practices, and faculty and student engagement around topics of race and racism.
Recommendations for programmatic practices include the formalization of communities of
practice among faculty to align their practices with the program’s social justice/DEI
commitments. Pedagogical implications include the interrogation and disruption of
oppressive and normalized academic practices and the need to pay more attention to
pedagogical training for faculty and approaches to address classroom dynamics.
DEDICATION

A mi madre hermosa que con tan poco, pero que con toda la devoción y dedicación me enseñó y me inculcó el valor y el significado de la educación. Ella ha sido y siempre seguirá siendo la luz que ilumina e inspira mi vida. Su apoyo incondicional en cada paso de este camino arduo y la valentía para enfrentar los obstáculos que la vida algún día nos puso la hacen mi heroína, pero sobre todo mi confidente, y mi gran tesoro. Madre, este es nuestro logro, nuestro proyecto de vida, nuestro sueño, aunque de una manera muy especial sea más suyo que mío.

La amo y la respeto infinito.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

While doing the program, I had to stop a couple of times or simply push through the impossible because… LIFE. Through this journey, I almost lost my mother, but her amazing recovery made it possible for her to continue to support me throughout this process unconditionally. Meanwhile, I changed careers, I underwent a wild surgery, and it was also through this journey that I became a mother. There were many times where I thought about quitting and focusing on my most immediate priorities and life changes. And while this narrative is all too common among PhD students (sadly), it really hits you when you have finally overcome that feeling and the obstacles holding you back. With the support of an army of friends, colleagues, and family, I was able to persist and find a way to get to the finish line. I have been incredibly fortunate to have so many people by my side cheering me up and showing me unconditional love, understanding, and support.

To my amazing advisor and dissertation chair, Dr. Katalin Szelenyi – You have not only been an advisor and professor for me. Very early on in my process, you became my mentor who through it all kept peeking into my life like a light house during a storm at sea to bring me words of wisdom, encouragement, reaffirmation, as well as great and lengthy conversations about life and academia. Thanks, from the bottom of my heart for believing in me and for guiding me so patiently to the end of this journey even when I told you I was done. Your phenomenal way of giving me feedback was crucial in my success. I enjoyed and fell in love with the writing process so much because of you. Your dedication to your students is unmatched and admirable. You truly walk the walk! All my love and respect to you.
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my goals.

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needed to press a few letters on the keyboard and call it a day. You even gave me your tiny
shoulder to cry and hugged me tight when I thought I could not do this anymore. But you
reminded me that I “had to be brave” and in your sweet and wise words you said: “You got
this, mama!!” I persevered because I want to be a role model for you. You are simply my
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achievements while being alongside you. Always. Te amo infinito.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>xv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>xvi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HESA Programs and their Commitment to Justice</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Statement</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining Racial Justice in Higher Education</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose and Research Questions</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Conceptualization and Discourse of Social Justice in Higher Education</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Origins of Social Justice</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Justice in Higher Education</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Injustice in Higher Education Disguised as DEI: Implications for Racial Justice</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Omnipresence of Racism in HESA</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students of Color as Native Informants</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invalidation and Stereotyping Students of Color</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings of Isolation</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment and Retention of Students of Color in HESA</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching for Social Justice in HESA: Faculty, Curriculum, and Pedagogy</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Role of Diversity Issues in the HESA Curriculum</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HESA Faculty as Owners of the Curriculum</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Potential Role of Critical Pedagogy for Social Justice in HESA</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual Framework</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epistemological Foundations</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophical Worldview</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Axiology</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher Reflexivity</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodological Approach..................................................................</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multicase Study.............................................................................</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations in Case Study Methodology.......................................</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sampling.......................................................................................</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to Programs and Participants..........................................</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection Instruments and Analysis....................................</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documents as Data.........................................................................</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intensive Interviewing..................................................................</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations................................................................................</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memos.........................................................................................</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis...............................................................................</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthiness............................................................................</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Cypress University and Willow University HESA Master's Programs: Historical and Contextual Foundations.</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction..................................................................................</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cypress University Program (CUP)...............................................</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Historical Context of the Program...........................................</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Program Mission........................................................................</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Admissions Process....................................................................</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Curricular Structure..................................................................</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Syllabi......................................................................................</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Program Newsletters and Events...............................................</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willow University Program (WUP)..................................................</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Historical Context of the Program...........................................</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Program Mission........................................................................</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Admissions Process....................................................................</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Curricular Structure..................................................................</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Syllabi......................................................................................</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Program Newsletters and Events...............................................</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary.......................................................................................</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Findings: Racial Justice in HESA Programs – Faculty and Students’ Perspectives</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction..................................................................................</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Pursuit of Racial Justice within a DEI Mission: Common Grounds.</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Justice and the Role of Faculty Scholar and Racial Identity...</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation to Work in the Program.............................................</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Contributions to the Mission.........................................</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversations about Race: Balancing Classroom Dynamics and Students’</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race in the Classroom through the Lens of Faculty</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navigating Tensions amid Race Conversations</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grappling with Race: The Classroom as a Space for Growth and Learning</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Role of Faculty’s White Racial Identity in Conversations of Race</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When Expectations Clash: Students of Color, White Students, and Race</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issues in the Classroom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students of Color as Race Experts</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When Good Intentions and Preparedness Are at Odds</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Peers in Race Conversations: How to Engage?</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Conspiracy of Silence: White Students’ Perceptions of Class</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversations about Race in the Classroom: A Fine Balance</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divergent Paths and Visions</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission through Curricular Alignment</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CUP Curricular Alignment to Mission: Faculty Perspectives</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Efforts to Advance Mission: CUP Students Voices</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WUP Curricular Alignment to Mission: Faculty Perspectives</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Efforts to Advance Mission: WUP Students Voices</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sailing Towards vs. Drifting Away from Racial Justice</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Future of CUP’s Mission</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Future of WUP’s Mission</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS                                         | 194  |
<p>| Revisiting the Conceptual Framework                                   | 195  |
| Social Justice Scholarship: A Key Driver in Centering Commitments     | 197  |
| to Racial Justice                                                     |      |
| Scholarly Congruence for Mission Alignment                            | 198  |
| Divergent Scholarship Values: Decoupled Mission Goals                   | 200  |
| When Intended Anti-Racist Classroom Practices Promote Racism          | 202  |
| Conflict Avoidance: A By-Product of Resistance to Protect Whiteness   | 204  |
| Trauma-Infused Pedagogies                                             | 206  |
| The Cycle of Blame                                                    | 207  |
| Who’s Ready for Disruption? Levels of Faculty Engagement              | 212  |
| when Teaching for Racial Justice                                     |      |
| Walking on Egg Shells: Faculty of Color Teaching about Race           | 214  |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Race and Racism: Openly and in Every Aspect of the Class</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenging Institutional Norms: The Next Step to Achieving Racial</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Implications</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for Program Practices</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for Pedagogy and Curriculum</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Research</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**APPENDIX**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A. BACKGROUND FORM FOR FACULTY</th>
<th>238</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR FACULTY</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR STUDENTS</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. DOCUMENT ANALYSIS PROTOCOL</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. OBSERVATION PROTOCOL</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. CONSENT FORMS FOR STUDENTS AND FACULTY</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure

1. Conceptual Framework .......................................................... 64
2. The Cycle of Blame ................................................................. 211
3. Faculty Racial Justice Engagement Typology ........................... 226
LIST OF TABLES

Table

1. CUP Faculty .................................................................................................................. 88
2. CUP Students .................................................................................................................. 89
3. WUP Faculty .................................................................................................................. 89
4. WUP Students ................................................................................................................. 90
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions in the United States (U.S.) have long struggled with a range of inequities facing their students with marginalized identities. Indeed, the effects of systemic forms of oppression are no stranger to colleges and universities today reflected, for example, in widespread inequities grounded in gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, different abilities, and international and immigration status. Amid these forms of oppression, however, racial disparities have been at the center of the most pressing issues that higher education faces. As a key expression of these disparities, an analysis of the 2015-2016 academic year showed that “students of color disproportionately go to schools that spend less on them. Because of this disproportionate enrollment, public colleges in 75 percent of states spent more on average, to educate a white student than either a black or Latino student” (Garcia, 2018).

According to a 2022 report by the National Center for Education Statistics looking at college enrollment rates from 2010 to 2020, the college enrollment rate of American Indian/Alaska Native students declined from 2010 from 41% to 22% in 2020. The report also highlights that in 2020, the college enrollment rate among 18- to 24-year-olds increased for
those who identified as Asian (64%) compared to their other peers: White (41%), Hispanic (36%), Black (36%), of two or more races (34%), Pacific Islander (34%), and American Indian/Alaska Native (22%). The enrollment rate was also higher for Asian students than the rates for Black, Hispanic, and white students in every year from 2010 to 2020. However, these enrollment rates were higher for white students compared to their Black and Hispanic peers in every year except for 2016. The report demonstrates that students of color continue to experience racial inequities in their access to higher education.

As a result of these widespread inequities, achieving social justice has become a growing concern, shaping educational policymaking, curricular content, and instructional practices (Boyles et al., 2008; Brennan & Naidoo, 2008; Furman & Gruenewald, 2004). This concern stems from the slow progress that higher education institutions have made in closing the racial achievement gap in enrollment, retention, and completion of undergraduate and graduate degrees among students of color. The American College Personnel Association (ACPA) acknowledges that the Black Lives Matter Movement has taught us that there is still a lot of intentional and bold work that needs to be done to dismantle the persisting racial and educational disparities that students of color endure (Wall & Moody, 2020). Such disparities have been the consequence of campus policies, curricula, and practices that were never created or intended to advance the needs and interests of students of color (Moody & Wall, 2020). As a result, the term social justice has become a popular concept among educators in higher education who manifest their interest in democratizing education and fostering a more just society through classroom practices (Boyles et al., 2008).

However, social justice as a term lacks a comprehensive and definitive meaning (Brennan & Naidoo, 2008; Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; McKenzie et al., 2008),
thus leaving this concept vaguely defined in a “feel good flavor that can cover up the absence of precise meaning” (Brennan & Naidoo, 2008, p. 287). Despite the fluidity of its meaning, the concept of social justice has transcended the realms of policymaking, research agendas, grants, and campus-wide discussions (Brennan & Naidoo, 2008). For example, social justice has influenced the field of higher education through access and retention programs that aim to recruit students from underrepresented populations and curricula that are inclusive in terms of the experiences and representation of students from a variety of backgrounds (Byrd, 2019). These efforts have been coupled with pedagogical approaches and philosophies that seek to engage students with marginalized identities in a more meaningful learning experience, as well as community engagement initiatives that attempt to impart equitable experiences to marginalized populations in the community (Byrd, 2019).

The insertion of the term “social justice” in mission statements, curricula, and the creation of social justice-oriented graduate programs has also become a common trend and discourse (Hytten & Bettez, 2011; Singh, 2011; Smith, 2012). As Smith (2012) indicates, “[w]hile many colleges have for years housed social justice groups and boasted about the commitment of their students and faculty members to social justice, the new programs are more formal and more closely tied to academic missions than most earlier efforts” (para. 5), which has been deemed the “social justice revival.” Most of the social justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs offered in higher education can be found in the fields of policy, leadership, and education, and social justice itself is a new emerging field, where the rapid growth of these programs stems from the urgent need to prepare students with the skills necessary to create change (Smith, 2012).
**HESA Programs and their Commitment to Justice**

The Higher Education and Student Affairs (HESA) field has become part of the social justice and DEI trend (Harris & Linder, 2018). HESA master’s programs are of special interest in this study, as they represent a field that prepares student affairs professionals to perform a multi-layered series of services and overall critical work for all students of higher education. The work of student affairs professionals includes educating, teaching, leading, advising, counselling, supervising, financially managing programs, educational policy making, among others, with the huge potential of having widespread impact on other fields and disciplines within the higher education arena. The HESA field has the responsibility of staying at the vanguard of the ongoing social, economic, and political issues that affect the overall recruitment and retention of students in higher education, shaping the performance of post-secondary organizations to meet the needs of the communities they serve.

In fact, one of the standards from The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) highlights the importance of equity and access issues—focusing on a range of marginalized identities in the realms of race, gender and gender identity, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, disabilities, etc.—in the preparation of student affairs professionals (CAS, 2006, as cited in Wilson & Meyer, 2011, p. 754). More than 82% of HESA programs that are governed by the ACPA and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA)—members of the CAS consortium—have adopted the CAS equity and access standard to reflect their social justice-centered mission to prepare higher education leaders to strengthen their awareness of and readiness to tackle social inequities (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Harris & Linder, 2018; Kline & Gardner, 2005; Rodgers, 2006). Although an exhaustive list of such programs is not available, some
examples include HESA graduate programs at Loyola University Chicago; Seattle University; University of California, Los Angeles; University of Denver; and University of Vermont. These programs require students to take at least one diversity course to fulfill the social justice or diversity cognate requirement as established by the CAS standard on equity and access (Harris & Linder, 2018).

However, the extent to which HESA master’s programs enact social justice or DEI missions has been questioned by various researchers (Harris & Linder, 2018; Kline & Gardner, 2005; Linder et al., 2015). While, generally, social justice and DEI are well-intended concepts, the diversity of meanings and interpretations of what the term entails has led to a dilemma where the ways in which educators define social justice or commitments to DEI differ greatly from their actual practices (Boyles et al., 2008). This has been highlighted as particularly problematic when it comes to the failure of HESA programs to provide educational experiences for students of color that are aligned with a serious commitment to racial equity and justice. Although some HESA educators subscribe to social justice and DEI principles and practices, including a focus on race and racial justice, students of color in these programs continue to report racialized experiences with faculty and classmates (Brunsma et al., 2017; Flowers, 2003; Harris & Linder, 2018; Hubain et al., 2016; Levin et al., 2013; Truong et al., 2016). This issue is exacerbated by the faculty’s reluctance to challenge white students on issues of race (Linder et al., 2015), and to embrace racial conflict as part of the learning and training process of prospective HESA professionals (Pasque et al., 2013). This issue is exacerbated by the faculty’s reluctance to challenge white students on issues of race (Linder et al., 2015), and to embrace racial conflict as part of the learning and training process of prospective HESA professionals (Pasque et al., 2013).
Part of the dissonance between what HESA faculty think about their self-proclaimed racial justice practices and the ways in which students of color perceive them is related to the fact that HESA preparation programs continue to be predominantly white spaces in terms of both student and faculty representation, making the recruitment and retention of students of color a difficult matter to address (Flowers & Howard-Hamilton, 2002; Levin et al., 2013; Talbot & Kocarek, 1997). Studies have demonstrated that the presence of faculty of color is deemed a vital factor to validate and motivate students of color to build their careers in fields where they can see themselves represented and competent (Quaye et al., 2017). The importance of faculty of color in academic programs stems from their ability to serve as mentors and role models for students of color as well as support systems to help them navigate feelings of isolation, tokenization, and disconnection, which prevail in predominantly white institutions and academic programs (Quaye et al., 2017).

Other issues concern students’ perceptions of faculty and curriculum in HESA programs (Flowers, 2003; Gayles & Kelly, 2007; Harris & Linder, 2018; Linder et al., 2015). All these studies point to a lack of depth in the diversity courses offered in HESA programs, which suggests that the implementation of only one or a few diversity courses as a requirement is inadequate to appropriately train Student Affairs Professionals (Flowers, 2003). The inadequacy of the courses lies in the fact that they focus solely on one type of diversity (e.g., disabilities), but do not integrate a comprehensive understanding of justice through various lenses of oppression and discrimination (e.g., race, social class, etc.) (Flowers, 2003). Students also indicate that in certain HESA programs, taking diversity courses is not even a requirement, so students use their lived experiences outside of the classroom or opt to take a diversity course in a different program (Gayles & Kelly, 2007).
In addition, classroom experiences in HESA programs have been described by students of color as filled with microaggressions from faculty and classmates, and faculty have been depicted as often failing to challenge white students on issues of race (Linder et al., 2015). In a study on racial conflict in the classroom, Pasque et al. (2013) found that faculty tend to avoid racial conflict, and oftentimes justify difficult dialogues in the classroom as mere opinions that students tend to have. This minimizes opportunities to discuss racial issues in the classroom and to create space for meaningful learning to happen.

From the faculty’s perceptions, Gayles et al. (2015) found that faculty in HESA programs report resistance among students when discussing issues of race and manifest lack of experience working with a diverse student population, which complicates potential opportunities to meaningfully deconstruct the concept of racial justice in those learning spaces.

Recognizing the centrality of these findings related to the experiences of students of color, my study focused specifically on the perspectives of faculty and students regarding racial justice as a component of the mission statements of HESA master’s programs. HESA master’s programs were the focus of this study since most HESA graduate programs only offer a master’s degree. Additionally, HESA master’s programs are particularly important to examine as they prepare a critical mass of HESA professionals who perform a wide range of multi-level services that have a direct impact on the students and the institutions they serve.

Problem Statement

Despite espousing commitments to social justice and DEI principles through their mission statements, HESA programs continue to provide programmatic and curricular experiences for their students, specifically their students of color, that are far from being just.
In fact, the experiences of students of color in HESA programs have been shown to be fraught with frequent experiences with racism, isolation, and racial fatigue (Briscoe et al., 2022; Flowers & Howard-Hamilton, 2002; Harris & Linder, 2018; Hubain et al., 2016; Kelly & Gayles, 2010; Linder et al., 2015; Wallace & Ford, 2021). Additionally, faculty’s frequent failure to deliver lessons and guide difficult conversations around race, along with their lack of experience working with students of color (Flowers, 2003; Gayles et al., 2015; Pasque et al., 2013), limit their ability to serve as critical facilitators and social change agents who recognize the importance of racial justice as a core component of social justice and DEI principles.

With the preceding in mind, the problem addressed by my dissertation resides in the limitations of the curriculum, programmatic practices beyond the classroom, and the faculty that prepare students in HESA programs, as racial justice specifically does not effectively inform the way courses or teaching practices are developed and enacted (Harris & Linder, 2018; Hubain et al., 2016; Kelly & Gayles, 2010). In the absence of racial justice-focused curricular alignment, teaching, and programmatic practices that enact racial justice authentically, it is unlikely that HESA programs can live up to their social justice or DEI missions to become inclusive spaces for students of color. The dissonance between the kind of education and principles that HESA program faculty believe to be delivering, and the racialized experiences of students of color face in these programs, confirm the persistent racial inequities and bias in the HESA curriculum, programmatic practices, and the discipline overall. As students of color do not feel welcome and validated in HESA programs (Flowers & Howard-Hamilton, 2002; Harris & Linder, 2018; Hubain et al., 2016; Kelly & Gayles,
2010; Linder et al., 2015), the retention rates of this student population and the potential to prepare genuine racial justice practitioners for the HESA field are jeopardized.

**Defining Racial Justice in Higher Education**

Racial justice, as one central aspect of the larger concept of social justice, is the recognition that justice for people of color is not achieved when there is a perceived and real presence of racial discrimination and racial biases. My definition of racial justice is informed by foundational work on Critical Race Theory (CRT) and scholars such as Delgado and Stefancic (2012), Bensimon (2004, 2005, 2018), and Ladson-Billings (1995, 1998, 2013). In the context of higher education, I see racial justice as the continuous examination of structural and systematic practices that perpetuate the marginalization of people of color and the intentional actions and initiatives in the form of institutional policies, commitments resulting in systemic changes that work toward the elimination of racial disparities while ensuring equitable opportunities and outcomes for everyone regardless of their race. This notion of racial justice implies that racial injustice in higher education is not just perpetuated by individuals externally, but also by individuals within the educational institution’s social arrangements which, by default, effortlessly reinforce other forms of injustice ranging from attrition and lack of job opportunities for people of color to cumulative economic disparities in wealth (Valls, 2018).

From this lens, I believe that racial injustice in higher education should be understood from a multilevel lens: (a) Macro level, which refers to the societal structures and systems that promote dominant ideologies and continue to guarantee the marginalization of people of color; (b) Meso level, which refers to how higher education institutions as organizations sustain and promote racial subjugation through policies, practices, and the lack
of intentionality, connectedness, and depth within the DEI work they profess to engage in;
and c) Micro level, which pertains to the individual’s (institutional agents) minimal or no
engagement in allyship and advocacy for people of color at the institution and beyond. For
this study, I focused on the meso and micro levels to analyze how individual stakeholders
(faculty and students) in HESA master’s programs center racial justice as part of their
commitments to DEI or social justice.

   Racial justice requires proactive, individual, and collective actions to anticipate where
systemic racism will get in the way, rather than reactive temporary solutions. At the
individual level, one must recognize and center issues of race as the rooting force and form
of resistance that should be present in one’s everyday practice. As a collective endeavor,
institutional agents must respond and be ready to eliminate disparate outcomes that result
from racist practices, and redress, on an ongoing basis, institutional policies and decisions
that further jeopardize positive outcomes for people of color. Adopting a proactive approach
to addressing issues of structural racism in higher education while centering the voices of
those affected by systemic racism will ultimately pave the way to integration, ongoing
support, and authentic advocacy for people of color (Bensimon, 2018; Valls, 2018).

Purpose and Research Questions

As the concepts of social justice and DEI, including a central focus on racial justice,
continue to be a prevalent discourse in HESA graduate programs, this study examined two
programs that aimed to focus on social justice or DEI into their missions to understand the
extent to which the faculty centered racial justice as part of their espoused commitments.
This research also examined the perceptions of students regarding the realization of the
program mission. The study was guided by the following central research question: How are
HESA programs that aim to center social justice or DEI working to realize their mission as it relates to racial justice? The study also addressed three secondary research questions:

- How is the historical/contextual foundation of HESA programs that aim to center social justice/DEI values enacted and reflected in mission statements and other program-related documents in specific relation to racial justice?
- In what ways, if any, do faculty translate the intended social justice mission of HESA programs into tangible racial justice-focused practices in the curriculum, pedagogy, student advising, and overall program outcomes?
- How do students perceive and experience the ways in which their programs enact, or fail to enact, their intended social justice/DEI mission related specifically to racial justice?

Chapter 2 dives into the various areas that informed the literature review of my study. The purpose of the literature review was to gain an understanding of the existing research and debates relevant to the concept of social justice starting from its origin and history to specifically delving into social justice and DEI as concepts embedded in HESA graduate programs.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

By delving into three specific areas of literature related to HESA programs, this literature review first aims to holistically deconstruct and better understand the discourse of social and, within that emphasis, racial justice in higher education. The first literature area thus takes a broad view of the origins and development of social justice, a focus that is necessary to lay the groundwork for understandings of racial justice more specifically in higher education and in HESA programs. The experiences of students of color in HESA programs that espouse values of social and racial justice will be discussed in the second literature area, followed by a description of the implications of teaching for social and racial justice in HESA programs.

The Conceptualization and Discourse of Social Justice in Higher Education

The Origins of Social Justice

The conceptualization and discourse of social justice are quite varied and complex, as there is not a common set of understandings of what the term means, implies, and requires in practice (Nkoane, 2012; Singh, 2011). Yet, the topic of social justice has captured the attention of many thinkers around the world (Zajda et al., 2006). To better understand the
intricacies and complexity of social justice, it is necessary to understand its origins, ideological assumptions, and the various ways in which the concept has been shaped throughout historical, social, and political contexts (Boyles et al., 2008). To begin, in medieval and classical thought, the concept “social” was never attached to the word “justice” (Boyles et al., 2008). In fact, Platonic and Aristotelian definitions of “justice” stem from its legalistic qualities and a distributive paradigm where everyone has an equal share of property (i.e., wealth and other material goods) in contrast to “social” as merely being associated with charity (Boyles et al., 2008).

The concept of social came as the result of modernity, more specifically after the Classical and Middle Ages (Arendt, 1998). However, social justice originated as a conservative religious concept and continued to develop in religious circles among Catholic authorities, and then adopted devotedly by religious organizations (Burke, 2010). The first use of the concept of social justice happened in 1840 and is attributed to the Jesuit Italian conservative priest Luigi Taparelli who, influenced by Cartesian doubt, predicted that private interests would come at the expense of public integrity (Boyles et al., 2008; Burke, 2010). Concerned about the economic and social change and political violence Italy was going through at the time (Behr, 2005), Taparelli’s writings were focused on constructing a theory of society on the relationship between powerful authorities in the society and regular citizens as an essential affiliation to work towards the common good (Boyles et al., 2008). Taparelli purported that for a society to be just, the collective efforts of its members were necessary, but those efforts had to come from what is currently known as “grassroots” movements: from “the small societies” (the family and the local organizations and authorities) to “the large
society,” the State (Burke, 2010). In this vein, Taparelli’s views of social justice differed from Platonic and Aristotelian top-down authoritative notions of justice (Boyles et al., 2008).

Since its conception, and despite its religious influence, the concept of social justice has permeated other social spheres from liberals to conservatives and from socialists to communists (Behr, 2005; Burke, 2010). In fact, by the end of the twentieth century, the term social justice had come to mean many different things as Protestants, Jews, religious opponents, and groups with no religious affiliation used the term within their own social, economic, and political perceptions of justice (Behr, 2005). Taparelli’s theory of social justice even influenced various social theorists such as Auguste Comte (positivism), Karl Marx (dialectical materialism), and John Stuart (liberalism) (Behr, 2005). However, the most influential figure in the social theory field was perhaps Marx with his theory of communism, class conflict, and ideology, which sustains that for a society to reach justice, it has to surpass capitalistic thinking about justice as connected to the idea of exchange, which thrives on the premise that what people deserve is based upon their choices (Wood, 1972).

Marx’s perspective of justice stemmed from his critique of capitalism as an unstable economic system, which would ultimately result in massive recessions and depressions leading societies to greater inequality due to unemployment, lower wages, and increased poverty for the proletariat (Wood, 1972). Yet, Marx saw the use of the word “social” as problematic since for him, the social was intrinsically the exploitive relationship between capital and labor (Brodie, 2007). Any attempt to pluralize the word as an array of “social problems” can be easily co-opted by liberals who view social justice as charity and which requires “sympathetic heart[s] for the misery of [their] brothers” (Brodie, 2007, p. 96). In this vein, Marx poses a critical distinction between justice and charity, placing the enactment of
justice on the eradication of structural inequalities through the State, which would require the systemic redistribution of shared resources by society (Brodie, 2007).

On the other hand, Derrida (1963/1996), the philosopher who coined the semiotic analysis known as deconstruction, addresses the issue of justice from the perspective of the “authority of law” as a “mystical” establishment that validates justificatory discourse. With this conception of “law” in mind, the rule of law or justice is then the product of historical circumstances, which have been socially constructed through discursive practices (Derrida, 1963/1996; Zajda et al., 2006). As a social construct and from Derrida’s conception of justice, social justice has served as a symbolic tool to sanction oppressive actions rooted in oppressive systems but has not been used to extend and guarantee human rights and freedoms for all (Nkoane, 2012). Derrida’s, Marx’s, and Taparelli’s conceptualizations of social justice have served to influence other theorists in other fields.

For example, the model of social justice proposed by the renown socialist feminist theorist Iris Young does not only call for an expansion of the concept beyond the confines of distributive paradigms, but also captures Taparelli’s theory of social justice as a collective endeavor, Marx’s theory of conflict and power, and Derrida’s definition of justice as a social construct. Young’s (1990, as cited in Gewirtz, 1998) conceptualization of justice lies in her theorization of injustice as explained through her conceptualization of the “five faces of oppression”: (a) exploitation, as the act of using someone’s labor for profit without or with unfair compensation; (b) marginalization, the act of consigning a group of people a lower social status condemning them to not be even worth of exploiting; (c) powerlessness, the act of being dominated by the ruling class and denied rights, which leads the powerless to internalize their oppression, feeling incapable of participating in democratic processes; (d)
cultural imperialism, as the act of taking the culture of the dominant group and adopting it as the norm; and (e) violence, as actual acts of violence against marginalized groups who live with the fear of being verbally and physically attacked either with motive or not, which are intended to humiliate and destroy the integrity of those who are oppressed. Young also presents a multidimensional conception of social justice (distributional and relational), which emphasizes a reconceptualization of distributive justice from the perspective of the equalization of wealth, power, and privilege, and not from the liberal perspective of just access, participation, and outcome.

Furthermore, Young’s theory stresses the individuals’ mediated relationships (i.e., mutuality: how we treat each other) and their commitment to respond to others and otherness (politics of recognition) while avoiding exercising power, control, and discipline over others. That is, for Young, justice is achieved when: (a) distributive justice takes the form of a tool to dismantle systemic power structures and not the mere amendment of superficial conditions in which individuals are oppressed (e.g., affirmative action) and (b) when mediated and unmediated relations among individuals in the society lead to collective political action whilst not forgetting one’s commitment to mutuality, respect, and recognition. Young’s multidimensional model for social justice suggests that social justice is not an external condition or system, but the responsibility of enacting the term is placed on the individual.

Similarly, Nieuwenhuis (2010) puts forward the argument that social justice is not a condition or system that one can learn through formal education. In his view, social justice is “an ideal—a vision that must become a way of life that permeates all aspects of being human” (p. 269). This view of social justice sheds light on the complexity of defining social justice. That is, as an ideal, social justice cannot be achieved through mere declarations,
policies, or laws—without minimizing their importance in the promotion of social justice—but must be believed and lived by each individual in the society (Nieuwenhuis, 2010). The principles of social justice are understood then as the responsibility of every citizen to protect, advance, and promote the values of this concept and the understanding that for oppressed groups, access to resources and opportunities to exercise their agency and capacities is an essential component to guarantee that all individuals in the society live an integral decent life (Nieuwenhuis, 2010).

As noted above, social justice has been explained through the concepts of mutuality, relational justice, distributive justice, recognition, and citizenry, among others (Desroches, 2016; Gewirtz, 1998; Nieuwenhuis, 2010; Nkoane, 2012; Singh, 2011). However, some scholars argue that social justice is still an undertheorized concept (Behr, 2005; Culp, 2016; Gewirtz, 1998). Culp (2016) argues that the lack of understanding and agreement on what social justice means stems from our society’s passive aversion to discussing social justice, as an open dialogue about this term would imply the total recognition of the ills of our society that basket our hopes for a better world and just communities. From this lens, with a variety of meanings of social justice also come a variety of interpretations (Nkoane, 2012). Particularly, the use of the term social justice in education has become a common trend in policymaking, curricular offerings, and pedagogical approaches (Atasay, 2015; Culp, 2016; Nkoane, 2012), which in turn, continues to be a contested issue.

**Social Justice in Higher Education**

With disparate uses and despite its benevolent meanings, social justice in education in general has served to polarize viewpoints as different groups may act against one another while all believing to be acting under the premise of social justice (Boyles et al., 2008;
Gewirtz, 1998; McKenzie et al., 2008). For example, various scholars such as Ravitch (1994, 2005), Adler (1982), Finn (1970/1993), Hertling (1985), Hirsch (1988), and Ruenzel (1996), sustain that justice in education is achieved through the equal distribution of resources and assimilation, which further exacerbate the same educational philosophies that have been used throughout history to maintain and perpetuate the pervasive unbalanced power structures that have characterized the U.S. (Boyles et al., 2008; Singh, 2011).

The scholars who operate under the equal opportunity for education paradigm assume that when educational resources are distributed equally, justice has been achieved (Boyles et al., 2008; Singh, 2011). Although distributive justice is a core component of social justice, the view of distributive justice as a synonym of social justice becomes problematic (Boyles et al., 2008; Singh, 2011). That is, egalitarian ideals where everyone gets an equal share tend to focus on the quantifiable qualities of the society, disregarding other less quantifiable traits such as virtues, actions, ideas, and the emancipatory emphasis of social justice, which ultimately seek to free those who live under oppression (Boyles et al., 2008; North, 2006).

Social justice as a synonym of distributive justice fails to examine institutionalized forms of domination and oppression, which are not only normalized, but frequently also unchallenged (North, 2006; Young, 1990, as cited in Gewirtz, 1998) rendering social respect (i.e., mutuality) and rights as possessions that can be purchased (Darder, 2012) as opposed to relationships that specify what people are morally obligated to do for one another (Young, 1990, as cited in Gewirtz, 1998).

Singh (2011) brings forward a similar argument and adds that social justice has been appropriated into a neoliberal strategy for higher education institutions to compete in the growing global economy. Social justice as a neoliberal tool takes away the social conscience
of the term and turns it into a capitalistic ideology that will not seek to dismantle oppressive power structures (Gewirtz, 1998). That is, the current corporate neoliberal state of higher education may be an obstacle for universities to exploit the potential that universities must counteract oppressive systems (Darder, 2012; Singh, 2011). In a corporatized educational environment, the “free market” is deemed as the enabler and vehicle for social justice (Singh, 2011). Nonetheless, various scholars in the field of education have placed great concern in neoliberal multiculturalism embedded in social justice education agendas (Atasay, 2015; Darder, 2012; Singh, 2011). That is, with neoliberal agendas that demand more human capital as a condition for expanding economic growth, educational institutions have been forced to restructure curricula and policies that serve corporate interests through instruction. With that, the neoliberal agenda ensures their human capital (i.e., students) are prepared to affiliate and compete with local and global production demands (Atasay, 2015). As universities continue to prioritize their goal to compete at a global scale through research, and the preparation of students for privileged positions—more generally the private good, their commitment to social justice is hampered (Culp, 2016).

What is more, the corporatization of education has been deemed the culprit of further social polarization (Giroux, 2009) as the “free-market” society reinforces meritocratic ideologies, which tend to place the burden of success on the individual. In this way, the most imminent effect of social polarization is the exacerbation of social injustices, namely debt-ridden students, overall economic disparities, criminalized Communities of Color, and the school-to-prison pipeline (Atasay, 2015; Giroux, 2009). Thus, individuals who do not adhere to the values and demands of neoliberalism are marginalized and regarded as unwanted in the pursuit of a neoliberal global economy (Darder, 2012; Giroux, 2009).
In addition, although the U.S. government sustains that their educational investments bring forth a more egalitarian system for all, the reality is that those investments have done little or nothing to dismantle socio-economic disparities among communities, but instead have aggravated the underlying causes of social corruption disguised as the free market of society (Atasay, 2015). The latter implies that when universities focus their funds and attention on increasing their global competition in the free market, they operate under a utilitarian principle that exacerbates hegemonic practices and ways of thinking that privilege those in positions of power while ignoring the experiences and circumstances of underrepresented populations (Atasay, 2015; Culp, 2016). Unfortunately, discerning meanings and views on social justice have engendered a very abstract, yet very politicized view of social justice in education, which have placed different groups with very different polarized agendas to act in opposition of one another while all claiming to be pursuing social justice in education (Boyles et al., 2008). When political agendas in education are conflated with the view of social justice as a tool to dismantle power structures, the result is an oppressive agenda that serves to advance the interests of the most powerful while commodifying the premises of social justice, thus perpetuating the same injustices they profess to be eliminating.

**Social Injustice in Higher Education Disguised as DEI: Implications for Racial Justice**

As the literature indicates, the concept of social justice in higher education has become a synonym for equality of opportunity (Gewirtz, 1998; Singh, 2011). As such, the goal of social justice education from a neoliberal lens is to indoctrinate Communities of Color as well as members of the dominant group into the promise of neoliberal multiculturalism through opportunities and capital, framing their path to justice and social
membership as purchasable goods (Atasay, 2015). This discourse thus tends to revolve around the concepts of diversity, access, and inclusion, mainly in relation to inequities experienced by People of Color (Archer, 2007; Iverson, 2007; Singh, 2011). Diversity in higher education has been used to mobilize two marketed ideas: one that implies that there is diversity of choice (i.e., access), that is, institutional diversity; and the second one that diversity in the form of human capital (i.e., People of Color on campuses) represents equality, equity, and social inclusion (Archer, 2007). From this lens, social justice discourse in higher education appears to have become a well-known brand, which has been commodified through the promise of diversity, access (Archer, 2007; Goldstein Hode & Meisenbach, 2017), and multicultural education (Atasay, 2015; Darder, 2012; Leong, 2013).

Although diversity is indeed necessary to ameliorate racial relations in the U.S., placing the value of diversity as commodification reiterates the way in which Communities of Color have been used: Historically, to enslave and oppress; and more contemporarily, as a social possession that adds value to White privileged segments of the U.S. society (Leong, 2013). For example, in a study that analyzed 21 diversity action plans of 20 land-grant universities from 1999 to 2004 through the lens of CRT, Iverson (2007) offers a thorough examination of the discursive framing of diversity in diversity action plans to better understand how these action plans may create an opposite effect of what they are intended to achieve: inclusion and equity. The study revealed that the discourse used to frame diversity is indeed reinforcing exclusion, inequity, and otherness. More specifically, Iverson (2007) points out how the way in which these policies are framed only serve to maintain the status quo, which at the same time reinforces the idea of otherness for people of color.
That is, while “diversity” is the buzzword to promote changes in institutional environment, climate, and culture, the truth is that diversity action plans have also become an advertising tool for higher education institutions to attract students and to maintain a reputation of social justice seekers. The analysis and interpretation of the data collected yielded an overarching theme, which Iverson (2007) claims is the “dominant discourse of access employed to shape [the images of the various challenges diverse persons face in gaining access to higher education]” (p.158) that construct underrepresented populations: the outsider. The discourse of “access,” which stems from specific terminology used in the reports such as “significant barriers,” and “discriminatory practices” is interpreted in the study as language that positions underrepresented populations as outcasts. From this lens, the diversity rationale seems to only serve to perpetuate racial subordination, and not to repair the historical racism that has characterized institutions of power in the U.S. (James, 2014).

Iverson’s study is also supported by Goldstein and Meisenbach (2016) and Leong’s (2012) analyses of racial identities as economic assets, which further marginalizes Communities of Color. Goldstein and Meisenbach sustain that the presence of students of color in predominantly White institutions can be explained through the interest convergence rationale. That is, as students of color strive to be part of elite institutions, their presence on those campuses benefits White students and administrators (Goldstein Hode & Meisenbach, 2017), as relating to people of color reflects their non-racist affiliation (Leong, 2013), while at the same time advancing their economic interests by commodifying People of Color through the commercialization of diversity (Goldstein Hode & Meisenbach, 2017; Leong, 2013). As the racial identities of people of color become a business for predominantly white institutions, the interests of White students will always reign over the pursuit of racial justice.
for students of color, which inherently perpetuates white entitlement to see and use people of color as a material property (James, 2014). The diversity rationale camouflaged for the self-interest of White individuals, if anything, has just served to exacerbate the issue of colorblindness, race neutrality, and the fallacy of equal opportunity as the means to achieve justice for historically marginalized communities (Iverson, 2007).

The consequences of the commodification of diversity and access in higher education should be then understood as the benefit and advancement of the interests of white people (Goldstein Hode & Meisenbach, 2017), while maintaining decisive efforts towards the eradication of racial and overall social inequities at the margins (Archer; 2007; Desroches, 2016; Goldstein Hode & Meisenbach, 2017; Nieuwenhuis, 2010). The advancement of the interests of White people in education is reflected in the value of people of color in predominantly White institutions as educational and marketable assets by using their race to promote diversity, and diversity to generate productive outcomes, turning People of Color identities into a utilitarian tool for commercial purposes (Goldstein Hode & Meisenbach, 2017; James, 2014; Leong, 2013).

However, as Leong (2012) claims, “[the] instrumental [view of people of color as economic and social property] is antithetical to a view of nonwhiteness—and race more generally—as a personal characteristic intrinsically deserving of respect. Worse still, the instrumental view of non-whiteness inhibits efforts at genuine racial inclusiveness and cross-racial understanding” (p. 2155). In higher education, racial justice has been appropriated into economic and overall managerial and competitive discourses disguised in rationales of diversity, access, and opportunity (Archer, 2007; Singh, 2011). However, such an ideology of inclusion obscures the fact that equality of opportunity and participation do not engender
racial justice, nor do they dismantle the co-option of human rights that further fuels the systemic configurations of power in U.S. society (Singh, 2011).

In response to the marketed conception of social justice in education, critical theorists and progressivists argue that for justice to take place in education, it is not only necessary to ensure a fair share of resources, but also to expose and eradicate the structures of power that have helped perpetuate the status quo in the first place (Boyles et al., 2008). For instance, taking Foucault’s lens to define social justice in education, it can be argued that in order to achieve justice for all students, it is imperative to challenge hegemonic practices engendered through educational practices (e.g., Eurocentric curriculum, color-blind teaching approaches) (Huckaby, 2008). In fact, Foucault’s concept of “parrhesia,” or “free citizen” as translated from Greek, encompasses the way in which all members of society openly challenge structures of power exercised by the strong onto the weak (Huckaby, 2008). From Foucault’s view on parrhesia and its intrinsic connection to justice, one can conclude that to completely eradicate oppressive practices against marginalized communities, it is indispensable to honestly engage in the pursuit of truth on the structures that maintain educational and societal hegemony; only in that way will the oppressed and their allies be capable of dismantling the power relations that continue perpetuating subjugation (Nkoane, 2012).

Through this lens, it can be argued that parrhesia starts within the individual and then outward towards the society to achieve justice. Nieuwenhuis (2010) supports this claim by arguing that social justice is an ideal, and as such, it should penetrate all aspects of our individuality as a way of life. From this perspective, social justice in education cannot be solely mandated through legislation or policies; it “must be lived” by everyone in the society (Nieuwenhuis, 2010, p. 283). With this definition of social justice in mind as a well-rounded
definition of term, it is also important to note that most of the work on social justice in education focuses on two main areas: (a) social justice as reflected in policy, campus-wide efforts, and discursive practices and (b) social justice as the quest of educators to engender a more equitable and just society; that is, the view of educators as change agents capable of transforming classroom practices as reflected in the curriculum, institutional structures, and overall production of knowledge (Nkoane, 2012). The latter implies that the enactment of social justice—and racial justice—is a pedagogical issue that places the responsibility of the enactment of social and racial justice on educators through classroom and curriculum practices.

As a guiding definition of racial justice in education for this study, I embrace the contributions of Nieuwenhuis (2010) and Nkoane (2012) as follows: social and, more specifically, racial justice is embraced by each faculty member and lived through ideals and actions that advance equitable and unbiased practices for students of color. Such practices must be intentional: (a) to embrace racial dissonance among all students, but specifically White students, using racial conflict in the classroom as a key component in the learning process and (b) to disrupt oppressive learning experiences rooted in colonialism and racism. Social justice in education thus centers racial justice as one of its primary goals in its quest to dismantle power structures embedded in pedagogical practices, curriculum, institutional structures and Western epistemologies that further place students of color at the bottom rung of the society.

**Summary**

Despite the historical, social, and political connotations attributed to the concept of social justice, these definitions still fall short in capturing a vision of an organized society
that advocates for the promotion, advancement, and protection of values for oppressed
groups to live an integral life (Nieuwenhuis, 2010). From medieval to classical thinkers and
liberals to conservatives, the conception of social justice and, arguably, racial justice does
nothing but sustain systemic inequalities (e.g., higher education) and unbalanced power
structures since it disregards virtues, actions, and emancipatory visions in oppressed
communities (i.e., students of color) and exacerbates colorblind racism (Atasay, 2015). It is
undeniable that both neoliberal ideologies and distributive justice truncate this ideal; thus, it
is compulsory to define racial justice as an emancipatory tool to engage in practices that
disrupt educational and societal hegemony through which oppressed communities and,
particularly, Communities of Color can find liberation and unsettle subjugation (Nkoane,
2012).

The Omnipresence of Racism in HESA

Regardless of the discipline, graduate students of color continue to experience
instances of racism and microaggressions in their graduate programs (Brunsma et al., 2017;
Truong & Museus, 2012; Truong et al., 2016. However, the racialized experiences of
students of color are more puzzling when they happen within the arena of graduate programs
that espouse programmatic and curricular values to social justice and inclusion (Harris &
Linder, 2018; Kelly & Gayles, 2010; King & Howard-Hamilton, 2003). For example, there is
extensive research on whether social justice-focused graduate programs are successful in
preparing social justice leaders and allies (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Juarez et
al., 2008; Kline & Gardner, 2005; Viesca et al., 2013). Some of the studies on the topic
suggest that although societal conditions reveal the urgency for educational leaders to operate
from a social justice lens, social justice-focused graduate programs continue to prepare
educators and administrators for traditional practices (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Harris & Linder, 2018; Hubain et al., 2016;), which tend to perpetuate inequitable outcomes (Viesca et al., 2013). Importantly, although most of the studies reviewed in this literature area focus on race and racial justice as central concepts, they use the broader “social justice” term when describing the commitments of HESA programs. My discussion of this literature follows the terminology used by the original studies.

More specifically, there seems to be an increased awareness of the importance of including social justice within curricular and pedagogical goals of HESA master’s programs (Harris & Linder, 2018; Kelly & Gayles, 2010; Mueller & Pope, 2001). Although very little has been documented on the racialized experiences of students of color in HESA programs, some research suggests that students of color may experience feelings of exclusion and socially unjust practices within their HESA graduate programs (Harris & Linder, 2018; Hubain et al., 2016; Linder et al., 2015; Linder & Winston Simmons, 2015). It is important to note that the dominant story of HESA programs is that their commitment to social justice starts from their efforts to create welcoming and inclusive spaces for all students and lies at the core of their principles (Hubain et al., 2016).

It is relevant to highlight that a good number of the studies that have revealed racism and overall negative experiences for students of color in HESA programs come primarily from research examining the perception of White students (Bondi, 2012; Mueller & Pope, 2003), their identity development as explored through gender (Olson, 2010; Robbins, 2016, 2017), and overall students’ perceptions on multicultural issues in the curriculum (Flowers, 2003; Gayles & Kelly, 2007). Nevertheless, studies focused on the experiences of students of color in HESA and other graduate programs indicate that students of color experience all
forms of racism (Brunsma et al., 2017; Flowers & Howard-Hamilton, 2002; Harris & Linder, 2018; Hubain et al., 2016; Kelly & Gayles, 2010; Levin et al., 2013; Truong et al., 2016), including racial microaggressions, as well as blatant forms of racism (Bondi, 2012). What is more, when conversations around racial issues do not translate into steps toward change, students of color tend to experience racial fatigue when they find themselves responsible for educating their peers about racial oppression (Hubain et al., 2016).

**Students of Color as Native Informants**

In a study examining the perceptions of students of color of the multicultural quality of life at their institutions in relation to personal, social, and academic areas and using a focus group of seven graduate students and structured interviews, Flowers and Howard-Hamilton (2002) found that students of color often feel responsible for being the spokesperson for all underrepresented groups in the classroom. Studies examining the racialized experiences of HESA master’s students of color have yielded similar results. Two studies using CRT as a theoretical framework explored the perception of students of color on their experiences in 21 HESA graduate programs from across the U.S. The studies revealed that students of color often feel the burden to educate their peers on issues of race and diversity (Harris & Linder, 2018; Hubain et al., 2016; Kelly & Gayles, 2007). Through semi structured interviews (Harris & Linder, 2018), composited counter-stories (Hubain et al., 2016), and focus group interviews (Kelly & Gayles, 2007), the participants relayed how white faculty call on them to serve as native informants (hooks, 1994) on issues of social justice, including race.

When students of color are used as the spokesperson for their race, they do not only feel the burden to be constantly engaged in teaching their classmates and faculty, but they are also forced to disengage from learning, as they become the primary informants of any topics
related to diversity and race (Harris & Linder, 2018). What is more, when conversations around racial issues do not translate into steps towards change, students of color tend to experience racial fatigue when they find themselves responsible for educating their peers about racial oppression (Hubain et al., 2016). Through the lens of CRT, the responsibility of students of color to educate their white peers can be conceptualized from the tenet of whiteness as property (Harris & Linder, 2018). Whiteness as property stems from the notion of whiteness on various societal levels and institutions of power, which grants white people the right of possession, use, enjoyment, disposition, and exclusion as rooted in racial domination (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Harris, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1998).

From this perspective, whiteness as property was reflected in two instances in the above-mentioned studies (Flowers & Howard-Hamilton, 2002; Harris & Linder, 2018; Hubain et al., 2016). First, participants of the studies revealed that although their white peers recognized their white privilege, they did not necessarily engage in interrogating such privilege and examining ways to relinquish their privileges as a form of action towards achieving social justice for communities of color (Harris & Linder, 2018). Second, when white students in HESA programs make the choice to remain silent or resist conversations on race, they are fully using and enjoying their white privilege as an asserted right that their skin color accrues them (Harris & Linder, 2018). This results in the further subjugation of students of color in a space that professes to educate leaders for social justice (Hubain et al., 2016). Participants in the studies manifested the urgency to infuse different perspectives into the dominant curriculum as a strategy to minimize the invisibility of People of Color, thus their burden to be the spokesperson in conversations of race and other social justice issues (Harris & Linder, 2018).
Invalidation and Stereotyping of Students of Color

Research on students of color in graduate programs has revealed that this student population is often ostracized, and their experiences are constantly invalidated as a result of their subordinated identities (Brunsma et al., 2017; Truong et al., 2016; Truong & Museus, 2012). Studies on the racialized experiences of students of color in social justice-oriented HESA programs confirm the latter findings. For example, Harris and Linder (2018) found that despite being used as native informants, students of color in those programs feel their experiences are invalidated in two ways: (a) peers and faculty undermine the experiences and opinions of students of color by stating directly that they are not only unwelcome, but also invalid. More specifically, according to participants, faculty and peers who claimed they did not “see” race, were the first ones to invalidate their comments and experiences and (b) students of color relayed that they felt invalidated by essentialism. That is, White faculty and peers tended to lump together all People of Color in one group regardless of their racial or ethnic background and view them from the Black/White binary, which exacerbated their racialized experiences in the classroom.

Students of color often feel silenced and perceive resistance from White classmates when they share their experiences, which may hinder the ability of students of color to learn and engage in conversations of race and oppression (Kelly & Gayles, 2010). A study suggests that students of color who experience racism and feelings of exclusion in spaces overtly committed to social justice and inclusion tend to have feelings of betrayal (Hubain et al., 2016). In fact, it can be argued that due to invalidation from majority faculty (i.e., White faculty), students of color perceive that their relationships with faculty are more difficult than
the relationships between White students and White faculty (Flowers & Howard-Hamilton, 2002).

In addition to facing instances of invalidation in the classroom, students of color also report being the victims of stereotyping (Harris & Linder, 2018; Hubain et al. 2016). For example, the most common spaces where participants reported feeling stereotyped were assistantships and within their academic programs, all occurring at the intersection of the students’ multiple identities such as gender and age. Previous research on graduate students of color has confirmed that racial microaggressions and stereotyping were further intensified by the intersection of students’ language, gender, and class, and not just race or ethnicity (Solórzano, 1998). Additionally, Harris and Linder (2018) found that while Asian students are seen as smart and hardworking, Latino and Black students relayed being stereotyped as intellectually incompetent.

For instance, a Latina student recalled a situation during a meeting in her program where she had to speak in front of others, and someone remarked how well-spoken she was (Harris & Linder, 2018). This form of microinvalidation carries hidden messages that subjugate the identities of the target person (Sue et al., 2009). In this case, the comment towards the Latina student may sound as a compliment. However, the hidden message clearly implies that Latinx people are not smart and that she is certainly an anomaly. This is further complicated by adding the student’s gender identity as a woman, which would also imply that in addition to the lack of intelligence of Latinx people, she is also a woman, who stereotypically and based on patriarchal notions, have been deemed as less articulate than men.
The theme of intellectual inferiority is consistent with findings in other research on graduate students of color (Gay, 2004), which have concluded that due to Eurocentric epistemology and the normalization of whiteness through the curriculum (Harris & Linder, 2018), students of color feel as “Guests in Someone Else’s House,” as the material dissonance (i.e., not culturally relevant) leads students of color to feel out of place (Turner, 1994). This further leads them to feel forced to prove themselves to not perpetuate such stereotypes (Harris & Linder, 2018), and to feel intellectually isolated, and this is compounded when they are the only ones, or one of the few people of color in the room (Hubain et al., 2016; Truong et al., 2015).

**Feelings of Isolation**

Congruent with literature on the feelings of isolation experienced by graduate students of color (Gay, 2004; Solórzano, 1998; Truong & Museus, 2012; Truong et al., 2016), Flowers and Howard-Hamilton (2002) and Harris and Linder (2018) found that the lack of representation of Students and faculty of color in HESA programs results in feelings of alienation and marginality. More specifically, students of color felt isolated within their academic programs, assistantships and overall campus community (Harris & Linder, 2018). Students attributed their isolation to the fact that they are often “the only one” of their race or ethnicity in the classroom. In addition, the students of color manifested that during their assistantships, they felt uncomfortable and a lack of connection working with White students. The cause of this, according to the participants, is the absence of an inclusive culture where they feel genuine support from their White peers.

The racialized experiences of students of color in HESA classrooms and programs may also lead them to feel intellectually isolated as other research on graduate students of
color has indicated (Gay, 2004; Solórzano, 1998; Truong et al., 2015). According to Gay (2004) and Solórzano (1998), students of color experience intellectual isolation when faculty members discourage them from pursuing research topics, when faculty have low expectations of their performance, and when peers resist engaging in conversations of racism and overall oppression of minority groups. What is more, in a study of 26 doctoral students of color and their experiences with vicarious racism, Truong et al. (2015) found that students of color also tend to experience feelings of isolation when they perceive racism and other forms of marginalization targeted towards faculty of color in their departments, which brings up the notion that isolation is exacerbated through relationships and the accumulation of events.

**Recruitment and Retention of Students of Color in HESA**

Students of color who experience isolation and other forms of racism and exclusion tend to drop out or transfer (Hubain et al., 2016). As a result, the retention of higher education professional administrators of color in HESA programs and in the higher education field itself becomes a growing concern (Hawkins & Nicola, 2017). Currently, data on the recruitment and retention of students of color in HESA programs are very limited (Linder & Winston Simmons, 2015), yet data on professionals of color in the student affairs field indicate low numbers (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Taub & McEwen, 2006) with approximately 26% of professionals of color in administrative positions (Bichsel et al., 2018).

For example, in 1988, ACPA and NASPA embarked on a joint task force to examine the recruitment and retention of student affairs professionals. The report revealed that various barriers contributed to the low numbers of student affairs Professionals of Color, including low-paying, low-status jobs, and limited mobility or professional development opportunities
(Linder & Winston Simmons, 2015). The report concluded that the “extremely low” numbers of people of color and people with disabilities in graduate preparation programs required immediate attention to recruitment and retention strategies of people from minoritized backgrounds in the field of student affairs at the graduate and professional levels (Linder & Winston Simmons, 2015).

More recently, a study in 2016 by the National Association for College Admission Counseling and the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers found that 85% of the 559 institutional chief admission officers interviewed were White, while only 8% were Black/African American, and even a lower percentage represented American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian/Pacific Islander, or other racial groups (Hawkins & Nicola, 2017). Similarly, the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources found that although in 2016 administrators of color were paid equitably in comparison to white administrators, only 2% of the administrative positions were held by Asians, 1% identified as another race or ethnicity compared to 3% by Latino and 7% Black administrators. The remaining 86% represented White administrators (Seltzer, 2017).

In relation to the persistent reality of low numbers of student affairs professionals of color, Flowers and Howard-Hamilton (2002) advocated for more outreach and contact with minority-serving institutions, for instance Historically Black Colleges and Universities to recruit students of color. Additionally, students of color stated that less emphasis on Graduate Record Examination (GRE) scores would motivate more students of color to apply to HESA programs and noted that more focus on high school GPA or work experience was necessary, as these are stronger predictors of success. A study on the career and program choice of students of color in student affairs programs yielded a similar finding (Linder & Winston
Simmons, 2015). Some students in the study indicated that they only applied to programs that
did not have the GRE as a requirement, as they see this standardized test as a stereotype
threat that may lead them to perpetuate the idea that students of color do not score well on
such tests. Other students framed their aversion of the GRE test from the perspective that this
standardized test was the manifestation of a system of whiteness to dominate the realms of
academia.

Flowers and Howard-Hamilton (2002) also found that students of color sustained that
to increase the participation of students of color in HESA programs, more financial support
was needed in the form of assistantships and stipends. On the same token, Linder and
Winston Simmons (2015) found that participants stressed the importance of assistantships to
obtain financial support and practical opportunities. Various participants indicated that with a
flexible curriculum to incorporate students’ interests, it was more plausible to incorporate a
practicum component that could give them the opportunity to gain experience and get hands-
on real-life situations they might encounter in their future jobs as student affairs professionals
and overall to increase their career prospects. According to Linder and Winston Simmons
(2015), through the lens of CRT, it can be argued that the urgency of students of color to find
programs that offered assistantships and practicum opportunities stemmed from their
understanding that as People of Color, they would have to work twice as hard to prove
themselves in a field where their White peers had more chances of getting a job because of the
structural racism embedded in hiring practices.

Participants in both studies (Flowers & Howard-Hamilton, 2002; Linder & Winston
Simmons, 2015) overwhelmingly highlighted the importance of peer advising programs with
other Folks of Color as well as mentoring programs with Faculty of Color as crucial to the
recruitment of students of color. A student in Linder and Winston Simmons’ (2015) study indicated that, “[as a Person of Color], you have to have somebody on your team, so I felt like having an African American on staff was a thing. … if something happened, [they] could understand, could relate to me, so that was one of my criteria” (p. 421). For this student, representation was a decisive factor in choosing a HESA program, as representation symbolizes inclusive spaces and a supportive learning environment for students of color.

The students also reported that a crucial component that influenced their decision-making process about which HESA program they wanted to attend was the program’s commitment to social justice. According to students, HESA programs with espoused social justice principles meant racial diversity representation among faculty and students, reputation of the program, and overall, first impressions while visiting the institutions (Linder & Winston Simmons, 2015). However, studies on the racialized experiences of Graduate students of color suggest that despite their programs and campuses professing to be pro-diversity and pro-social justice, the culture is not only White, but also not receptive to change (Flowers & Howard-Hamilton, 2002; Harris & Linder, 2018; Hubain et al., 2016).

Additionally, both HESA preparation programs and the professional field continue to be predominantly White, so there is an urgent need to attract students of color and Faculty of Color to create more supportive environments for students of color in those programs (Flowers & Howard-Hamilton, 2002). Flowers and Howard-Hamilton (2002) suggest offering more diversity courses and bringing more guest speakers; however, if pedagogical, curricular, and overall institutional practices remain unchanged, a few diversity courses will not change this reality. As students of color noted in their study, being taught by educators
who truly espouse their values and commitments to social justice and multicultural issues is of paramount importance to ensure the recruitment and retention of students of color.

The above studies suggest that the presence of students of color in higher education institutions appears to be important for its educational and marketable value that serves the economic and social interests of the dominant group—White people, thus perpetuating the status quo and persistent racial injustices (Goldstein Hode & Meisenbach, 2017). Despite the increasing number of students of color on U.S. campuses, scholars continue to report hostile and unwelcoming environments for students of color, including constant racial microaggressions (Solórzano et al., 2000; Yosso, 2005, Chapter 1), which puts into question the effectiveness and enactment of the myriad diversity-driven efforts that populate the discourse of higher education. This also shows that internal actors are aware that “diversity” and “multicultural education” are popular as images and ideas—that White students want some diversity, but not to the extent that they are completely engaged in openness, social change, and the interrogation of their privileges, which reinforces the notion of whiteness as property (Bondi, 2012). That is, diversity becomes White people’s right to use and enjoy, which objectifies the identities of students of color as property when it advances white students’ educational and marketable interests (Bondi, 2012). Yet, those same identities are disposable and excludable when White people can no longer benefit from them (Bondi, 2012).

Summary

The studies discussed in this section situated a good portion of the racialized experiences of HESA Graduate students of color as an issue that emerges in classroom interactions, which calls for an examination of the pedagogical and curricular practices of
HESA programs. Although research demonstrates that students of color continue to experience feelings of isolation and instances of racism, microaggressions, invalidations, and stereotyping, curricular practices do not necessarily include their racialized lived experiences, which have helped maintain oppressive educational practices, and real options for change very unlikely to happen. What is more, students of color undergo exclusion and unjust treatment vis-à-vis their white counterparts and become victims of tokenism and essentialism (Harris & Linder, 2018; Flowers & Howard-Hamilton, 2002). Furthermore, students of color not only experience difficult relationships with White students, but they also encounter challenging dynamics with White faculty, which is consistent with the findings that account for the perceived intellectual inferiority of students of color due to the normalization of whiteness in the curriculum, and the resistance of White faculty to change the discourse (Flowers & Howard-Hamilton, 2002; Gay, 2004; Harris & Linder, 2018).

**Teaching for Social Justice in HESA: Faculty, Curriculum, and Pedagogy**

Since the 1970s, the number of students of color enrolled in higher education has continued to rise (Flowers, 2003; Gayles & Kelly, 2007). While in 1976, students of color constituted 15% of the student population, such percentage increased to 29% in 2002 (Gayles & Kelly, 2007). According to the 2019 Census Bureau, the U.S. population of color represents approximately 42%, which indicates that the number of students of color in higher education will also continue to increase (Gayles & Kelly, 2007). With the reality of a more diverse student population, HESA programs have centered their attention on deciding what core competencies are necessary in the curriculum to prepare student affairs professionals to be at the vanguard of the current demands and needs of the higher education field—that is, a diverse student population (Herdlein et al., 2010; Wilson & Meyer, 2011).
HESA programs work to align and adhere their curricular content to CAS (Herdlein et al., 2010; Wilson & Meyer, 2011). Such standards serve as a guide for these programs to better understand what should be included in the curriculum (Wilson & Meyer, 2011). Of special interest has been the CAS standard that highlights the importance of equity and access issues in the preparation of student affairs professionals. Specifically, the standard states, “[a] graduate program must adhere to the spirit and intent of equal opportunity in all activities. The program must encourage establishment of an ethical community in which diversity is viewed as an ethical obligation” (CAS, 2006, as cited in Wilson & Meyer, p. 354).

As members of the CAS consortium, ACPA and NASPA have espoused commitments to social justice, and 82% of HESA preparation programs have adopted this commitment by requiring their student body to take at least one diversity course in order to develop their multicultural competence (Flowers, 2003; Harris & Linder, 2018). A study that sought to find out which diversity courses are required in HESA master’s programs found that 74% of the respondents had at least one required diversity course, while 8% of the remaining 26% were in the process of integrating this requirement into the curriculum (Flowers, 2003). Another study found that students took the initiative to take diversity courses as electives, do internships, or just rely on personal experience, when these courses were not required in their programs (Gayles & Kelly, 2007).

In addition, an overview of the literature indicates that for effective practice in highly diversified higher education settings, HESA students must develop multicultural competence comprised of three areas: awareness, knowledge, and skills (King & Howard-Hamilton, 2003). However, CAS indicated that multicultural compentence is integrated in the
curriculum within the areas of student development theory and student characteristics, but not into other core areas of the curriculum such as history, philosophy, organizational areas, and administration of student affairs (Pope & Mueller, 2005).

**The Role of Diversity Issues in the HESA Curriculum**

Student development theory has been used in HESA preparation programs since the late 1970s to help student affairs professionals make sense of the behaviors, norms, attitudes, and overall outcomes of college students, in addition to theories of organizational development, learning, and campus environments to better understand the needs of diverse groups of students (Patton et al., 2007). Although theoretical perspectives have illuminated the work of HESA educators, student affairs professionals, and researchers in general, the theories have been criticized for the absence of language about issues of race and racism in HESA students’ development and learning (Patton et al., 2007). In this vein, while White HESA students engaged in multicultural competence education will eventually make gains in their understanding of a diverse student population (Pope & Mueller, 2005), such gains will be partial, superficial, and insufficient to prepare student affairs professionals to adopt anti-racist and social justice approaches within their practice (Robbins, 2016). The implications of this argument center the attention on the revaluation of diversity and multicultural education in HESA programs, as the lack of integration of privilege, whiteness, and power within all areas of the curriculum only serves to perpetuate the same systems that this type of education attempts to disrupt (Bondi, 2012; Robbins, 2016).

Patton et al. (2007) argue that racism continues to be at the center of the HESA curriculum, as it mainly focuses on White, Eurocentric ideologies, which serve not only to invalidate the experiences of students of color, but also to perpetuate their invisibility in
course material and course discussions. For instance, theory courses in HESA preparation programs tend to promote the idea that the understanding of theories should guide the practice of student affairs professionals. However, the absence of conversations of race in theory courses that critically look into the various ways in which students of color experience racism, exclusion, and other forms of discrimination on college campuses directly contributes to the perpetuation of racism against the diverse student populations with whom future student affairs professionals will work (Patton et al., 2007).

The presence of Eurocentric ideologies as the guiding light of the curriculum has historically been a vehicle to maintain systems of oppression by producing and reproducing knowledges, experiences, values, beliefs, and cultural relations (Foley et al., 2015). These hegemonic practices preclude students of color from fully participating in the construction of different knowledges due to the predominance of whiteness as a neutral way of seeing the world as well as a manifestation of invisible racism (Berry, 2015). In fact, white Eurocentric colonial epistemologies have always emphasized intellectual and/or cultural superiority by imposing structures of knowledge such as subjects’ disciplines, objective outcomes, and standardized courses that ignore the cultural capital of people of color (Berry, 2015).

In this way, the omission of critical, social justice-focused discussions of race and racism across the HESA curriculum should be of great concern, as it not only perpetuates the educational injustices that students of color experience daily, but also serves as a disservice to student affairs professionals with the potential of effecting change within their future or current professional roles (Patton et al., 2007). The difficulty of spotting whiteness in the HESA curriculum can be attributed to the invisible epistemological and ontological constructs embedded in course materials, and which are often used as measures to compare
and marginalize the knowledge and cultural capital of students of color (Berry, 2015). As Harris and Linder (2018) claim:

The ways in which students’ multiple identities are influenced by and intersect with multiple systems of domination must be interrogated and honored through HESA curriculum. Failing to include accurate and complete historical representations of higher education and failing to problematize research that unequivocally centers the experiences of White students, upholds white supremacy in education and society, which is a system of domination that HESA organizations (ACPA, 2015) and educators discursively purport to deconstruct. (p.155)

Despite the omission of race in most courses of the HESA curriculum, various multicultural scholars recognize that the integration of multicultural knowledge, awareness, and skills is an essential component for student affairs professionals to approach their practice in an ethical and effective manner (Gayles & Kelly, 2007; King & Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Pope & Reynolds, 1997). However, existing literature has also highlighted that HESA programs are not doing an adequate job in preparing students to work with a diverse student population (Pope & Mueller, 2005; Pope & Reynolds, 1997). For example, Talbot’s (1996, as cited in Pope & Mueller, 2005) study on student affairs master’s students’ perception of diversity within their academic program revealed that although 80% of the students believed diversity training was important to them, 60% of the respondents also reported that the diversity training in their programs was low or not deep enough.

A similar study by Gayles and Kelly (2007) examining the perception of HESA graduate students and student affairs professionals on the integration of diversity in the curriculum found that only some students were required to take at least one diversity course.
The students manifested that the amount of time spent on diversity issues was not enough to cover the complexity the topic entails. Some students intentionally sought to enroll in additional multicultural courses, internships, and other extra-curricular activities that could help them learn about diversity issues. The findings also revealed that students found it difficult to apply what they have learned in diversity courses to their own practice and believed it was unethical to require them to enroll in diversity courses that did not provide them with tools to be effective social justice agents (Gayles & Kelly, 2007).

The lack of a diversity course requirement in the curriculum in this study aligns with Flowers’ (2003) findings in relation to the need to incorporate diversity as a requirement in the curriculum and the need for HESA programs to assess the degree to which their courses integrate diversity, and arguably, the implementation of equity and social justice into the HESA curriculum as part of course materials across the curriculum. Also, consistent with Patton et al.’s (2007) argument, students in this study manifested difficulty in applying theory in practice, when students were encouraged to be social justice advocates and practitioners but were never told how to be effective social change agents. A similar finding in a year-long study of new professionals in the HESA field revealed that new professionals feel that their graduate programs emphasized too much the attainment of knowledge (i.e., theories), ignoring the application of such theories in real life situations they might encounter in their professional experiences, “leaving them at a loss once they got into the field” (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008, p. 329). This has strong implications for the need to incorporate critical topics on diversity into the HESA curriculum and the way in which student affairs educators situate their role as facilitators in conversations of diversity and social justice issues in general.
HESA Faculty as Owners of the Curriculum

Research has shown that faculty in HESA programs recognize the importance of aligning HESA curricula with the needs of the profession (e.g., working with a diverse student population) (Herdlein et al., 2010; Pasque et al., 2013; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). A study on faculty attitudes toward the importance of intended learning outcomes and necessary skills students in HESA should develop revealed that diversity and multiculturalism were considered to be some of the most essential courses for HESA students to become effective practitioners (Herdlein et al., 2010). However, the relevancy and level of comfort of HESA faculty in engaging students in topics of race and racism has shown incongruences. To illustrate, in a study on faculty’s competence to teach diversity and multicultural issues, Talbot and Kocarek (1997) indicated that the omnipresence of white students and faculty in HESA programs has serious implications for the profession as the demographics of higher education are shifting towards the presence of a more diverse student population. Because the majority of faculty and graduate students in HESA tend to be predominantly white (Robbins, 2016), their exposure to diversity and diversity issues is quite limited (Quaye, 2012; Talbot & Kocarek, 1997). Part of the problem is that HESA students “are being taught by white men and women who are a product of white neighborhoods and white institutions of higher education” (Talbot & Kocarek, 1997, p. 284). In addition, results of the study also suggested that faculty manifested mixed perceptions of their comfort, skills, and knowledge to teach diversity issues, feeling the most comfortable teaching gender issues.

Other studies on higher education faculty and their approaches to facilitating conversations of race in the classroom have indicated that faculty oftentimes feel conflicted in the way they handle difficult conversations during class discussions. For example, Pasque
et al. (2013) conducted a study where 66 faculty members of different races, ethnicities, ages, genders, and disciplines were interviewed to examine their pedagogical approaches and dilemmas they experience when discussing issues of racism and racial conflict in the classroom. An important finding of this study showed that various faculty members denied instances of racial conflict in the classroom despite having shared a situation of racial conflict in other parts of the interview. Although the questions asked did not frame conflict in either a positive or negative stance, the faculty appeared to perceive the word “conflict” as inherently negative and manifested their concern about conflict as a possible cause for students to feel anxiety and hostility in the classroom. The denial of conflict helps maintains a “safe” space for students of the dominant group (i.e., white students), while staying focused on the neutrality of the “scientific material on hand” (Pasque et al., 2013, p. 7). In addition, denial to recognize the intricacies of subtle racial conflict further excludes students of color and directly contributes to the perpetual supported ignorance of white students whose problematic behavior and attitudes during class conversations may go unnoticed and unchallenged (Pasque et al., 2013).

Sue et al.’s (2009) study on racial conflict with eight white faculty members at the graduate level revealed a similar finding as Pasque et al.’s (2013) study. Through semi-structured interviews, the faculty shared a common fear of losing control of classroom dynamics when allowing racial conflict to happen during class conversations. One of the participants shared an experience of racial conflict in his class indicating, “it was a sense of loss of control … that I associated with conversations being difficult, and sometimes that loss of control is manifested in students attacking one another in ways that I am uncomfortable with” (Sue et al., 2009, p. 1096). This finding suggests that the faculty’s perceptions of racial
conflict and the potential of this type of conversation in the classroom are highly subjective, putting the faculty member’s personal emotions and level of comfort over the potential for white students to engage in difficult dialogues as learning opportunities, and for students of color to have a space for their experiences to be validated.

Avoidance and minimization of conflict was a common theme in Pasque et al.’s (2013) study, as some faculty recognized that racial conflict did indeed happen in the classroom and that it was important to address it eventually but engaging the students in difficult dialogue or ridiculing the white students who triggered the conflict created more conflict. The conflicted views of faculty members who let comments that spark racial conflict to go unchallenged miss out invaluable opportunities to model classroom and pedagogical leadership for students (Pasque et al., 2013). Furthermore, the faculty’s perceptions of student emotions (anger, defensiveness, sadness, anxiety) and behaviors (crying, students leaving the room, withdrawal) make them feel helpless, anxious, disappointed, and uncertain (Sue et al., 2009), thus unable to find strategies to use racial conflict to facilitate learning in a more effective classroom environment.

Other studies on the level of multicultural competence in the HESA field have revealed important findings. For example, King and Howard-Hamilton’s (2003) study on the multicultural experience and competence of graduate student personnel preparation programs, student affairs staff serving as internship supervisors, and diversity educators, revealed that faculty who taught diversity issues scored the highest on the Multicultural Competencies for Student Affairs-Preliminary Form in various categories (e.g., intercultural contact in collegiate settings and outside collegiate settings), while students of color scored higher than the internship supervisors. The latter is worrisome as Gayles and Kelly (2007)
Another study on the competence of faculty to teach multicultural issues found that faculty of color or faculty who are members of institutionally discriminated groups scored higher on their understanding and engagement of multicultural issues than their white counterparts (Pope & Mueller, 2005). This finding aligns with Sue et al.’s (2009) study on the perceptions and reactions of White faculty to classroom dialogues on race and racism, which revealed that race and gender had a correlation with the inclusion of diversity in course content. Seventy-five percent of men of color, 83% white women, and 89% of women of color reported they included diversity content in their course material, unlike white male faculty who reported feelings of anxiety and lack of preparedness to teach about diversity issues (Sue et al., 2009).

Scholars have suggested that the multicultural competence of faculty should be investigated even further (Flowers, 2003; King & Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Pope & Mueller, 2005). Although there seems to be consensus in the field that diversity and multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills are essential to prepare effective student affairs professionals, the lack of comprehensive data on faculty’s diversity and multicultural competence hampers the possibility for full understanding to address the gap between HESA students and their potential to effectively function in a diverse university environment (Pope & Mueller, 2005). The new trend of preparation programs that claim to teach social justice continues to increase (Viesca et al., 2013). Yet, what concerning is that as this social justice trend populates the discourse of HESA programs, more faculty claim to be preparing students for social justice while still engaging in practices that perpetuate inequitable outcomes for
students of color (Boyles et al., 2008; Patton et al., 2007). Even more concerning is the fact that many faculty members in HESA do not feel equipped to address issues of race and racism in the classroom, which results in disengagement and avoidance (Harris & Linder, 2018).

However, an interpretive study examining the experiences of faculty who teach diversity courses in HESA programs analyzes various strategies these educators use to engage racial conflict and other difficult dialogues in the classroom (Gayles et al., 2015). Results of the study indicated that overall, faculty who teach diversity courses acknowledge the importance of difficult dialogues for the critical and personal examination of issues of diversity through various democratic processes that center the students and professors as co-producers of knowledge. That is, faculty recognized the importance of disrupting traditional notions of teaching, which situate the professor as the authority and only source of knowledge by using their power and privilege to step back and allow space for students to engage with each other and even question the faculty member’s assumptions. Second, creating an environment for difficult dialogues for students to personally connect to the class material was of paramount importance for the faculty in this study, noting that racial conflict had the potential to create an environment that fostered risk-taking, civil discourse, and dissonance while at the same time faculty moderate to appease situations of exclusion and hostility. This strategy was described as “the delicate dance” faculty enacted to facilitate dialogue and learning (Gayles et al., 2015, p. 305). An important finding of this study also suggests that the social identities of faculty members (i.e., race, gender, sexual orientation, religion) play a crucial role in the extent to which diversity content is included and deepened in the curriculum and the faculty’s level of comfort teaching it (Gayles et al., 2015).
Unfortunately, despite the effort of some educators, many faculty in HESA programs still operate under monocultural, color-blind standards that further legitimize Western notions of knowledge and which continue to validate meritocratic ideologies, rationality, exclusivity, and the marginalization of the epistemologies of people of color (Patton et al., 2007). As such, HESA educators who claim to operate under a critical race lens must recognize their power as owners of the curriculum and critically design it in a way that allows them to reflect on their ontological and epistemological assumptions of what counts as knowledge and what should be included in class discussions so that their assumptions are not only reevaluated, but also that they do not harm students of color in any form (Patton et al., 2007). In this way, HESA educators who subscribe to principles of justice and a commitment to diversity have the responsibility of engaging future or current student affairs professionals to interrogate the myriad ways in which higher education as an organization has perpetuated racism and structural inequities through its functions and practices (Patton et al., 2007). In order to disrupt the normalcy of racial conflict avoidance and important conversations of social justice issues in the classroom, HESA faculty must undertake an intersectional perspective in their teaching approach, one that challenges essentialized notions of race and racism that have been internalized and perpetuated in HESA programs (Harris & Linder, 2018).

Despite the increasing attention on teaching diversity issues in HESA programs, there seems to be a lack of data specifically about the racial justice pedagogical competence of faculty within the classroom in relation to their interactions with students of color. Although studies have focused on the racialized experiences of students of color in HESA programs (Brunsma et al., 2017; Harris & Linder, 2018; Hubain et al., 2016; Griffin et al., 2015; Levin
et al., 2013), the enactment of racial justice in HESA programs from a pedagogical lens (i.e., from the faculty’s perceptions) must be further explored to address the chasm between students’ perceptions and the faculty who train them.

**The Potential Role of Critical Pedagogy for Social Justice in HESA**

Since Paulo Freire set the foundation of critical pedagogy in the 1960s (Freire, 1968/1972), many educators claim that their pedagogical practices have been transformed and informed by the tenets of this teaching philosophy. Under the tenets of critical pedagogy, educators have the possibility to bring the historical and sociopolitical implications in which knowledge is perceived as natural and neutral (Barjesteh et al., 2013; Crookes, 2010). Akbari (2008) asserts that critical pedagogy seeks to expose the discriminatory foundations of education and include groups who have traditionally been left out and misrepresented. As Canagarajah (2005) affirms, critical pedagogy is a practical way of doing learning and teaching since there are broad connections between the classroom and society within relevant social contexts that have implications for power (as cited in Barjesteh et al., 2013). These connections are considered to construct egalitarian, equitable, and ethical educational social environments (Barjesteh et al., 2013). Additionally, critical pedagogy names systems of oppression and domination as the forces that influence what is taught, how it is taught, and what students should learn in the classroom (Wagner & Yee, 2011).

A fairly large body of work accounts for critical pedagogy and its potential to help impart social justice education (Allen, 2004; Bettez, 2011; Davis & Steyn, 2012). The goal of social justice in education is to guide students to critically develop tools to deconstruct the sources and structures of oppression, as well as their own socialization within oppressive systems so that students cultivate a sense of individual agency and their potential to generate
change and disrupt oppressive attitudes within themselves and in the communities and institutions in which they co-exist (Bell, 2016). Kumashiro (2015) sustains that teaching toward social justice requires troubling knowledge, which includes the discussion of a wide range of social issues, and above all, acknowledging that anti-oppressive teaching practices are not fixed, but in constant flux. Such a stance to pedagogy suggests that teaching can never be a politically neutral endeavor (hooks, 1994), and in fact, no teaching practice can either be fully trouble-free or anti-oppressive (Kumashiro, 2015). In addition, teaching social justice can be mentally and emotionally strenuous (hooks, 1994), as an approach to critical pedagogy entails a critical process of unlearning preconceived notions of how one makes sense of the world (Kumashiro, 2015). The unlearning process is not only disorienting, but also frustrating, and confusing, which can lead both learners and educators to experience anxiety and mainly resistance (Allen & Rossatto, 2009; Kumashiro, 2015).

However, if resistance is perceived negatively as noted in various studies on faculty and racial conflict in the classroom (Pasque et al., 2014; Sue et al., 2009; Talbot & Kocarek, 1997), a natural response from faculty is to avoid such a topic all together (Davis & Steyn, 2012). When viewed and utilized positively, resistance has the potential to lead students to learning, as lack of receptiveness in class does not mean lack of effect; that is, “resistance does not mean ‘not engaging’” (Davis & Steyn, 2012, p. 31). As hooks (1994) notes, “I have found through the years that many of my students who bitch endlessly while they are taking my classes contact me at a later date to talk about how much that experience meant to them, how much they learned” (p. 42). In other words, the learning process entailed in social justice pedagogy embraces the idea that resistance is an essential component of social justice education although it may not engender immediate learning results. Yet, such learning may
actually come later, either in days, months, weeks, or even years that follow (Davis & Steyn, 2012). In fact, resistance is a sign of how white students often engage in racial conversations given the intensely embedded problematic white discourses and white privilege, so their resistance can be used as a powerful teaching moment to pave a meaningful path toward learning (Davis & Steyn, 2012). From this lens, educators must engage resistance as a useful tool in their pedagogical approach rather than avoid it, as the latter only serves to shelter White students (Davis & Steyn, 2012).

While conflict avoidance as a by-product of resistance has been well documented, many self-proclaimed social justice educators continue to promote the idea of the classroom as a “safe space” to discuss issues of race and overall oppression, situating the concept of “safety” as an untouchable construct (Jansen, 2009). Although safety is an important component of certain pedagogies as a sign of respect for students’ emotions and in the promotion of growth, trust, and empathy, in the case of critical pedagogy toward racial justice, safety may hinder the deepening of critical conversations and the further examination of systems of oppression (i.e., safety for whom and why?) (Davis & Steyn, 2012). In other words, when white students expect a comfortable environment where their ideas about the world and society are not challenged, the possibility for development and growth are hampered, as “promising safety sets up the false promise of a pain-free, conflict-free, comfortable and unchallenged classroom experience” (Davis & Steyn, 2012, p. 33). Safe spaces are often fostered through experience and dialogue-based pedagogies, which tend to center the attention on white students’ experiences, which are oftentimes uncritically shared, thus encouraging abuse of classroom freedom (hooks, 1994), not leading to transformation (Davis & Steyn, 2012).
In fact, one of the major critiques of critical pedagogy as a movement in the U.S. is that it has been appropriated into a White discourse regardless of the good intentions of those from the dominant group who promote it (Allen, 2004). Instead, Allen (2005) proposes that critical pedagogy as a movement has the potential to transform white identity and the abolition of white supremacy by re-racializing the root essence of critical pedagogy and its conception of the nature of oppression only if this pedagogy is imagined from a race-radical perspective. Critical pedagogy has often been used uncritically by self-proclaimed critical pedagogues who operate from a color-blind approach, and who see the use of critical pedagogy from the lens of class (Allen, 2005; Leonardo, 2005). Part of the problem resides in the origins of critical pedagogy, as it had its roots in class given its influence from the writings of Marx, the Frankfurt School, neo-Marxism, cultural studies, and post-foundational critiques (Leonardo, 2005). For that reason, critical pedagogy has not played a major role in the deconstruction of racism, albeit scholars in the field of education argue for a critical engagement of race within this pedagogical approach (Allen, 2005; Leonardo, 2005; Solórzano & Yosso, 2005).

For example, Solórzano and Yosso (2005) propose that for a better understanding of the role of critical pedagogy in higher education, it is necessary to use CRT, for it attempts to deconstruct the oppressive structures of society that “maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions in and out of the classroom” (p. 69), as a way to engender personal and societal transformation. Critical race pedagogy is then a teaching approach that recognizes the centrality of race and racism in the field of higher education and functions toward the elimination of racism as well as other forms of oppression such as language, class, gender, and sexual orientation (Solórzano & Yosso, 2005).
The tenets of critical race pedagogy recognize: (a) the centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination, understanding also that class analysis alone does not comprise the complexities of racial oppression; (b) the challenge to dominant ideology, characterized by traditional claims that the educational system and institutions are neutral spaces that thrive on objectivity, meritocracy, equal opportunity, and color-blindness. Critical race pedagogy exposes such traditional views as a camouflage for the perpetuation of power structures, privilege, and self-interest of the dominant group; (c) the commitment to social justice through curricular and pedagogical work that guide all students toward the eradication of racism, sexism, and poverty, as well as the empowerment of students of color and other underrepresented groups. Critical race pedagogy recognizes that “educational institutions operate in contradictory ways, with their potential to oppress and marginalize coexisting with their potential to emancipate and empower” (p. 71); (d) the centrality of experiential knowledge of faculty of color as legitimate, appropriate, and essential to the deconstruction, examination, and teaching about racial subordination; (e) the transdisciplinary perspective, which challenges ahistoricism and the undisciplinary examination of race and racism and situates them both in a historical and contemporary perspective along with analytical intersections of ethnic studies, women’s studies, sociology, law and other disciplines (Solórzano & Yosso, 2005).

Despite the potential of critical race pedagogy as an emancipatory tool for students, classrooms continue to be “safe spaces.” (Davis & Steyn, 2012), but only for white students and their unchallenged views about white supremacy and systems of oppressions. By contrast, students of color can rarely voice their experiences with whiteness and white people
and are therefore silenced, which leads them to become complicit of the racial
dehumanization of People of Color (Allen, 2005). As Allen (2005) suggests:

Whites who are uncomfortable with race-radical people of color naming and
critiquing whiteness have not yet been reborn into solidarity. In the intercultural
communication process between whites and people of color, we whites tend to have
more of a problem hearing than speaking. Our possessive investment in whiteness
and our programmed surveillance of daily white privileges prevent us from really
hearing people of color. … However, the need for change is immediate and people of
color do not have time to wait for whites to take some slow, bourgeois journey of
white self-discovery. (p. 65)

Although critical race pedagogy is specifically meant to address the needs and be
responsive to students of color, educators invested in critical race pedagogy could utilize its
tenets to transform classroom practices. For instance, they can develop the tools to foster an
environment of dissonance that leads white students into an identity crisis so they can start
interrogating their whiteness while at the same time navigating other ways of being white
(Allen, 2005).

Summary

Considering the increasing population of students of color in higher education, the
efforts to provide multicultural competence are still seen in isolation within the student
development theory and student characteristics frameworks (Pope & Mueller, 2005) and
issues of race and racism in HESA remain underexplored (Patton et al., 2007). This discourse
does not connect to an anti-racist and racial justice-oriented curriculum since the
conversation remains partial, neutral, and superficial (Robbins, 2016), and perpetuates
colorblind ideologies, disciplines, and outcomes that ignore the cultural capital of students of color and advance the interests of White students (Berry, 2015). The lack of criticality in diversity courses not only disregards the discourse to empower potential racial justice agents, but also ignores the implementation of equity and racial justice in the curriculum (Flowers, 2003). The prevalent defensiveness of White faculty and the fear of Faculty of Color to address issues of race in the classroom—usually framed as a “hostile” and “conflictive” topic (Pasque et al., 2013)—maintains the racialized experiences of students of color unchallenged to protect the “comfort” of White students. Although preparation programs for social and racial justice are on demand across U.S. universities, pedagogical practices continue to perpetuate inequitable outcomes for students of color (Boyles et al., 2008; Patton et. al., 2007).

A possible direction for educators to expose discriminatory foundations and practices in education can be attained through the tenets of critical race pedagogy (Solórzano & Yosso, 2005), as it offers the possibility to bring historical and sociopolitical perspectives to construct egalitarian and equitable educational environments (Barjesteh et al., 2013). Within the pedagogical terrain of critical race pedagogy, racial justice education allows for the discussion of social issues engendering anti-oppressive teaching practices to resist Eurocentric colorblind educational hegemony as well as to humanize and honor the lived experiences of students of color.

Chapter 3 focuses on the methodology that guided my study and delves into the data collection methods and analysis used to examine the findings. The chapter also includes the conceptual framework that guided my research as well as the philosophical worldview that informed my approach to the study.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I start by presenting the theoretical lens and conceptual framework that guided this study. More specifically, I present conceptual foundations for the study. I also describe the epistemological foundation that guided this research project followed by my positionality, and how it informed both how my study was conducted and its outcomes. I proceed to describe the methodology that guided this study of the enactment of racial justice in social justice/DEI-focused HESA graduate programs. Next, I explain the selection of Multicase Study as the methodological approach for this study. I then proceed to explain the methods that directed the study (i.e., sampling, data collection, and data analysis). Last, I examine points related to trustworthiness, reflexivity, subjectivity, and biases.

My study addressed the following central research question:
How are HESA programs that aim to center social justice or DEI working to realize their mission as it relates to racial justice?
Research sub-questions included:

- How is the historical/contextual foundation of HESA programs that aim to center social justice/DEI values enacted and reflected in mission statements and other program-related documents in specific relation to racial justice?
- In what ways, if any, do faculty translate the intended social justice mission of HESA programs into tangible racial justice-focused practices in the curriculum, pedagogy, student advising, and overall program outcomes?
- How do students perceive and experience the ways in which their programs enact, or fail to enact, their intended social justice/DEI mission related specifically to racial justice?

**Conceptual Framework**

CRT formed the umbrella foundation of this study, as my interest in understanding how HESA programs enact racial justice through their social justice/DEI mission stems from my personal and political views of racial justice within a social justice lens. I view racial justice as the pivotal component of social justice or DEI. As such, I see the perpetuation of structural inequities in education (and society) as a result of the misuse of social justice as practiced from a color-blind perspective. Additionally, CRT’s commitment to activism to generate change informs my interest in understanding and exploring ways in which HESA programs envision themselves enacting a social justice/DEI mission that is racially conscious and that serves as the starting and foundational step to eradicating other forms of oppression. As a critical form of inquiry, CRT served as the overarching guide of this study, as CRT seeks to interrogate systems of oppression with a dimension that calls for action to systemically dismantle marginalization at all levels.
In its origins, CRT was deemed as a movement led by critical scholars and activists to expose the insidious role of the U.S. legal system in the systemic perpetuation of white supremacy (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Although CRT started as a movement, its influence has penetrated various disciplines (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). For example, in recent years, CRT has been widely used in educational settings to dismantle the racist structures that have characterized the educational pipeline of the U.S. (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Linder et al., 2015; Patton, 2016). CRT in education has served to uncover issues of inequity, hierarchy, tracking, controversies over the curriculum, and testing, among others (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

The activist dimension of CRT has also attracted educational researchers to interrogate the experiences of students of color and understand the influence of race in their experiences while giving voice to their narratives as legitimate and honorable, and as a tool to create change (e.g., Hubain et al., 2016; Linder et al., 2015; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). CRT “not only tries to understand our social situation, but to change it; it sets out not only to ascertain how society organizes itself along racial lines and hierarchies, but to transform it for the better” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 3). CRT affords a theoretical and conceptual lens to examine inequitable experiences and outcomes of students of color through its basic and added tenets. For the purpose of this study, I centered three tenets as the guiding light of my conceptual lens:

1. Challenging notions of race neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness, and meritocracy.

CRT helps situate the phenomenon under study (racial justice) and the concepts that build its framework in relation to larger societal and global concerns—larger units—as a foundational component to adopt a critical perspective. Those units are analyzed
through the lens of ideas and actions that pertain to issues of equity, racial justice, power, unchallenged notions of whiteness, as well as individual and collective understandings of justice as it impacts students of color. CRT also puts forward the argument that policies and structures built on notions of individual merit and colorblindness perpetuate the dominance of whites, thus perpetuating racism.

This tenet provided an important lens for this study since it rejects claims that the university policies, programs, and physical structures that undergraduate and graduate students live within are racially neutral. Additionally, as the concept of colorblindness is thought to fully incorporate racial justice, this tenet offered a framework to problematize notions of equality and equity that presume a color-blind we-are-all-the-same rhetoric that only serves to strengthen systems of oppression and oppressive practices, so they go unnoticed and unquestioned. This tenet affords the possibility of fostering change, as the researcher becomes a tool to anchor agendas for future action that may translate into policies and practices as they engage in deep examination of issues that pertain to racial equity.

2. Interest Convergence. The notion of interest convergence explains that any social and racial gains for people of color will only materialize if they advance the interests of white people, which makes racism difficult to eradicate. Originating from the work of Derrick Bell (1980), interest convergence is the notion that white people will only support racial justice (in the form of policies, laws, practices) as far as there is a positive outcome in it for them, or a “convergence” between the interests of whites and non-whites. In this study, the focus was on examining how members of HESA academic programs individually and collectively envision and realize social justice or
DEI commitments, with a particular focus on racial justice. A responsible approach to this study was to take a critical stance on how HESA programs could adopt practices that could transform the experiences of all their students, but more specifically students of color toward a more inclusive and equitable educational experience that honors their individual struggles as embedded in oppressive systems within higher education.

3. Commitment to Social Justice. A commitment to social justice centering on the importance of eliminating racial injustices as the path to eradicate all other forms of oppression is necessary. CRT “recognizes that multiple layers of oppression and discrimination are met with multiple forms of resistance” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 22). As the focus of this study was to better understand ways in which HESA programs could advance in more intentional ways their racial justice missions, this tenet reveals ways to seek the elimination of racial oppression through programmatic practices. In addition, as an overarching goal, CRT aims to affect other forms of oppression through its own attempt to address structural racism.

Within the realm of HESA programs, a commitment to social justice indicates that there is room to devote attention to actively designing and constructing programmatic landscapes that are inclusive and that pro-actively promote equity and outcomes for students of color and students from other marginalized social groups while, at the same time, preparing and modeling for future HESA professionals to address issues of racial and other forms of injustices in the higher education arena.

Additionally, the action-oriented nature of this CRT tenet resonated with my personal and political views that research should have a transformational dimension to it to push the
boundaries of mere exploration and/or examination. My interest in examining how HESA programs understand, realize, and envision the social justice mission with a focus on racial justice in their curriculum and practices was informed by the premise of CRT-informed research in that it brings a focus on the importance of taking a critical stance that promotes actions that aim to transform organizations and social institutions.

As reflected in Figure 1, the conceptual framework is structurally informed by Harper’s (2010) question-based anti-deficit achievement framework for studying students of color in STEM. For this reason, for each area of the framework, I have included specific questions that I engage in in this study. Through a question-based framework, I weave in concepts and issues highlighted in the literature review of this study that comprehensively allow me to examine and discover how HESA programs organize and understand their practices. More specifically, I aimed at understanding how these programs deliver an educational experience to their students that is reflective of their commitment to racial justice and inclusion. Additionally, consistent with CRT, this framework calls for the legitimization of students of color’ narratives of discrimination and exclusion within their programs as the foundational approach to effect programmatic change.

As seen in Figure 1, such actions can start being enacted through tangible efforts: the implementation of a racially conscious curriculum and pedagogical guidelines and the engagement of HESA students of color through peer-networks, student advisory committees, and professional development for cross-racial interaction. The questions in the above-mentioned sections serve to interrogate and counteract the lack of intentionality in the curriculum development of HESA programs (Flowers & Howard-Hamilton, 2002; Harris & Linder, 2018; Hubain et al., 2016). The questions in these sections are geared toward the
understanding of the multidimensional and complex scope in the advancement of a racial

equity agenda and allow space for a critical understanding of the omnipresence of whiteness
Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

- **HESA Master’s Programs**
  - Re/Examination of Programmatic Missions
  - Data-Driven Program Assessment

- **Engaging HESA Students of Color**
  - Diverse Academic
    - Classroom Discussions on Race
      - How do HESA faculty facilitate discussions on race in the classroom in a way that students of color are not centered as native informants?
      - How do HESA program leaders use their mission statements as a critical tool to guide how they serve racially and ethnically diverse student populations?
      - How do HESA programs draw on their racial focused mission statements to conduct program racial climate assessments?
      - What aspects of the mission statements of HESA programs serve as guidelines to assess how the program culture impacts their students of color?
      - How do HESA programs intentionally use their mission statements as their pillar to recruit, retain, and graduate students of color?
  - Peer Network
    - Engaged HESA Students of Color
      - Peer-Network
        - What types of opportunities do HESA programs provide for students of color to form networks of support with others of color?
        - What mentoring opportunities do HESA students of color have as support and validation systems?
  - Student Advisory Committees
    - Do HESA programs offer student advisory committees as a central mechanism to obtain feedback on academic content, department offerings, syllabi, faculty representation, and racial awareness among faculty members and program leaders?
    - What is the impact of a student advisory committee as a democratic space on the improvement of the program racial climate and racial culture for students of color?
  - Professional Development for Cross-Racial Interaction
    - What types of training or professional development spaces do HESA programs offer to help students from various racial backgrounds engage in dialogues across differences?
    - How do HESA programs facilitate training or professional development spaces that allow students to build cross-racial collaborations to strengthen the foundational values stipulated in the programs’ mission statements?
  - Recruitment and Hiring of Faculty
    - What tangible efforts do HESA programs engage in to diversify their faculty body?
    - How do HESA programs connect their faculty recruitment efforts as it relates to the goals specified in their mission statements and the student population they serve?
  - Communities of Practice
    - How do HESA programs assist faculty in reimagining their pedagogy to ensure they have abundant strategies to provide inclusive classroom settings for students of color?
    - What strategies do HESA programs use to facilitate resources sharing (teaching approaches, course materials, etc.) among faculty as peer-feedback and mentoring tools?

- **Support for HESA Faculty**
  - Diverse Curriculum and Racially Conscious Pedagogy
at the practice and institutional levels (McNair et al., 2020). In the last section of the framework, I included the importance of the representation of faculty of color, but not as mere diversity artifacts, but as essential elements in the retention and completion of HESA students of color. The questions in this section of the framework also highlight the accountability of HESA programs to ensure the mentoring and proper professional development they must provide to faculty of color as another mechanism to retain them and train them to advance the mission of their programs.

**Epistemological Foundations**

A foundational part of a qualitative research design is the role of the researcher’s awareness of their own philosophical stances, as it ultimately sheds light on their perspectives (Jones et al., 2006). For researchers, it is imperative that they first take into consideration their views on how knowledge is not only generated but also what the nature of reality is (Jones et al., 2006). Jones et al. (2006) put forward the claim that any study, regardless of the methodological approach, must include an epistemological and theoretical stance. Failure to do so may result in “[u]ngrounded studies [that] risk running adrift, rambling, becoming lost, and having no direction” (Jones et al., 2006, p. 122). Epistemology is defined as the “related assumptions about the acquisition of knowledge” (Jones et al., 2006, p. 9), which inform “the relationship of the researcher to that being researched” (Creswell, 1998, p. 74). A theoretical perspective offers a lens to explain and predict the ways in which the world operates (Creswell, 1998) and serves as the philosophical foundation that informs methodology (Crotty, 1998). The epistemological and theoretical perspectives that guided this study consisted of multiple theories that have informed my
teaching practice in higher education, and that ultimately informed the methodology for this study as well as my positionality (Jones et al., 2006).

**Philosophical Worldview**

The paradigm that guided this research falls into a transformative framework, one that seeks to transform systems of oppression through action and through the voices of participants in the study as co-constructors of knowledge (Poth, 2018; Mertens, 2010b). The concept of paradigm has been defined by Thomas S. Kuhn (2012) in his foundational book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (originally published in 1962), as “the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by the members of a given community” (p. 175). The transformative paradigm emerged during the 1980s and 1990s in response to postpositivist assumptions that “imposed laws and theories that did not fit marginalized individuals in our society or issues of power and social justice, discrimination, and oppression ... needed to be addressed” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Although there is not a solid body of literature describing this paradigm, its tenets have been associated with various groups of critical researchers and theorists, action researchers, Marxists, feminists, communities of color, people with disabilities, indigenous and postcolonial peoples, as well as members of the LGBTQA community (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The foundational tenet of the transformative paradigm is that knowledge is not neutral, and this is reflected through dynamics of power and social relationships (Poth, 2018). In the transformative paradigm, the researcher acknowledges that “power is an issue that must be addressed at each stage of the research process” (Mertens, 2010a, p. 213). Thus, a transformative worldview sustains that research must go beyond knowledge construction and focus on using co-constructed knowledge to advance an action-oriented agenda that helps
and emancipates marginalized communities (Poth, 2018). Within this paradigm, research inquiry must be intertwined with politics and a change-focused agenda to address oppressive practices at various societal levels, aiming to transform the lives of the participants, as well as the institutions in which participants are involved (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Mertens, 2015).

Centered on the premise of ethical responsibility in a transformative paradigm, the purpose of this research was to inform practice, and as such, I hope that the findings of this study will be used in HESA social justice-focused programs to act toward a more just lens and as a vehicle to deliver their social justice/DEI mission in more intentional and effective ways, especially when promoting racial equity and justice.

**Axiology**

Axiology refers to the role of values that inform the ethics of a given paradigm (Poth, 2018). Ethical practices in a research project are an essential component to the process from the planning to the implementation phases (Mertens, 2015). Axiological assumptions include the recognition of biases and the value-laden nature of research, and the role of those within the context of the study (Poth, 2018). Regarding the ethical assumptions of research, respect, beneficence, and justice are the three foundational principles that guided a study (Mertens, 2010a). However, Mertens (2010a) explains that a transformative axiological assumption expands on these notions on various levels: (a) Respect is carefully determined by the cultural norms of interaction of a given community and across communities. (b) Beneficence is assessed through the degree to which the study advances the interests and needs of the community involved. (c) Justice is examined in terms of the critical assessment of the process and outcomes of the study and the potential to further a social justice agenda.
A primary value associated with a transformative paradigm is the commitment to represent the viewpoints and voices of all stakeholder groups, including those with less power within the program or community to amplify the researcher's understanding and accurate description of their experiences with the phenomenon under study (Mertens, 2010a). For this study, I included HESA faculty and students to ensure the legitimization of findings as the bulk of knowledge produced from their experiences comes from the actual people affected by the program (Mertens, 2010a).

**Researcher Reflexivity**

CRT relies on the concept of “cultural intuition,” which stems from Chicana Feminist studies (Bernal, 1998) and refers to four sources of cultural intuition that researchers use during the research process: Personal experiences, existing literature, professional experience, and analytical process. Cultural intuition validates the perspectives and experiences of the researcher (Huber, 2008). However, cultural intuition is not only a component of CRT (Malagon et al., 2009), but also a tool to help the researcher explore their background and personal experiences to examine potential biases they bring into the research project. Building off three of the four sources of cultural intuition: (a) personal experience, (b) existing literature, and (c) professional experience, I present my subjectivity for this study.

My first source of intuition refers to the validation of my own personal experiences, background, and personal history as shaped by collective experiences within my community. My experiences as a Latina woman (predominantly from Indigenous origin) in Colombia and the U.S. have shaped my perspectives on social justice and education and how these two concepts inform other areas of my life and my social identities. While in Colombia, I grew up
with a mother who was an avid advocate for education and who always instilled in me the idea that it was through education that I could achieve my goals. However, gender and economic inequities coupled with lack of support from institutional agents (teachers and professors) always accompanied my experiences in school, which later intensified in college.

My sense of justice became more palpable when I moved to the U.S., and while in my master’s program, I felt I was valued for my knowledge and passion for learning for the very first time. I had a caring advisor who was demanding but encouraging, and always pushed me to achieve more than I thought I could (educationally and professionally). Although literature on the experiences of students of color in graduate school often reports lack of support from faculty and advisors, my experiences in my Higher Education PhD program (with a focus on social justice) were even more reaffirming and validating, and through the unconditional support of my advisor and most faculty in the program, I developed a more critical lens on the concept of racial justice and more generally social justice and what it meant for students with marginalized identities like me. My personal experiences allowed me to use my perspectives in the decision-making process of this research study. My past experiences have become implicit knowledge about not only racial justice as a term, but as a way of imparting and practicing education within HESA programs. This implicit knowledge eventually helped me step into the research process with more confidence as I made sense of events, actions, and discourses used in the context of the study (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

My second source of intuition refers to the existing literature on the topic of HESA programs that have a social justice mission, including a focus on racial equity. For example, the critical curriculum I was exposed to while doing my coursework in my PhD program (i.e., CRT, critical feminist studies, activism, social justice as practice in educational settings,
socio-political and historical theories and narratives of students with marginalized identities, higher education as a public and private good, among others) illuminated the decisions for sampling and other choices I made to approach this study. This source of cultural intuition shaped the ways in which I not only collected the data, but also how I looked at them.

Finally, my third source of intuition comes from my professional experiences. My accumulated experiences in education (from elementary school to higher education) provided insight into this research study and the context in which it is developed. More specifically, my professional experience has mainly been connected to higher education in various roles including teaching at the undergraduate level for nine years and overseeing the English as a Second Language pre-collegiate and undergraduate programs in a social justice-oriented public university and in a full-time capacity for the last two years. Throughout my experience as a faculty member and as an administrator of an academic program, I have had the opportunity to shape my views on how the mission of the university might not necessarily be aligned with what some programs do within the institution. Within this capacity, I always question the degree of racial justice within the decision-making of the program I work for and the impact of those decisions on our students, the vast majority of whom identify as students of color.

My personal, academic, and professional experiences have shaped the way in which I define justice in society, but more specifically in the educational field, as this is a big part of my identity. From my point of view, centering racial justice, DEI, and social justice in education means to constantly bring and hear the collective voices of all stakeholders not just as narratives, but as key mechanisms to question structures of power that perpetuate the subjugation of people of color. My experiences as a student, as an immigrant, as speaker of
English as a second language, as a professional, as a woman of color give me the conviction that it is only when we problematize structures of power and the status quo intentionally using the voices of those affected by them that a social justice agenda centered on racial justice can be moved forward.

**Methodological Approach**

Methodology is the tool for the researcher to understand how data will be collected in relation to the nature of the study (Jones et al., 2006; Mertens, 2010b). The purpose of the methodology is to provide a clear direction to the study as grounded in an epistemological stance as well as a theoretical perspective (Jones et al., 2006). In this study, I chose a qualitative research lens, as it is consistent with my epistemological and theoretical perspectives and the overall structure of my research questions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, Chapter 4).

The qualitative researcher engages in a thorough examination of the individual and/or collective experiences of participants to explain a social process or make sense of their human experience (Hatch, 2002). A qualitative study “allows researchers to get at the inner experience of participants, to determine how meanings are formed through and in culture, and to discover rather than test variables” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 67). The role of the researcher is then to construct a well-rounded description of the phenomenon under study through a rigorous analysis of the words, meanings, contextual factors, and behaviors shared by participants in a naturalistic setting (Hatch, 2002). In the fourth edition of the *Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Denzin and Lincoln (2011) defined qualitative research as:
[A] situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p. 3)

However, in its latest edition of the same book (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017), qualitative research has been reinterpreted as a research approach that is on the move while also heading in different directions at the same time. Denzin and Lincoln (2017) remind us that, “post interpretive paradigms are on the horizon ... Older paradigms are being reconfigured. Hybrid paradigms are emerging alongside new geographies of knowledge and new decolonizing epistemologies” (p. 29). The reason for this is the urgent call for critical qualitative research, one that situates current realities within the historical present coupled with the undeniable need for social justice through transformative actions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017).

The need for emancipatory practices and visions that resist oppression and lead to deep social change falls into a view for social justice within a transformative paradigm that challenges inequities and all forms of marginalization based on race and other oppressed identities (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This lens coincides with my transformative worldview and epistemological foundations. The transformative paradigm guiding this study not only allowed me to understand my worldviews, but also to guide the methodological decisions made throughout the development of the study (Mertens, 2010a). For this study,
my goal was to examine HESA social justice-oriented programs and their commitment to dismantling systems of racial oppression at the individual, programmatic, and institutional levels.

Scholars in the field have argued that prior research on HESA social justice programs has focused only on the racialized experiences of students of color or the experiences of white students (Flowers & Howard-Hamilton, 2002; Harris & Linder, 2018; Hubain et al., 2016; Kelly & Gayles, 2007). My study focused on examining how HESA faculty and students and collectively perceive and learn about the concept of racial justice as it applies to their social justice or DEI mission statements and ways to move forward in relation to strategies for HESA programs to attain their mission goals more meaningfully for faculty, staff, students, but most importantly for students of color. In this vein, qualitative methods offered an inductive path toward theory generation, using participant data as the channel for the theory to emerge (Creswell, 2018). Qualitative methods provide an adequate analytical framework to not only capture social phenomena in a more complex way, but also to deconstruct meanings that individuals ascribe to the social contexts in which they co-exist (Hatch, 2002). Thus, a qualitative method allowed me as a researcher to fulfill the purpose of the present study examining the ways in which students and faculty in HESA programs envision, realize, and perceive commitments to racial justice in these educational contexts.

Consistent with my worldview aligned with a transformative paradigm, this study is shaped by my beliefs that people’s realities are rooted in human oppression as a result of unequal power structures, and the urgent need to address and dismantle such oppressions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The transformative paradigm centers attention on the multiple realities influenced by the experience of different cultures, as well as marginalized,
oppressed, and underserved populations. Epistemologically rooted in a transformative research paradigm, I see these beliefs and assumptions to be consistent with CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Malagon et al., 2009), a foundational framework guiding my study.

**Multicase Study**

Case study is a popular research method that has been utilized to study individuals and organizations in different fields, including the health and social sciences (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 2000). Case study can be defined as “an empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the ‘case’) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (Yin, 2017, p. 15). In other words, a case study guides the researcher to understand a real-world case “and assume that such an understanding is likely to involve important contextual conditions pertinent to [the] case” (Yin, 2017, p. 16).

An interpretive multicase study approach was employed in this qualitative study. A multicase approach helped me in gaining qualitative understanding (Stake, 2006) of how HESA faculty and students perceive their racial justice as infused in the social justice or DEI missions in tangible ways. Additionally, this multicase study allowed me to explore and document how students perceived and experienced the way racial justice missions are enacted and juxtapose their experiences with how HESA faculty perceive they are delivering their mission in tangible ways. Having these aims clearly stated in my research questions provided the methodological and philosophical understanding of the importance of multicase study to facilitate the exploration of the phenomenon within the context and the use of a variety of data sources (Baxter & Jack, 2008).
In the context of the methodological approach used, a multicase study represents both a process and product of the inquiry (Stake, 2006). Multicase study research invites researchers to systematically examine a problem within a real-life context and answer questions of “How?” and “Why?” instead of simply “What?” This approach situated the study as a sustained form of inquiry that went beyond mere descriptions (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 1989). As such, a multicase design challenged me to ask questions rather than make assumptions about what it means to realize and advance racial justice through social justice or DEI missions in HESA master’s programs. A multicase study methodology stemmed from my interest in focusing on the actual case: How HESA faculty work to address racial justice through their social justice or DEI missions in tangible ways and the way their enactment of the mission is perceived by students.

Additionally, given its relevancy in the higher education field, as well as the historical, practical, and applicable nature of multicase designs (Jones et al., 2013; Merriam, 1998), this methodology yielded mechanisms and strategies to understand and develop new knowledge on more effective ways to realize a racial justice focus in HESA programs that operate under a social justice or DEI mission. Also, a multicase study offered the tools to predict and analyze similarities and contrasts between the programs under study as well as the stakeholders (faculty and students) (Yin, 2003).

In the design, I started by recognizing the targeted concepts (social justice or DEI missions) that connect the cases together (Stake, 2006). It is important to note that this study yielded a large amount of comprehensive data. However, the data analysis phase was approached with the employment of existing theories (Baxter & Jack, 2008). To have a comprehensive understanding of the two HESA masters programs and their enactment of
racial justice through their social justice or DEI missions, I also framed my conceptual framework around CRT as the overarching model illuminating the whole research process.

Multicase study designs have increased in frequency in recent years (Yin, 2017) and the evidence collected from multiple cases provides a compelling and robust collection of evidence to describe the phenomenon (Herriott & Firestone, 1983). This also aligns with the “how” questions that I proposed and provided more clarification of the nature of this inquiry (Yin, 2017). In terms of analysis, the use of a multicase study approach allowed me to analyze each setting individually and then perform a cross-setting analysis to understand the similarities and differences between the cases (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This methodological approach also facilitated the description of the findings in a comprehensive fashion, so the reader could have a full and robust understanding and depiction of both HESA master’s programs (Yin, 2017; Stake, 2006). This qualitative multicase study aimed at representing the “self-centering, complexity, and situational uniqueness of individual cases” (Stake, 2006, p. 23), and the data collected from multiple sources through iterative processes (e.g., document analysis, interviews, and observations) provided a holistic description of the cases being investigated (Easton, 2010).

Regarding data analysis, Merriam (1998) explains case study as an “intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single unit or bounded system” (p. 12). As described above, the single unit or two bounded systems for this study consisted of the two social justice/DEI-focused HESA programs. Within these bounded areas, a more holistic inquiry was possible with triangulation. For this study, I focused on using multiple sources of data from faculty, students, document analysis, and the observation of some classes. Baxter and Jack (2008) delve into the process of triangulation and situate case study as an approach that “facilitates
exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources. This ensures that issues are not explored through one lens, but rather a variety of lenses which allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood” (p. 544). From this lens, this multicase approach guided my study into the understanding of the core phenomena pertaining to how HESA programs understand and enact racial justice missions (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Jones et al., 2013; Merriam, 1998).

Limitations in Case Study Methodology

In terms of paradigmatic assumptions, case study research is conceived from a constructivist perspective, which means that reality is socially constructed (Searle, 1995) through collaboration and constant engagement between the researcher and participants. At first sight, there seemed to be a philosophical conflict in proposing case research for this qualitative inquiry. However, I utilized a pluralist methodological approach where I, as the researcher, recognized the importance of subjective human creation of meaning (Stake, 2006), but the interpretations, analysis, and discussion were aligned within a critical transformative paradigm. This meant that I was explicit about the social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and racial values that define reality (Mertens, 2015).

Despite some limitations discussed in the research methods literature, multicase study research fit the aims of the proposed research questions. First, there has been a tendency to answer broad questions and to have too many objectives for one study (Baxter & Jack, 2008). According to Yin (2003), “the pitfall that novice researchers fall into is that they analyze at the individual subunit level and fail to return to the global issue that they initially set out to address” (p. 550). These critiques were mitigated in the proposed study by having clear and attainable research questions as well as an explicit research objective to examine how racial
justice is infused in social justice and DEI missions and can inform practice and action within HESA programs. As a researcher, I was aware of the aims and scope of the proposed study as well as the process of particularization. Rather than seeking to apply generalization logic, which is typical in positivist and post-positivist paradigmatic assumptions (Easton, 2010; Stake, 2006), I provided truthful and accurate descriptions, and I was mindful of how I handled my own interpretations to record perceptions with precision (Stake, 2006). In this way, the process of particularization shed light on the uniqueness of the settings.

In terms of research evaluation, multicase study has also received critiques about its reliability and validity. There is a common assumption in conventional wisdom in research arenas that establishes that case study research does not offer value because there are not linked hypotheses or “well-known hypothetico-deductive models of explanation” (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 3). Conventional views of research assume that (a) context-independent knowledge is more valuable, (b) it is impossible to “generalize” based on individual cases, and (c) case research is useful in the first stages of the research process (Flyvbjerg, 2006). However, these assumptions are deemed as inaccurate because case study research is a strong method for research tasks, and indeed, its distinctive characteristics allow the researcher to understand a phenomenon in depth and comprehensively (Easton, 2010; Maxwell, 2012, 2020).

Aligned with the transformative perspectives of this qualitative inquiry, the logic of generalizability is compensated with trustworthiness or “truth value,” values that were well thought out during the overall study design. In the end, the reader/audience have the opportunity to assess the credibility of the findings and analysis, and the truthful representation of events in the discussion (Baxter & Jack, 2008). I included an integrated
holistic interpretation of the cases based on the philosophical orientation that guided the study to produce causal explanations.

The importance of causal explanations has always been a matter of controversy in the discussion of qualitative research methods even for those working from constructivist interpretivist paradigms (Maxwell, 2020). However, the significance of causation and the implications of this realist concept for social research in education have the potential to challenge conventional wisdom, which assumes that causation is merely a matter of finding regularities between events without having explicit models leaving the data collected as improvised narratives. Maxwell (2020) claims that there are misleading and erroneous views of causation because causation is not about “regularities” but more about real and observable causal mechanisms and processes of a small number of social entities to develop a holistic description through iterative research processes (Easton, 2010; Maxwell, 2012, 2020). In this study, I assumed causation as I see the world in terms of events and processes that are interconnected and influenced by each other. I established causation by directly and truthfully observing the cases, and underscoring the contexts, mental events, and processes of the concept under investigation where causal processes can determine causes of behavior (Maxwell, 2020).

Additionally, a multicase study design allowed me to understand and describe the context from a critical realist perspective of causation for social research where embedded meanings of the phenomenon were real phenomena and could be observed and analyzed as causes of behavior. I was able to identify and verify causation by using qualitative methods that aligned with multicase study research and the transformative paradigm. I pursued the fundamental tenet of critical realism: “use causal language to describe the world” (Easton,
2010, p. 119). As stated by Yin (2018), case study research is demanding because data collection procedures are not routinized. However, I asked well-structured questions, engaged in reflexivity, was an attentive listener, adapted to situations, and deeply examined and understood the issue being studied. Most importantly, I prepared to collect evidence ethically, professionally, and with sensitivity to all kinds of evidence (Yin, 2017).

**Sampling**

*Sampling Philosophy.* Sampling in qualitative research is defined as “the selection of specific data sources from which data are collected to address the research objectives” (Gentles et al., 2015, p. 1775). The decision-making process, as well as the criteria necessary to build a sampling strategy for a qualitative study, are instrumental not only because “they result in participants for a particular study, but also because they serve as further reflection of one’s theoretical perspective, one’s methodological approach, and the researcher's interpretive stance” (Jones et al., 2006, p. 65). In this regard, the researcher's goal when crafting a sampling strategy for a study is to maximize opportunities that will allow them to unearth data that directly connect to the overall purpose of the study and to allow the sampling process to interact with data analysis (Jones et al., 2006). Sampling strategies depend, however, on prior decisions about the unit of analysis for the study (Patton, 2002).

As a result, “purposeful sampling” (Jones et al., 2013, p. 65) guided this study, which is a method generally used to conduct case studies. Within the boundaries of case study, sampling must be highly intentional with an “emphasis on information-rich cases that elicit an in-depth understanding of a particular phenomenon” (Jones et al., 2013, p. 65). Purposeful sampling implies that the sample is intrinsically connected to the study’s purpose (Patton, 2002, as cited in Jones et al., 2013). After the purpose of study and research questions are
framed in the pre-sampling decision-making, the researcher starts the process of identifying pertinent spaces, settings, contexts, and groups where potential study participants may reside (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000a, as cited in Jones et al., 2013).

Selection of Sites. To select the programs, I used criterion sampling. Criterion sampling entails carefully reviewing and selecting “all cases that meet some predetermined criterion of [relevance]” (Patton, 2002, p. 238) to ensure methodological rigor. For this study, I chose two HESA master’s programs. Master’s programs became the focus in this study as this field prepares a larger pool of student affairs professionals to perform a variety of services through critical work to ensure support and success for all students in higher education. Both programs were selected based on the criteria described in the pages that follow.

First, the programs needed to offer a master’s degree in HESA with either a specific social justice or DEI statement in the mission statement, or a social justice lens in the form of commitments to inclusiveness, diversity, and equity as it pertains to race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, disability, social class, religion, etc. This criterion was essential given the context and focus of this study on the degree to which racial justice commitments are infused implicitly or explicitly within social justice or DEI HESA programs. I did not select a program that had an explicit racial justice mission because the goal of this study was to examine the ways in which commitments to justice were integrated as part of a larger social justice or DEI mission, as racial justice has been deemed as a pivotal facet of social justice (Bensimon, 2018).

As the unit of analysis of this study is academic programs, careful selection of programs was a must (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Building off the purpose of the study to
examine ways in which HESA faculty perceive, engage, and could better engage in the realization of their social justice missions, with particular emphasis on racial justice, I selected two HESA masters programs in two different regions of the U.S. The names of these programs are replaced by pseudonyms: Cypress University Program (CUP) and Willow University Program (WUP). To select the programs, I conducted online research on the website of the Professional Preparation Commission of ACPA – College Student Educators International (ACPA), which maintains a Directory of Graduate Programs Preparing Student Affairs Professionals (Commission on Professional Preparation, n.d.). Institutions are listed in the directory because they “have at least one graduate program that prepares student affairs professionals” (Commission on Professional Preparation, n.d., para. 1). The descriptions of these programs are significantly expanded in Chapter 4. The information provided below was compiled from the university website as well as the descriptions provided in the ACPA directory.

**Cypress University Program (CUP).** CUP is located in the northeast of the U.S. in a state university. CUP offers a master’s degree in HESA through the Department of Educational Leadership. This master’s program meets all the requirements of CAS and ACPA standards and claims to offer a curriculum with the premise of developing reflective practitioners in student affairs. CUP is a 44-credit-hour program, which entails the core curriculum, as well as elective courses. However, students are only allowed to take electives during their second year, when they also do their supervised practicum. CUP is a two-year program and has a cohort model of 18-20 students who get accepted into the program each year and who are required to complete their core courses together. Most students are enrolled full-time and, during the data collection phase, CUP started offering part-time options as
well. CUP has four full-time faculty who teach the core courses, and an unknown number of part-time faculty who tend to be student affairs professionals or recent graduates of their PhD program. CUP takes pride in not only offering 20-hour assistantships to all their full-time students, but also in offering one of the most competitive compensation packages in the U.S., which includes a full tuition waiver, subsidized medical and dental benefits, and a generous stipend.

CUP has an extensive and detailed statement on their commitment to DEI. This commitment includes a statement inviting students from all social identities to apply to the program and highlighting how the program values everyone’s lived experiences and the intersection of those experiences with their multiple identities. CUP presents their curriculum as the vehicle to help their students deepen their understanding of DEI issues and encourage faculty and students to engage in conversations about difference and how to approach them from a just lens. From all the courses listed on their website, only one appears to have a specific and explicit focus on diversity: “Multicultural Educational Environment.” Additionally, CUP states that their commitment to justice is seen through their support to other programs on the campus dedicated to DEI and social justice.

CUP’s website does not offer information on students’ recruitment, retention, and completion rates. However, it does offer a page dedicated to showing the current students in the program. Also, although there is no specific information on international students, CUP believes that part of their diversity mission is realized through the inclusion of students from more than nine states across the country in addition to students from two other countries. CUP requires the completion of a comprehensive exam, which is an hour-long oral presentation where students deliver a critical summary of what they learned as related to the
core competencies of the program.

**Willow University Program (WUP).** WUP is a program operating in a state university located in the eastern region of the north-central U.S. WUP offers a master’s degree in HESA leadership through the College of Education and Human Development. The HESA master’s program is one of the four concentrations offered in the Education Leadership MA program. Each concentration has separate requirements, courses, and program coordinators. WUP abides by CAS and ACPA standards, and it is designed to prepare students for mid-level entry professional positions in colleges, community colleges, and universities. WUP is a 39-credit-hour program that includes the core curriculum, diversity cognate, 300-hour field experience, a 100-hour capstone experience, and completion of a portfolio (no thesis is required). The length of the program depends entirely on the students’ chosen pathways: full-time, which may or may not include summer courses, or part-time, which is an option for working professionals. WUP has five full-time faculty members and ten part-time faculty. In addition, WUP is strongly committed to supporting their students through full-time and part-time assistantships, and their website states that most of their students hold some type of assistantship either across the campus or through partnerships they have with other nearby colleges.

More importantly to the focus of this study, in their mission statement and descriptions of the program, WUP makes explicit commitments to the centrality of diversity and inclusion in higher education with special attention to historically marginalized and underserved populations. The program website states that their students often land on roles that include admissions, academic advising, residence life, student activities, financial aid, career services, and offices designed to support and retain historically underserved student
populations such as LGBTQA services, services for students with disabilities, multicultural affairs, women's centers, veteran and military services, offices for foster care youth, among others. The curriculum offers general courses on student affairs issues, and only one core course is specifically named “Equity and Diversity in Higher Education.”

WUP establishes that one of the ways to ensure the realization of their commitment to equity and justice is through a required and individually designed diversity cognate, which is a six-credit course that students take with the guidance of their advisors. Courses typically taken for the diversity cognate requirement include Asian American students in higher education, global perspectives in higher education, LGBT students in higher education, students with disabilities, social justice mission of community colleges, Hispanics and Latinos in higher education, white privilege and white identity, women in leadership, and first-generation college students. WUP, however, does not specify data on the social identities of the student population enrolled in the program, or their recruitment, retention, and completion rates, nor does it specify program size. However, they accept applications from domestic and international students, and accept applicants from a wide range of majors if part of their past coursework includes a critical reading and writing course. No entrance exam is required, and students are not given the option to write a thesis or take a comprehensive exam.

**Participant Selection.** The selection of participants in qualitative research must be intentional with careful attention to the relationships between the expertise of the participants in the phenomenon under investigation and the purpose of the research questions (Jones et al., 2006). Following Jones et al.’s (2006) principle of “maximizing opportunities to uncover relevant data” (p. 71), the selection of “excellent” participants is of paramount importance.
(Morse, 2007). An excellent participant is one that has experienced, observed, or been through the phenomenon under study for a considerable amount of time, and who wants to volunteer to participate knowing they must devote time to sharing the information needed by the researcher, be reflective, and as clear as possible to successfully convey their experiences (Morse, 2007).

Morse (2007) reminds us that “[n]ot all of those people who volunteer to participate in your study will have all of the characteristics of an excellent participant” (p. 231), so remaining mindful of the purpose of the study, research questions, and participant selection criteria was imperative throughout the research process. Excellent participants for this study were deemed as those who had relevant information and experience with HESA programs either from a professional standpoint or as degree-seeking students. Excellent participants also understood the transformative/solution-oriented intent of the study as a result of their input and reflexivity during the analysis of the data collected.

Guided by case study principles and the purpose of this study, during the initial sampling phase, I employed maximum (heterogeneity) variation as a sampling strategy. This type of sampling yielded: “(1) [very] detailed descriptions of each case, which were useful for documenting uniqueness; and (2) important shared patterns that cut across cases and derived their significance from having emerged out of heterogeneity” (Patton, 2002, p. 235). Because the unit of analysis of this study is academic programs, I was intentional about the inclusion of faculty and students with the assumption that they were all experienced stakeholders within the context of the program and who could serve to facilitate informed global sense-making to construct a holistic understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Suri, 2011).
Additionally, scholars have argued that previous studies on HESA programs have focused either on only faculty, only students of color, or only white students (e.g., Olson, 2010; Robbins, 2016, 2017), but no studies had specifically focused on the integration of the perspectives of faculty and students in the aggregate. From this perspective, maximum variation ensured that all stakeholders in the HESA programs selected for this study could offer their experiences and expertise on the infusion of racial justice in their social justice or DEI missions, which led to a more holistic understanding of their sense-making and their expectations. Through maximum variation sampling, I aimed at selecting faculty members and students from various racial and ethnic backgrounds but without a specific number in terms of representation for each group. Also, the participants of this study were representative of the experience and expertise required to address the research problem, purpose of the study, and research questions (Morse, 2007).

Sample Size. Patton (2002) reminds us that “there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry” (p. 244). Yet, decisions about sample size must be grounded within the parameters of the methodological approach and the purpose of the study (Jones et al., 2006). Regarding sample size in case study, an important issue is defining how many participants, but not just through a simple number, but through the correct amount of “coverage” (Jones et al., 2013, p. 66), or how to make sure that the purpose of the study and research questions are being fully cross-examined with the specific selection of participants (Jones et al., 2013). For this reason, an important consideration of sampling is developing a set of criteria for participant selection that organically aligns with the study’s purpose and research questions. This way, the researcher sets up a pathway where they will be able to carry out a controllable investigation that sufficiently covers the range of phenomena of study.
For this study, I interviewed a total of eight participants per program representing both part-time and full-time faculty members (3) and students (5), for a total of 16 participants in interviews. The students and faculty were recruited from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Including the voices of students of color and faculty of color was important to make sure that their perspectives were represented. To recruit students, recruitment emails were sent to all students with the authorization of program coordinators, in addition to snowball sampling. To recruit faculty, I emailed all the faculty body, and as responses came, I emailed the faculty participants. Access and recruitment are further explained in the sections below.

Participants’ Demographics. To contextualize this section of the findings, I provide a table describing the faculty and student participants’ gender and racial and ethnic identities (as provided on the demographic forms that participants filled out), scholarship interests, and other relevant background information.

Table 1

*CUP Faculty*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Racial / ethnic identities</th>
<th>Gender identity</th>
<th>U.S. born / foreign born</th>
<th>Part time / full time</th>
<th>Scholarship interests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nick</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>U.S. born</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>Undocumented students in higher education, college access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>Black / Afro-Caribbean</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Foreign born</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>Racism in higher education, Black Lives Matter movement in higher education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>U.S. born</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>Racism in higher education, critical white studies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2

*CUP Students*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Racial identity</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Domestic / international</th>
<th>First gen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carina</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Hispanic / Latinx</td>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Cisgender man</td>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abeer</td>
<td>Middle Eastern</td>
<td>Cisgender woman</td>
<td>Middle Eastern</td>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stella</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Genderfluid</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophie</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>English, Welsh</td>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3

*WUP Faculty*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Racial / ethnic identities</th>
<th>Gender identity</th>
<th>U.S. born / foreign born</th>
<th>Part-time / Full-time</th>
<th>Scholarship interests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>Mixed race: African American, Latina / Mexican, Caucasian</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>U.S. born</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>Older adult learning (50+ ages in higher ed), college environments, global engagement in higher education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terri</td>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>U.S. born</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>Multiculturalism in higher education, DEI issues in higher education, international higher education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cora</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>U.S. born</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>N/A - Full-time administrator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4

**WUP Students**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Racial identity</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Domestic / international</th>
<th>First gen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jerry</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josephine</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Cisgender woman</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>European American (White)</td>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Access to Programs and Participants**

An integral component of the sampling strategy is also the strategy to access participants through the development of trust and rapport, thus careful “attention to relationship-oriented processes will aid the researcher in facilitating access to participants” (Jones et al., 2006, p. 74). Gaining access depends on the purpose of the research study as well as the existing relationships the researcher builds with those who grant access (Jones et al., 2006; Patton, 2002). I gained access to the study programs and participants through working relationships with the program coordinators of the two selected programs. Program coordinators for the purpose of this study were situated as potential gatekeepers who held formal authority in granting me access to the research setting and the rest of the participants required to carry out the study (i.e., the program, faculty, and students) (Jones et al., 2006).

I contacted the program coordinators of both programs via email to request an initial meeting with them. My purpose was to provide a compelling case for conducting the study in their program and requesting access. To build trust and ensure cooperation, I presented a clearly thought-out plan for the research, demonstrating my knowledge about the program,
including faculty and staff, while ensuring confidentiality and making myself immediately available to respond to questions and concerns the program coordinators may have had (Patton, 2002).

I recruited participants via email, and I remained open to meeting with them via Zoom to further clarify the purpose of the study and the degree of involvement expected from them. Building rapport and trust were factors that determined the participation of students and faculty (Jones et al., 2006). Also, in order to collect insightful data, it was important to have a clear plan about the data collection instruments required to conduct this study.

**Data Collection Instruments and Analysis**

To generate robust analysis, researchers must gather rich data (Charmaz, 2014). Rich data are defined as “detailed, focused, and full” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 23) information that reveal participants’ perceptions, feelings, intentions, and actions occurring within the context and structures of their lives (Charmaz, 2014; Yin, 2017). Rich data can be achieved when engaging in processes such as intensive interviews, extensive field notes of observations, participants’ written personal accounts, relevant documents related to the phenomenon under investigation, and so forth (Charmaz, 2014; Yin, 2017). For this study, I collected different types of data, including documents, interviews, and class observations.

**Documents as Data**

In research, documents can provide rich data and serve as active rather than passive agents in the research process (Charmaz, 2014; Prior, 2008; Yin 2018). For case study design, documents are one of the most important data collection tools to corroborate and amplify evidence from other sources (Yin, 2017). Traditional notions of qualitative inquiry
have regarded documents as being simply “informants” and so have been valued for their static content, yet useful in the development of theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1965). However, Prior (2008) has critiqued the lack of recognition of what documents can do if their potential to be active discursive actors in the research process is ignored. Documents are active inner voices in organizations and represent discourses, actions, and meanings embedded in cultural and social contexts (Charmaz, 2014). Written texts, whether historical, current, elicited, or extant, are not mere records, but blueprints that explain, justify, or predict actions in an organization. Adopting Prior’s (2008) and Charmaz’s (2014) approach to documents, I used extant documents in this study.

Extant documents refer to existent documents in an organization (Charmaz, 2014). The nature of this study stemmed from the idea of looking at the mission statements of social justice or DEI focused HESA programs, and how they infuse the concept of racial justice in their programmatic and pedagogical practices. Looking at the mission statements of these programs allowed space for understanding how the stakeholders realize their commitment to racial justice. Mission statements in academic programs inform not only syllabi, course content, but also research agendas that faculty and students engage in. For this study, I examined program documents that spoke to the ways in which the program has engaged in their social-justice or DEI mission, with particular focus on racial justice.

I also examined other program data that referred to the realization of their mission from formal documents (e.g., recruitment, admission criteria, curriculum) to more informal texts such as brochures, fliers for program events, etc. In addition, the examination of syllabi was key to understanding the extent to which the faculty did or did not translate the mission into pedagogical choices that informed course design. Syllabi and curriculum documents
were requested from the program coordinator and other faculty members in the programs, and fliers and brochures were collected from the websites.

**Intensive Interviewing**

Intensive interviews (or in-depth interviews) are deemed important sources of evidence when conducting case study research, as they offer the space for researchers to explain and understand the “hows” and the “whys” of important events, as well as a deeper understanding of the participants’ relativist perspectives (Yin, 2017). Intensive interviewing serves as a tool to generate data in qualitative research and refers to deep but smoothly guided one-sided conversation between the researcher and the participants (Charmaz, 2014). This type of interviewing aims to carefully examine the perceptions of participants on their first-hand experience with the research topic (Charmaz, 2014). The process of intensive interviewing relies on open-ended questions and the follow-up of unanticipated areas of inquiry that can guide participants to unearth as many details of their experiences and the situations surrounding the topic under investigation as possible (Charmaz, 2014).

The main goal of intensive interviewing is its emphasis on gaining a rich understanding of the participants’ perspective, experience, and meaning, which aligns with the purpose of this study. For this study, I interviewed a total of sixteen participants across the two programs: six faculty members and ten students. Each participant was interviewed once for about 90 minutes each. For faculty, the questions covered their perceptions on the program mission, their teaching practices, and perception of program practices. For students, the interview protocol was aimed at touching on the perceptions of the mission as well, perceptions of the curriculum and faculty, and perceptions of the program as rooted in their experiences. Intensive interviewing was a key element to generate data directly from faculty
and students in HESA programs, as they have first-hand experience with the ways in which their programs function and their perceptions of whether the race-related aspect of their social justice missions is realized or not. The exploration of faculty’s and students’ perspectives and experiences were important to shed light on how they individually and collectively make sense of their own experiences.

Although many studies have focused on the experience of students of color and white students in HESA programs (Flowers & Howard-Hamilton, 2002; Harris & Linder, 2018; Hubain et al., 2016; Kelly & Gayles, 2007), no study had focused on whether and how the students’ perceptions clash with those of the faculty in the program and/or how HESA programs engage in the realization of their mission.

**Observations**

Observations allow the researcher to get a deeper sense of the culture, setting, or social phenomenon under study from the perspective of the participants (Creswell, 2015; Hatch, 2002). Observations are a great tool to generate data that stem from the context in which the topic under investigation occurs (Hatch, 2002; Mertens, 2010b). Although there are different types of observations in research, for this study, I adopted the role of a complete observer (Mertens, 2010b). After each interview with the faculty, I asked them for permission to observe their classes. I observed a total of three classes of three different faculty members for three hours each class. It is important to note that it was impossible to observe other courses, as two of the faculty members who participated in this study were not teaching during the period of data collection, and another one never responded to my quest to observe her class. Two classes were observed via Zoom and another one was observed using Webex per the faculty member’s request. I did not interfere or participate in the activities.
taking place in any of the sessions I observed. I only focused on taking notes and observing what went on in the setting (class sessions) in terms of verbal and non-verbal interactions as well as details of the space (Mertens, 2010b). The role as a complete observer (i.e., nonparticipant observer) allowed me to concentrate more effectively on the observation process (Krathwohl, 2009).

Class observations served as a tool to examine how syllabi (as extant documents) were aligned with class discussions and assignments. I observed various forms of interaction (verbal and non-verbal) and the degree of engagement among students and faculty with course content that aligned with the mission statement. Through the class observations, I was able to analyze elements of class interaction that my participants took for granted (Mertens, 2010b). As Hatch (2002) indicates, “[t]he idea [with conducting observations] is to be there in the social setting, to make a careful record of what people say and do, and to make sense of how the participants make sense within that setting” (p. 73).

Zoom presented some challenges that would have been avoided in an in-person observation. For example, it was hard to observe body language and gestures of all the students, as the computer in the room pointed me to the instructor and to only some students due to the capacity of the angle of the camera. Informal interactions were hard to capture, but some instances were possible when the faculty pointed the camera to the whole room during breaks. However, given the logistical and financial costs of traveling to other states to conduct these observations, Zoom became a much more approachable solution to mitigate those concerns.
Memos

Aside from the data collected from participants, I engaged in writing personal reflections through memos. Memo-writing is an indispensable practice that happens between data collection and the actual drafting of the analysis (Charmaz, 2014). Memos serve as a tool to engage the researcher in data analysis during the early stages of the research process as the researcher captures ideas and makes connections of the data and the codes that emerge during the coding process (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014). The reflective nature of memos allowed me to step back during the data collection process and data analysis and ask questions such as “what is going on here?” and “how can I make sense of it?” (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014).

Data Analysis

The data collection process for this study yielded sixteen interview transcripts, 34 program documents, and nine pages of observation notes. For the interviews, I used a transcription company (REV), and upon receiving the transcriptions, I saved them along with my observation notes in a password-protected drive. For accuracy purposes, before the coding process, I read the transcripts while listening to the interviews to make sure I could capture inconsistencies. I also wrote memos after each interview and observation as a mechanism to capture my first thoughts and highlights of the data. As established in the IRB application, once the interviews were transcribed and revised, I deleted all the recordings to protect the identity of my participants. Case studies may also rely on various strategies not only for data collection, but also for generating rich data analysis. This study employed both deductive and inductive approaches to data analysis. Regarding deductive data analysis, I
used the conceptual framework of this study (see Figure 1) to identify themes that could potentially respond to the questions presented in the framework.

In addition, as other themes also emerged in my data analysis, I turned to an inductive approach, which is known as “working data from the ground up” (Yin, 2017). This inductive approach allowed me to remain open during the coding process to notice patterns for the first time and unveil new concepts (Yin, 2017). This analytical strategy through coding stems from the coding strategies used in grounded theory, which have been adopted as a data analysis approach in other qualitative methodologies, including case study (Yin, 2017).

The data collected for this study included a total of sixteen interviews: ten student interviews and six faculty interviews. Additionally, I analyzed 34 program documents that included curricula, syllabi, course assignments, course Power Points, program newsletters, and websites. Finally, I observed a total of three classes and generated observation notes for each class session. For the interviews, I read all the transcripts in their entirety and highlighted quotes that I classified by overarching themes. Interviews and documents were coded using ATLAS.ti where 65 codes emerged for the faculty interviews, 108 codes for student interviews, and 103 codes for the documents. From the focused coding, I synthesized the codes into 34 codes for faculty, 24 for students, and 54 for the documents, yielding 609 quotes in total. These codes informed the comparative analysis of the two cases. Given the volume of data collected, only data pertinent to addressing the research questions were used and are discussed and analyzed in detail in Chapter 6.

*Initial Coding.* In the initial coding phase, “initial codes are provisional, comparative, and grounded in the data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 48; Yin, 2017). As initial coding must stick as closely as possible to the data, I ensured that the codes are aligned to the participants’
experiences by using words that reflect action instead of topics (Charmaz, 2006). Coding data as actions reduced the possibility of coding people as types, reducing the data to individuals rather than what is happening in the data (Charmaz, 2014; Yin 2018). I also approached the initial coding phase with the understanding that the initial codes would be provisional, comparative, and grounded in the data and engaged in a follow-up process to ensure the codes really fit the data I collected and reworded them where needed.

To code the data collected from the interviews, the documents, and the observations, I used ATLAS.ti, a software to organize, code, and analyze qualitative data. As a first step and before delving into the initial coding, I identified overarching themes connected to my conceptual framework which included curriculum, mission examination and assessment, programming to engage students of color, representation of faculty of color. I regarded these as provisional codes as well. After having these codes as the basis for the initial coding phase, I separated the documents, faculty, and the students’ interviews in three different projects in ATLAS.ti, and I coded each set of interviews focusing on the richness of the participants’ responses. For the faculty interviews, 65 codes emerged, and for the student interviews, I ended up with 108 codes. For document analysis, I had 103 codes.

**Focused Coding.** The next stage of the data analysis for this study was centered on focused coding. Through focused coding, I was able to identify the most salient and recurring codes, which led me to engage more in comparative analysis to assess the adequacy of the codes identified during the initial coding phase (Charmaz, 2014; Yin, 2017). Focused coding was an essential component of the data analysis process as it served as an organizing tool to manage the analysis. During focused coding, I was able to synthesize codes and identify categories, as well as trim excess codes that were not relevant. Through focused coding, I
was able to synthesize the initial codes into 34 codes for faculty, 24 for students, and 54 for the documents. After this, I had 609 quotes, some connected with one or more codes.

*Cross-Case Analysis.* Once the focused coding process was finalized, the next step was to make comparisons across the various themes that emerged throughout the coding process, as well as making comparisons across both cases (i.e., both HESA programs under study). With ATLAS.ti, I was able to use the “query tool” to select multiple codes from a codebook, and then show all the associated quotes, which facilitated the management of information. After this, I analyzed the codes and organized the findings into big categories and sub-categories as well as overlapping and differing themes to outline the context and findings chapter.

The comparative analysis in case studies does not occur linearly, but in a more iterative fashion (Schoch, 2020). Comparative analysis is the examination of concepts and themes emerging from the data collection phase in terms of their dynamic interrelationships (Rihoux & Lobe, 2009). The goal with using a comparative analysis in this study was to connect categories and subcategories and examine how they were related and “gather in-depth insight in the different cases and capture the complexity of both cases (gaining ‘intimacy’ with the cases), and also produce some level of generalization” between both cases (Rihoux & Lobe, 2009, p. 223). The comparative analysis also offered a step to do systematic analysis and constant comparison of data to reduce the number of codes and connect the merging of themes to the notions laid out in the conceptual framework.

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness refers to the ability of the researcher to find mechanisms within the design of the study to guarantee the accurate representation of the participants’ realities of the
social phenomena that they perceive as credible (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Part of the
trustworthiness of this study relied on the careful comparative analysis used in multicase
studies. As Kolb (2012) states, “the researcher continually sorts through the data collection,
analyzes and codes the information, and reinforces theory generation through the process of
theoretical sampling” (p. 83). This method allowed me to revise the data frequently and
ensure that enough information had been collected so the codes were representative of the
participants’ perspectives on their program’s social justice/DEI mission.

Additionally, in Chapter 4, I also provided thick, rich descriptions of both HESA
programs as well as the participants in deep detail. Thick descriptions generate
“verisimilitude, statements that produce for the readers the feeling that they have
experienced, or could experience, the events being described in [the] study” (Creswell &
Miller, 2000, p. 129). This strategy requires the use of vivid detail and serves to inform the
readers about the applicability of the findings in other similar settings or contexts.

However, the researcher’s lens to determine what strategies are used to establish
credibility is not the only factor at play since the researcher’s paradigm assumptions also play
a key role in the choice of trustworthiness procedures (Creswell & Miller, 2000). From this
lens, and guided by a transformative and critical paradigm, I approach this study from the
perspective that I, as the researcher, must unearth the hidden assumptions about how the
narratives gathered among my participants are constructed, read, and interpreted (Creswell &
Miller, 2000). A transformative paradigm puts forward the principle that “what governs our
perspective about narratives is our historical situatedness based on social, political cultural,
economic, ethnic... gender, [and power dynamics] antecedents of the studies situations”
(Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 126).
This perspective of trustworthiness implies that validity itself should be called into question, and “its assumptions interrogated and challenged” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 127). The latter required my reflexivity, full openness of what I, as a researcher, brought to the study including my own biases. Using two strategies of the transformative and critical paradigm as premises on trustworthiness, I relied on two strategies: researcher flexibility (i.e., subjectivity, described earlier in this chapter). In addition to these two strategies, I also used thick descriptions of the setting and participants of the study.

The next two chapters present the most outstanding findings of my study. Chapter 4 outlines the historical context of the programs in relation to their mission statements and delves into more specific programmatic processes such as admission process, curricular structure, syllabi, and program newsletters and events to fully address the first research question regarding the historical and contextual factors surrounding each program. Chapter 5 presents the most salient findings resulting from the interviews with faculty and students in both programs and encapsulates the findings in overlapping and differing themes.
CHAPTER 4
CYPRESS UNIVERSITY AND WILLOW UNIVERSITY HESA MASTER’S PROGRAMS: HISTORICAL AND CONTEXTUAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine HESA masters programs with an explicit social justice or DEI mission statement to understand how faculty members translate their mission into tangible racial justice practices and how students perceive and experience the ways in which the faculty’s practices enact or do not enact racial justice. This chapter addresses the first research sub-question regarding the historical and contextual foundation of the programs by providing an in-depth description of the context of the two programs under study. The chapter integrates the voices of the program coordinators, program faculty, as well as findings from my analysis of documents. The descriptions of the two programs are presented separately, and each includes six subthemes, including the (a) historical context of the program, (b) mission statement, (c) admission process, (d) curricular structure, (e) syllabi, and (f) program newsletters and events. Given the large amount of data collected, this chapter only focuses on highlighting findings that directly connect to the research questions for this study: DEI and race/racial justice-related findings.
It is important to note that this study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the events surrounding the murder of George Floyd. These two aspects became important contextual factors to situate some of the findings of this study in relation to conceptualizations of justice and race overall in higher education. The COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on students of color disproportionally not only economically and mentally, but also academically, as high rates of absenteeism became a determinant factor in delaying their degree completion (Correia, 2022). However, the racial concerns around the pandemic were exacerbated following the death of George Floyd (Wood & Hudson, 2021). More specifically, after the murder of George Floyd, colleges and universities felt pressured to release statements that not only condemned his murder but also that recognized the permanence of systemic racism and the need to make concrete commitments to social justice and, most importantly, racial justice (Wood & Hudson, 2021).

Commitments to racial justice change included the establishment of social justice centers, racial justice committees, reframing of institutional mission statements, and structural changes within higher education institutions ranging from practices to policies that reflected a switch in the discourse, one that highlighted their commitment to eradicating any form of racism and discrimination on the campuses (Meikle & Morris, 2022). As such, the findings of this study were understood within this specific context and potentially informed the participants’ perspectives and the different ways the programs (CUP and WUP) conceived their notions of justice, more directly connected to racial justice.
Cypress University Program (CUP)

**Historical Context of the Program**

CUP was born out of the division of student affairs of Cypress University, a four-year institution on the East Coast of the U.S. Nick, who identified as a Latino man and who was the program coordinator, noted that the program did not have official historical documents due to the way that CUP came into existence. Specifically, CUP was initially part of the Division of Student Affairs, which would pay faculty colleagues to teach classes at CUP. This meant that during the initial years of the program, there were not any full-time faculty, so the program relied heavily on part-time faculty at the university to run their courses. Additionally, all the students’ graduate assistantship placements were within the division. After a few years, CUP transitioned the program to a full-time faculty model and was eventually moved to the Leadership Department of the university.

**Program Mission**

At the beginning of this research study, when the programs were selected based on information from program websites, CUP outlined their commitment to DEI in general terms. This mission statement acknowledged the importance of centering people’s lived experiences, the intersection of their identities, and their commitment to DEI. However, the mission did not specifically mention race or other specific social identities. Between the spring and summer of 2022, the mission on the program website had been updated but, instead of presenting a mission statement per se, program faculty revised their previous mission and turned it into a DEI statement. When prompted to talk about the change in mission, Nick said:
I love having a statement like that on our website, one that really resonates with who we are as scholars in our program. I’m happy that we have that. I think it’s a statement that is more substantive than what you would read like a mission statement that’s a sentence or two. To have something that is more robust, I think, really speaks to the importance that we place on that both outward facing as well as internally in our courses, in our advising, and really everything that we do in our program.

At the time of data collection for this study, the word “mission” was not mentioned anywhere on the website. The new DEI statement continued to highlight people’s lived experiences and the intersection of their identities, but it also specifically mentioned that they welcomed students from any race as a core component of who they were as a program, and they also referred to other specific marginalized identities such as race, ethnicity, religion, age, sex, nationality, ancestry, sexual orientation, disability, and gender identity. The DEI statement emphasized that the curriculum was designed to achieve the program’s DEI goals and alluded to their effort to align their statement to the *social justice* mission of the leadership department they belonged to and the *diversity* goal of the division of student affairs.

When asked about their efforts to integrate their mission into other program practices, all three faculty members I interviewed expressed how intentional everything they did was to ensure that their DEI statement was realized through the curriculum and their interactions with students. Rose, a white woman, talked about the DEI statement in relation to their commitment to race and racism:

When we consider our diversity, equity, and inclusion aims or mission, I think that race and racism are the predominant focus of that. And I would say that for thinking
about our coursework, how we structure things, I think that we very much follow, for
the most part, a set of practices that is focused on teaching about and challenging
racism foremost.

Sandra, a Black woman, also believed that the “core components of their DEI
statement are race and racism” and stated that they put it at the forefront of everything they
did. Throughout the interview with Nick, he always emphasized that they had a more
comprehensive perspective on the word, diversity, one that was not just centered around race,
while the other two faculty members always put race and racism at the center of their
understanding of their DEI statement.

Admissions Process

All three faculty members highlighted ways in which their DEI mission statement
was embedded in the application process, asking applicants to reflect on their DEI statement.
Rose stated that:

from the admissions pieces, we really do assess applicants on their level of DEI, and
whether or not they’re telling us fluff or whether or not they’re actually knowing what
they’re talking about, which you can decipher really quick and very easy.

Applicants wrote two reflective essays as a part of their application process, and one was
particularly on DEI and how they understood issues around equity and inclusion.

In addition to the DEI-focused essay, at the time of this study, CUP implemented
affinity groups. Nick explained that they

had affinity groups that were based on students’ identities and one of them was on
race. So, a race affinity group, sexual orientation affinity group, things like that for
students to be able to, again, sort of be able to model. This is something that’s really important to our program.

Sandra thought that for their students to start the program with such intentionality and connection to their mission meant that the students were being trained from the very beginning, and that it continued as they infused concepts around race, racism, and other diversity issues into their courses. Sandra noted when referring to their admission process:

We never shut up about diversity, equity, and inclusion. During orientation, we talk about it, we do a mock class during our welcome weekend or during our admitted students’ weekend, and we’re talking about issues of race and racism, we’re talking about issues of DEI in our info sessions that we do in the fall before we... We are constantly, constantly, constantly talking about it. It is very clear to anybody that applies to this program that this is what we are about, and this is what we are doing.

**Curricular Structure**

CUP offered a two-year program and a part-time option as well that students could complete in six semesters for 36 credits total. The students in both the full-time and part-time program took a total of 12 classes, but the curriculum varied slightly. In the full-time program, students took four courses during the first semester, including a course that fostered racial dialogue, and prepared students “to engage in conversations around race” (Nick). Based on interviews with both faculty and students, this was an essential course in the curriculum, as it allowed the students to “explore themselves and their own identities” (Nick), and what that meant in relation to the work they were expected to do as HESA professionals. The course centered on topics related to microaggressions, racism, oppression, and white supremacy, which “are evident in educational spaces” (Rose).
In addition to core classes, students had seven electives to choose from, but none of them were strictly connected to DEI issues based on the course descriptions outlined on the Website. During the last semester, students took a class that was specifically on DEI issues in higher education. However, none of the course descriptions in the curriculum, including the DEI class, mentioned anything related to race or any other marginalized identities.

Reflecting on the curricular and extra-curricular requirements in the program, Rose and Sandra both commented on how their students may have felt overworked as a result of the structure of the curriculum and the heavy emphasis they had on the practicums and an assistantship, which Rose contended was “the biggest place that we are not aligned with what I would consider to be our social justice mission.”

For Rose and Sandra, issues of productivity could not be easily separated from other commitments to DEI in social justice and DEI missions. Rose believed that students in the program were increasingly coming in with an awareness of the damage of excessive workloads and westernized notions of productivity. Rose also noted that the students in the program were active members of the unionized graduate workforce at the university and were constantly seeking to improve their working conditions on the campus, stating that CUP had “students that are increasingly coming in with an anti-capitalist analysis of their world.” She also perceived that the effects of productivity culture, of busy-ness, of workload “have largely remained untouched within our program, alongside work that is very explicitly about social justice and anti-racism and diversity and inclusion.” Sandra and Rose discussed that this dissonance between their DEI statement and the curriculum/extra-curriculum needed to be addressed and students’ voices needed to be more intentionally integrated to align their
commitments to DEI to the way students experienced their curricular and extra-curricular structure.

The part-time program option offered a six-semester curriculum where students took two classes per semester. Due to low enrollment in the program, the COVID-19 pandemic, concerns around equity, and questions about what student population could commit to an intensive full-time master's program, CUP faculty decided to add a part-time option that would also not require students to obtain an assistantship before starting the program. Rose explained that they were trying to continue expanding to have more part-time students in the program, and noted that this had been a huge conversation of how do we have to change what we’re doing? How do we have to change our language? I think that for a long time our program had a very elitist bent. It was highly selective. It was really selective. I don’t know, like five years ago our admission rate was probably like 8% to 10%.

Rose saw this part-time option as a step toward a more inclusive program that gave students from various social backgrounds the opportunity to study and not just to those who had the “privilege to go full-time” to get their master’s.

**Syllabi**

I was able to obtain syllabi from four different courses at CUP. Three of the syllabi were from two of the faculty I interviewed: “Foundations of Higher Education,” “Practicum in Higher Education,” “Leadership and Administration,” and one syllabus from a course I refer to as “Race Talk” to protect the identity of the program. I will describe the syllabi guided by two main themes: (a) Course descriptions and policies and (b) course readings, expectations, and assignments.
Foundations of Higher Education. The description and learning outcomes of this course, taught by Nick, did not have any specific language related to race, racism, social justice, or DEI issues. The syllabus included a paragraph on DEI, explaining how those values were rooted in the university and, more specifically, in the program. Also, Nick included an anti-discrimination policy that stated that all students “should embrace diversity in all its richly complex and multi-faceted forms, whether expressed through race and ethnicity, culture, political views, religious and spiritual beliefs, language and geographic characteristics, immigration/citizenship status,” among other social identities. Readings for this class presented authors from various racial and ethnic backgrounds, including Nick’s publications, with four units dedicated to the discussion of minority-serving institutions, affirmative action, equity and inclusion, and undocumented students. Students were encouraged to ask critical questions pertaining to social justice issues including those related to race. Nick offered a series of sample questions modeling how students should address this assignment. Most of the examples included the words race, racism, marginalization, and oppression.

Finally, assignments, which included op-eds, essays, and group projects, encouraged students to question and analyze issues of race and racism. Some of the class topics included anti-Blackness in HESA professionals’ practice, recruitment, and retention of racially/ethnically minoritized HESA professionals, the impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of racially/ethnically minoritized students, and the experiences of HESA professionals who identify as racially/ethnically minoritized, LGBTQ+ populations, among others. Although the course description and learning outcomes did not address issues of race and racism, these concepts were heavily emphasized in the assignments and class discussions.
*Practicum in Higher Education.* The syllabus of this course, taught by Rose, did not necessarily mention race or racism as part of the course description, but there was language that could be connected to DEI issues. For example, Rose stated that the assignments, reading material, and class sessions focused on helping students “develop the ability to enact equitable and humanizing practice within the social context of higher education institutions.”

Learning outcomes were for the most part general and spoke directly to competencies that students should develop as student affairs practitioners. Rose included the word “multiculturalism” in one of the learning outcomes as an important component to “promote inclusive practices,” but it did not specify which ones. Rose also included a full statement regarding her teaching philosophy, with reference to her grading schema, which she defined as being rooted in a liberatory philosophy based on engagement, participation, and completing assignments. She also had other philosophical approaches to teaching (critical feminism informed by Black feminist thought), and an included acknowledgement of the inherent power she held as the instructor, and as a white woman.

Her syllabus outlined resources for all students, including those related to mental health and DEI. Syllabus language also conveyed flexibility and understanding of students’ lives and circumstances and offered them various options to participate in class (attendance) and additional assignments to make up for any absences. All the class policies were presented in a way that demonstrated the faculty member’s flexibility and understanding of students’ multiple responsibilities outside of class.

The reading material for this class included authors from various racial and ethnic backgrounds and included only one unit specifically dedicated to “racial justice and equity.” Assignments for this course included reflection and in-class journals, which Rose saw as a
tool that “ensures different methods of participation.” The goal of this assignment was to align it with the program outcome that related to reflection. Students in this course also wrote three essays that directly connected to their practicum experiences, including the relationship with their supervisors, unfair policies and practices at practicum site, and a paper on an issue of equity, either student- or staff-related. During the interview, Rose mentioned that previous iterations of this course required students to create an hour’s log. She claimed that this assignment came at the expense of students’ mental health and stress levels, so she decided to eliminate this requirement. She described this assignment as having “a disproportionate impact on first-generation students and students of color.”

**Leadership in Administration.** The syllabus for this course, whose instructor was also Rose, shared many similarities with the syllabus for the practicum class. For instance, there was no specific language related to race or racism in the course description or learning outcomes, but the course called for “equitable and humanizing” values that can transform the higher education field. She also had her teaching philosophy statement, and her policies were equally flexible as the ones outlined in the practicum syllabus. One of the learning outcomes emphasized equity as a core component of leadership.

The course readings included authors from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. One unit was specifically dedicated to issues of diversity and whiteness in higher education leadership, and Rose included articles she had written on this topic. The assignments for this class included a personal learning plan that encouraged students to think about the learning outcomes of the course in relation to their own learning development. Another assignment asked students to reflect on their experiences with leadership and asked them to focus on a
specific social identity, including race. In addition, students were expected to write analytical papers on case studies, and they also had student-led discussions.

**Race Talk.** This course was taught by various faculty members in the department (typically in a co-teaching style) and was deemed “one of the most challenging courses to teach” according to some faculty members. Based on faculty and student interviews, this class was critical in the curriculum and was taken during the first semester of the program. The class was purely about race and racism and the impact of whiteness on higher education institutions. This course aimed at connecting students across racial and ethnic backgrounds and engaging them in what they called “contentious conversations.” Nick contended that the fact that this class was the first one for students to take was very intentional and had to do with their focus on equity and inclusion. Exposing students to this content from the beginning, argued the faculty I interviewed, had proven to be effective in lowering resistance when these topics were also part of other courses in the curriculum. Despite the clear focus on race, the course description and learning outcomes did not explicitly mention race, racism, oppression, whiteness, or any other concept related to race.

Despite the absence of the concepts of race and racism in the course description and learning outcomes, the required text for the class was *Race Talk and the Conspiracy of Silence: Understanding and Facilitating Difficult Dialogues on Race* by Derald Wing Sue (2015). Also, the course outline was entirely dedicated to topics about race and how to build effective dialogue around issues of racism and racialized oppression. The syllabus did not elaborate specifically on course expectations, but outlined some general statements on preparedness, engagement, technology, and technological skills required to complete the course. The faculty provided resources for students to access the required technology through
the university. Finally, the assignments for the course included personal narratives, reflections, and group projects where each group focused on a specific racial group.

**Program Newsletters and Events**

The program newsletters included communications to current students and alumni. Different stakeholders at CUP published newsletters on the website, including faculty, alumni, and current students, but there was not a consistent system or timeline for publication. In other words, the newsletters were published randomly and not necessarily on a monthly or semester basis. Also, CUP highlighted the publications and work their faculty were engaged in as well as dedicating entire publications on the website to celebrating different racial groups’ heritage months (e.g., Hispanic and Asian/Pacific Heritage Months, Black History Month).

Most of the newsletters addressed topics related to race, racism, social justice, and DEI issues. For instance, one newsletter written by Sandra discussed how to become social justice equity leaders, while another faculty member wrote about globalizing strategies for the advancement of racial equity. Other publications featured interviews with faculty members, current students and alumni, and the questions centered on issues pertaining to race, including healing in racial equity, decolonization of academic spaces to promote racial equity in higher education, and the application of equity principles in the student affairs field.

Most of the events that CUP offered centered on race and racism. As an illustration, the fall of 2022 featured a panel dedicated to discussing and unpacking systemic racism through the lens of CRT in the content of Cypress University. Other events were based on affinity groups and invited students to join conversations around the support they needed from CUP or the university. The faculty who participated in this study emphasized that the
COVID-19 pandemic created significant obstacles for them to foster meaningful events for the students, but they were hoping to rebuild community through events in the semesters that followed.

**Willow University Program (WUP)**

*Historical Context of the Program*

WUP was created approximately in 2007 and used to be part of the counseling department at Willow University, which “was not atypical of the time,” according to Terri, an Asian American woman, founder, faculty at WUP, and Chair of the Educational Leadership Department. After about 10 years of WUP functioning through the counseling department, “it became very clear nationally and at my institution that there was that separation that was occurring, that student affairs did not belong in counseling, and we were trying to help people understand that they were not in fact counselors,” explained Terri. Fifteen years ago (2007), Terri “petitioned to change departments and to bring the program with me.” As a result, Willow University agreed to move the master’s program from the counseling department to an educational leadership area.

*Program Mission*

Interestingly, WUP also changed their mission statement during the data collection stage of this study. The previous version of their mission made explicit commitments to the centrality of diversity and inclusion in higher education with special attention to historically marginalized and underserved populations. The previous mission also highlighted the importance of preparing competent student affairs professionals that supported and retained historically underserved student populations (i.e., LGBTQA Services, services for students with disabilities, multicultural affairs, women's centers, veteran and military services, offices
for foster care youth, among others). The new mission was significantly shorter and outlined three specific areas they hoped their student body developed: (a) knowledge and skills to support students in higher education; (b) recognition of the importance of DEI issues to higher education; and (c) effective and ethical leadership. While the DEI component remained, the mention of specific social identities, including race was eliminated. Terri stated that this decision was informed by their hope to address higher education issues from a more global perspective.

However, DEI and social justice issues had always been at the center of the mission of WUP. Terri said:

When I moved to ed leadership and took the program with me, I was able to redesign the program in its current form because it had to go through the full curriculum proposal process to move it. And at that time, I proposed that the program needed to be realigned in terms of its focus of DEI being at the center, social justice being at the center because higher ed, for the future, as far as I could see, if we didn't prepare students to work more with diverse populations and be centered in systems that could enhance and cultivate diversity, then we weren’t doing justice to our program. So, I had the unusual pleasure of being able to create this program when it moved.

The mission was followed by a series of learning outcomes, but none of them referred specifically to any DEI issues, and the words “race,” “racism,” “oppression,” or “marginalized” did not appear either. The outcomes were mainly centered on skills and application of theory to practice in general terms. They continued to promote their program as a strong partner of other colleges in the area, where their students participated in assistantships as well as in networking and mentoring opportunities.
When I asked Terri about her perception of the importance of race as a driving force in their mission, she stated that they try to address inclusiveness on all fronts, all populations who come to higher ed. But clearly where we started was around race. And that goes back, don't make me do the history of higher ed here, in terms of who was not even allowed to attend colleges and universities.

She also noted that despite all efforts to eradicate racism, “we have still not gotten a good hold of that. And so, that was the primary issue that we struggled with. But we haven’t resolved those issues. We still see them in higher education.” Terri saw race as a key component of the work they did in the program from the perspective of their DEI and social justice lenses.

Terri also recognized that when she moved into an administrative position in the department, she had to step aside from leading and primarily teaching in the HESA program. The program hired other faculty and a faculty coordinator, who ultimately brought their own values and scholarship, which shaped the mission and helped the program evolve according to their strengths and what they brought. And I think a big piece that was not part of the program at that time, I think 15 to 20 years ago, was as much emphasis as we're putting on global populations now.

The emphasis on global populations in higher education became more central to some of the coursework and work that they did in the program.

Laura, an African American/Latina/Caucasian woman and faculty coordinator at WUP, said during the interview that when she was applying for the job, she was very clear about her scholarship and that she did not consider herself a social justice or DEI scholar.
Her focus was on adult learning, but the search committee at WUP reassured her that they had a wider understanding of diversity and that her area of research was in fact related to a “subset of diversity.” Laura continued to say that “many people think very narrowly about diversity. And then there’s also the work around social justice, which in our field tends to focus a lot on race, ethnicity, and gender identity.” However, she recognized that the program’s focus remained on DEI issues:

I’m laying that out there because the mission was very clearly stated. And I didn't see myself as immediately being able to be a scholar in that area, but the mission of the program is around preparing entry-level professionals to serve historically marginalized and underserved students.

When asked to reflect on their mission in relation to race and racism, Laura did not directly answer the question, but said that given the centrality of DEI issues in their mission, they incorporated the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) as a part of their curriculum. Students at WUP took the assessment at the beginning of the program and at the end when they were about to graduate. The IDI was described as an assessment tool aimed at helping individuals improve their intercultural competence and build effective dialogue and relationships while bridging cultural differences. Laura also talked about the effectiveness of the IDI and noted:

I’m not saying that everybody who graduates from our program is a diversity expert...

But what they have been able to do is be able to speak clearly about how race, ethnicity, diversity is central to higher education, which is part of what our mission is.

Cora, a white woman and faculty member at WUP, thought that the faculty strived very hard to do a good job at implementing race in their practice as an important component
of their mission, but also recognized that they were all on their journeys and would never get to a point when it came to race and racism to say “got it. We’re doing a good job.” Cora also thought that the IDI had been an important tool to incorporate the concept of race as a central value of their DEI mission, but not enough to address issues of race and racism.

**Admissions Process**

WUP also operated with a cohort model and accepted applications on a yearly basis. To ensure that prospective students received information on the program and Graduate Assistantship interview dates, applicants had to submit their application materials by the beginning of the calendar year. The program held an info session and interview day event as a mechanism to get all newly admitted WUP students acquainted with the campus, the curriculum, and potential employers for Graduate Assistantship positions. On their website, WUP welcomed students from any major to apply and offered full-time and part-time options for everyone as well. The program required applicants to have an overall GPA of 3.0 at least in the last two years of undergraduate work, but it did not require GRE scores. Prospective students were required to fill out their online application, submit a resume, upload their transcripts, provide three recommendation letters, and write an essay where they explained why they chose WUP, challenges they anticipated, how prepared they felt for the program, and how WUP’s mission committed to the centrality of DEI issues in higher education fit into their career goals.

Terri discussed how their mission statement was clear to students from the application process, as it was embedded in everything they did:

We’re lucky in this program because our mission is very clear, one of the things they have to address in their admission statement is a question about DEI issues. Not that
they have to have the answers, but how are they going to handle the conversation when they are uncomfortable, basically it is the question, because this will be central to the program that they are entering. So, if students come in not able or willing to engage in that conversation, they’ve missed the warning signs here, because they are everywhere.

Laura also spoke about the admissions process, highlighting that:

there’s three things we want every person who applied to HESA if they talk to us to know about HESA... On that script, the third one is, “You’re aware of our mission, right?” Where we focus on helping you serve historically marginalized, underserved students.

Through Laura’s lens, from the beginning, the program was letting the students know what the values of the program were and the practitioners they wanted to prepare. Terri and Laura agreed that infusing their mission from the admissions process facilitated the way in which they engaged students in topics connected to race and racism when they started the program.

Curricular Structure

According to their website, the WUP curriculum aimed to prepare partitioner scholars for the field of student affairs in higher education through a cohort model. They also stressed that their curriculum met CAS standards and ACPA/NASPA professional competency areas through a 39-credit-hour coursework. The curriculum was divided into three areas, including theory on leadership and higher education issues, DEI electives, and practicum. The 2022 flyer promoting WUP stated that their goal was to highlight intercultural development and advocacy skills for historically marginalized student populations in the higher education field. The curriculum for WUP was not presented on a semester basis, but as a general
curriculum with five concrete areas. Some of these areas have been renamed to protect the identity of the program: Leadership, Core Areas of Higher Education, Practicum, Diversity Cognate, and Capstone Project. The program did not establish a strict timeline for completion, but students could finish the program in two to five years.

Core Areas of Higher Education included a class dedicated to DEI issues in higher education. The DEI class was the only class in the curriculum that explicitly connected to their DEI mission. The Diversity Cognate consisted of a series of courses students could choose from, including an independent study or a study abroad experience, but these courses had to be in alignment with their mission of focusing on issues of equity, inclusion, and access for historically marginalized student populations and with the stated goals of the Diversity Cognate. Students had to fulfill the six-hour credit Diversity Cognate requirement in a combination of two three-credit courses, or various one and two-credit courses. Eight of the 21 courses in the Diversity Cognate area were related to race, racism, or ethnicity. At least three courses mentioned the word race in their description, and one specifically focused on issues of race, ethnicity, and justice. Other courses focused on gender, class, religion, psychology, counseling, and disability.

The last area was the Capstone Project, a two-credit course that entailed a 100-hour supervised field experience, a seminar, and the completion of a self-development portfolio indicating students’ level of growth during the program and through their professional experiences in their practicum. This area, according to Terri, was directly connected to their mission, and they complemented it with their IDI assessment, so students got a well-rounded perspective of their growth in relation to DEI issues throughout the program. She also said that “[The students in the Capstone course] have to create a portfolio, and within the
portfolio, they have to create a diversity portfolio. So, they have to have some components and talk about some of the key places where their DEI competency was increased.”

None of the course descriptions in the core curriculum mentioned the words “race,” “racism,” “marginalization,” or “oppression.” Laura explained that the lack of focus on these words specifically, race, stemmed from their commitment to offering a wider perspective of diversity that went beyond race. Laura said that “[i]n our program though, we don't have a single class that's called race. We only have one required class that’s actually called, equity and diversity in higher education. And I believe the description for that class... Probably talks about that they explore diversity from race, gender, sexual orientation, from different pieces,” and not just race. However, Laura and Cora explained that DEI was always present in the courses as their standards were informed by the diversity components in the ACPA handbook. For example, in the introduction to student affairs course that all students took, they used what they “affectionately” called “the green book.” The green book was the ACPA handbook support. Laura explained that everything in that book came through with a diversity lens, and that “they start students off on exploring the history of higher education from the idea of inclusion and exclusion.” Laura also talked about the foundational questions students asked when they started the program:

So, who was higher education originally designed for and how does that impact the work that we do today? And so initially, the very first conversation that students have, like the second week of classes is like, “Oh, higher education was designed for white men.” So, I bring this up because that's typically the first entry point that students even have into, what is the purpose of higher ed? How did it begin? Who was it for?
Who was excluded? It’s kind of a race-based focus and then gender that it was for males even back then.

Although the topics of race were included in the conversations, Laura said that the topic of race was so complex that, as a program, “[w]e can never do it justice.” She explained that that was the reason their curriculum made the Diversity Cognate such an important piece of the coursework and that she deemed it as “the more formal ways that [our] mission is played out.” However, to be more intentional with their commitment to race, Laura affirmed that some of the courses included diversity learning outcomes, but they were working to have it be a formal practice that every single course had a diversity learning outcome. Similar to Laura’s perception, Terri reflected on her perspective on race as connected to the curriculum and concluded that:

we’re constantly talking about the curriculum and playing with it. Some of it’s around DEI issues and some of it's around looking at where we are. Higher education has changed dramatically in the last four or five years, especially since COVID, and what do our students need as they walk out?

**Syllabi**

For WUP, I was only able to collect two syllabi, from Laura and Cora. The faculty coordinator was apprehensive to share the syllabi of other faculty members who did not participate in the study. Laura shared the syllabus for her Higher Education and Administration Foundations course, and Cora shared the syllabus of her Student Development course. The courses have been renamed to protect the identity of the program. For this section, I will follow the same structure as I did when describing the syllabi for CUP, including course descriptions and policies, course readings, expectations, and assignments.
Higher Education and Administration Foundations. Laura typically taught this course. As noted in the curriculum section, this course did not have any language pertaining to race, racism, marginalization, or underserved populations. However, the course description of the syllabus varied greatly from the one outlined in the general curriculum. The syllabus version indicated that special attention was given to social justice and inclusion issues in higher education, and how those affected diverse student populations. The learning outcomes were more general and more focused on leadership and organizational theory with only one outcome about the analysis of policies affecting “a diverse and dynamic student body.” The syllabus carefully outlined competency areas connected to ACPA/NASPA as well as two CAS standards (5b.2 and 5b.4).

The syllabus also had a paragraph for the following letter grades: A, B, and C, and explained what they meant in relation to the quality of the work students turned in. A C/D grade indicated that the student had “more severe weaknesses” and had not met the expectations of the course or the assignment, and the syllabus referred to a D grade as “inadequate/weak.” The reading material for this class included articles on institutions serving different racial and ethnic groups, and some written by authors of color. One of the assignments for the course included a research essay exploring the learning environment of an underrepresented and/or marginalized student population. Students were expected to collect some data (interviews, documents, and observations) to complete the assignment. On the syllabus, there was a rationale for this assignment saying that this project was directly aligned with WUP’s mission statement and their commitment to DEI and their IDI assessment.
**Student Development.** Cora taught this course during various semesters. The course description was the same as the one outlined in the general curriculum and included a sentence that referred to how the course looked into the needs “of diverse student groups.” The learning outcomes mainly focused on the development of skills to incorporate student theory into practice, and only one referred to the analysis of “multicultural and global contexts.” The syllabus included a short diversity statement derived from the university commitment to diversity in addition to boiler plates for accommodations, other policies, and services students could access through the university. The syllabus also included the program mission statement and connected it to the CAS standards (part 5b, and subparts 5b.1 and 5b.2, which refer to knowledge, awareness, and advocacy for historically marginalized and/or underserved student populations in all areas of professional practice).

During the interview, Cora explained that she had inherited this course from a faculty member who went on sabbatical, but she ended up changing some parts of the course to better fit her philosophical orientation to teaching, specifically content-wise. The readings for the course included authors of color, and there was a unit on student development in relation to racial and ethnic identity development in college. There was only one unit in the course that explicitly indicated a discussion of race and racism. Other units included gender, psychological development, and moral development. The assignments for these courses were general and none of them included a specific focus on students of color, race, or racism.

**Program Newsletters and Events**

The newsletters for WUP appeared to be semester-based. I analyzed a total of five newsletters, and they typically followed the same outline: (a) semester events that often include: conferences, student panels, the interview day event, shoutouts to faculty and
students for their recognitions on campus, and program community events; (b) WUP student profiles, of which all five included two students of color and a white student; (c) WUP alumni spotlight, which included only one graduate per issue; (d) a special guest highlight; and (e) donations to WUP. None of the newsletters or events included anything related to the program’s students of color, or any diversity/affinity-based programming or highlights. Only one issue included a shoutout to Terri for being the recipient of Willow University’s Excellence in Diversity Award. They highlighted Terri’s commitment to diversity for over 30 years and that she was honored for her “commitment to diversity and inclusion” as a national and international scholar-practitioner, faculty, and advocate. The newsletters did not highlight the scholarship of their faculty, or any events dedicated to students of color.

Summary

This chapter presented the contextual and historical backgrounds of WUP and CUP and offered a detailed description of the programs using various program documents, such as syllabi, events, newsletters, as well as narratives of faculty and program coordinators. The integration of documents and the voices of faculty participants allowed me to build the discussion of this chapter into six different areas: (a) historical context of the program, (b) mission statement, (c) admission process, (d) curricular structure, (e) syllabi, and (f) program newsletters and events.

The historical context of CUP included a shift in their approach to refer to their mission. While before 2021, the CUP website referred specifically to the program as having a mission statement, in 2022 the website reflected a DEI statement in lieu of a mission. However, their commitment to serving students from all racial backgrounds remained. The faculty spoke specifically about their central commitment to exposing issues of race and
racism as informed by their program statement. Their commitment to dismantling issues of race and racism was infused from the admissions process to the curricular content of various courses in the program. Despite their open commitments to issues of race, the syllabi obtained for this study did not have specific language on race or racism in the course descriptions albeit language connected to diversity was present in some parts of the syllabi. However, CUP’s newsletters and events were more intentional to center issues of race and ethnicity, which was evident in the program events, faculty publications, and integration of students’ narratives in their newsletters.

At WUP, their historical context included the separation of the program from the counseling center at Willow University. The values of WUP are also rooted in commitments to diversity and social justice. However, as in CUP, WUP’s mission statement changed in 2022, and explicit language on race and racism was replaced by the concept of DEI as a mechanism to move beyond race and address higher education issues from a more global perspective. At WUP, faculty also mentioned infusing their mission and commitments to DEI from the admissions process and believed that the integration of the IDI at the beginning and end of the program was a helpful tool to assess students’ growth regarding their understating of DEI issues. Issues of race and racism were more directly addressed in the DEI course they offered, and students could also choose from a selected menu of courses to fulfill their diversity cognate requirement. The syllabi did not include specific language on race or racism either and their events and newsletters did not happen often and never highlighted any topics connected to race or ethnicity.
CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS: RACIAL JUSTICE IN HESA PROGRAMS – FACULTY AND STUDENTS’ PERSPECTIVES

The way that we do things in our program could create equity issues, could be disadvantaging to our students of color, our first-generation students, international students, students with various immigrant statuses. How can we pick up on those things? How can we change our language and practices? (Rose, White Faculty Member)

Introduction

This chapter presents the most salient findings that emerged from the student and faculty interviews as well as the analysis of class observations and program documents. More specifically, this chapter focuses on addressing the second and third research questions:

- In what ways, if any, do faculty translate the intended social justice mission of HESA programs into tangible racial justice-focused practices in the curriculum, pedagogy, student advising, and overall program outcomes?
• How do students perceive and experience the ways in which their programs enact, or fail to enact, their intended social justice/DEI mission related specifically to racial justice?

I used cross-case comparison of CUP and WUP, and the themes were organized by patterns occurring in both programs and patterns exclusive to one program for interpreting the relationships in the data. Cross-case comparison served as a strategy to envisage the data collected from both programs and the dialogical potential between ideas and evidence (Rihoux & Lobe, 2009). Cross-case comparison is mainly geared toward multiple-case studies, in a small or intermediate design (2-3 cases) (Rihoux & Lobe, 2009). Through this comparative approach, I strived to meet two goals: (a) gaining in-depth insight into the two HESA programs (CUP and WUP) to capture the complexity of the cases (overlapping and differing patterns) and (b) producing some level of generalization to gain a more extensive understanding of the unit of analysis, that is HESA social justice/DEI-focused programs and their commitment to racial justice.

After analyzing the 24 codes that emerged during the focused coding, I analyzed the faculty’s and students’ codes that I created to find more specific elements and reclassified the data gathered for both programs. This process allowed me to regroup and merge codes to produce bigger themes that could yield more precise patterns in the data and address the research questions more intentionally. Four overarching themes merged from this process: overlapping themes included (a) faculty’s identity in relation to their commitment to advancing the mission and (b) classroom dynamics around topics of race. Differing perspectives were mainly found in (a) faculty’s and students’ perceptions of curricular alignment to mission and (b) their commitment to continuing to advance the program’s
mission. These themes also yielded various subthemes, which are presented in detail in this chapter.

**The Pursuit of Racial Justice within a DEI Mission: Common Grounds**

This section of the findings presents three themes that were common to both programs. First, faculty in CUP and WUP discussed their motivations to join the program and how that motivation stemmed from their commitment to justice, specifically racial justice. Faculty also referred to specific practices they perceived as being directly connected to and contributing to the mission. Second, faculty in both programs shared similar perspectives regarding how they handled conversations about race in the classroom. Four subthemes were identified in this area, which included how faculty: (a) included the topic of race as an important aspect of the courses; (b) navigated tensions during race conversations; (c) perceived growth and learning as related to racial justice; and (d) looked at the role of faculty racial identity in conversations about race. Finally, this section concludes by presenting the third theme, which discusses the perspectives of students of color and white students in CUP and WUP regarding engagement and expectations for class participation around topics of race and racism.

**Racial Justice and The Role of Faculty Scholar and Racial Identity**

*Having a group of colleagues who get the racial aspect of our mission, who see the importance of and want to go ahead and spend the extra time that it's going to take to do this work is absolutely important for our students' learning experience and what they're going to get in our program, as well as for our field. (Nick, CUP Faculty Member)*
To examine the extent to which faculty members were committed to and understood their program mission statements in relation to race and racism, it was important to understand how their commitment stemmed from their motivation to work for the program and advance the goals as established in their program statements. During the interviews with the faculty members in both programs participating in this study, all except for one, Laura in WUP, talked about the role that the DEI mission of the program played in them joining their respective programs as well as their contributions to their programs. In many cases, the faculty brought up their professional experiences in the field of higher education and their scholarship journeys to discuss what motivated them to be a part of the program and to embrace the program statement, more specifically the commitment to racial justice.

**Motivation to Work in the Program**

In CUP, Nick noted that his career started around thirty years before in the field of student affairs and referred to his job as his “passion.” Nick also discussed that DEI issues had always been at the center of his research interests, and that he became increasingly interested in working with master’s students, as he saw the importance of preparing scholar-practitioners who were genuinely equity-minded:

My career in the professoriate first started in working with doctoral students. I wanted to engage in the experience of working in a program that is more focused in student affairs and equity and inclusion, for sure... and also working in the preparation of scholar practitioners with people who are getting master's degrees in practicing and working in HESA-type roles.

Nick also shared that his own life experiences had shaped his scholarship and the ways he embraced the mission of the program. His parents were undocumented and growing up in the
U.S. in a mixed-status family highlighted for him the importance of centering DEI issues in the field of education.

Also in CUP, Sandra explained that her research focus was on international higher education, so when she came across the opportunity to apply for a tenure-track job in her program, she made sure that her scholarship identity would be affirmed and valued in that program, and that she could “authentically” do that job in the context of the U.S. and the program mission. She extensively researched the program before she applied for a faculty position:

They had a whole page on DEI type of work, and it was everything I was like, “Okay, I wouldn't have to explain myself too much or try to figure out what am I doing.” So truly it was very serendipitous, but it also had all of the core elements, where I was like, “All right. You write about it, it’s marketed and branded, let's see what you’re about as well.” So that really was a great defining moment and then I actually decided to teach in the space.

For Sandra, it was also important to make sure that she did not have to start over her career “from scratch,” as she was already an associate professor at a university in her home country, especially as a Black woman in academia. She added:

A huge piece for me was whether or not they valued the work that I have been doing; that was very important. Especially as a Black woman in the academy, you're a walking unicorn because there's not that many of us that are tenured. So, it was very important to see that they were colloquially putting their money where their mouth was, “So you’re about DEI, do you also recognize that there’s not that many tenured Black women? I've been doing this for a while, why am I going to start over?”
On the other hand, Rose was an alumna of CUP, a non-tenure-track part-time faculty member and a part-time administrator in the program. She described her role as a “weird path,” since she felt that her multiple roles in the program comprised her full-time job. Her duties included teaching various courses in the program, advising students, and coordinating programming. However, when asked about her motivation to work in the program, Rose said she was mainly attracted to the tangible practices of the program as connected to anti-racism and other DEI issues, but not specifically to the mission by itself:

So, we have a diversity, equity, and inclusion statement. And to be completely honest, I don't think that much about that statement as it actually exists, and the reason for that is because I think that the commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, and I would say more specifically to anti-racism and to social justice and to liberation, is deeply infused in everything that we do. So, I don’t really think about that statement that much, because it's part of everything. So, I would say that because everybody in the program... The focus of our research is pretty much social justice-focused, most of us are doing research often about racism. My research is about critical whiteness studies. And so, I think that that informs our teaching. We always talk about how this is part of our program in every class that we teach.

Rose often referred to her identity as a white woman, and how important it was for her to engage in anti-racist practices, which she perceived as being a huge component of the program.

Terri, the founder of WUP, recalled that the separation of the program from the counseling department was necessary in order to move the program in a more socially just direction, which was extrinsically her main motivation:
At that time, I proposed that the program needed to be realigned in terms of its focus of DEI being at the center, social justice being at the center because higher ed, for the future, as far as I could see, if we didn’t prepare students to work more with diverse populations and be centered in systems that could enhance and cultivate diversity, we weren’t doing justice to our program.

Terri’s scholarship in multiculturalism informed the ways in which she shaped the program and its mission as well as the faculty she hired and trained. Terri mentioned how important it was for her to hire faculty who would be on board to advance the commitments to justice that the program had. For example, Cora talked about her motivation to join the program as a part-time faculty member, and described the role Terri played in forming her approach to teaching and perspective on the importance of DEI issues in higher education:

[Terri] mentored me in how she taught and that was a good opportunity. And then I got a chance to adjunct after that. For a while, I was doing it more frequently. They had less faculty and then I also, I felt there should have been a “women in higher education” course or something like that. So, I actually brought that to the department.

Although Laura also discussed that her motivation to join the program stemmed from Terri’s support for her scholarship, she was the only faculty member who openly admitted to not having direct interest in issues pertaining to social justice or race. She repeatedly said throughout the interview that she was not a social justice or DEI scholar but, when she joined the program, Terri reassured her that her research agenda on adult learning and global higher education was a part of diversity scholarship work:
I actually do not consider myself, and I’m very clear about that, I do not consider myself a diversity scholar and I do not consider myself a social justice scholar. So, actually, one of the concerns I had when I applied to this program was that the program’s mission when it started, this master’s program, when it started, it grounded itself in preparing practitioner scholars or entry-level professionals to advocate for historically marginalized and underserved populations. So, when I applied to this position, I actually said to the faculty, “I don’t know if I’m what you’re looking for. I don’t consider myself a diversity scholar. It's not what I do.”

Laura explained that Terri’s perspective on diversity issues was ample and allowed other scholarship beyond issues of race and racism to be centered as important components of their mission statement.

**Faculty Contributions to the Mission**

In both programs, all faculty except for one, Laura in WUP, discussed that the mission of the program aligned not only with their personal values and who they were, but also with their pedagogy and everything that was part of the program. When I asked them to explain how their individual contributions to the mission related to race and racial justice, the two faculty members who identified as white (Rose in CUP and Cora in WUP) and the foreign-born Black faculty member (Sandra in CUP) mentioned specific practices that they engaged in to support the mission and, specifically, students of color through anti-racist practices. In contrast, Nick (CUP), Terri (WUP), and Laura (WUP) had more general perspectives on how they contributed to their programs’ DEI statement, but none of them referred to concrete practices that connected their contributions to students of color or racial justice in general. When comparing the faculty's racial and ethnic backgrounds, it appeared
that the white and international faculty members brought a different lens and more straightforward approach to issues of race and racism. However, the faculty of color who were U.S.-born had a more careful approach to talking about the topic.

As an illustration, Sandra discussed that CUP’s program statement was ingrained in her values and what she believed in. When talking about tangible practices she used to contribute to the mission, she said:

“It’s a part of my pedagogy. I had this framework for how and why I teach. And so, at the center of it is how you know your students in and outside of the classroom... So that’s part of my teaching philosophy, it’s that I do know my students. I really do. I end up either knowing their families or who’s closest to them, and not all at the same level. It literally has to be fully organic, and so it’s something that I really think has to be emergent. It’s how we talk about not just what’s going on in the classroom, but what is happening outside of the classroom.

For Sandra, getting to know her students opened a window onto their worlds which, ultimately, had an impact on her practice and how she understood the systemic barriers that students, specifically students of color, must go through when they are in higher education. She also felt that the need to get to know her students was amplified during the pandemic, as many students were facing additional obstacles, including mental health issues. Sandra also recognized that the emphasis that her field (higher education) put on getting to know the students “is uncommon... It took me a while to understand that.” Getting to know the students was a priority for Sandra as, in her view, being aware of the obstacles that students were facing ensured that they were being served equitably:
I am a firm believer in that you cannot assess a student when they’re not fully whole. It’s really hard. And a lot of our students try to perform, and they submit, but they’re not fully whole. It is so difficult to fully assess them. And our students of color are probably the most affected by all of this.

Some of the faculty also referred to other practices such as advising, listening to students’ concerns, and ongoing support outside of class to ensure that they were fully supporting the students and honoring the commitments of their mission statement. For instance, Rose in CUP perceived her role as an advisor as critical in not only the advancement of the program mission, but also for the support and validation that students of color required as they went through the program. She made it a point to be available for advising multiple times (three to four) during the semester as opposed to only once, as it is the norm. For Rose, this created a special connection with her advisees and allowed her to guide them when they were struggling:

I have very strong involvement with my advisees. And I think that what that looks like in particular for me is the way that I support the students of color that I advise in the program, the way that I help them navigate some of their experiences as graduate students, having really open conversations with them about feelings of imposter syndrome or racial dynamics within the cohort. There are always racial dynamics within our cohorts. And again, it’s because we're engaging them right from the get-go in inter-group dialogue. So, there’s no place to hide from these difficult conversations. And so, I think taking, I would say, a really equity-minded, really strengths-based approach in my advising, and trying to validate students in their experiences as much as possible, knowing in particular that students of color at this
predominantly white institution are coming into those advising meetings with specific challenges.

Cora also felt that the DEI mission was part of her core values, and she demonstrated her contribution to the mission by supporting students directly when they had concerns about their performance or even in the form of graduate assistantships through the precollegiate area she oversaw at Willow University. She specifically mentioned that a way to support her students of color was by listening to their concerns about how they perceived the program. Cora gave a concrete example about a faculty member of color in her program who taught a class on DEI issues, but the students of color felt disconnected and disappointed about the way the class was handled. She said:

I had several HESA GAs [Graduate Assistants] that were in my office working, and they were very frustrated about the conversations around race, diversity, power, privilege, and oppression. And so, they were super frustrated, and they felt like this potential faculty member wasn’t getting it. And I listened to them.

Cora felt that, given the mission of the program, it was her responsibility to address the issue first with the faculty member so she could guide her students in the right direction through productive conversations:

I went back to the students, and I didn’t share our conversation, but I said, “There’s more to this and in order to really get what you want, you need to have the conversation with [the professor]. You need to talk to [the professor], express your concerns.” And then they did. They had a conversation with her. I think in some ways, they felt like she was being fake, and I can tell you, that wasn’t the case. But it was definitely by not being able to go there and owning that, honoring that space to
have those conversations, students felt like their identity wasn’t being represented or honored, and it’s being glossed over and that was not her intention at all.

Cora felt that listening to her students at that time was a “learning experience for everybody,” including for herself, and it was a demonstration of how much “the students trust the work” that she was doing and “how willing I am to put myself out there in authentic ways.”

On the other hand, other faculty participants, specifically U.S.-born faculty of color, did not directly mention or elaborate on tangible practices that contributed to the advancement of their program statements and kept their comments on philosophical or general levels. Nick in CUP, for example, referred to his contribution first, as something that was part of his values, but also, from a collectivist perspective and highlighted how his and his colleagues’ contributions were action-oriented: “DEI is, I think, so ingrained in who I am as well as who we are as a program, as well as my faculty colleagues, that there’s deliberate action.” However, Nick did not elaborate on what those actions were and how they were carried out and aligned with their DEI statement.

Terri talked about her contributions to WUP’s statement from the perspective that she was “in transition.” She explained that she was in an administrative role until the summer of 2022, that she had just started again as a faculty member in the program, and that she was also close to retirement. She questioned if she had made contributions to the program in the last few years: “I’m not sure. Am I making contributions right now? Do I fit with this right now?” Terri also talked about her respect for the work and direction that Laura and other faculty members envisioned for the program, including the mission:

While I was in the administrative role, I encouraged other faculty to take ownership of the program and to give it life and bring it forward in the way they feel best
bringing that forward. And so, I want to be very careful now that I’ve come back, that I don’t need anyone to defer to me. They’ve given life to where the program is now. I’m trying to understand what the current coordinator’s goals are and how they see what they’re doing fits with the mission. We’ve never strayed from the mission of the program, but like I said, it’s implemented slightly differently, and that’s a good thing as I see it.

Laura also did not refer to specific practices or contributions to the program. Instead, she focused the discussion on further clarifying that she was not a social justice scholar, nor was this her interest necessarily. However, she spoke about her interest in organizational justice and, overall, her work ethics as she learned during her graduate program, which emphasized her commitment to supporting any mission or program commitments at any organization she worked for. While talking about her efforts to advance WUP’s DEI statement, Laura explained that her commitment and efforts had been a process:

I’ll tell you it’s been a progression. I’m not sure if it came from an initial commitment to serving a socially just mission. I think what it came from was... My doctoral degree is in educational leadership, but we had an organizational theory focus. So, I think what it came from was like, “Okay, if this is what our mission is, and we say we do this, well, how are we acting out our mission?” So, it didn’t come from my personal like, “Oh my gosh, we need to be promoting social justice.” It came from the understanding of who our program is and who it says it wants to be, so damn we’d better be doing that.

However, Laura also explained that if the mission of the program was different and not DEI-centered, she would find a way to support it because it was ingrained in her
academic training, more specifically what she learned in her organizational theory class while she was in graduate school:

Number one, I was taught how to be very clear in understanding what the mission of your organization is. Number two, I was taught that you need to be able to support how you’re saying what your mission is and how you’re actually playing that out. And number three, I was taught for my doctoral and my master’s program, how would you assess that you’re actually doing those things.

**Conversations about Race: Balancing Classroom Dynamics and Students’ Expectations**

A lot of what we did in the past two years in class was trauma dumping. I’m tired of trauma dumping to all [my classmates]. I trust [them], but it’s just so tiring, to a point where you just talk about your trauma... We felt like we were educating our peers with more privileged identities about our marginalized identities. (Casey, CUP student)

Faculty often discussed their perception of their program’s mission in relation to conversations about race in the classroom and students’ perception of the faculty’s ability to manage those types of discussions. In general, faculty in both programs recognized the racial dynamics at play among students when it came to discussing topics of race in the classroom. The findings in this section present the perceptions of conversations about race from faculty’s perspectives as well as the navigation of conflict amid topics of race and racism in the classroom.

**Race in the Classroom through the Lens of Faculty**

When prompted to discuss how they handled conversations about race and racism in the classroom as well as conflict or resistance, faculty in both programs discussed that having
a straightforward DEI statement and reinforcing it through the content of student orientations were crucial in avoiding student resistance in the classroom when discussing issues of race. More specifically, the faculty referred to specific courses in the curriculum that set the ground rules for students to understand that issues of race and racism were an important component of the classes and their development as scholar-practitioners. From their perspective, having an intentional statement, coupled with courses dedicated to discussing topics of race and racism, ensure that students are not as resistant during class conversations around these topics, which leads to more openness to learning. Sandra in CUP noted that having a course specifically on race at the beginning of the master’s program curriculum facilitated the ways in which the students perceived those topics throughout their experiences in the program:

They’re really more cemented on feeling free to call out whiteness, use it in their language, how they critique themselves if they’re a part of whiteness. Where they are in liberatory consciousness is something that I teach them. They’re just at the starting places of awareness, how do they make those shifts? What does that shift look like? For them to become hyper aware of indigeneity and the lack of native communities around us... So really pushing them, but again it’s expected because it’s almost like this is what you signed up for, the program is this. It is a HESA program, but we are doing it based on racial justice, decolonization; these are the frameworks we’ve outlined that this is how you do it.

Rose also perceived low resistance regarding race topics in the classroom and attributed that not only to the intentionality of the CUP statement, but also more directly to the Race Talk course students take in their first semester:
So, in their first semester, they have the [Race Talk] course, and so they are getting a full introduction to race and racism; we are talking about identity; we are talking about social justice in this program. And they’re being trained in [the Race Talk class]. So, by the time I get them in the second semester or third semester, which is the classes that I’ve been teaching during my time in the program, they are already trained in [this type of dialogue]. And I think that that makes a huge difference in terms of their ability to engage with dissonance.

Similarly, Terri explained how infusing race and racism in the WUP curriculum was important to structure those conversations in the classroom:

Clearly, we incorporate readings and research and experiences, but we know that growth really occurs through facilitated conversation. That’s how we get people to really reflect and to think about how they incorporate those things. Again, I think that has to do with the people I have hired.

Laura also referred to their curriculum and that, in every class, “there’s going to be some component of diversity,” which means that “the students are not surprised when every class will have some component of talking about either race, diversity more broadly, whether that be gender, and all the different ways I kind of talked about it.”

Cora spoke more specifically about the ways in which she infused the topic of race in the classes she taught even if they were not directly connected to issues of racism:

In the women in higher ed leadership class, we go over some of the history of women in higher education, how women could not even have access to higher ed. But then also we talk about the feminist movement and the various waves. And so, failure of
the feminist movement was their inability, white women’s inability, to incorporate women of color into the movement. And that’s pretty much why it didn’t succeed.

**Navigating Tensions amid Race Conversations**

Despite setting clear expectations regarding issues of race and racism in their missions, in onboarding programming for students, and in the curriculum, faculty in both programs also recognized that race conversations in the classroom were clearly delineated by students’ racial identities. Faculty reported that while white students believed that the classes addressed race and racism enough, students of color wanted those concepts more explicitly infused in all the courses. Faculty also depicted white students as experiencing more discomfort than students of color during conversations about race. However, faculty recognized that students of color tended to become frustrated when they saw themselves as the race educators for their white peers.

For example, Nick in CUP talked about his experience facilitating conversations of race and explained that “[it] creates, I think, a really powerful learning opportunity for students, but it can be one that can sometimes be quite confrontational as well.” He also referred to the dynamics between students of color and white students, and highlighted a specific point of contention in the classroom, where students of color feel they are deemed as the holders of knowledge and educators for their white peers but, at the same time, white students feel that they are being attacked and accused of being racist:

It’s common for our students to talk, especially for our BIPOC students, to say, why am I the one who constantly must be teaching my white peers... are we specialists? Our BIPOC students say, “Why am I the one who constantly has to be teaching my white cohort mates around issues that impact my community, that impact me? That’s
not my responsibility, that’s theirs.” Then, of course, you get issues of white guilt, white fragility that comes up from our white students and things like that as well. That’s not me, right? Issues like that without really confronting that. That can be the storming stage of our relationship that occurs with our students. That can sometimes be a little bit tough too to navigate as a professor.

In WUP, the faculty also acknowledged the tensions that naturally emerge when students of color and white students are in the same room discussing issues of race and racism. Terri explained that facilitating conversations of race in the classroom “feels like trying to choreograph a dance, to be honest, and trying to say, ‘Okay, we need everybody to participate in this conversation.’” She talked about the importance of balancing conversations and understanding that all students start at a different place:

So, you have some students who are very comfortable having that conversation and have had quite a bit of it. And then, you have some students who, they’re just trying it on, they’re just figuring it out. And so, the balance is to try to get those students who are just trying this out to enter the dialogue, while not pushing down those students who are more experienced, trying to get them to back off a little, enough to let others into the conversation.

More precisely, Terri referred to students of color as joining conversations about race and racism with pre-conceived notions and strong opinions given the lived experiences and baggage that they brought with them. She noted the importance of balancing the expectations of students without invalidating their experiences, while also allowing white students to be part of the conversation:
The hard one is when we have people [of color] who have very strong, dogmatic feelings about certain things, to try to quiet that a little bit, just enough to let other people join the conversation, while recognizing that that probably comes from a place of hurt. And so, not trying to completely shut that down but recognizing it could dampen the conversation if we let it go too far.

Similarly, Laura in WUP also referred to race dynamics in the classroom, noting that students of color perceived topics of race differently from their white peers. More specifically, she noted that the balance required to facilitate conversations of race and racism was hard to achieve as white students perceive those topics to be overemphasized, but students of color feel that those topics are not sufficiently addressed:

I think that the white students think that we focus on diversity a lot. The white heterosexual gender normative, is that the right word? Gender normative? We probably focus a lot on diversity. I still think that most of our students of color think that we don’t focus on it enough. I feel like we get a lot of pushbacks; I feel like we’ve lost students of color; they still say they feel marginalized; they feel decentered.

While faculty in both programs recognized the tensions that occurred in the classroom between white students and students of color, Cora and Laura in WUP discussed racial dynamics in the classroom but, more specifically highlighted their struggles with students of color and white students as they went through the learning process regarding race and racism. Cora noted that she had a harder time with white students in the classroom whenever she brought up a topic related to race. She recalled a situation in which she had to deal with one of her white man students who felt threatened by the discussions that Cora was facilitating in
class pertaining to race and racism. The white student she mentioned felt that he was being personally attacked and blamed for the racial injustices they were discussing in class and decided to elevate the issue to the faculty coordinator, Laura:

I taught maybe six or seven years ago, way before the pandemic, and it got back to me that an older student, I think he was 28. Older for being right in their masters. He had been in the military; he was a white male. He had told his supervisor, and it had got back to me that, “If she calls me a white, male, racist, sexist pig one more time.” And I was like, “I’ve never said anything like that.” I always try to set [the conversation about race] up with as much care and empathy as I can, but at the same time, I still have that challenge... It can be perceived as “I’m coming for your identity.”

This experience was shocking for Cora, but she also used it as an opportunity for reflection. Cora explained that while she heard about this complaint, she never confronted the student, and she truly regretted that. She thought she could have at least had a check-in meeting with the student and approached it carefully while allowing space for the student to express his frustration with her and the class and use the incident as a teaching moment. As a white faculty member, Cora said her challenge was mainly with white students, but she also added that she understood the challenges that came with grappling with your own privilege and recognizing that despite not directly or intentionally being racist, white people are still participants and beneficiaries of white supremacy and the systems of oppression that come with it:

That’s the thing that I feel like the challenge is especially with white students. It’s threatening for them to identify as contributing to a racist system. And there’s a lot of
reasons that go into that. And maybe because on some level, they have a consciousness that they are and it’s just really hard to reconcile. But I don’t want to lose people. So, I do go in with love and care. But also, we can’t be so loving and caring that we’re not challenging. So, it’s a fine line. I don’t always nail it.

On the other hand, Laura expressed frustration with her students of color and the system at the same time and wondered what else they could do to make students of color feel included. From her perspective as a woman of color, as a program, they were doing enough. She felt they were doing many different things to ensure that students of color felt represented in the curriculum and overall welcome in the program, but she felt that the students of color in WUP never felt it was enough:

I’m like, “What the hell else can we do? I don’t understand. I don’t even...” We have two African American women, an Asian American woman, a gay male, two race scholars. We do all the things I’m telling you about, we talk about race and our students still feel marginalized. And so, it’s very hurtful, as an African American woman. I’m mixed race, Mexican, African American, first gen, like all these things. Sometimes I just want to be like, “What the hell? What else are we supposed to do?”

Laura also stated that, given her racial and ethnic backgrounds, she somewhat understood why students of color in her program felt frustrated since, despite efforts to eradicate oppressive systems and practices, being at a predominantly white institution meant that there were still areas where marginalization and oppression would naturally occur: “Is it happening from the classroom? Is it from me? Is it just from being in the system? Being at a predominantly white institution, is it really the program? Is it the system? It’s heartbreaking. It’s heartbreaking; it is what it is.”
Despite the discomfort that both students of color and white students experienced, and faculty’s perceptions of resistance and tension, over time, some faculty in both programs perceived growth, learning, and not unmanageable levels of tension given practices implemented in the application process as well as in the classroom. Sandra in CUP talked about similar race dynamics in the classroom as discussed by other faculty in both programs and added that it was critical for her students to be exposed to guest speakers of color and overall to center race in class to not only increase awareness around racial oppression, but also to provide space for white students to move past their white guilt stage:

I have guest speakers that come in with a racialized identity that is also a part of those communities, and how those communities are more deepened in terms of the literature will preface whiteness always and assimilation to whiteness. And so, for you to really understand those experiences at their core or at the heights of oppression is really you need to understand race and racism, that’s how it’s taught from the outset... So, my white students in particular have moved beyond guilt, which is very important. They’ve moved beyond white guilt into really getting more critical analysis or critical whiteness areas.

The faculty’s perceived notion of low resistance and tension among their students regarding issues of race stemmed from the importance of being open with students from the beginning (i.e., the application process) about their commitment to DEI, and specifically issues if race and racism. The three CUP faculty depicted that as an effective way to mitigate tension or conflict once students were engaging in topics of race and racism in class. Rose, for instance, explained that she had not seen much resistance when it came to topics of race
and racism in the classroom, as she believed that “from day one, [the students] have gotten the message and they have decided to engage in this program, they’re willing to go into the discomfort with us most of the time, or they're willing to take that path.” She also acknowledged that despite showing some growth, students in the program continued to find ways to struggle with issues of race and racism:

When somebody in a classroom says, “This is white supremacy,” it’s not like someone’s like, “I don’t know about that.” They’re in it. Now, that does not mean that our students do not struggle with it. It does not mean that our students do not micro-aggress each other. It does not mean that they don’t mess up or have really tough learning edges. It does mean that they know what they signed up for.

WUP faculty also discussed having clear messages about their commitment to DEI, including issues of race and racism, in the application process and beyond. Terri, for example, highlighted the importance of setting up ground rules around cohort expectations to discuss issues of race, and what those rules mean when students are discussing the meaning of respect. For her, asking questions that everybody answered set the ground for people to participate, and she acknowledged that these conversations were not just helpful for white students, but also for students of color. Terri explained: “Just because you’re a student of color doesn’t mean that you have all the answers. You have your experience, and maybe you’ve done some work to understand the topic more broadly from your investment in it.” So, “inviting people to speak” allowed them to assess and monitor how to go through the process of learning about race and racism.
The Role of Faculty’s White Racial Identity in Conversations of Race

Although faculty in both programs talked about the dynamics of handling conversations about race and racism in the classroom and balancing the expectations of students of color and white students, white faculty in both programs perceived that those conversations were received differently depending on the racial identity of the faculty members. Rose in CUP noted that students of color may have had a more positive perception of race conversations if those were facilitated by faculty of color. She also connected the lack of resistance in the classroom to her privilege as a white woman, especially when she was teaching white students:

I think part of that is that I’m a white instructor, so I’m a white woman, I’m engaged with a group of mostly white women, so I don't take for granted the fact that the messages that I’m sharing with them, from my perspective, from my experience, likely resonate with them in ways that are aligned with their own identity development, for those students in particular.

Like Rose, Cora in WUP also mentioned that some faculty of color in her program felt more resistance from white students when bringing topics of race and racism into the classroom. She gave two concrete examples. The first one was related to the class of a faculty member of color and the issues she was having with students around topics of race. This colleague asked Cora to teach the first part of the curriculum for that class, which was on ethnic and racial issues in higher education. Cora encouraged her to co-teach the class so she could feel more comfortable talking about race in class. The second example that she mentioned was when she realized that her colleague was not the only faculty of color encountering resistance in the classroom, as she had conversations with her other faculty
colleagues of color who also expressed perceiving resistance when they tried to teach topics about race and racism:

I have had other friends and colleagues that are of color that have presented on these topics and get really frustrated and feel like there is racism right in the class, in the moment, that their own identity is being devalued and questioned by the very students that they're trying to educate... It’s still racism. It’s still personal. But yeah, you do have to do that. You have to separate it out and be like, “[Students are] on their own journey.” But at the same time, it is racism, and it is personal.

When Expectations Clash: Students of Color, White Students, and Race Issues in the Classroom

The intent to have meaningful conversations about race is there. But I think in order to do it effectively in a classroom environment, you need to be pushing students and making them uncomfortable. And I think that is a space that our faculty does not engage. (Stella, Black woman student in CUP)

Students’ perceptions in both programs about race and racism as central topics in the classroom aligned with the faculty’s perceptions in that students of color and white students engaged in these topics differently. However, students in CUP and WUP addressed not only the dynamics during discussions about race and racism, but also the ability of faculty to facilitate such conversations in effective ways. This section of the findings first presents the perceptions of students of color in relation to their role in conversations of race, the role of the faculty, and the role of their white peers. The second part focuses on white students and their perception of effective ways to participate and engage in conversations of race in the classroom.
Students of Color as Race Experts

Students of color in both programs discussed their discomfort during class conversations about race or racism. From their point of view, the conversations were tailored in a way that centered white students while positioning students of color as informants. Some students of color also referred to the concept of “trauma dumping,” where they felt forced to share their experiences with racism, and which resulted in students of color reviving traumatic events they had gone through. As an illustration, Abeer, a Middle Eastern woman in CUP, referred to her disappointment about how race conversations were handled in CUP, and she specifically felt inadequate in the Race Talk course when students were asked to share experiences related to their racial identities. From her perspective, the intention of the class was to “help students of color feel supported and seen in the program, but execution was another story,” as students were put in a position where they had to share about their social identities regardless of their comfort level:

Overall, our cohort, especially the students of color, was generally disappointed in the quality of the conversations that were being prompted in our class. And there came a time in the class where we had to do personal testimonios, where we had to focus on two of our social identities. And one of them had to be race. The other one could be anything we chose, like ability, or religion, or gender identity. I had some personal issues with it because I felt like we were forced to share our traumas at such an early time and in the classroom setting.

Carina, a Latinx woman in CUP, also discussed the issue of “trauma dumping” in her classes and believed that she and her other classmates of color were left to educate their white peers, which did not feel inclusive or fair in her perspective. Carina discussed that she
would refuse to work on what she called a “trauma-dumping project,” and decided to focus on a different identity other than race, but she also recalled that some of her peers of color ended up presenting and crying as they shared their experiences. Carina did not think that the conversations were productive. Instead, she deemed the discussions about race exhausting and a space where the only benefactors were white students:

A lot of what we did in the past two years was trauma dumping. At one point, all of our cohort members of color were like, “I’m tired of trauma dumping to all of you guys. I trust you, but it’s just so tiring, to a point where you just talk about your trauma. And I don’t want to talk about this anymore.” We felt like we were really more educating our peers with more privileged identities, like white peers, about our marginalized identities.

Stella, a Black woman in CUP, also talked about the Race Talk course, expressing her disappointment at the content and delivery of the course. From her view, the course was basic and tailored to the needs of white students, so she “was doing a lot of emotional labor,” and as a Black student, she did not feel that there was a space for her to learn. Some students talked about the lack of action-oriented approaches when talking about issues of race in the classroom, which left the students of color with no option but to be race informants. For instance, Josephine, a Black woman in WUP, questioned the lack of action and activism outside of the classroom space:

I feel like as students we could read and have scenarios and watch videos about racism and oppression. Okay, but do they actually know someone who is facing these injustices when it comes to racial, social justice, anything? What are they doing to be, I guess, an ally or being a support for students of color?
Similarly, Jerry, a Black man in WUP, referred to the expectations from faculty and students with more privileged identities to have students of color share their experiences with racism. However, from his lens, those conversations left students of color as the educators in the room, while faculty and white students engaged dispassionately and superficially in those conversations, which he deemed as a trend in academia:

White supremacy and white supremacy in academia is invested in white folks and not folks like me. In academic spaces, we can talk dispassionately about racism happening in academia. We can talk dispassionately about transphobia and academia and things like that. And that’s considered right or professional, but it comes at the exclusion and deeper oppression of students of color.

**When Good Intentions and Preparedness Are at Odds**

Students of color in both programs recognized that faculty genuinely put in the effort to make them feel included in the program, and that incorporating topics of race in the curriculum was a demonstration of such effort. However, students of color discussed the dissonance between their intentions and the actual execution of those in the classroom and attributed this misalignment to the faculty’s lack of preparedness to handle conversations about race. In CUP, both Abeer, a Middle eastern woman, and Stella, a Black woman, thought that professors did not do enough to push students out of their comfort zone to truly engage in conversations about race. For instance, Abeer said: “[O]ur professors didn't really push us to be like, ‘No, but think about this.’ So, it doesn't foster the conversations where we really sit down and learn, which was hard for me to speak up and say how I felt or called out things that I felt for being either excluded or erased” because that meant she would rock the boat, and “unity” would be disrupted. Stella also believed that their conversations were “at a
very surface level.” She thought that to effectively engage in conversations about race, faculty needed to push students and make them uncomfortable, but she thought that was something faculty were not willing to engage in, so those conversations always remained at a superficial level:

The course attempted to address race and racism, but the faculty did so in a superficial way such as, “here’s what a micro-aggression is” basic level, so it prevented students from being able to do the deep reflecting on their own identity and how it showed up in spaces. And I think that trying to create a peaceful atmosphere in the classroom harmed the progress that could have been made because students went into that course to learn, but then were like, “Oh, I know everything there is to know about racism. I don’t have any issues.” And then moved on from that course.

On a similar note, Jerry noted that, in his program, it was easier to have race conversations one-on-one with the faculty, but he felt that, in class, the faculty were not willing to dive deep into conversations of race to not “ruffle any feathers” or foster conflict among students. He referred to the faculty’s lack of intention to fully engage in conversations of race as “something that faculty did not intentionally walk.” For him, the conversations also remained at a superficial level and were not infused in every course he took, as the expectation was that students would learn about this topic more in depth in their equity course. Josephine, a Black woman in WUP, said that faculty never pushed white students to think beyond their assumptions about people of color, and that the conversations in general were not pushed beyond what was in the readings or the videos the students watched in class. Josephine noted: “You can read and do all that stuff [race conversations] in class, but how is this actually being helpful for these students?”
Students’ perceptions of faculty’s good intentions but lack of ability to push white students during conversations about race was also another area that I could see during some of the classes that I observed. A concrete example happened during Cora’s (WUP white faculty member) while she was discussing systems of oppression and how people of color had to navigate those spaces. Although Cora was very intentional and open to talking about topics of race and racism, she did not attempt to push white students when they were making comments about how people of color also enjoyed privileges. In the first part of the class, she recapped what they had covered in the previous class, including racial theory, oppression, and white racial theory, and multiracial identity. She explained macro-ecosystems and micro-ecosystems pertaining to race and how people of color experience those spaces. She showed different types of racial identities and reminded the students that the topics on race are challenging and that she, as a white woman, could not compare her experiences to those of people of color.

Cora proceeded to ask the students: “How can we think of our points of oppression and at the same time think about changing systems?” A white student said that some Black people/athletes are not interested in changing systems because they enjoy their privilege, so he asked how we could reconcile with that. She said change was also individual. The white student continued and criticized Colin Kaepernick, the U.S. athlete who kneeled during the national anthem at a football game, for doing that, but not having a problem with his paycheck. Cora said: “It’s conflictual to do work on dismantling oppression... People from all races, genders and ethnicities have oppressed people in terrible ways too.” She added that she hoped the classroom would offer a space for them to express themselves, but it was important to find ways to be redirected in the right direction. She did not elaborate more on the topic,
and her comments were more geared to appeasing the situation, but not challenging the white student’s view. Cora quickly switched topics and reminded the students that for the following class, they would be discussing ethnic identity development. She asked them how they would define ethnicity, and students paused to think. She said that ethnicity was socially constructed just as race was. One student mentioned the word “Caucasian,” and she replied: “You can choose Caucasian or white but it’s your preference. I’m against Caucasian because it’s a name after a beautiful mountain that white people appropriated to name their race.” The class ended and all the students stayed to chat among themselves and Cora.

**White Peers in Race Conversations: How to Engage?**

Another subtheme that emerged in the findings was the perception of students of color in both programs regarding their white peers’ participation in conversations about race and the dynamics of race in the classroom among their cohort peers. Stella, a Black woman in CUP, believed that “the white students have a very rose-colored glasses way of thinking about group discussions or how those things went. And they are typically unaware of different dynamics at play, the way that they say things and how they could be perceived.” Because of the white students’ “unawareness,” Carina, a Latinx woman in CUP, thought that cohort dynamics could be affected, and divisions naturally happened: “The students of color were drastically closer to each other than they were to the white students. It really impacted the ways that we bonded, even in a community-building activity: Who you chose to sit next to, who you hung out with outside of the classroom setting.”

Some students of color also referred to how white students specifically engaged in these conversations and deemed their contributions as minimal, superficial, and impractical. Abeer, a Middle Eastern woman, described the contributions of her white peers as unrealistic,
as their comments were minimal, but also noted that they would also agree with everything that was shared by the people of color in the room:

The experience that I had was very much people of color saying an opinion or a piece or something that they think about, and then our white peers saying, “Yes, I agree,” and the next person will say, “Yes, I agree,” which isn't a bad thing, per se. However, I think it’s still really limiting to the conversations we can have because there’s no way that all of us, every single 13 of us can agree exactly the same way for every single topic. So, it just didn’t seem realistic to me.

Similarly, Stella also recalled an experience in her Race Talk class in CUP where they had an assignment about a personal narrative around two identities, one of which had to be a racial identity. Stella contended that the difference in depth between the students of color and the white students “was a serious point of contention.” She remembered that white students would use that space to “victimize themselves” because of their whiteness, and that it became a pattern in the discussions:

Some students of color left the room angry because there were people, one of the people of color talked about being diagnosed with an eating disorder, their parent being in prison, coming out. And then one of the white persons cried through her narrative and it was basically like, “I’m white. And here’s how I came to learn that I was white, and I’m a woman and that makes me sad sometimes.”

Like Abeer, Jerry also perceived his white peers as not being overly engaged and described that “it may have been a little challenging for some of them. And for some others, it’s not necessarily something that they spoke to or believed in.” Similarly, Josephine noted that white students would “sit back” and wait for students of color to do all the talking.
However, despite describing herself as a very active person in class, Josephine decided to pause on her participation as much as she could, so white students could participate more:

I didn’t over-engage because I personally wanted to hear more white students to really talk about what we read, like the material or just the videos we read, or just case studies. I really wanted to hear their side. So, for me, I didn’t really talk as much because I’m just like, it’s not that I didn’t have anything to say, but I just didn’t want to be their educator. I just didn’t feel like that was really my space to really talk. I feel like it was more just them figuring it out.

The decision to sit back and remain silent described by Josephine was also evident among other students of color in one of the courses I observed in WUP. The course was on organizational theory in higher education and was taught by Laura. The class discussion revolved mainly around the bureaucracy of organizations, given their missions, which included a brief discussion on issues of diversity as related to race in the context of organizational theory. They discussed the concepts of input (students) and output (graduation rates). The Black woman, Latinx students and the Japanese student did not really participate in class. The class was very much dominated by three of the white women students. Even when they were in groups, the students of color did not participate much in the class.

After discussing the bureaucracy of organizations, students worked on the final project, which consisted of selecting an underrepresented student population and learning about it all semester. Laura told them that students tended to struggle to write journals and do research on these student populations without feeling that they were invading space, but she never elaborated on why that was an issue or guided them with tools to address those potential challenges. The students also remained silent, and she continued with the class.
Overall, Laura did not attempt to unpack why students might have felt as invaders when researching marginalized populations, nor did she engage the students to connect the topic of bureaucracy with the issue of racialized organizations and how that affected students of color.

*The Conspiracy of Silence: White Students’ Perceptions of Class Participation*

While the perception of students of color regarding their white peers’ participation was described as superficial and unrealistic, through the lens of white students, refraining from participating too much in class was what they thought was the right thing to do. However, white students in both programs also talked about having a difficult time figuring out the right balance in their class participation in a way that they were not taking up too much space while not coming off as apathetic. Some white students also referred to the lack of preparedness from the faculty to address these nuances in the classroom. Overall, for white students, navigating that balance often resulted in white students being silent during conversations about race and racism, which they saw as giving space to their peers of color to express themselves.

For example, Sophie, a white woman in CUP, discussed that, as a white person, she witnessed herself and other white students feeling particularly uncomfortable when talking about issues of race in the classroom. For Sophie, the discussion of any identities other than race and their respective oppressions was a lot easier as everybody would “nod and agree.” However, when the conversation about racial identity surfaced, the “comfort level” was automatically low and silence among the white students would prevail in the room. Yet, while she acknowledged that being silent was problematic, she did not feel like the faculty knew how to engage them effectively. As a result, as Sophie explained, white students would...
end using “metaphors and other language” to avoid addressing the topic very directly, which she deemed as harming:

Silence doesn’t come without harm either. I think white folks in our program do not really get it [issues of racism], and myself included, I will include myself in culpability of silence. Not acknowledging the experiences of folks of color in our cohort who have racially marginalized identities is damaging. And it is not just silence, but also how white students talk about race and racism in ways that are not as accessible or clear.

Some students recognized the culpability of silence as well. Thomas, a white man in CUP, acknowledged that, for white people, the first response when involved in conversations of race was silence, but he also talked about how having explicit conversations about this in some of his classes helped him understand that silence was not the right response:

A lot of us white people will be quiet in those conversations, because we don't want to say the wrong thing, but then that silence is viewed as us not wanting to engage...

You need to engage in the conversation, and if you say something wrong, we can go from there, but the response isn't to not say anything because you're scared of not saying the right thing.

However, other students firmly believed that silence was a demonstration of respect for their peers of color. For instance, Mark, a white man in WUP, felt that as a white person, it was not his place to give his opinion when it came to conversations around race and racism and shared that during conversations with his other white peers, there was consensus that remaining silent during discussions about race and racism was the right approach:
I think for those of us in the room who were, you know, were not a racial minority and maybe hadn’t studied it or lived it, I think a lot of us were pretty quiet because we understood it wasn’t, it wasn’t like we weren’t allowed at the table, but it wasn’t necessarily our story to tell. I think the students of color definitely shared a lot, whether it was personal experience or if it was a topic that they were interested in working with.

Some other students also justified their silence by saying that, as white folks, they did not have anything to contribute to conversations of racism since they had never really experienced it. Michael, a white man in WUP, brought an example about the year of 2020 during the George Floyd protests and a discussion they were having in class about this issue:

I think our professor came in and just asked us questions about racism. I just remember, I didn’t answer anything because, because I’m just a white guy. So, I just remember staying silent on that. But the other students, mostly the black women, they were the first ones to make their opinions heard, and it made sense to me. I was like, yeah, this is something close and personal for them, seeing these injustices, kind of fearing that might happen to them. I remember letting them just take the reign on that and me staying out of it, because nothing I’m going to say right now is really going to be pertinent really, just because of my lack of identity for it.

Michael, however, also reflected on his comment and recognized that silence was not the best strategy because “you’re not doing any bad, but you’re not doing any good. So, it’s just remaining complacent.” Michael recalled being called out by some of his classmates of color who questioned his lack of participation when discussing race and racism: “Why don’t you ever talk?” I was like, “I don’t think I have really anything to say.” They’re like, “Well
you wouldn’t be here if you didn’t have anything to add.” After unpacking these questions with his classmates, Michael said that he found that the best way for him to contribute “was just to ask questions.”

*Conversations about Race in the Classroom: A Fine Balance*

Although the dynamics of silence was a salient theme for the white student participants, they also perceived that the infusion of race and racism in class discussions was sufficient and sometimes overemphasized. This perspective greatly differed from the perception of students of color who felt that race and racism were “glossed over,” and the conversations in class were very “superficial.” Michael, a white man in WUP, stated that the constant exposure to issues of race coupled with the IDI assessment were essential for him to see his growth in issues of race:

At the beginning of the master’s program, I did an intercultural development inventory. The grading scale had four different levels. I can’t remember exactly what they were or how that worked. But it showed you where you were, like how interculturally competent you were. So, I remember thinking that I was high up there (interculturally proficient). I know how to be respectful of other people’s identities and things like that. I remember I got the test back and I scored really low. But I kind of saw that coming just because of my lack of exposure to all the different identities but having that was a good place for me to start to learn about those issues.

Similarly, Mark, a white man in CUP, said that the topics of race were very present in his courses and that a big take-away from his experience was that “recognizing my own privilege was a huge journey for me in my master’s program, and it’s something I never take for granted.” Although most white students in both programs felt that the exposure to issues
of race and racism was adequate and effective, one white student perceived the emphasis on issues of race and racism as exaggerated and unnecessary. For instance, Kelly mentioned that “race was discussed pretty heavily in our classes... And I acknowledge that I’ve had a very privileged life, so there are things that I’m still learning about my own privilege.” However, Kelly also discussed that she did not like to focus too much on issues of race or oppression in general:

   I think part of it is my privilege. Part of it is my personality. I just don’t like to look at past things that have gotten me down. I like to grow through them and think of them as positive experiences instead of negative experiences. So, I didn’t like that we were told that we had to think about things like oppression and race or the way that we had been oppressed in a certain area.

**Divergent Paths and Visions**

   The previous sections of the findings discussed the themes that were common to both programs. This section of the findings focuses on areas where the two programs, CUP and WUP, differed in their perspectives. Two overarching themes emerged during the data comparison stage. The first part discusses the programs’ missions through curricular alignment from the perspectives of faculty and students from each program. The second part discusses the faculty’s and students’ perspectives in regard to the future of their missions and how they envisioned programmatic changes that could better align with their program DEI statements.

**Mission through Curricular Alignment**

   Curricular alignment as related to the programs’ statements was a significant finding of this study. In this area, the perception of students and faculty differed between the two
programs. While CUP faculty felt that they were not entirely satisfied with how their curriculum, program practices, and their DEI mission aligned and spoke of ways they could refine that alignment, CUP students recognized the faculty’s effort to advance it despite clear improvements they could make (i.e., more curricular alignment to the program statement). However, WUP faculty all spoke about their intentionality to make sure their curriculum aligned with their DEI mission, so they felt satisfied with the work they had done. Yet, the students felt the mission was infused in one or a couple of courses, but not in the rest of the required courses which, in their perspective, needed to be addressed.

**CUP Curricular Alignment to Mission: Faculty Perspectives**

*Curricular alignment must be an ongoing process and that our students continue to bring to our attention. Because they're the ones that are in all the classes, so they know. The dissonance is clear to them when it exists. (Rose, White Faculty Member)*

During the interviews, CUP faculty often referred to the ways in which their conversations could be more intentional to align their curricular practices to their mission statement, specifically as connected to racial justice. Nick, for example, discussed the lack of capacity in the program to make room for such conversations to happen. He believed that, as a faculty group, they were “tapped out,” as they all were at the associate level, which translated into high levels of service commitments. From his view, service did not allow them to be able to engage in conversations about the curriculum and how their courses could be better aligned with their DEI statement. He felt that they should be addressing important questions and dissecting the language of their mission to assess whether they were truly living up to those values, more specifically in relation to the three core elements of their DEI statement, including DEI values, scholar-practitioner identities, and reflection:
Even, for that matter, who are we as a program? I think, with those three elements, are we all three or four of us on board with thinking that those are the three key pillars of who we are as a program? I think my colleagues would say, “I don’t know.” That’s my perspective. So, do those keywords still resonate with us? I don’t know. It’s hard. It’s hard to be able to have those types of conversations. When do they normally occur?

Nick also added that conversations around the DEI statement tended to happen during external program reviews. He believed that conversations around the curriculum happened “because you’re having to engage in them. But, unless you have to engage in them, unfortunately the faculty often don’t have the capacity to be able to do that, and we’re certainly in that situation, I would argue.” However, Nick also highlighted that the faculty, on an individual level, were doing their best to integrate the mission into their courses, as he was convinced that they genuinely shared the values of the mission they were trying to advance.

Other CUP faculty members shared the same perspective. Rose said that conversations about curricular alignment did not happen as often as they should. For her, discussions about the curriculum happened on an annual basis at their faculty retreat, but they tended to focus on “big-picture concepts” and not necessarily a thorough examination of the mission as connected to the curriculum. However, she pointed out their efforts to align both mission and curriculum, starting from the competencies to the incorporation of alumni as important stakeholders to assess the effectiveness of their mission. Rose also thought that current students should be involved, but she was not sure that was the direction the program intended to take. As Nick, she also recognized the individual effort of faculty to advance the mission and integrate student feedback:
I don’t know if the intention is to involve current students. And so, I think that we on an individual instructor basis engage with our students in terms of feedback and conversations and those things about the class content. And I see class content changing from semester to semester based on individual instructors getting that feedback or seeing how things went for students. But I think that we don’t do a great job of that on a program level.

Despite the improvements that could be made, Rose acknowledged that since justice was such an important value for each faculty member, she thought they “are graduating students that have the competencies and the attitudes and the abilities to advance equity in their future workplaces.” Similarly, Sandra discussed that infrequent conversations around alignment to mission were an issue and blamed the COVID-19 pandemic for exacerbating the lack of communication among faculty around curricular issues. According to Sandra, they went from having two to only one meeting per month. She discussed feeling at odds with the amount of attention required to assess the advancement of their DEI statement. On the one hand, she felt pressured to have these meetings and talked about how exhausted she felt after two years of having these meetings. But on the other hand, she also recognized the importance of having more meetings to discuss the program’s DEI statement to ensure that they could have tangible deliverables:

So, what we did was because after two years of that I also was done. I was like, “I can’t. I can’t.” But what we do now is we condense the two in one. So, we go through some of the rudimentary stuff. So, we meet once a month, which is good, but not great. We have always this running agenda item about one is of course our students.
Sandra also talked about when she took over the program as the director, and she made sure that the mission “was just not left on a website.” She meticulously reviewed every course material, including syllabi, and their course competencies to ensure that the mission, more specifically the racial justice area of the mission, was reflected in every aspect of the program:

And so immediately the words anti-racism and race are all situated. It’s having it in the discourse being repeated over and over and over and over again. And then the way in which it is done when we redesigned the program when I got in, was that we started the students out with a structural dialogue course which focused on of course calling in, calling out, looking at these critical topics and areas around race specifically.

Faculty Efforts to Advance Mission: CUP Student Voices

Both white students and students of color shared the perspective that the faculty at CUP tried hard to live up to the DEI statement. Carina, a Latinx woman, spoke very highly of the faculty and mentioned that despite the dissonance in classroom conversations around race, she felt that the faculty overall were very committed to advancing the mission and making sure those connections were clear in the curriculum. She specifically referred to a white professor in her program and described him as “amazing.” She also talked about the collective feeling in her cohort toward this white faculty member:

All of our cohort really connected with him because as a white man, of course, we didn’t want to put him on a pedestal. I think all of our cohort was like, “As a white person, you need to try a bit more.” He didn’t try so hard that we felt like he was trying too hard, but he generally cares about social and racial justice issues, and he
tries to learn more from us, since he’s a white man... He didn’t teach the equity classes specifically, but he still incorporated a lot of racial justice into his assessment courses.

Other students noted similar perspectives regarding the faculty’s effort to live up to their commitments. For example, Sophie, a white woman, also felt that the faculty brought the mission into each assignment, each discussion, and everything they did in their courses. Although she recognized that there were times the faculty did not execute everything perfectly well, they showed how much they cared. Sophie mentioned that a way the mission felt incorporated in the curriculum was through the ability of the faculty to address emotion and not just knowledge during class facilitations:

I think other faculty did a good job of asking thought-provoking questions that had to do with race and equity and things like that. So always having that be a part of the conversation and the questions that they ask are important for students.

Also, the three elements of CUP (DEI values, scholar-practitioner identities, and reflection) were regarded as tangible ways in which the faculty demonstrated their commitment to the DEI statement of the program. Abeer, a Middle Eastern woman, also alluded to the reflective piece of the curriculum as something the faculty tried to always address. She also highlighted the work of the white faculty member as someone who genuinely wanted to advance racial and social justice in the classroom. However, Abeer also added that despite good intentions, sometimes faculty realized the mission in different ways:

I think as a collective, they are doing a great job. They’re very reflective about like, “Okay, what worked well this year? And what are we changing?” And thankfully, they are very transparent about what they are considering changing. They present that
information to us and give us the opportunity to give feedback on it... There is a consensus about the mission and the program. But when it comes to executing the mission, people are going in different directions.

Stella, a Black woman, also referred to the reflective component of the courses and said:

All the courses are very reflective, which is how they have that ability to bring in your lived experience because you were reflecting on your own identity and how it shows up in the workplace, how that impacts how you see the world, and how you’re taking in the material.

Thomas, a white man, said that “everything was always based on racial justice; we always used equity as a lens for how we analyzed content or approached work with each other.” He also talked about the reflection piece and added that the curriculum was flexible enough to allow students to integrate their feedback:

Our feedback was implemented in some spots, but even where it couldn’t, it still felt like they cared about what we thought, and that was important to me too, because we had a really diverse cohort in terms of race and ethnicity. So, it’s like if y’all about equity and inclusion, then you have this diverse cohort telling you this, what you’re doing is wrong, it’s... For me, the fact that they would take our feedback very seriously showed that they wanted to elevate student voices.

**WUP Curricular Alignment to Mission: Faculty Perspectives**

*Higher education has changed dramatically in the last four or five years, especially since COVID, and what do our students need as they walk out? (Terri, Faculty Member of Color)*
During the interviews, two of the WUP faculty members expressed how important the conversations they had about curricular alignment in relation to their DEI mission statement were to them. Cora, however, felt that they did not talk about the mission much. Terri explained that they had very specific curricular practices to ensure that everything they did was aligned with their mission statement. For example, she mentioned the diversity portfolio students wrote in lieu of a thesis where they discussed how much their DEI competency “was increased.” Terri also explained that they “constantly talk about the curriculum and DEI issues” to assess where the faculty and the program as a whole were. Terri specifically referred to the “continuous assessment” of their program statement by engaging in discussions with faculty and noting what areas needed more alignment. Terri also added that hiring faculty who were willing to be on board with the mission was crucial to sustain and advance their commitments: “It’s about who I hired, that that philosophy was central to who they are [as faculty].” She also thought that students’ growth was intrinsically related to their practices:

One of the things we’re clear on and we talk about is, with the IDI, that it is very clear that growth only occurs when some intentional effort is put forward to move along that continuum [in the intercultural levels of proficiency based on the IDI scale]. And so, we provide some of that through the curriculum and through different practicum experiences, but they also have to make some commitment to our DEI values.

Echoing Terri’s perspectives, Laura also believed that their curriculum was well-equipped to address the mission, and that it “was established” that way from the beginning. More specifically, she referred to the diversity cognate as the “most formal way” their students “enhance their work around working with diverse populations,” and sustained that
the faculty, for the most part, were committed to that. However, not all their courses centered
diversity as an important component to advance their mission, and the alumni voiced this
concern during their exit interviews where they got the chance to give robust feedback to the
program:

The comment we most get in the exit interview, the most comment we get, I pretty
much say this. Yeah, I do pretty much all the exit interviews, I do 80% of them, is, “I
was kind of disappointed that our such-and-such class didn’t bring race, or ethnicity,
or diversity more into the topics.” So, we do a really good job in some classes, and we
have a harder time in other classes.

Although not all courses addressed DEI or race specifically, Laura indicated that
having dedicated faculty members who specialized in these topics was enough to make sure
they were still part of the discourse of the program:

I think it helps that we’ve got two folks. Specifically, Terri, who started the program,
is a diversity and race kind of scholar. That’s her area, multiculturalism. And then,
Rich also is. So, they love talking about these things, and they also teach equity and
diversity courses. So, their mind is on these topics all the time, so I love that. So, they
help hold me accountable as the program coordinator to those things.

On the other hand, Cora did not think conversations pertaining to curricular alignment
to the mission happened often or at all: “I would say that I don’t feel very often that we talk
about the mission of the program, but we do talk about the program and the students in the
program and are they getting everything that they need to get out of the program? I have
those conversations.” She said that the conversations as a faculty group revolved around
identifying issues with students and getting advice from colleagues. Cora also said that she
compared mission statements dedicated to social, racial justice or DEI in general to “marketing strategies” and “capitalism”:

I’m going to be controversial and probably negative. But I kind of think missions are dumb. I think if you mean it, you can say it. But typically, a diversity mission is, “We are dedicated to diversity, inclusion or equity of all students,” or something. What does that even mean?

As in marketing strategies, Cora thought that racial or social justice-focused mission statements were there to attract people, and that it was especially convenient to the institutions, as “[t]he true push behind anything like that is going to come from the faculty, and then they’re going to grow it in the students. And then it’s going to come from the students.” She said she did not have much patience for mission statements in higher education but acknowledged that the program may have good intentions. However, she was not so sure about the institution: “I don’t know if they genuinely mean it or not. Now WUP, I can say, yeah. I feel like there’s genuine intent behind there and effort. But I don’t know at our university as a whole.”

**Faculty Efforts to Advance Mission: WUP Student Voices**

Both white students and students of color at WUP shared the perspective that despite good intentions to align the program mission to the curriculum, they mainly discussed DEI issues, specifically topics of race, in the diversity and equity class, a course taught by the same two faculty members. The students also discussed that the diversity cognate gave students the chance to choose what diversity issue they wanted to learn more about, so race was not always something all students would be further exposed to beyond the diversity and equity class. Josephine, a Black woman, for example, explained that it was only in her DEI
class that she was exposed to content pertaining to race and racism, which she deemed as important given the leadership roles the students could take after graduating. However, she noted that this class also covered a wide variety of topics, and not just around race. Josephine said:

In terms of racism, I feel like when it comes to institutionalized racism, the DEI class addressed some of the inequities, just these flaws and just these injustices that are going on when it comes to student populations on college campuses, but we didn’t go in depth, “How are we really going through it?” That’s what I feel like. We talked about it, but are we really putting this into practice?

Similarly, Jerry, a Black man, also felt that the course that really connected to the mission was the DEI class. He described the class as “the most helpful,” as they were using real scenarios related to diversity issues, specifically racial issues, to analyze during class. Jerry added that no other courses centered DEI:

So, I guess in the program, I’m trying to think of any of my other classes. I mean we do have a portfolio to pick out situations and experiences like that, but for me, it really is just coming back to that class because I felt like for me and my cohort it was the most helpful, and probably only class where we discussed things connected to the mission.

Jerry also discussed that, in terms of alignment with the mission, “some faculty made an effort, some more than others, some others didn’t. Our key faculty, Terri, in the program made a valid effort. Yes. Period. That’s who she is. Some of the others, they just tried.” Michael, a white man, noted that only a few instructors would focus on aligning their content to the mission:
Depending on the professor of the class, it was going for it straight on, talking about all the racial inequities that we were seeing within the world and challenging our own views on that stuff. Then with some faculty, we didn't really spend much time on that stuff at all.

He also felt that the alignment to the mission was more connected to the IDI, as this assessment was considered central in determining if students had made progress in relation to their knowledge on intercultural competence, so he thought the faculty viewed the IDI as the only reliable and measurable way to assess their learning. He spoke about his own learning process:

So, we did the first, the IDI, the initial IDI my first semester. Then my last semester was when we did debrief, and we did the inventory again, just to see where and how we grew. I just remember scoring low and then gaining a little bit higher. So, I’m pretty sure it was four levels. I think I started at level one and then I was level two or three.

Overall, students at WUP discussed that issues of race were mainly emphasized in one course and, overall, the program statement could be connected to that same course: DEI. Kelly, a white woman, referred to the DEI class as the only course she could directly connect to the program statement and described the content as “inclusive of all social identities, not just race.” She said that “there were probably classes where we didn’t talk about DEI issues, but it’s not like we never went a whole semester without talking about it at least once in one of our classes.” Similarly, Mark, a white man, said that the DEI class was the course he could connect the most to the program statement, as many of the other courses did not go in depth
Sailing Towards vs. Drifting Away from Racial Justice

While curricular alignment and faculty’s efforts to advance the programs’ statements were important themes in the findings, the way faculty and students in both programs envisioned the future of their respective program DEI statements was also a highlight in the findings. More specifically, when prompted to discuss the future of the program statement as connected to program practices, faculty and students at CUP were aligned in terms of what changes they saw as necessary to ensure that the mission was more intentionally realized. On the other hand, two out of the three WUP faculty interviewed referred to their hope to include more global higher education in the outcomes and in the form of required courses, while the third hoped to see more social and racial justice at the center.

The faculty at WUP also mentioned the need to decrease the number of credits required to graduate as a social justice move that they hoped to implement in the following few semesters. From the faculty's perspective at WUP, credits were strictly tied to money, which could represent a financial burden for students when their programs required many credits to graduate. In their view, this turned into an access issue that mainly affected low-income first-generation students. However, WUP students of color talked about the need to center students of color and revise the curriculum to integrate racial justice in all the courses. Some WUP white students referred mainly to workload and courses they wished the program would offer, and one student referred to the overemphasis on diversity issues.
The Future of CUP’s Mission

You can’t have an anti-racist program without having an anti-capitalist program, without having a program that honors students’ labor, that understands that their mental health challenges are directly connected to the material conditions of their lives as graduate workers, and that they’re exploited within the structure of the university, there will always be a limitation on what we’re able to do in terms of truly being an anti-racist program or trying to endeavor toward decolonization. (Rose, white faculty member)

CUP faculty discussed how important it was for them to never feel like their work in terms of the mission and program practices was done and mentioned areas where they could improve. Interestingly, the areas that the faculty highlighted as potential points for improvement and alignment were also mentioned by both students of color and white students. As an example, Nick said that their programming (i.e., student events that were primarily organized as affinity groups based on students’ social identities) since the COVID-19 pandemic had not been great, and he hoped that they could reintegrate their activities, including affinity groups, that focus on students’ identities:

We could be doing better programming. Programming has been one year that could be strengthened where we offer development type of opportunities for students to be able to engage in different types of topics of equity and inclusion, for example. We’ve been missing the mark the last couple of years of offering those types of opportunities for our students just broadly learning beyond the classroom.

Additionally, Nick referred to the need to move the equity and inclusion course to earlier in the curriculum as, for many years, this was a course students would take in their
last semester. He feels that the Race Talk class could either be moved from the first semester to the second or even later to make sure students have built community and tensions could be lessened. Interestingly, students of the program shared many of the perspectives of the faculty regarding the future of the mission and its alignment with program practices. For instance, similar to Nick, Stella (Black woman), Sophie (white woman), and Abeer (Middle Eastern woman) felt that the Race Talk course could be better scaffolded and required at a later semester in the program, and not in the first semester, so white students and students of color could build community and trust.

For instance, Sophie noted:

Allowing there to be some more connections so that especially the students of color feel like they have support and community and are getting to learn something. Not just like, okay, now we're going to sit here and listen to folks who have never personally experienced racism.

Sophie also talked about revising the curriculum to eliminate courses that did not have a direct impact on their practice, which in her view were courses that did not specifically address racial issues. She saw the topics of race and social justice as integral components of the work that students would perform in higher education after graduating: “The ones that I think were less useful are the ones that probably least addressed those concerns of social justice and racial equity.”

Also, Abeer hoped that the Race Talk course would be “more robust, and perhaps having professors to model those conversations. And allowing and properly fostering dissonance in the classroom might be really helpful for students who don’t feel comfortable perhaps disagreeing or being in dissonance with each other even if it’s in a small way.” On
the same issue, Stella said that, as a person of color, she believed that the courses should be more focused on preparing students to deal with microaggressions in the classroom and in the workplace: “How do I navigate white students who say problematic things to me, but they’re my students? So, what is that line? I had to seek those resources out for myself.” For Stella, it was also crucial that the program found more effective ways to engage students in conversations of race. From her view, it meant

having higher standards for the white students’ knowledge around race and racism coming into the program, so that when you have a class about race, you’re able to have it from a higher level. So that students of color are not having to go through Race 101, again, for the sake of their white peers.

Connected to changes the faculty at CUP envisioned to align the curriculum to their program DEI statement, Nick also said that despite their students being able to take elective classes in the program, in his perspective, there were not a rich number of classes, university-wide, that their students could take that spanned many different topics of equity and inclusion:

Yes, we have things on disability, great. Yeah, we have a multicultural counseling course, good. But I’d love to be able to see more classes that they could take in other topics. Some racism courses, yes, but I wish that there was more that students could take as an elective. Our students haven’t opted to take those courses. Students preferred to take the general multicultural course, and many of our students have taken it [instead of other options available in the curriculum].

In discussing the changes needed in the program to align it to their program statement, some faculty talked about the importance of reviewing their core competencies
and update policies that do not necessarily align well with their anti-racist commitment. First, Sandra discussed that their goal was to review their core competencies to address issues of race more intentionally, as “there should be more language specific around race and racism in particular and this is hard, naming anti-blackness, naming anti-racism in general. So, really pinpointing those components, but also around decolonization work. I don’t know that we do enough work on indigeneity and Native Americans.” Sandra saw the urgency to be more intentional at aligning their mission to the needs of their students, especially students of color. For Sandra, “there are multiple intersections of oppression that are hitting at the students of color in ways in which we’re doing them more harm than good.” Sandra talked about the importance of centering the voices of students of color in their program practices and really questioning their practices and how much effort they were putting forward to protect the students:

I often talk about where does our rainbow center ends versus where our Latinx center starts? Where does our African American cultural center start versus where does our Latinx cultural center start? And so, the intersections of our students’ identities are pulled out in higher ed, but they’re experiencing these oppressions simultaneously. So, our inability to really look at it from that approach as a solution really, it’s killing them, if I’m being very honest with you. I don’t think they hurt themselves, I think it’s the system is genuinely killing them.

When discussing the future of CUP’s statement, Sandra reflected for a while about the impact of COVID on their students, but more specifically their students of color. For Sandra, all the lessons she learned from the pandemic became important aspects to keep in mind as they strengthened their statement through impactful practices. She described how
they lost one of their students of color, Sandra’s advisee, to suicide. She also noted that shortly after this student passed away, she had another student of color on the verge of committing suicide: “We overuse frontline, but I promise you on the frontline when you are literally begging a student, ‘I’m going to call 911 right now, I just need you to stay on the phone. I'm going to be there.’” Sandra talked about these experiences as “an eye opener” for her and the program. In her perspective, the pandemic was a catalyst to understanding that it is important to constantly question why topics of racism are brought to the classroom, but never transcend the walls of the classroom to support students through a more humanistic standpoint:

I feel like oftentimes, we’re thinking about how we infuse these topics into the classroom, how to talk about and dissect systems of oppression in the classroom. But very rarely do we actually stop to think about how, by bringing these issues, we may be exacerbating some of their trauma without addressing other important areas of looking at the students, the human piece that they're also bringing into this.

As an important aspect of an anti-racist commitment, faculty and students talked about the urgency to examine students’ commitment inside and outside of the program to truly understand how their school-work-life balance may affect their overall experiences and success in the program. Rose expressed that she believed that CUP and graduate programs in general need to continue to question the practices that do not align with an anti-racist or social justice mission:

The areas where we do need to continue to challenge ourselves and to grow are in continuing to push back on the norms of the field of student affairs, of higher
education and of higher education graduate preparation programs, around expectations for students and student work and workload after they graduate. From her perspective, that is “the biggest place that we are not aligned with what I would consider to be our social or racial justice mission.” Similarly, Carina, a student of color, referred to the need to support students, especially students of color, as they navigate the politics of the workplace while they are doing their assistantships and beyond. In her perspective, students of color needed more guidance and support to deal with toxic environments that sometimes are embedded in racist practices.

Like Rose, another student also talked about the importance of pushing back the norms of the field. Stella contended that for a program to be truly social or racial justice-oriented, it is important to value different ways of knowing and learning. In her perspective, despite the program’s efforts to be more equity-minded in all aspects, they valued a specific way of learning: “Within the classroom, they center and value one type of learning. Not one type of learning, one type of demonstrating for learning. It’s a lot of reading and a lot of writing.” Stella also thought that to create a more socially and racially just program, there needed to be a strong emphasis on the impact of impostor syndrome on students of color:

If you’re going to have students of color, impostor syndrome has to be talked about on a broader level because I think naming that is really good and helpful. But if your program is such that students are not receiving the validation and opportunity to create those roots that help balance out that impostor syndrome, then your students are just going to be experiencing impostor syndrome for the rest of the time that they’re in the program.
Rose also referred to the support that students required in their assistantships, in achieving school-work-life balance, and the ways in which the program required students to do an “unfair number of hours of work” between practicum, internship, and classes:

The learning edge for our program is that, from my perspective, you can't have an anti-racist program without having an anti-capitalist program, without having a program that honors students’ labor, that understands that their mental health challenges are directly connected to the material conditions of their lives as graduate workers, and that they’re exploited within the structure of the university. To me, without engaging that, there will always be a limitation on what we're able to do in terms of truly being an anti-racist program or trying to endeavor toward decolonization. There’s a lot of divestment from productivity culture and from exploitation of graduate student labor that still needs to happen for this program to realize a true social justice mission.

Students also referred to the issue of school-work-life balance. For example, Thomas, a white man, referred to the number of hours they were required to spend on their assistantships, internships, and classes as important factors to keep in mind when building a socially just program. For Thomas, having to do “unpaid labor is obviously a problem.” While doing the program, Thomas did two 20-hour paid practicums in addition to the unpaid internship, which was 10 hours per week:

So those semesters where you're doing your practicum, I’m working 20 hours a week for ResLife, and I had a union in a department that was actually respectful of my 20 hours a week. I know some people in my cohort, even though they’re also in a union, ended up doing a little more than 20 hours a week. We would have full time classes,
and then 10 hours a week of an internship, and that was a lot. If I had a kid by myself, it would’ve been impossible... It was hard enough to feed me and take care of me, never mind people who would be dependent on me. Yeah, that was busy, busy, busy, busy.

Stella, a Black woman, discussed the unrealistic number of hours they spent in their practicum, internship, and then in classes, and how the students were expected to succeed in every area. For Stella, “that alone is not equitable and that really prioritizes people who are able bodied, of abled mind, able to do this level of work and then at what cost? But how can we as a program resist that trend within higher education and help our students to have better boundaries?” Abeer, a Middle Eastern woman, also commented on the number of hours they were required to put in for their assistantship, internship, and classes, and felt that the faculty sent them mixed messages regarding self-care while also expecting them to fulfill the requirements of the program:

Faculty are really like, “Take care of yourself. Your mental health is really important. Take the time you need. Do what you need to do.” But also, you're going to be working 8:00am to 6:00pm every day just on school, and then good luck making dinner and taking care of your partner and taking care of yourself and everything else. Listening to what faculty have to say about taking care of yourself and analyzing how the structure of the program is, is not conducive to that value of mental health and taking care of your own needs that is so essential for everyone but especially for students of color.

While reflecting on the school-work-life balance issue, Abeer also commented on the impact of having faculty who do not balance their time properly, so they cannot serve as
models for students. The modeling that faculty do, according to Abeer, is one where being exhausted and burnt-out is normal and admired:

We have a couple of faculty who live in a different state completely. And they commute an hour and a half, two hours, to get to campus, which is wild. They don’t have time for their families or their needs or whatever. And it’s hard for us to do the same or ask for it when it’s what they do as a normal part of their lives... I almost want to say it’s a prideful burnout culture which is you have to be doing the most to be doing it right, which is weird. So, there’s some modeling that could probably shift.

**The Future of WUP’s Mission**

*I think that most of our students of color think that we don’t focus on race and racism enough. I feel like we get a lot of pushback from students of color... I feel like we’ve lost students of color because they still say they feel marginalized; they feel decentered. (Laura, faculty member of color)*

At WUP, Terri discussed the future of the mission only from a curricular perspective, highlighting the importance of reducing their credit load and adding more learning outcomes and courses on global higher education. While Laura supported the integration of global higher education, she did not think that reducing the number of credit hours was a good idea. On the other hand, Cora discussed the need to have more tangible ways to assess the growth of the students in terms of their understanding of DEI issues, more specifically connected to race. The students also had different perspectives on how to better align the mission to program practices. While students of color felt lack of representation and support in the program and wanted to have more DEI courses, some white students spoke more about the
need to implement other courses such as counseling, and one of them referred to the overemphasis on DEI.

The integration of global perspectives on higher education was a predominant theme throughout the interviews with Terri and Laura. For Laura, the focus on internationalization was strictly connected with DEI issues and she believed that their curriculum should have global learning outcomes: “We’re an interconnected world, you cannot really focus on diversity, and inclusion, and multiculturalism without also, we think, bringing in the world piece, the international piece to it, so that's something we would like to add.” Terri also noted her support for Laura in the creation of an international practicum and internship, as they had been able to “partner with a sister institution in another country.” She explained that their goal was to visit the sister institution with some students and have some students from their institution come to WUP as a practicum exchange so students could expand their notions of multiculturalism and diversity.

Another issue that Terri brought up as an important step for the program to strengthen their DEI mission was to decrease the number of credit hours required for graduation. From her perspective, this issue was directly connected to social justice, as many first-generation low-income students who came to their program struggled to pay for tuition and graduated with large amounts of debt:

And you would think that’s not a social justice issue, but we see it that way, as we think about the kinds of resources that students have or don’t have. So, there’s a tension point there, though. So, trying to decrease the amount of money that students have to spend to get their degree, while trying to make sure that they get everything they need in terms of knowledge, skills, that kind of thing. The challenge is, we have
students walking out of our programs with lots of debt, and that’s a social justice issue right there, because they’re not making a huge amount of money as they walk out.

However, Laura did not support the reduction of credit hours, as in her perspective, it would mean to sacrifice courses that were essential to the advancement of the mission:

Even much to the chagrin of some of the faculty who wish we only had a 36-credit hour program or a 34-credit hour program, the only way we would be able to do that is probably to remove the diversity cognate. And so that’s not happening because that’s our mission. So that would always stay, curricular-wise.

On the other hand, for Cora, aligning the DEI mission of WUP meant looking closely at their assessment of students and incorporating topics of race more intentionally and extensively. In her perspective, the “IDI is a good tool. It’s just one tool, though. But I think it’s good, in terms of, more kind of a quantitative kind of, get something quantitatively assessed,” but the IDI did not provide a rich qualitative assessment of the students’ growth. Cora believed it was crucial to implement more topics around DEI issues in the curriculum, specifically racial justice, and a more robust type of evaluation:

I would do maybe some focus groups or exit interviews with students and really ask them some of these hard questions. Maybe you ask them in the beginning, too, so you have a pre and a post perspective and you could ask them, “how do you think your perspectives have grown in terms of your understanding of diversity and inclusion, race, power, privilege and oppression?”

WUP students of color, however, focused more on areas regarding their racial identity that could be more intentionally and tangibly infused into the program to align them with the
DEI mission. Josephine, a Black woman, thought that there was a lack of “program activities specifically for students of color, for us to participate in” and lack of representation in the student and faculty body when it came to people of color. From her point of view, most cohorts were mainly white with only a few students of color:

I feel like it’s important to have more people of color in a cohort, in a program like this because it’s very impactful, especially just being in higher education because institutions are mostly white. So now that they recognize that there’s more marginalized populations in higher education, there needs to be a change. And they say it is, but are they actually hiring people, faculty people, administration that’s going to do that?

In addition to feeling lack of representation and support as a student of color, Josephine believed that there was an inadequate number of DEI classes and connections to race in her program:

I definitely feel like there needs to be more DEI classes and a focus on race, and it could just be DEI in general, but also DEI in higher education because you only take one class and then, okay, gone, but there needs to be continuity. Definitely some type of continual theoretical practice that we should be continuing to do so we can continue that knowledge.

Jerry, a Black man, also expressed a similar perspective and talked about the importance of “putting a little bit more of a social justice lens in the educational experiences in all of the courses. I would’ve definitely decolonized the curriculum. Clearly, I would’ve done that. I would probably do that first.” Jerry, however, did not elaborate exactly what that decolonization would look like.
For Mark and Michael, both white men, adding some courses to the curriculum would provide a better alignment to the mission as students would be exposed to a more comprehensive set of DEI issues. Both discussed that they would have liked to have a counseling focus and more courses connected to race, such as CRT to better prepare them for situations in their professional lives. Michael said that he needed “more of a counseling type education, I suppose. Because there’s some conversations I’ve had, like I said, I’ve worked full time now where I was just like, I’m just not equipped to do this right now. Because I don’t know where to begin with this student.” Michael also mentioned that he would have liked to see more emphasis on CRT or a specific course for that, as he felt that other classmates of color were more equipped to have “deep conversations on race” and knew the terminology, and “I never knew anything about that.”

On the other hand, Kelly, a white woman, felt that “there’s maybe a tendency to try and get everybody to think about how they’re a victim in some way.” In her view, the overemphasis on DEI issues put students in a situation where they had to not only expose their experiences, but also reflect on them, which she deemed unnecessary. She recalled a situation in a class where she felt forced to reflect:

I wrote a paper, and it was a paper about myself and just about my experiences. And I’ve had job experiences with like very bad situations of sexism, but in my life, I have chosen to not hold onto those. And one of the comments that I got back from my teacher was that I need to reflect on these and commented something like “It’s okay to acknowledge that or you should acknowledge that this stuff is bad.” It’s not that I’m not acknowledging that it’s bad, but this was two years ago. It’s a part of who I
am, but I can’t continue to play victim to it. And that’s a choice that I’ve made for myself.

Summary

This chapter presented the most relevant findings of this study from the data collected. Cross-case analysis was the strategy used to dive into more complex understandings of the findings at CUP and WUP and to gain in-depth insight about the unit of analysis guiding the study: HESA master's social justice/DEI programs and their commitment to racial justice. The data analysis yielded four themes that were organized by two overlapping themes (a) faculty’s identity in relation to the programs’ mission, (b) classroom dynamics when discussing topics of race and racism) and two differing themes (a) faculty’s perspectives on curricular alignment to program mission, (b) faculty’s commitment to advance the mission with a focus on racial justice).

The first area of the overlapping findings presented how all the faculty, except for one, connected their personal values and scholarly identity as their motivation to join a program that focused on DEI/social justice issues, and specifically racial justice as an important element of the programs’ mission. The faculty also mentioned specific pedagogical and programmatic practices they engaged in to advance the mission of their programs and also aligned their practices to not only the mission but also their personal values. The second area of the overlapping findings pertained to the classroom dynamics when engaging students in conversations of race. Both faculty and students referred to the inevitable tensions that emerged when students of color and white students were in the same room. However, faculty expressed frustration at being able to balance such tensions and deliver content on race that was well received by both students of color and white students. Students of color and white
students, on the other hand, blamed faculty for not handling such conversations effectively, but students of color also felt that their white peers did not make a genuine effort to engage meaningfully.

The first area of the differing themes presented how faculty perceived mission alignment in relation to the curriculum and their DEI/social justice commitments. While CUP faculty recognized issues with their mission-curriculum alignment and identified specific areas for improvement, WUP faculty felt satisfied and confident about their alignment. However, WUP students felt differently, and said that more effort was necessary to address the curricular misalignment in relation to WUP’s mission. On the contrary, CUP students were on the same page as the CUP faculty regarding changes needed to align the mission to the curriculum, and the students also recognized the faculty’s efforts to establish practices that highlighted their commitment to advance their mission.

The last area of this chapter focused on the second differing theme, which exposed that, in discussing the future of their mission, CUP faculty had clear goals to continue to interrogate and improve their practices to align them not only to their DEI mission, but most importantly to underscore their commitment to racial justice. By contrast, WUP faculty had divergent views regarding the future and efforts needed to advance their mission. While some faculty members believed that the integration of global higher education was a step toward realizing their mission, one of the faculty members felt that their mission needed to be more connected to issues of race and racism as a demonstration to their DEI/social justice commitment.

Next, Chapter 6 presents the conclusion and implications of this study. More specifically, the chapter is focused on delving into the relevance and importance of the
results of these findings as well as an in-depth examination of what they mean in light of the research presented in the literature review.
My dissertation examined two HESA master’s programs in the U.S. that had a specific social justice or DEI mission: Cypress University Program (CUP) and Willow University Program (WUP). More specifically, the study focused on understanding the extent to which faculty centered racial justice as part of their commitments to advance the program mission through practice. Although existing literature has examined social justice/DEI-focused HESA programs, such studies have been limited to a focus on the perspectives of either students (Harris & Linder, 2018; Hubain et al., 2016; Linder et al., 2015) or faculty (Flowers, 2003; Gayles et al., 2015; Pasque et al., 2013). To gain a more complex understanding of the centrality of commitments to racial justice in social justice/DEI-focused programs, I incorporated the voices of both faculty and students in my study. This research was designed as a qualitative multicase study to capture the complexity of the faculty’s and students’ voices (Yin, 2017). The study included sixteen participants: ten students (five in each program) and six faculty members (three in each program). Data collection methods entailed one intensive interview with each participant; an analysis of documents including syllabi, program events, flyers, and newsletters, and class observations.
Given that educating equity-minded HESA professionals in a predominantly white field is an important goal of the HESA profession (Talbot & Kocarek, 1997; Robbins, 2016), this study focused on understanding how faculty in CUP and WUP espoused commitments to social justice/DEI and included an intentional racial justice lens in their practice. CRT served as the umbrella concept and guiding light to situate the study and to inform the conceptual framework. This chapter first revisits the conceptual framework of the study and how the perspective employed in this research provided new insights into the concepts of race, racism, and racial equity in social justice/DEI-focused HESA programs. I then discuss the findings in light of the existing literature and offer new insights that the cross-case comparison of the findings revealed. This chapter ends with implications for practice and limitations of the study, which could inform future areas of research on the topic.

**Revisiting the Conceptual Framework**

This section offers a brief and overarching account of the various aspects of the conceptual framework and how they guided my research. First, as a critical form of inquiry, CRT served as a theoretical and conceptual umbrella for the conceptual framework to examine how faculty in two social justice/DEI-focused HESA masters programs aligned the programs’ mission to commitments to racial justice in their practice (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). To narrow the analysis of the findings, I initially focused on three specific tenets of CRT. First, I emphasized the tenet of challenging notions of race neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness, and meritocracy. This tenet served as a lens to unveil how the social justice/DEI missions of CUP and WUP were operationalized through curricular structures and faculty practices that were not racially conscious despite good intentions from faculty to center racial justice. This tenet also shed
light on the notion that racism is endemic and subversively privileges white people within HESA masters programs.

The second CRT tenet, interest convergence, exposed that any efforts to advance racial justice will be only considered as long as it either benefits white people, or the gains benefit both white people and people of color (Bell, 1980). And third, the tenet of commitment to social justice highlighted efforts to advance a social justice agenda to include specific commitments to the eradication of racism and systems of oppression that continue to marginalize students of color. This tenet served as a lens to critically examine the extent to which CUP’s and WUP’s commitments to social justice/DEI were congruent with commitments and continuous efforts to address racial injustices within the programs through curricular decisions, pedagogical approaches in the classroom, and program policies.

As a theoretical tool, CRT also informed the rest of the conceptual framework, which I structured using Harper’s (2010) question-based anti-deficit achievement framework for studying students of color in STEM. The framework presents five multidimensional areas to capture the complex scope and nuances relevant for the advancement of racial justice commitments. The five areas include the reexamination of program missions, racially conscious curriculum and pedagogy, data-driven program assessment, engagement of HESA students of color, and HESA faculty engagement and development. Each of the areas contains a series of questions that aided in the collection of data and analysis of the findings presented in Chapter 5. Through the analysis of the findings, all areas of the conceptual framework were evident. However, the findings also revealed other important areas and theoretical concepts that contributed to a more comprehensive analysis.
The following sections present the discussion of the findings. The first part focuses on the impact of faculty’s scholarship on their commitment to advancing racial justice. The second section dives into specific classroom practices that unintentionally promote racism. The third area presents a discussion of faculty practices that are connected to their commitment to centering racial justice as a core component of their pedagogy and program practices.

**Social Justice Scholarship: A Key Driver in Centering Commitments to Racial Justice**

A salient finding in this study was the connection between faculty’s scholarship and their desire to pursue or advance a social justice/DEI program mission that centered racial justice. First, it is important to note that in CUP, most faculty members were faculty of color and, overall, the student body of the program was more racially diverse compared to students and faculty at WUP. All faculty in CUP and WUP, except for Laura in WUP, had a specific social justice-driven scholarship agenda and attributed their motivation to join the programs to the DEI commitments the faculty had. Having an explicit commitment to social justice through their scholarship appeared to be an important element to predispose the faculty to be more in tune with the commitments established in the programs’ mission statements. More specifically, faculty in CUP and WUP with a social justice scholarship agenda were more open to the integration of racial justice as an important component of their espoused commitments to DEI. While some faculty members acknowledged their DEI commitments to racial justice as a component of social justice, some other faculty members expressed their DEI commitments specifically focused on racial justice.

The following sub-sections discuss how faculty scholarship had an impact on how CUP and WUP faculty aligned in light of their respective mission statements. While faculty at CUP
appeared to be in tune with their DEI commitments through their scholarship, faculty’s scholarship at WUP had divergent scholarly interests, and some of them were not connected to the program’s DEI mission.

**Scholarly Congruence for Mission Alignment**

In CUP, all three faculty members had explicit social justice scholarship agendas: Nick’s (faculty of color) research focused on undocumented students in higher education, Sandra’s (faculty of color) on international higher education at the intersection of race and racism, and Rose’s (white faculty) on critical white studies. All three spoke about specific practices they engaged in to advance the program mission, which they deemed ingrained in their own racial, ethnic, and scholar identities. For CUP’s faculty, their commitment to racial justice was a collective effort and was embedded in their everyday decision-making, from the admissions process to the curriculum, pedagogical practices, and advising.

The connectedness and sense of like-minded scholarly community in CUP revealed the importance of faculty scholarship in the buy-in and advancement of a program’s social justice/DEI mission. In fact, the findings indicated that the rootedness of social justice and racial justice in faculty’s values has the potential to generate better mission alignment and evidence-based practices in the programs. That is, the program’s stakeholders, in essence, faculty, share a common ground in their scholarship that can serve as the anchor and accountability tool to ensure that social justice/DEI mission goals are congruent with their practice. From this perspective, scholarship values can be seen as transferable to create, approach, and accomplish faculty collaboration, as the implementation of and assessment of practices are realized through mutual accountability.
A case study by Navarro (2018) on the impact of a community of transformative praxis in a group of K-12 social justice-oriented educators found that a community of practice for social justice educators had the power to situate the teachers to strengthen their social justice teaching and overall practice, while also serving as a space for them to grapple with issues of resistance they faced at their schools. Navarro’s findings connect to the community of practice experienced among faculty in CUP. The faculty in this program appeared to have a very strong community of practice which, in their perspective, created the ideal conditions for the advancement of their mission and their commitment to racial justice. The faculty’s description of tangible practices they engaged in to advance the mission as well as the constant reflection they did individually and at faculty meetings seemed to provide a space for validation and support.

Having a community of like-minded faculty colleagues can, in turn, provide program cohesiveness, which is essential to not only advance a mission, but also to develop a sense of criticality and identify areas of improvement. In CUP, all faculty talked about their efforts to advance their mission, but they also mentioned the importance they placed in being more intentional about conversations to identify gaps in their practice that did not align with their commitments to DEI and, specifically, racial justice. All faculty members at CUP stated that their work to build a more socially just and racially just program is not close to complete and identified specific areas where they were failing to enact their mission. These areas included students’ school-work-life balance, pedagogical preparedness to integrate topics and conversations about race and racism in the classroom, curricular structure, continuous assessment of their mission, and integrating students’ voices. They also talked about their
immediate plans to prioritize conversations around their mission and program practices and policies to strategize ways to remove oppressive practices in which they still engaged.

In CUP, the faculty’s scholarship alignment did not only have an impact on the advancement and enactment of their DEI statement, but it also directly shaped how students in the program perceived the faculty’s commitments to it. The students at CUP all recognized areas where the program could improve but felt confident about the faculty’s efforts and genuine intentions to change practices that aligned better with their DEI goals as related to racial justice. The students also felt that their feedback was taken into consideration, which increased their trust in the faculty and their intentions to live up to their espoused commitments. These findings also demonstrate that a community of like-minded faculty has the potential to naturally demonstrate commitment and engagement to the students and foster a program culture based on trust and validation.

**Divergent Scholarship Values: Decoupled Mission Goals**

Contrary to CUP faculty’s perceived community of practice, in WUP, not all faculty members subscribed to social justice values or scholarship and their individual perspectives seemed more disjointed and misaligned in relation to the advancement of their mission. Terri, a woman of color and multicultural and social justice scholar, and Cora, a white woman and CRT-driven practitioner, discussed the centrality of racial justice in their research and work agendas and the intrinsic connection of social justice-focused scholarship to issues of race and racism as embedded in their program mission. Laura, a faculty member of color and adult learning scholar, deviated from Terri’s and Cora’s focus on issues of race. Laura always emphasized that she was not a social justice scholar and that the only reason she centered that
concept in the program curriculum was that she had been trained to do whatever a program mission established whether she believed in it or not.

The differing perspectives on social justice in relation to the mission, coupled with their different scholarly interests and values, appeared to be an issue driving faculty at WUP in different directions. For Laura, her approach to advancing their social justice mission meant incorporating broader aspects of internationalization of higher education and including a diversity-based outcome in each course of the curriculum. Being close to retirement, Terri thought that she needed to respect the perspectives and directions that the new faculty (i.e., Laura) brought to the program and justified that Laura’s focus on international higher education was an issue of diversity, so it was, in a way, connected to their social justice mission. Terri and Laura both claimed that the faculty were constantly engaging in conversations and assessment regarding their social justice mission, and in their perspective, they felt very well aligned and well positioned to continue delivering the diversity and social justice components of the mission.

Cora and the students at WUP, on the other hand, did not think that their mission was necessarily aligned curricular-wise and believed that, in a predominantly white program, representation was an issue to be addressed. Cora wanted to see more extensive integration of DEI issues in the curriculum, and she specifically highlighted racial justice as a crucial component. However, Cora felt that they never engaged in critical conversations about the state of the mission. She also implied that having the IDI assessment tool to dictate the faculty’s effectiveness in educating students to do DEI work was very limiting and did not integrate students’ voices. The students, in alignment with what we know from existing literature (Flowers, 2003; Gayles & Kelly, 2007; Pope & Mueller, 2005; Pope & Reynolds,
1997), also wanted to see more race-related topics infused in the curriculum and talked about how having just one course dedicated to DEI issues was not enough to truly capture the complexity of these topics.

These findings suggest that faculty scholarship—and faculty alignment in their commitment to social justice in a fundamental way—may have an important role in advancing a program’s mission. A program mission can present a roadmap for faculty to understand the directions the program strives to go, as well as to identify ways to align strategic priorities and build program capacity to realize their espoused commitments as established in the mission. However, having faculty whose scholarship is not in alignment with the program’s mission can represent challenges. In other words, if the scholarly values that faculty bring with them into a program are at odds with what the mission states and what other faculty in the program value, confusion and even conflict may arise, and the mission will be open to interpretation. This may create dissonance among faculty members, which can permeate into program and classroom practices that are incongruent with the commitments outlined in the mission. This can have a direct and potentially negative impact on how students experience and perceive the program.

**When Intended Anti-Racist Classroom Practices Promote Racism**

“Many teachers are disturbed by the political implications of a multicultural education because they fear losing control in a classroom where there is no one way to approach a subject—only multiple ways and multiple references.” (bell hooks, 1994, pp. 35-36)

An additional salient finding in this study related to classroom dynamics when it came to discussing issues of race and racism. On the one hand, faculty in both programs
discussed the clear differences between the ways in which students of color engaged in conversations about race versus their white counterparts, which created imbalance and sometimes tense interactions in the classroom. On the other hand, students of color noted their frustration at how faculty handled conversations of race in the classroom, as well as how their white peers engaged in such conversations. Interestingly, white students talked about their confusion about best ways to participate in conversations about race and also discussed faculty’s lack of preparedness to engage them effectively.

Faculty at CUP and WUP emphasized the various mechanisms they utilized to ensure that they mitigated conflict and tensions regarding issues of race, depicting those mechanisms as examples of anti-racist practice. Faculty referred to the application and onboarding processes for students and specific courses in the curriculum as essential points to lay out the expectations of the programs in relation to diversity issues and, specifically, race and racism. For them, intentionality to expose students to these topics from the start, grounded in anti-racism, was key to anticipating and easing tensions or conflict that could occur within the classroom. This central focus on conflict avoidance, however, appeared to challenge faculty’s anti-racist intentions and, at times promoted racism. The ensuing sections elaborate on specific practices that, despite being perceived as adequate to address topics of race and racism in the classroom, had the opposite effect as perceived by students. The next sections address how perceived anti-racist practices such as conflict avoidance and imposed sharing of students’ narratives, promoted racism and fostered a cycle of blame among students and faculty.
Conflict Avoidance: A By-Product of Resistance to Protect Whiteness

CUP and WUP faculty constantly emphasized their commitment to be upfront about their missions from the admissions process to the practices they infused in the classroom, which was perceived as an anti-racist effort and central aspect of their programs. While being upfront about race as a key element of the programs’ DEI/social justice statements and integrating this topic intentionally in the courses are important factors to advance the HESA programs’ missions, conflict avoidance can also become an unintended mechanism to center whiteness (Patton et al., 2007).

That is, conflict avoidance may be perceived as a mechanism to foster harmony and a safe space for all students, but specifically for students of color. However, fear of open conflict in the classroom can be damaging to the whole classroom culture, but especially harmful to students of color who are de-centered from the learning process and become mere subjects of study and sometimes educators for their white peers. In the context of how faculty at WUP and CUP viewed tension and conflict, they were inadvertently participating in the promotion of values ingrained in white supremacy. More specifically, their urgency to engage in conflict avoidance promoted defensiveness, a characteristic of white supremacy, which sustains that any criticism of those in positions of privilege and power is perceived as threatening and inappropriate (Dismantling Racism Works, 2001). As a result, faculty fostering of defensiveness can silence students of color, reinforcing an oppressive culture in the classroom.

When the structure of a class and the pedagogy the faculty use to deliver content on race and racism are focused on mitigating potential conflict, they are not protecting healthy classroom dynamics, but the power and privilege of white students whose feelings may get
hurt if they perceive themselves as the problem (Dismantling Racism Works, 2001; Pasque et al., 2013). Defensiveness is also connected to the concepts of perfectionism and either/or thinking, which are also characteristics of white supremacy (Dismantling Racism Works, 2001). Once the classroom is set up as a space to avoid conflict and mitigate resistance, white students may perceive themselves as being accused of being the enemy if issues of racism are brought up, which contributes to the right/wrong and them-against-us dichotomy, making it very difficult for them to accommodate conflict and dissonance (Dismantling Racism Works, 2001).

The urgency of WUP and CUP faculty to establish mechanisms to mitigate resistance and conflict despite their intentions to center race in the curriculum aligns with literature on faculty and conflict avoidance. For example, Gayles et al. (2015) indicated that, overall, faculty recognize the importance of racial dialogue and conflict and decentering themselves as figures of authority in the classroom. Faculty in the study also indicated that racial conflict in the classroom fostered risk-taking, civil discourse, and dissonance when the faculty served as facilitators and appeasers of hostility and exclusion. Yet, other studies suggest that faculty, regardless of their racial background, tend to perceive the presence of conflict in the classroom as inherently negative, which may render problematic behavior and bad attitudes by white students invisible (Pasque et al., 2013; Sue et al., 2009). These studies also revealed that faculty fear losing control of the classroom if they allow conflict to unravel during class discussions (Sue et al., 2009), and they also fear ridiculing white students which, in their view, would intensify the conflict (Pasque et al., 2013). These existing studies on conflict avoidance shed light on the issues faced by faculty at WUP and CUP and reinforce the argument that, in order to foster genuine conversations of race, faculty must disrupt the
normalcy of conflict avoidance (Harris & Linder, 2018). To do so, faculty must engage in deep self-reflection and undertake an intersectional perspective of their pedagogical approaches to challenge essentialized notions of racism, which have been deeply embedded and perpetuated in HESA graduate programs (Harris & Linder, 2018).

**Trauma-Infused Pedagogies**

Another anti-racist practice that appeared to have the opposite effect on students of color at WUP and CUP was the overemphasis on their narratives about racism and other forms of oppression they had endured. For students of color in both programs, the expectation that they had to share their narratives in either class conversations or class assignments had two specific effects: (a) they were positioned as race educators for their white peers and (b) they were forced to share their trauma as a result of their experiences with racism, which resulted in uncomfortable experiences where they would be forced to express their emotions in front of their classmates. Despite the good intentions of the faculty to center the voices of students of color in the curriculum, framing their courses around the experiences of students of colors with racism was another way to center whiteness in the classroom. Some students referred to their experiences in the classroom when discussing topics of race and racism as “trauma-dumping” and “emotional labor,” which only served to position them as race-informants (Flowers & Howard-Hamilton, 2022; Harris & Linder, 2018; Hubain et al., 2016; Kelly & Gayles, 2007).

Through a CRT lens, the concept of whiteness as property, a tenet I did not include in my original conceptual framework, is helpful in understanding why faculty at WUP and CUP may have unintentionally centered white students’ needs and expectations, while ignoring the impact of requiring students of color to share their narratives. Whiteness as property refers to
the concept of whiteness as infused and embedded on all societal levels and institutions of power, granting white people the right of possession, use, enjoyment, disposition, and exclusion as rooted in racial domination (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Harris, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Whiteness as property can also explain the lack of engagement among white students at WUP and CUP who, despite recognizing their white privilege in conversations of race, did not take that acknowledgement as the first step to interrogate tangible ways to relinquish their privilege. The classroom dynamics at CUP and WUP fostered a learning environment where students and faculty brought issues of race and racism in “dispassionate ways,” as a student in CUP referred to, which served as an impediment to their learning community to examine steps toward change (Hubain et al., 2016). This also created a space where students of color experienced the Atlas complex, as they had the burden of and became responsible for educating their peers, leading them to develop racial fatigue, which they referred to as “trauma-dumping.”

**The Cycle of Blame**

A critical feature of this study related to the inclusion of perspectives from students of color, white students, and faculty regarding classroom engagement when discussing issues of race and racism. Many studies have focused on the perspectives and experiences with race and racism in the graduate and, specifically, the HESA classroom of students of color (Harris & Linder, 2018; Hubain et al., 2016; Truong et al., 2016), white students (Linder, 2011; Olson, 2010; Robbins, 2016, 2017), or faculty (Pasque et al., 2013; Quaye, 2012; Robbins, 2016). However, this study integrated the perspectives and voices of faculty and students from a variety of racial backgrounds in two HESA masters programs to better understand
how they grappled with the programs’ commitments to DEI/social justice in relation to racial justice. This aspect of my study’s design led to novel findings.

When examining and analyzing the perspectives of faculty and students in WUP and CUP regarding their expectations of effective classroom discussions about race, it was clear that even though faculty, students of color, and white students were respectively trying to engage in genuine ways, they were doing so without understanding each other’s expectations and perspectives, which clearly created a cycle of blame. However, to understand the complexity of this finding, it is important to situate this study as being conducted during and after the pandemic, as well as after the murder of George Floyd. With the pandemic affecting various racial groups differently and disproportionately, the murder of George Floyd was likely a catalyst that intensified and highlighted issues of race and racism with much more prominence. From this lens, students of color at WUP and CUP may have perceived issues of race in the classroom as an add-on to the curriculum, given that the pandemic and the murder of George Floyd may have exposed the gaps in our still essentialist understanding of racism in the U.S.

The cycle of blame started with the faculty who felt that their intentions to center race and students’ expectations were difficult to reconcile. Faculty in both programs understood the clear dynamics of tension between students of color and white students. They also voiced that, despite their intentions to diversify their curriculum and foster meaningful conversations about race in the classroom, students of color always felt that their efforts were not enough and that they were educating their peers, which was frustrating for the faculty. Also, faculty noted that white students felt that they were vilified and that the classes focused too heavily on race, which was also difficult for faculty to process and navigate. All faculty noted the
disappointment and challenge to balance the expectations of students of color and white students, which often put them in positions where students would confront them and accuse them of being biased.

The next part of the cycle of blame included students of color in both programs. Students of color discussed the faculty’s efforts in diversifying the curriculum and incorporating scholars of color in the reading material. However, they noted that the execution of the classes was not entirely focused on problematizing whiteness and racism through complex discussions. Instead, the students of color felt that the faculty fostered simplistic and superficial discussions of race and racism, which resulted in unchallenged moments when white students did not engage or engaged in safe and not critical ways. Students of color blamed faculty for their lack of preparedness in facilitating conversations about race, but they also blamed their white peers.

As noted by the students of color in WUP and CUP, white students did not engage in genuine ways and always maintained a “rose-colored” perspective on issues of racism. The ways in which their white peers engaged appeared to them to be minimal and unrealistic, as they tended to nod and agree with everything the students of color said in class. Their silence and lack of intentional participation made the students of color feel that their white peers used this mechanism to protect themselves from confrontation and to find ways to victimize themselves. The students of color perceived the classes to be catered to educating their white peers and expected faculty to be more upfront at pushing white students beyond their simplistic notions of race and to scale up the conversations. The students of color felt that the classes did not go beyond what was in the readings and simple definitions around racism, something a student of color called “Race 101.”
The last part of the cycle of blame included white students. White students in WUP and CUP discussed their dilemma when participating in conversations about race. From their lens, it was difficult to grapple with their own racial identity as white and privileged and how to effectively insert themselves in these discussions. In their view, remaining silent was a way to show respect for their peers of color and to allow them to have space to voice their opinions. However, some white students also recognized that always being silent was not the right approach and could even be harmful, as they also feared being perceived as indifferent.

Some other white students felt that it was not their place to give an opinion. Remaining silent, however, is not only a choice, but a way to exercise white privilege (Harris & Linder, 2018), which can result in further marginalization of students of color (Hubain et al., 2016). They also acknowledged their tendency to agree and nod when they discussed other forms of oppression (e.g., gender, sexuality, religion, etc.), but when race was at the center, their levels of comfort were low. The white students blamed the faculty for not being equipped to orchestrate the classroom dynamics and effectively engage them in discussion of race.

This cycle of blame (Figure 2) exposes the unmatched and unspoken expectations among faculty and students and among students of color and white students, and challenges ways in which programs work to enact their DEI/social justice missions. That is, faculty at CUP and WUP focused their energies on diversifying the curriculum, creating mechanisms to expose students to topics of race and racism while mitigating resistance and conflict, and centering the voices of students of color in the classroom. However, issues of faculty preparedness to incorporate topics of racism in the classroom, pedagogy, students’ ways of making sense of the topics discussed in the context of their racial identities, and faculty’s
instructional approaches were not put at the center of the conversation. Neither was attention paid to faculty members’ and students’ understanding of each other’s perspectives, experiences, and positions, thus missing opportunities for humanizing discussions. WUP and CUP faculty spent a lot of time on communicating the centrality of their mission in relation to issues of race and building rules for engagement and “safe” classroom environments, but they did not devote time to allowing students to openly express how they felt about their peers and the faculty during class discussions as a starting point, not to build agreement, but to foster and normalize dissonance, conflict, and discomfort. The assumptions from faculty about effective ways to handle classroom conversations about racism and the uncommunicated expectations of students regarding discussions of race and racism in the classroom created a never-ending cycle of blame, which led students and faculty into a rabbit
hole of frustration and sometimes disappointment with no foreseeable strategy to achieve a resolution.

These findings also challenge essentialist notions that faculty of color are ready, equipped, and effective at incorporating topics of race and racism in the classroom simply because of their racial identity. For example, although Nick, Terri, and Sandra as faculty of color recognized the importance of race and racism in the classroom and valued those topics as core components of their pedagogy, students of color and white students still perceived their approach to handling conversations about race as insufficient and superficial. Kishimoto (2018) argues that just as white faculty must acknowledge and grapple with their privilege, faculty of color also need to go through a learning process before engaging in anti-racist pedagogy and work through their internalized racism and fight their desire to appear as authoritative figures to justify their presence in the classroom as a result of their presumed incompetency and expertise.

The next section discusses various levels of faculty engagement identified in this study regarding the faculty’s commitments to racial justice and outlines specific practices that demonstrate their dedication to either perpetuating the status quo or disrupting and transforming practices that go against racial justice.

**Who’s Ready for Disruption? Levels of Faculty Engagement when Teaching for Racial Justice**

“The most profound and potentially most radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else’s oppression.” (Smith, 1983/2000, p. 267)
An important finding of this study concerned the different levels of engagement among faculty and their perceptions of racial justice in the classroom and the curriculum, which aligns with the area of the conceptual framework related to faculty engagement and development (Harper, 2010). While some faculty members understood the centrality of race and racism in the classroom, they did not fully embody or only partially embraced a commitment to enacting racial justice through their own pedagogical practices. Some faculty members, on the other hand, felt the responsibility to not only infuse race and racism as important components of their classes, but also engaged in disruptive practices that challenged certain program policies (e.g., logging practicum hours, advising time dedicated to students, personal connection to students) and expectations of their fields. Overall, all the faculty members who participated in this study were aware of the importance of racial justice as an important component of the curriculum and of the mission of the programs. The white faculty members in both programs, Rose (CUP) and Cora (WUP), recognized their racial identity and the privilege they held when teaching topics about race but, most importantly, they also acknowledged that dynamics in the classroom look very different when faculty of color are presenting those same topics.

These faculty perceptions have been documented extensively in the literature. Studies on faculty of color have showed the racial resistance that faculty members of color face from white students in explicit and implicit ways in the classroom, which range from questioning their expertise (Tuitt et al., 2009; McGee & Kazembe, 2016) through questioning their presence in the classroom while teaching topics about race (Sue et al., 2011) to challenging their authority (Truong et al., 2014) and disrespecting them during class (Parker & Neville, 2014). Although faculty of color who participated in my study did not mention encountering
hostile environments or negative attitudes in the classroom, they did talk about having a hard
time navigating how white students struggled to engage in topics related to race and racism,
and how students of color perceived the topics. Interestingly, the levels of engagement in the
topics of race and racism varied among faculty members during the interviews and class
observations, but these differences were not entirely connected to their racial identity. The
following sub-sections present a discussion pertaining to three ways in which faculty at CUP
and WUP engaged when teaching about race and racism, concluding with a typology of
faculty engagement when teaching for racial justice.

**Walking on Egg Shells: Faculty of Color Teaching about Race**

First, faculty of color did not express feeling alienated or micro-aggressed in the
classroom when discussing race and racism. Yet, when asked how they specifically engaged
in conversations of race and racism as an important element of their programs’ missions,
Nick’s (CUP), Terri’s (WUP), and Laura’s (WUP) attitudes and comments were careful and
general. For instance, they did not emphasize race much during the interview and, when
prompted to discuss race or racism in any of the questions, they always redirected the
conversation to the importance of considering all the “isms” and all forms of injustice, not
just race. This was also evident during Laura’s class, which I observed.

It is important to note that Terri and Nick were more willing than Laura to
acknowledge the role of race and racism in relation to their program missions, but they also
noted the urgency to focus on other forms of oppression. For Nick and Terri, issues of race
and racism were ingrained in their values as individuals and as scholars. They always
highlighted the importance of issues of race and tried to connect their efforts in the classroom
and beyond to improving the experiences of students of color in the program. However, their
statements about race and racism were always accompanied by a disclaimer that they also
cared about other forms of oppression and that it was important to integrate them all, instead
of focusing only on race.

Deemphasizing topics of race and racism without completely ignoring the impact of it
may be a strategy that Laura, Nick, and Terri adopted as faculty of color to mitigate the
negative experiences that faculty of color have historically had teaching white students
(Neville & Parker, 2014; Truong et al., 2014). Additionally, the scrutinization of their
research agendas and the resistance that faculty of color often encounter (Antonio, 2022;
Dancy & Jean-Marie, 2014; García, 2000; McGee & Kazembe, 2016) could also be a factor
that explains why Nick, Terri, and Laura subscribed to more general definitions of justice and
approached the topics in their classes more carefully. For Nick, Terri, and Laura, adopting a
dee emphasized perspective on race and racism could have been a survival mechanism to
protect themselves from being accused of biased knowledge and to mitigate the impact of
potential student and perhaps institutional backlash, resistance, and retaliation.

**Race and Racism: Openly and in Every Aspect of the Class**

Unlike Nick, Terri, and Laura, Cora, a white faculty member in WUP, was much
more intentional to talk about and include topics of racism and whiteness in her syllabus, and
in her classes, based on my observations. Cora saw it as her responsibility as a white woman
to put forward pedagogical efforts to ensure that all students were exposed to topics of race
and racism and how those issues pervasively existed in the field of higher education. She
infused the topic of race in every aspect of her classes because, from her perspective, it was
impossible to examine the oppression of various social identities without bringing in a
historical and racial lens. Cora acknowledged her positionality in bringing up issues of race
in the classroom and noted the struggle that white students went through as they grappled with their white identity and the reality of the invisible structures that continue to produce and reproduce white supremacy and privilege.

Cora’s awareness of her own identity allowed her to have a better understanding of not only how she approached topics of race in the classroom, but also how her students (white students and students of color) were affected by her pedagogy in relation to her racial identity. Her awareness and constant interrogation of her privilege as a white woman and her blind spots allowed her to have more intuition and empathy for her students, particularly white students, as they struggled to grapple with their own identity and their role in the classroom around topics of race and racism. From this lens, racial identity development and racial identity awareness are also key factors that determine faculty’s willingness to infuse racial justice in the classroom.

**Challenging Institutional Norms: The Next Step to Achieving Racial Justice**

Like Cora, Rose (white faculty) and Sandra (faculty of color) at CUP centered race as the most prominent factor in advancing the DEI mission of CUP, but these two faculty members perceived their commitment to advancing racial justice beyond the classroom. For Rose, advancing a racial justice commitment meant disrupting traditional notions of rigor in academia. She referred to the capitalistic values emphasized in graduate education and talked about specific practices she engaged in to challenge the status quo of her program. For instance, Rose refused to follow the program policy that required students to log all the practicum hours. In her view, there was a clear dissonance between the program’s espoused commitments to DEI, and specifically to racial justice, and students’ non-existent school-work-life balance. Students in CUP and WUP also voiced their concerns about keeping up
with the academic demands of their programs, the assistantships they were required to do, and their lives outside of school. In addition, Rose made it a point to meet with her advisees three to four times per semester as opposed to one, which was the norm, to ensure that they were feeling supported. She also encouraged students to participate and advocate for themselves in the graduate student union and modified her syllabi as much as possible to allow for flexibility, reflection, and creativity instead of rigor. For her, anti-racist practices could not be achieved without also engaging in anti-capitalist values and disruption of norms.

Taking the commitment to advancing racial justice and the program mission beyond the classroom was a practice that Sandra prioritized as well. For Sandra, it was essential to create a connection with her students in a way that, as a faculty member, she could be well acquainted with their lives and struggles outside of the classroom. Sandra also talked about her commitment to checking in with her students of color individually, especially after the pandemic and the George Floyd tragedy, as their mental health was her top priority. As part of her practice, Sandra called her students often and would even visit them at their dorms when she felt that something was off. In her view, she could never advance a racial justice agenda if she was not always present and not deeply involved in her students’ lives. Rose’s and Sandra’s efforts were also highlighted by the students of color and white students in CUP, who often brought up their names during the interviews to express their deep admiration for their way of approaching their work and for their inspirational and genuine commitment to justice.

The disruptive approach to norms that Sandra and Rose engaged in challenges notions of academic hierarchies and rigor that emphasize academic practices rooted in emotional detachment from students, the institutionalization and normalization of barriers, complexity,
and difficulty in the name of meticulousness and prestige. Interrogating and dismantling notions of rigor can be seen as direct strategies to adopt anti-racist practices in the classroom and beyond and not as a threat to academic legitimacy and excellence. For Sandra, disrupting academic hierarchies that promoted emotional detachment from students was her way to contribute to CUP’s DEI mission and to highlight her commitment to racial justice. She embraced her own and her students’ emotions to get to know them better so that she could be able to spot systemic barriers in the classroom and the program and create a more welcoming and safer environment for her students, particularly for students of color.

In Rose’s approach, challenging a program policy (requiring students to keep a copious log of their practicum hours) that disregarded students’ well-being by requiring them to work many hours on their practicums in addition to an internship and their coursework was her way of disrupting a practice that, in her view, promoted racism. While this policy affected all students in the program, for Rose, this had a much larger effect on students of color, who were already navigating an institution rooted in whiteness and the dominance of principles of productivity. Rose’s attitude toward her practice did not erase important requirements that ensured that students were grasping the learning outcomes in her courses, but she did remove barriers that affected students mentally and emotionally. Rose’s decision to being flexible and to constantly interrogating and spotting unfair but normalized practices, which were often taken as the foundation of the program’s commitment to maintaining rigorous practice, reflected her deep commitment to dismantling systemic whiteness in the program and at the institution. This also reflected her understanding of the daily experiences of students from marginalized backgrounds with the curriculum, assessment, and program expectations.
Conceptualizations of rigor in higher education are deeply rooted in whiteness (Calvo & Bradley, 2021), and inform how the curriculum is structured, which serves to perpetuate systems of oppression (Foley et al., 2015). The higher education field presents rigor as the expectation and the only mechanism to succeed in academia, disregarding how this system advances the attitudes, values, and beliefs of the dominant white culture (Fleming, 2019).

Rigor serves as a concept and as a framework that informs and drives recruitment, curriculum, pedagogy, research, and practice, reproducing and normalizing ways of knowing that promote whiteness (Calvo & Bradley, 2021). When discourses of rigor in graduate programs go unnoticed or unquestioned, either embedded in program policies, curriculum, pedagogy, or assessment, faculty are automatically devaluing other ways of knowing as illegitimate, thus operating from a deficit-based perspective (Almeida et al., 2019; Calvo & Bradley, 2021) whether these faculty subscribe to principles of racial justice or not.

While divorcing from emotional detachment and rigor were central values for Sandra and Rose, the concept of anti-capitalism to advance racial justice was another important element to consider in the enactment of DEI or social justice missions. Rose put forward the argument that to truly live up to racial justice commitments, a program needed to also adopt anti-capitalist values. She brought up the issue of graduate student exploitation through assistantships, which only promoted cheap labor and extenuating hours of work on top of the academic demands of the program.

Rose’s argument on the exploitation of graduate students suggests that academic programs, as hierarchical by-products of higher education institutions, emulate the behavior of corporations by profiting from cheap labor and feeding off the financial needs of students who are willing to accept assistantships to avoid the impact of student loans and long-term
debt after graduation. This practice, according to Rose, had a much larger impact on students of color, as many were first-generation and came from low-income families. Rose’s perspective raises another issue: When DEI/social justice-focused academic programs put forward efforts to recruit students of color, but do not have mechanisms in place to fully support this student population relying, instead, on poorly funded graduate assistantships, they may be inadvertently engaging in another form of racial capitalism (Leong, 2013) through the exploitation of the very students for whom they claim to work.

In WUP and CUP, students also talked about the number of hours students spent on courses, assistantships, and internships, and how very little time they had to pay attention to class projects and their lives outside of school. Requiring students to commit to time-consuming assistantships can represent an emotional and mental burden for students and slow down their progress (Hinchey & Kimmel, 2000). The issue of exploitation through assistantships in higher education graduate programs is also tightly connected to organizational ethical culture. Organizational ethical culture is defined as the perceptions of organizational members, their shared moral obligations, and the way ethical issues show up in their organizational practices (Chernyak-Hai & Tziner, 2021; Cohen & Baruch, 2022).

This perspective provides a lens to examine graduate programs in relation to students’ workloads, and how the stakeholders (i.e., faculty) engage in and interrogate oppressive practices while operating through a DEI/social justice mission.

In a study examining the relationships between perceived ethical climate and organizational deviance among employees in seven electronics companies, Hsieh and Wang (2016) identified various areas that employees believed to be essential to building an ethical organizational culture. According to this model, an organization is considered ethical when
its members: (a) put the interests of their colleagues as their priority; (b) focus on the intrinsic value of their mission; (c) show concern for the well-being of others; (d) make decisions based on the values of the organization and not externally imposed expectations; and (e) carefully consider the moral and ethical consequences of their decision-making and actions.

Hsieh and Wang’s (2016) study sheds light on the work overload issue that students at CUP and WUP faced, as it shows how the culture of these academic departments, despite having DEI/social justice commitments, might have been rooted to the institution’s culture of productivity and exploitation. This can, in turn, blindside faculty to perceive an abusive culture toward students as normal or even beneficial to the students’ academic and professional growth (Hsieh & Wang, 2016). Openly deviating from the institutional expectations regarding student labor and academic rigor, CUP and WUP may send the message to their institutions that they are departing from established organizational norms (Appelbaum et al., 2005).

**Implications**

The findings of this study highlight the nuances and complexity of implementing a DEI/social justice mission, especially with a focus on racial justice, in HESA master’s programs. The integration of the voices and perspectives of faculty and students, along with document analysis and class observations, revealed important insights, which can have critical implications for theory, as well as program practices, policies, and teaching. More specifically, the accounts shared by faculty and students demonstrate not only the permanence of racism within organizations that profess to dismantle oppressive educational structures, but they also make prominent the responsibility, ethics, and intentionality required to truly advance racial justice commitments in academic programs. The in-depth reflections
and experiences shared by students of color juxtaposed with the narratives of their white peers and faculty challenge programs to situate their missions and espoused commitments to dismantling racism beyond good intentions, so that they pay special attention to ongoing discussion, informal check-ins, and tangible outcomes. More importantly, emphasizing discussions and informal check-ins can lead to a better understating of each other’s viewpoints (areas where they agree and diverge). Through the lens of my participants’ voices, reflections, and expectations of their programs’ commitments to racial justice, I present theoretical, practical, and pedagogical implications.

**Theoretical Implications**

The findings of my dissertation revealed the various degrees to which faculty members at CUP and WUP engaged in racial justice as they advanced their DEI/social justice missions, which resulted in a typology of faculty engagement. This typology affords important theoretical implications. Instead of relying on the themes outlined in the findings, I constructed the typology by comparing the participants’ (faculty and students) perspectives on the various areas addressed during the interviewing process and then looking for commonalities as well as points of divergence between participants’ entire accounts (Stapley et al., 2022). The faculty’s accounts of their understanding of their missions, their motivations to join the program, their scholarship interests, their pedagogical approaches to teaching about race in the classroom, and their perception of how students engage in conversations of race and racism provided a lens to categorize the faculty based on their willingness to center race and racism in their pedagogy and other program practices.
Faculty Racial Justice Engagement Typology

The students’ perspectives on faculty’s commitment to advancing racial justice also served as evidence to confirm the categories. These categories yielded a typology that I present below. The faculty are classified in each area and, in Table 5, following my description of each category, I provided a few quotes to contextualize the categories. It is important to note that in a case study, the role of the researcher is not to merely describe the phenomenon under study, but to gather extensive data that can lead to the creation of a typology or continuum that “conceptualizes different approaches to the task” (Merriam, 1998, p. 28). In my study, the importance of producing a typology lay in its potential contributions to the formation and refining of concepts around faculty’s level of engagement to advance racial justice in the classroom, and unearthing fundamental categories that can be classified, measured, and replicated in other relevant contexts.

First, this typology can help DEI/social justice-focused program administrators identify professional development and ongoing program support (i.e., through less formal mechanisms such as individual check-ins, peer class observations, communities of practice) to onboard new faculty and overall align all faculty with the values established in the mission. This can also have a positive impact when trying to address potential dissonance among faculty members. Having such a categorization can also serve faculty to develop metacognitive awareness in relation to their beliefs, values, and approaches to racial justice education. When faculty are more mindful of what they do and why, and of how their preconceived notions of racial justice teaching influence their students and colleagues, they might be more willing to examine their biases and engage in dialogue with other faculty, and even students. A higher level of self-awareness among faculty can also lead them to
transform their curricular and pedagogical approaches and to stay more in tune with what their colleagues do and the directions the program aspires to take. This could also result in opportunities to foster spaces for faculty to be vulnerable and navigate potential venues for individual and programmatic change. The categories below, including neutral-aware, active-aware, aware-advocate, and disruptive-advocate form the typology that classifies faculty’s levels of engagement at CUP and WUP in relation to racial justice.

**Neutral-Aware.** Neutral-aware faculty understand and do not disregard that issues of race and racism exist. They perceive issues of race as another element to include in the curriculum to check the diversity learning outcome box. They also see diversity as the act of adding faculty and/or students of color into the program and/or adding one or two articles on issues of diversity into the curriculum. However, they do not center race as an essential element of their pedagogy or scholarship and avoid engaging in conversations or actions that are directly connected to efforts to achieve racial justice. Neutral-aware faculty may also appear uncomfortable when topics of race and racism arise inside or outside of the classroom.

**Active-Aware.** Active-aware faculty recognize the importance of integrating issues of racial justice in the curriculum. While addressing issues of race and racism are ingrained in their individual and perhaps their scholarship values, they integrate these topics in their pedagogy more carefully and in more general terms. They address issues of racism in the classroom but conceal them within the discussion of other forms of oppression as to not center race alone. Their curriculum includes some topics of race and racism, but the topics are not necessarily the lens to understand other forms of oppression and, as such, the topics are treated as stand-alone concepts and often in one unit of the syllabus or as part of a unit
dedicated to diversity issues more broadly. Active-aware faculty are cautious not to appear too focused on issues of race and may avoid engaging in topics that are purely connected to the topic.

*Aware-Advocate.* The aware-advocate faculty frame curriculum, pedagogy, and classroom practice around the centrality of race and racism and as a foundation to understand all forms of oppression. They are intentional at building courses and class activities that constantly challenge students to interrogate oppressive systems and their own privilege where applicable. These faculty have a degree of awareness that allows them to examine their racial identity and constantly interrogate how their identity and classroom practices influence their students’ understanding of race as well as their racial identity development. Aware-advocate faculty willingly seek to engage in topics of race and racism and question how their understating of these topics shape their pedagogical approaches. Their pedagogical efforts, however, do not expand to efforts outside the classroom.

*Disruptive-Advocate.* The disruptive-advocate faculty comprise all the characteristics of the aware-advocate, but they take their commitment to racial justice beyond the classroom through activist approaches. They challenge and disrupt established policies, norms, and expectations that go against anti-racist efforts. They interrogate pedagogical, program, and institutional policies that appear to be beneficial or fair and situate them through a racial justice lens to unveil systemic forms of oppression. These faculty prioritize self-reflection and action beyond the constraints of the classroom to situate themselves as removers of program and institutional barriers that continue to silently oppress students of color. Disruptive-advocate faculty are unafraid and constantly seek to engage in conversations about race and racism with fellow faculty members, students, and other institutional
stakeholders and see their anti-racist efforts as part of a larger quest that goes beyond their programs.

**Figure 3**

*Faculty Racial Justice Engagement Typology*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neutral-Aware</th>
<th>Laura (WUP)</th>
<th>“We have two African American women, an Asian American woman, a gay male, two race scholars... What else are we supposed to do?” (Laura)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active-Aware</td>
<td>Nick (CUP), Terri (WUP)</td>
<td>“I would say that while we place an emphasis on race, I don’t think that we should just talk about issues of race when we’re thinking around issues of diversity. We should also be thinking about it from other lenses as well” (Nick)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aware-Advocate</td>
<td>Cora (WUP)</td>
<td>“There is a hierarchy unfortunately with how we oppress people. And I think that it’s important to have very honest conversations that, in this country, oppression is not new. It’s been in place since humans existed. But in this country, race has been used to the maximum in terms of oppression. And that has to be acknowledged and discussed and never shied away from.” (Cora)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disruptive Advocate</td>
<td>Rose (CUP), Sandra (CUP)</td>
<td>“I look at our practices and I say, ‘That’s a practice that is systematically taking away our students’ agency, is limiting them in terms of their ability to care for themselves, is totally overworking them, and that’s going to have a disproportionate impact on first generation students, that’s going to have a disproportionate impact on students of color. I’m getting rid of it.’ And I didn’t ask anyone for permission, and I didn’t ask anyone for forgiveness, and I just got rid of it.” (Rose)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Implications for Program Practices

As evidenced in the findings of this study, scholarship values are connected to the faculty’s readiness to engage in the advancement of DEI/social justice missions, with a specific interest in racial justice. This particularly highlights the responsibility that HESA graduate programs, and DEI/social justice-focused academic programs, have to attract faculty whose individual and/or scholarship values resonate with the mission the program tries to enact. The findings of this study showed that some faculty are hired because of their specific area of expertise, which is certainly important, but not the only factor that will contribute to the advancement of the program’s mission. As such, academic programs that profess to be DEI/social justice-oriented must rethink their hiring practices and interrogate the balance between faculty expertise and their readiness to integrate their scholarship and pedagogical approaches into the values of the program. In other words, while the faculty’s scholarship does not have to have a specific focus on racial justice, it should be at least connected in a way to the program mission and/or resonate with the values and expectations of the rest of the faculty. This aspect should not only be part of hiring, but also the onboarding process of new faculty through explicit discussions and check-ins.

Although hiring social justice-minded faculty is an important first step for mission alignment and outcomes, establishing formal structures within the program for faculty to reflect on their practices and their positioning in relation to the mission is imperative to build communities of accountability and transformative practice (Navarro, 2018). Trusting that faculty are doing their best to advance the mission is crucial, but not enough, as this hampers the programs’ ability and criticality to assess what is being done in the name of good intentions versus what is making a difference in the student experience through tangible
outcomes. If DEI/social justice and racial justice are to become central driving forces of academic programs, understanding the value of communities of practice and incorporating such opportunities as standing permanent structures within the departments should be a priority for faculty and administrators.

Communities of practice also focus on accountability and reflection (Navarro, 2018), which can additionally provide faculty a space to question and challenge program practices and policies, including curricular structure, program requirements (course load, graduation requirements, assistantships, etc.), and expectations for students. This is particularly important for faculty within the different categories of the racial justice engagement typology I developed. For example, Rose’s and Sandra’s disruptive advocate approach demonstrates the importance of not only holding beliefs and values that promote racial justice, but also embodying those beliefs and values to challenge and remove policies and practices that go against the mission they profess to advance. In addition, communities of practice would offer opportunities for faculty embodying neutral-aware and active-aware approaches to racial justice engagement to reflect on, broaden, and deepen their racial justice practice by, for example, going more deeply into the implications of race and racism in their programs. This might include actively engaging in conversations about oppressive practices at all levels of program functioning. Issues such as these can become topics for reflection and discussion in faculty communities of practice.

I also invite faculty and administrators in DEI-social justice HESA programs preparing practitioners in education and society to consciously and intentionally engage in reflective exercises that can unearth the policies and practices they have in place and have silently normalized. Most importantly, I would encourage faculty to pause and understand
how certain pedagogical and academic program practices are harmful even with the opportunities they seem to provide (e.g., overworked students through assistantships and low wages, the use of the narratives of students of color as a vehicle for instruction on issues of race and racism, the rigor of a demanding coursework coupled with the exigencies of practicums and required internships). These policies and practices continue to sustain oppressive structures and they inevitably and directly marginalize their students, more specifically their students of color (Harris & Linder, 2018; Kelly & Gayles, 2010; King & Howard-Hamilton, 2003). The omnipresence of whiteness in the higher education field makes oppressive and racist practices appear normal, desirable, and impossible to replace.

In addition, the unquestioned faculty expectations of students, more specifically students of color, to perform white middle-class academic norms disregard the cultural practices and investments that students of color bring to academic spaces (Alim et al., 2020). This means that faculty must first engage in the difficult exercise of unlearning normalized expectations of student performance and their learning process, academic success, and classroom dynamics, which often center faculty as the experts (Kumashiro, 2015). Faculty must then identify pedagogical approaches and mechanisms such as responsibly centering the voices of students and constructing their courses through a more democratic process where students’ participation is expected and is the norm. Additionally, fostering dialogue among students to interrogate program practices outside of the classroom can lead to the identification and elimination of programmatic and institutional barriers that hamper the students’ ability to make progress in their degrees and establish new ways of integrating students’ feedback while honoring the identities and integrity of the students they serve.
The findings of this study could also afford a framework for HESA programs to assess and interrogate their practices not only through their communities of accountability and transformative practices, but also through the integration of the students’ voices and perspectives. Mission alignment cannot happen when only faculty’s views are informing changes, but when students’ reflections and expectations are embedded as well. However, integrating students’ voices should not be limited to student evaluations, sporadic surveys, or occasional meetings, but through group facilitations where faculty are willing to be vulnerable, to welcome dissonance, and to ask questions that may or may not align with their own perspectives of their efforts to advance the mission. It is important to recognize issues of workload that may hamper faculty’s ability to frequently engage in such conversations, but through dedicated time during faculty meetings, informal check-ins with colleagues, and one or a couple more formal facilitations per year or per semester, faculty can foster spaces to keep discussions about the mission alive and always on their radar.

**Implications for Pedagogy and Curriculum**

*Neoliberalism knows what it wants. Neoliberalism wants to produce workers—cheap sources of labor. So, when you ask the question of how to teach, think first about what you want to produce. So, whereas neoliberalism wants to produce cheap labor, culturally relevant pedagogies and culturally sustaining pedagogies want to produce critically thinking human beings. Start there. (Gloria Ladson-Billings, 2014, Lecture at Stanford University)*

The student participants in this study demonstrated their role as essential stakeholders of their programs through their critical insights about faculty’s good intentions as opposed to effective implementation of those intentions. The students’ perspectives also shed light on
how, despite faculty’s good intentions, efforts to advance a mission remained on very superficial levels in the programs: diversity course requirements, creation of temporary affinity groups, program events, newsletters, etc. However, those intentions were not always or often devoted to examining pedagogical approaches, which made the classroom experiences in these programs become oppressive and an afterthought for faculty and administrators.

The latter was evident in classroom interactions where students of color felt demoralized for carrying the burden of educating their white peers, but white students felt unequipped to participate in conversations about race and racism. All this was intensified as both students of color and white students felt that faculty did not engage them effectively in class discussion, but faculty felt frustration since students did not recognize their efforts to foster meaningful discussion about race and racism. As evidenced above, unquestioned pedagogical practices led to a cycle of blame between faculty and students. As such, an important implication of this study is the need to disrupt the cycle of blame that faculty and students participate in.

Several complementary practices can help achieve this goal. For example, the responsibility of academic programs to provide support for faculty for professional development related to pedagogy needs to be emphasized. Many faculty members enter academia with established scholarly agendas and areas of expertise. However, their expertise and knowledge do not always translate into effective pedagogical practices that engage students and foster their learning, particularly when topics of race and racism are part of the curriculum. The experience of students of color and white students in this study in class discussions about race and racism revealed that having expertise in a field of study, even in
topics of race and social justice, does not make faculty experts in facilitating conversations in the classroom. In addition to providing formal pedagogical training for faculty to leverage conversations of race in the classroom, programs should also take into consideration an important factor: The classroom is only *one* space where students can engage in conversations about race and racism, but it is perhaps the one where the formal structure and expectations hamper their ability to fully engage with an open mind.

Additionally, a responsive and responsible approach to re-thinking and re-envisioning narratives in the classroom is informed by Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2017; Alim et al., 2020). Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies not only seek to disrupt the pervasive racism that defines our educational spaces, but also proposes to create educational spaces that honor and sustain the lives of communities of color rather than eradicating them through white-washed perceptions of excellence and rigor. This is particularly important since the findings of my study confirmed that students of color are often used as race educators for their white peers despite faculty’s efforts to engage in anti-racist teaching practices (Harris & Linder, 2018; Hubain et al., 2016; Kelly & Gayles, 2007). Although pedagogical advice and anti-racist approaches to education have emphasized the importance of centering the voices and narratives of students of color in the classroom, faculty should problematize the romanticization and elicitation of narratives of students of color as the vehicle for learning, as this inevitably centers whiteness and exacerbates the racial traumas of students of color.

It is particularly important for faculty to assess the impact of trauma-infused narratives in the classroom for students of color as well as reading material that essentializes their experiences or exacerbates their racial fatigue. The integration of course content,
assignments, and class activities should be part of a democratic process where faculty and students negotiate readings and assignments that will inform the course. This would entail another process of unlearning for faculty who are used to walking into the classroom on the first day of class with a robust syllabus and an imposed agenda that students rarely get the chance to ask questions about. In particular, the life stories of students of color are of paramount importance and can serve as counter-stories. However, integrating narratives in the classroom should require the consent of students to avoid their use to promote trauma and pain among students of color. This can have also a positive impact on how white students participate in class and interact with students of color around discussions of racism.

An additional practice relates to the ways in which white students engage in conversations about race and racism. Unlike other studies on white students’ resistance to engage in issues of race in the classroom (Olson, 2010; Robbins, 2016, 2017; Robins & Jones, 2016), the white students that participated in my study talked about their confusion and dilemma to engage in conversations of race. In fact, white students appeared to be balancing silence to give space to students of color to express their opinions and trying to insert themselves in ways that did not seem apathetic or controlling. Some of the white students noted their interest in learning how to effectively interact in the classroom and fully recognized their privilege when choosing to remain silent when they felt uncomfortable. From this lens, it is crucial for faculty to consider social circumstances and contexts that can affect how students understand and want to engage in conversations about race and racism. The COVID-19 pandemic and the murder of George Floyd, for example, may have served as catalysts for many individuals to reconceptualize their notions of racism. Faculty should pay
special attention to how students enact their multiple identities based on societal contexts and not make assumptions based on fixed versions of practices among racial groups.

Further, given the nuances of handling race conflict in the classroom and the sensitivity around this topic, DEI/social justice programs should offer permanent, additional, and more informal spaces where students can process class content related to race, as well as the dynamics of their interactions. This could be achieved through retreats, workshops, focus groups, and affinity groups so that students can have multiple ways to unpack their perspectives. Having institutionalized spaces to specifically talk about their experiences in the classroom around topics of race can provide faculty with another layer of feedback on how to foster constructive confrontation instead of conflict mitigation.

Most importantly, an important question for faculty to consider relates to how they use pedagogies to effectively engage students of color in racially diverse classrooms. I encourage faculty to problematize the creation of “safe spaces” and imposed “community/cohort agreements” that, despite being meant to foster productive and diplomatic interactions in the classroom, only serve to protect white students and faculty’s fear of confrontation and loss of control. Forced agreements can create passive-aggressive environments as well as disengagement and disappointment among students. Critical pedagogy asserts that a comfortable learning environment does not necessarily translate into development and growth, and resistance and conflict do not mean lack of receptiveness or lack of effect in students’ engagement and learning (Davis & Steyn, 2012). Explicitly negotiated cross-racial dialogues that focus on expectations regarding classroom interactions beyond white-washed concepts such as “safe space” and “agreements” can have a larger
impact on students’ engagement and learning as well as the development of critical skills that can lead them to become effective disruptive-aware practitioners.

**Future Research**

My study offers several important avenues for future research. The findings of this study exposed a cycle of blame: faculty feeling their efforts to advance racial justice within their DEI/social justice missions were not perceived well by both students of color and white students, while students of color and white students blamed faculty for not being equipped to facilitate race-related conversation in the classroom, but also students of color blaming their white peers for their superficial and inauthentic ways to engage in such dialogues. While my study exposed the cycle of blame, it did not delve into specific solutions to disrupt the cycle, as this was beyond the scope of my research. Future studies could focus more heavily on identifying tangible classroom strategies for faculty and students to engage in discussions around race and racism more effectively. Such studies could utilize focus groups of faculty and students to better understand their perspectives on the issue of race and racism in the classroom and on solutions to address and disrupt the cycle of blame. These studies can have the potential to reveal important and helpful pedagogical and practical strategies for academic programs trying to advance a DEI/social or racial justice mission.

Examining the cycle of blame could also inform future research on ways to identify strategies for more effective faculty engagement and pedagogy. For example, findings of these studies could offer specific types of professional development that faculty could benefit from to anchor and align their scholarship to the values of the program as stated in their mission statements and their classroom practices. Identifying strategies for faculty development specific to DEI-social justice-focused programs could also guide faculty to
develop a strong program identity that makes them aware of the program challenges to realize their mission and ready for engaging in dialogue with fellow faculty and students to integrate innovative and inclusive solutions.

Also, although this study used two DEI/social justice-focused HESA graduate programs to understand their commitment to racial justice, my sample was small. I suggest that future research focuses on studying a larger number of DEI/social justice-focused HESA graduate programs to expand the conclusions drawn from this study. Having a larger sample may provide additional directions and recommendations for faculty and administrators on effective ways to examine their mission statements as connected to tangible practices within the programs. Such studies should also include the combined voices of faculty and students to gain a more comprehensive perspective on the topic and expand on the findings of this study.

In addition, while my study provides new insights into program practices, faculty engagement, and pedagogical approaches, the data collected only represent the perspectives of students and faculty in one semester. Future research could examine DEI/social justice missions with a focus on racial justice through longitudinal studies to explore in depth the evolution and enactment of mission statements and what specific factors shape the perspectives of faculty and students over time. Longitudinal studies can be ideal to more comprehensively explore how DEI/social justice-focused HESA programs evolve in light of their mission over time and address challenges related to the directions they expect to take in their programs.

Moreover, the interviews I conducted included students from various cohorts and stages in the two programs. Future research studies could focus on following specific cohorts
in HESA programs, also through a longitudinal lens, to capture the initial perspectives of faculty and students in the cohort in relation to racial justice, the students’ progress, learning process, their final stages of studies in the program, and how their engagement in the program informs their aspirations and expectations of themselves as practitioners in the HESA field. Disaggregating students' perspectives by gender and perhaps racial and ethnic identities could also shed light on the ways in which students perceive racial justice commitments in their programs and provide more insight into the cycle of blame that characterized classroom interactions in this study.

Finally, this study focused on understanding the curricular structure of the programs more broadly through document analysis and class observations. Future studies could narrow this view and study specific courses within DEI/social justice HESA programs to examine the integration of topics of race and racism as well as classroom dynamics. Such studies could also include focus groups, more intensive course observations, and interviews with faculty and students at various points of the semester. The findings of this study could also inspire the construction of a racial justice assessment tool for academic programs to increase awareness and accountability of tangible outcomes at the programmatic and pedagogical levels.
APPENDIX A

BACKGROUND FORM FOR FACULTY

1. Full Name: ________________________________________________________

2. Email address: ___________________________

3. Graduate Institution and Program: ______________________________________

4. Year you started teaching in the program: ________________________________

5. Please indicate if you are a full-time or part-time faculty:
   Part-time _______________ Full-time _______________

6. Please write in your racial and ethnic identity in the space below:
   Racial identity/identities _____________________________________________
   Ethnic identity/identities _____________________________________________

7. Please write in your current age (in years): ______________

8. Please write in your gender or preferred gender identity: ____________

9. How many courses do you teach per semester? ______________

10. What courses have you taught in the program? __________________________

11. What are your research interests? ________________________________
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR FACULTY

I would like to thank you for your willingness to participate in this study. To protect your identity, I will assign you a pseudonym and I will ensure you do not have any identifying information. Additionally, the information gathered during this interview will be completely confidential and I will be the only person who will have access to it. To further guarantee confidentiality, please do not state your name or the names of others and any other identifying information. If for any reason, your responses reflect any type of identifying information, I will remove it so I can protect your identity and identity of others. Given the in-depth nature of this interview, I’d like to record your answers. Your interview will be only available to me and will be destroyed after the interviews are transcribed. All the data for this study will be kept in a password-protected drive. Please note that you may withdraw your consent at any time or choose to skip any questions if you don’t feel comfortable answering them. Finally, participation in this study is not contingent upon your permission to audio record.

[review aspects of consent form]

And to confirm, you completed the consent form for this study indicating that I have your permission (or not) to audio record our conversation. Are you still ok with me recording our conversation today? ___Yes ___No

If yes: Thank you! Please let me know if at any point you want me to turn off the recorder or keep something you said off the record.

If no: Thank you for letting me know. I will only take notes of our conversation.

Before we begin the interview, do you have any questions? [Discuss questions] If any questions (or other questions) arise at any point in this study, you can feel free to ask them at any time. I would be more than happy to answer your questions.

A. Program Mission
1. Tell me why you came to teach in this program? What attracted you about it?
2. How would you describe the mission statement and commitments the program has established?
3. Were the mission and commitments of the program factors that attracted you to the program? If so, in what ways? If not, why do you think that is the case?
4. Read mission of the program and go through it with the participant. What is your perception of the mission? What is your perception of the mission in relation to race and racism?
5. In your view, what, if any, is the role of issues of race and racism in education and the overall advancement of social justice?
6. How would you define “racial justice” in general terms?

B. Teaching
7. How would you describe your teaching philosophy?
8. What connections do you see between your teaching philosophy and the mission statement and commitments of your program?

9. What is your perspective on social justice as it applies to education and your work with students?

10. How do you think your courses connect or not to the mission of your program?

11. How, if at all, do you center issues of race and racism as important content components of your courses?

   If they do not center race and racism:
   - What elements of social justice and inclusion do you prioritize in your courses? Explain why.
   - How do you think the elements you just mentioned contribute to the advancement of the program mission? In answering this question, you can also refer to program initiatives, curriculum, syllabi, etc.

   If they center race and racism:
   - What would be an example of a topic related to race and racism in your courses?
   - How do you present such content (racial justice)?
   - How do students tend to react when you bring up issues of race during class? And how do you facilitate discussion?
   - Beyond course content, to what extent do your practices and interactions with students inside and outside of the classroom reflect your commitment to addressing issues of race and racism?

12. At the individual level, what do you think are your contributions in relation to the advancement of social justice in your program? For example, inclusion, diversity, racial justice?

13. How often do you talk to other faculty members and/or students about the mission and commitments of the program?

C. Program Practices

14. How often do you discuss with your colleagues’ ways to align practices and course content to advance and realize the mission of the program?

15. As a program, how do you formally discuss/assess the advancement of the social justice mission? If so, what are those meetings like? What specific items do you discuss?

16. If you were asked to assess the effectiveness of the program in their quest to advance their mission and commitments to racial justice, what would you say? What would you keep? What would you change and why?

17. How do you think that students in the program perceive the mission of the program?

18. How do you think students perceive efforts to achieve racial justice as part of the program mission?

19. Does the program include students in discussions pertaining to the advancement of the mission?

20. In your opinion, have you as a program experienced challenges in maintaining and advancing the mission?

21. From your point of view, how central is the program mission to the every-day operations and functioning of the program?
22. Tell me how you define racial justice within the practices of your program. For example, program initiatives, curricular decisions, etc.

23. As a faculty member, could you describe what specific/tangible practices, if any, the program engages in to advance their mission and commitment to racial justice? In answering this question, you can also refer to program initiatives, curriculum, syllabi, etc.

24. Before we conclude this interview, is there something about your experience in this program that you think influences how you engage in racial justice that we have not yet had a chance to discuss?

25. Is there anything else you would like to add or reflect on?
APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR STUDENTS

I would like to thank you for your willingness to participate in this study. To protect your identity, I will assign you a pseudonym and I will ensure you do not have any identifying information. Additionally, the information gathered during this interview will be completely confidential and I will be the only person who will have access to it. To further guarantee confidentiality, please do not state your name or the names of others and any other identifying information. If for any reason, your responses reflect any type of identifying information, I will remove it so I can protect your identity and identity of others. Given the in-depth nature of this interview, I’d like to record your answers. Your interview will be only available to me and will be destroyed after the interviews are transcribed. All the data for this study will be kept in a password-protected drive. Please note that you may withdraw your consent at any time or choose to skip any questions if you don’t feel comfortable answering them. Finally, participation in this study is not contingent upon your permission to audio record.

[review aspects of consent form]

And to confirm, you completed the consent form for this study indicating that I have your permission (or not) to audio record our conversation. Are you still ok with me recording our conversation today? ___Yes ___No

If yes: Thank you! Please let me know if at any point you want me to turn off the recorder or keep something you said off the record.

If no: Thank you for letting me know. I will only take notes of our conversation.

Before we begin the interview, do you have any questions? [Discuss questions] If any questions (or other questions) arise at any point in this study, you can feel free to ask them at any time. I would be more than happy to answer your questions.

A. Program Mission
1. What attracted you to pursue your studies in this program?
2. What do you know about the mission of this program? (if interviewee does not mention specifics of the mission such as commitments to address racism, I will ask: Are you aware of the social justice mission/commitment of this program?)
3. Read mission of the program and go through it with the participant. What is your perception of the mission? What is your perception of the mission in relation to the program’s commitments to diversity, and inclusion?
   • In what ways, if any, did the program’s mission play a role in your decision to apply?
4. In what ways, if any, does the mission of this program address your own perception of racism?
B. **Definition of Concepts**
5. From your point of view, what is social justice?
6. When I mention the concept “racial justice” what comes to your mind?
7. What does social justice mean to you as a person? What does racial justice mean to you personally?
8. In your opinion, what, if any, is the role of understanding issues of race and racism in education?
9. From your perspective what is the overall role of addressing issues of race and racism in the advancement of social justice?

C. **Perception of Curriculum and Faculty**
10. Can you think of any specific instances when your program addressed issues of racism? For example, initiatives, events, or committees specifically dedicated to evaluating and promoting racial justice in the program? Assessment of the experiences of People of Color in your program? Through your interactions with peers and faculty? In classes? With the curriculum?
11. How do you think the mission of the program is reflected in the content of courses you have taken so far?
12. As a student, how would you describe the faculty’s efforts in advancing the mission through course content? For example, topics discussed in class, specific assignments, exercises in class.
13. In what ways, if any, do faculty or specific faculty members engage in practices that reflect their commitment to advance the interests of Students of Color in your program? For example, through mentoring, advising, assistantships, etc.
14. Could you tell me examples of how topics of race and the experiences of People of Color are included in your classes? What are your experiences with the discussion of those topics in class?
15. How do faculty in your program engage students in conversations of race and the experiences of People of Color?
16. From your perspective, how would you describe your classmates’ responses to content that relates to race, racism, and the experiences of People of Color?
17. Do you see yourself using what you learned in your program about race, racial inequities, and racial justice in your professional career? If so, can you tell me about specific ways in which you think those concepts will be useful to you?

D. **Perceptions of the Program**
18. To what extent do you see tangible efforts in the program to center People of Color in different areas (e.g., initiatives, activities, specific practices, etc.)?
19. Can you tell me about times when faculty and/or the program involved students in discussions of race and racial inequity? What did you walk away with from those conversations? For example, what is working? What needs to be done?
20. If I asked you to reflect on your experiences in the program, what would you do if you had the power to make changes to the program? Why do you think those changes are needed?
21. Before we conclude this interview, is there something about your experience in this program that you think influences how you engage in issues of race and racism that we have not yet had a chance to discuss?
22. Is there anything else you would like to add or reflect on?
APPENDIX D

DOCUMENT ANALYSIS PROTOCOL

For this protocol, I will focus mainly on the program mission, relevant documents provided by the program director, and syllabi.

Core Question:

How does the program mission connect, if any, to the way faculty develop and organize their curricula and deliver it via pedagogical practices as evidenced in syllabi and other course documents?

Guiding Questions:

a. Mission Statement
   • What language does the mission statement include that indicates their commitment to racial justice?
   • How does the language of the mission of the program translate to other documents (e.g., flyers, brochures, initiatives, workshops, syllabi, etc.) in the program?
   • Does the mission statement or other program documents reflect a clear pathway and template for faculty to inform their pedagogy and curricula?
   • How accessible are program documents to students?
   • What language is used to email students? How often do emails or other types of written communication go out to students that somewhat or entirely reinforces the commitments outlined in the mission statement? How much of the language is allusive to racial justice and People of Color?

b. Syllabi
   • Does the faculty member exhibit their commitment to social justice and/or racial justice within their syllabus or other pertinent course documents as established in the mission statement?
   • Is content knowledge on the syllabus organized by issues pertaining social justice and/or racial justice? How do social justice and/or racial justice concepts and disciplinary background concepts overlap?
   • Does the course description and/or learning goals include more disciplinary based terminology or terminology that connects to social justice and/or racial justice?
   • What terminology is used to describe certain social justice and/or racial justice phenomena within the syllabus? Is the language deficit-based or asset-based?
   • What other ways is the disciplinary background of the instructor observable on the syllabus or course description? For example, does the faculty member explain how this course would relate to the requirements of the department or major?
• Are units or course content knowledge organization related to racial identity/culture/group background? How prominent is racial identity when reading the course documents?
• Do course projects/assignments listed on the syllabus or course description have any relationship with People of Color, race, or racial justice?
• Based on these projects, assignments, and class activities, what are the ways that faculty attempt to communicate commitments to social justice and/or racial justice? Is it possible to infer this from observing the documents alone? Why or why not?
APPENDIX E
OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

→ Core Question:

How do faculty in the program develop and organize their courses around the program mission?

Guiding Questions:

1. Does the faculty member engage students in conversations related to race and oppression?
2. What terminology related to racial justice or People of Color is prevalent during classes?
3. What aspects of racial justice are present within the class’ activities? For example: journaling, literature/writing assignments, group work, debates.
4. How are students’ interactions different or not when topics related to race, racism, and People of Color come up?
5. Does the faculty member share aspects of their social identity during the class session? If so, how? If not, are there any reasons to observe why?
6. Does the faculty member tell any personal stories, or relate content or activities to issues of race and racism?
7. What goals as connected to the program mission and racial justice can be interpreted/extracted (and then confirmed through interviewing and member checking) from the class session’s activities, or other materials (example: slides, discussion questions, case study, homework etc.)
8. What pedagogical practices are observable based on the way the class session is conducted?
   • How is the room organized if the class is in person? How does the faculty member manage or interact with students if on Zoom?
   • How does the faculty member interact with students in general? Does the class feel cold, stressful or is there a friendly atmosphere? How would I describe this based on the observable interactions and class discourses?
   • Is knowledge delivered via faculty lecture in a monodirectional form? Or is knowledge co-created between faculty and students bidirectionally? Or is knowledge co-created via student-to-student discussion multi-directionally?
   • (if applicable) How do these observable pedagogical practices relate to what the faculty member discussed in their interview?
9. What other notable observations were there from this class session that may be outside the scope of the research questions, but important to report and analyze? What new information could be added to the conceptual framework?
Consent Form for Dissertation Research Study:
The Enactment of Social Justice Missions in Higher Education and Student Affairs (HESA) Programs

Introduction and Contact Information:
You are asked to take part in a research study. Participation is voluntary. The researcher is Lorena Fuentes, a PhD student from the Higher Education Program at UMass, Boston. The faculty advisor and dissertation chair is Dr. Katalin Szelenyi; you can contact her at this email address if needed: Katalin.Szelenyi@umb.edu. Please read this form and feel free to ask questions. If you have questions, I (Lorena Fuentes, the primary researcher) can discuss them with you. My email is Lorena.Fuentes-Lopez@umb.edu.

Description of the Project:
The purpose of the research project is to conduct a multicase study through qualitative design and investigate how HESA programs realize their social justice mission statements through the curriculum, pedagogy, and other program practices.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to engage in an interview of approximately 90 minutes about your experiences as a student in the program.

Compensation:
Compensation for participation is available. You will be compensated with a $25 Amazon gift card after completion of the interview.

Risks or Discomforts:
There are minimal risks involved in participating in this study. You may experience some discomfort when responding to some of the interview questions since the topics focus on various aspects of your experiences. During the interviews, you can skip any questions or end at any time. Another risk of participation is a loss of confidentiality. I will do everything I can to protect your information.
You may speak with Lorena Fuentes or Dr. Katalin Szelényi to discuss any distress or other issues related to study participation. If you wish to discuss concerns with university counseling services, you are encouraged to contact the counseling center at your university.

Benefits:
There is no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. However, this study will be beneficial to not only HESA programs, but also other graduate programs that have commitments to social justice, as it will hopefully shed light in understanding how faculty’s and students’ perspectives of justice can inform and advance social justice missions at the program and institutional levels. Additionally, the narratives of HESA faculty and students have the potential to help universities understand the important work that social-justice focused HESA programs do to prepare HESA professionals who perform crucial roles to better serve marginalized and vulnerable student populations in higher education.

Confidentiality:
Your participation in this research is confidential. That is, the information gathered for this project will not be published or presented in a way that would allow anyone to identify you. Information gathered for this project will be password protected or stored in a locked file cabinet and only the research team will have access to the data.

- The University of Massachusetts Boston Institutional Review Board (IRB) that oversees human research and its representatives may inspect and copy your information.
- Your information collected as part of this research will not be used or shared for future research studies, even if all of your identifiers are removed.

Audio and Video Recording of Interviews:
This study involves the audio and video recording of your interviews with the researcher. Upon the completion of each interview, the video recording will be erased. Neither your name nor any other identifying information will be associated with the audio recordings or the transcripts. Only the researcher will be able to listen to the audio recordings. The audio recordings will be transcribed by the researcher and erased once the transcriptions are checked for accuracy. Transcripts of your interviews may be reproduced in whole or in part for use in presentations or written products that result from this study. Neither your name nor any other identifying information (such as your voice) will be used in presentations or in written products resulting from the study.

Immediately following the interviews, you will be given the opportunity to have the recording erased if you wish to withdraw your consent to recording or participation in this study.

By checking the box in front of each item below, you are consenting to participate in that specific procedure for the recordings:

- having your interviews recorded;
- to having the recordings transcribed;
use of the written transcripts in presentations and written products.

**Voluntary Participation:**
The decision whether or not to take part in this research study is voluntary. If you do decide to take part in this study, you may end your participation at any time without consequence. If you wish to end your participation, you should tell me directly in person or via email. Whatever you decide will in no way cause any problem or any form of penalty/consequence, and withdrawing yourself will mean that your data will not be used, unless further discussed.

**Questions:**
You have the right to ask questions about this research before you agree to be in this study and at any time during the study. If you have further questions about this research or if you have a research-related problem, you can reach Lorena Fuentes (Lorena.Fuentes-Lopez@umb.edu).

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact a representative of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, which oversees research involving human participants. The Institutional Review Board may be reached by telephone or e-mail at (617) 287-5374 or at human.subjects@umb.edu.

By verbally agreeing to participate, you will agree to participate in the research. Please keep a copy of this form for your records or if you need to contact me.

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**INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR FACULTY**
University of Massachusetts Boston
Department of Higher Education
100 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, MA 02125-3393

**Consent Form for Dissertation Research Study:**
The Enactment of Social Justice Missions in Higher Education and Student Affairs (HESA) Programs

**Introduction and Contact Information:**
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**Description of the Project:**
The purpose of the research project is to conduct a multicase study through qualitative design and investigate how HESA programs realize their social justice mission statements through the curriculum, pedagogy, and other program practices.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to engage in an interview of approximately 90 minutes that focuses on the realization of your program’s social justice mission and your experiences in the program as a faculty member.

**Risks or Discomforts:**
There are minimal risks involved in participating in this study. You may experience some discomfort when responding to some of the interview questions since the topics focus on various aspects of your experiences. During the interviews, you can skip any questions or end at any time. Another risk of participation is a loss of confidentiality. I will do everything I can to protect your information.

You may speak with Lorena Fuentes or Dr. Katalin Szelényi to discuss any distress or other issues related to study participation. If you wish to discuss concerns with university counseling services, you are encouraged to contact the counseling center at your university.

**Benefits:**
There is no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. However, this study will be beneficial to not only HESA programs, but also other graduate programs that have commitments to social justice, as it will hopefully shed light in understanding how faculty’s and students’ perspectives of justice can inform and advance social justice missions at the program and institutional levels. Additionally, the narratives of HESA faculty and students have the potential to help universities understand the important work that social-justice focused HESA programs do to prepare HESA professionals who perform crucial roles to better serve marginalized and vulnerable student populations in higher education.

**Confidentiality:**
Your participation in this research is confidential. That is, the information gathered for this project will not be published or presented in a way that would allow anyone to identify you. Information gathered for this project will be password protected or stored in a locked file cabinet and only the research team will have access to the data.

- The University of Massachusetts Boston Institutional Review Board (IRB) that oversees human research and its representatives may inspect and copy your information.
- Your information collected as part of this research will not be used or shared for future research studies, even if all of your identifiers are removed.

**Audio and Video Recording of Interviews:**
This study involves the audio and video recording of your interviews with the researcher. Upon the completion of each interview, the video recording will be erased. Neither your name nor
any other identifying information will be associated with the audio recordings or the transcripts. Only the researcher will be able to listen to the audio recordings. The audio recordings will be transcribed by the researcher and erased once the transcriptions are checked for accuracy. Transcripts of your interviews may be reproduced in whole or in part for use in presentations or written products that result from this study. Neither your name nor any other identifying information (such as your voice) will be used in presentations or in written products resulting from the study.

Immediately following the interviews, you will be given the opportunity to have the recording erased if you wish to withdraw your consent to recording or participation in this study.

By checking the box in front of each item below, you are consenting to participate in that specific procedure for the recordings:

- having your interviews recorded;
- to having the recordings transcribed;
- use of the written transcripts in presentations and written products.

**Voluntary Participation:**
The decision whether or not to take part in this research study is voluntary. If you do decide to take part in this study, you may end your participation at any time without consequence. If you wish to end your participation, you should tell me directly in person or via email. Whatever you decide will in no way cause any problem or any form of penalty/consequence, and withdrawing yourself will mean that your data will not be used, unless further discussed.

**Questions:**
You have the right to ask questions about this research before you agree to be in this study and at any time during the study. If you have further questions about this research or if you have a research-related problem, you can reach Lorena Fuentes (Lorena.Fuentes-Lopez@umb.edu)

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact a representative of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, which oversees research involving human participants. The Institutional Review Board may be reached by telephone or e-mail at (617) 287-5374 or at human.subjects@umb.edu.

**By verbally agreeing to participate, you will be agreeing to participate in the research. Please keep a copy of this form for your records or if you need to contact me.**
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