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## The impact of communication principles on organizational diversity

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THE IMPACT OF COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES  
ON ORGANIZATIONAL DIVERSITY

Thesis

Submitted to

The School of Communication of the  
University of Dayton

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

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By

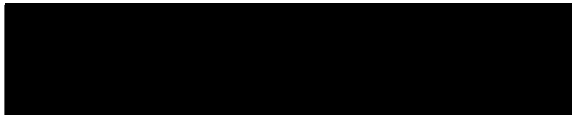
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## ABSTRACT

### THE IMPACT OF COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES ON ORGANIZATIONAL DIVERSITY

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Though diversity has been widely researched over the past twenty years, little research has been done to study the impact of communication principles and theory on organizational diversity. In the university setting, there is a debate as to whether diversity is an educational benefit to students. University administrators are often unaware of the ineffectiveness of their diversity initiatives, or unsure what elements need to be changed in order to make these initiatives successful. A review of various organizational communication theories on creation of messages and the organizational culture suggest that subcultures within the audience of an organization obtain and interpret information in different ways.

By surveying over 200 students and conducting qualitative interviews with 10 student leaders, this study sought to examine the following research questions: 1. Are the diversity efforts of the university being communicated to the entire student body? 2. Are there differences in how different groups of students obtain and interpret diversity information? 3. Do students believe that interaction

with diverse students provides educational benefit? Findings reveal that students within a university receive varying levels of communication about diversity and race relations according to race and years attended at the university. Student leader interviews suggest that students are divided by race when interpreting diversity messages as well. Students responded that interaction with students of diverse backgrounds does provide an educational benefit to university members. Metaphors and decisional premises of the interview responses revealed a university environment in which groups within the university are highly segmented and opposed.

These findings identify the impact of communication principles, and the importance of understanding and including communication theory into organizational diversity initiatives. By including communication theory into the study of diversity, organizational leaders will be able to create more effective messages, use proper media when attempting to reach certain audiences, and understand how the language used within the organization impacts the way diversity is viewed. This understanding can increase the effectiveness of the organization as a whole. This study outlines implications for further research in the areas of mass, organizational, group and interpersonal communication.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The word 'diversity' is used in a variety of ways in today's culture. Often times, controversy over diversity stems from a disagreement over the vocabulary or the "vagueness of the term" (Hon & Brunner, 2000) rather than from conceptual disagreement itself. Hon and Brunner (2000) go on to explain,

Diversity has become a catchall phrase for a complex set of issues having to do with gender, racial, and other forms of discrimination, multi-culturalism; and the social and legal responsibility the business community has to manage diversity proactively (p. 311).

One popular definition of diversity is to look at both objective (demographic) and subjective (cultural behavior, values) variables. In this way, diversity has been defined as "difference in ethnicity, race, gender, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, disability, veteran status, age, national origin, and cultural and person perspectives" (Bhawuk & Triandis, 1996).

A broader perspective of diversity uncovers four dimensions for definition. This perspective was given by Levine (1991), whose study of diversity was conducted at colleges and universities. His first component is representation: raising the number of members of underrepresented groups to reflect the

numbers in society. The second dimension is support: sustaining the new members through compensatory education, diversity counseling and special programs. The third dimension, integration, focuses on making new members part of the organizational culture. The final dimension, multiculturalism, emphasizes creating a shared community without sacrificing the uniqueness of the individual members.

From Levine's study alone, we can see the obvious implications of communication theory in diversity research. This study will use the term *diversity culture* to define the relationship of diversity and communication by expanding Levine's (1991) definition of the dimensions of diversity to include communication principles. These dimensions were chosen because Levine offers a thorough definition of diversity that includes race, culture, and interaction, which allows the most complete picture of all aspects of diversity. Also, because the Levine's (1991) study was conducted in universities and colleges, this definition is extremely useful as a theoretical perspective for this study.

When expanding Levine's (1991) original definition, communication principles can be included in each dimension. In representation, the organization must understand interpersonal communication in regard to recruiting diverse members, and sensitivity in training recruiters in order to create appropriate messages. For support, messages must be created for and received by the intended members in an effective manner. Integration includes the identification of the members with the organizational culture. Finally, multiculturalism will be impacted by the groups of members identified by the organization as 'diverse,' as

well as messages sent, received and interpreted by these 'diverse' members and the organizational members in general.

Even though communication is an important part of the dimensions of diversity, communication theory often plays an incidental role in diversity studies. Many studies call for more research in communication theory in the diversity realm (Arai, Wancu-Thibault, Shockley-Zalabat, 2001; Henze, 2005; Jones, Watson, Gardner, Gallois, 2004; Ziegahn, 2002). Studies that do focus on the impact of communication principles or theory on diversity have found interesting results. Henze's (2005) study found that school leaders use metaphor to construct and convey diversity concepts. Another study found support that discussion on diversity constructs the social reality of diversity in the organization (Castor, 2005). Riedlinger, Gallois, McKay and Pittam (2004) found that communication is the main disadvantage to diverse groups. Other researchers find vital need for inclusion of communication theory in diversity training (Arai et al., 2001). Jones et al. (2004) go as far to suggest that diversity be included in every study of organizational communication.

There is a strong need for further research into the relationship between communication theory and diversity theory. This study will examine this relationship in a context in which diversity has always been controversial—the university setting. Diversity has long been an important issue in education. According to Henze (2005), educational leaders are working to

Create environments where students and staff of diverse backgrounds feel physically and emotionally safe, and where differences are respected.

Many of these leaders are aware that social and economic inequality, segregation, racism, and other factors underlie many of the problems we see in schools today, including racial and ethnic conflict and the persistent achievement gap. The public discourse of education is replete with language that attempt to capture these goals. (pg. 243)

In this statement, we again see the need to understand the communication principles (language) in order to create successful diversity initiatives. This statement also hints at the large role diversity plays in education itself. Because many believe that education and equal opportunity will reverse the effects of racism, diversity in education would make this a realizable goal.

Many involved in diversity and education research disagree on the perceived benefit of diversity to the university student body. However, this study will show how these disagreements are not on content level as they appear, but on the literal level of vocabulary. The vagueness of the term 'diversity' has allowed many different negotiations of meaning to take place, causing nonsensical misunderstandings. Further study of communication theory in diversity should shed light on this issue as well.

This study will uncover different communication principles that affect the diversity culture of the university. It will show how these principles construct the diversity culture by analyzing the language of the students to reconstruct the diversity reality on campus and measure the assimilation of the students as organizational members into the culture. This study is important because it will provide an alternative to varied diversity theories by offering analysis,

measurement and suggestions from grounded communication theories. It will allow any organization the ability to harness the success of diversity initiatives in order to enrich the organization members, while improving the bottom line. Also, this study will answer the call of many who believe the area of diversity should be included with communication theory and provide further insight to this widely-ignored area.

### The History of Diversity

Diversity became a major issue in the 1990s. The issue of diversity was born when three significant trends each reached critical points at the same time:

1. The global market in which American corporations must do business became intensely competitive.
2. The makeup of the U.S. workforce began changing dramatically – becoming more diverse.
3. Individuals began to increasingly celebrate their differences and become less amenable to compromising what makes them unique. This inclination represents a marked departure from previous times when predispositions were to fit in (Thomas, 1996).

In order to address the first significant trend, one must understand the global market of industry. The element of diversity becomes a major issue, as described by the following statement:

The design-production-distribution processes of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will involve extreme diversity. For example, the design of a product may occur in Germany, financing might be obtained from Japan, execution of the plans might be directed

from the united States, the clerical work might be done in Bulgaria, the manufacturing work in China, and the distribution may include a universalist sales force. The interfaces among those activities will require highly diverse workplaces (Triandis, 1995).

In regards to the second trend one must admit, the face of the organization has changed. This is a result of many factors. The populations of developed countries have reached a plateau, while those of developing countries continue to increase. This demographic shift will most likely result in accelerated migration from developing to developed countries (Triandis, 1995).

Environmental degradation might also become a contributing factor to the diversifying of American organizations. The United Nations predicts that 20% of the world population will become environmental refugees by the year 2020 due to deterioration of physical environments, draught, etc. To illustrate, the number of environmental refugees in 2020 would be comparable to the entire world population in 1926 (Triandis, 1995)! This prediction suggests that diversity will be an important organizational issue for many years to come.

The third trend can be attributed to culture. Culture is becoming increasingly more important to many individuals, which indirectly affects the entire society. America has been slowly moving away from the metaphor of the "melting pot" where each race is slowing blending into one large mixed race and towards the symbolic imagery of a "mixed salad" where each different ingredient retains its own shape and flavor in order to enhance the final product. This is what Thomas refers to as the end of assimilation. "Traditionally, the American approach to

diversity has been assimilation. Newcomers are expected to adapt so that they fit into the organization--the burden of making the change falls to the new members (Thomas, 1996). Because this type of assimilation is easily fallible, more newcomers are rejecting the idea of assimilation altogether, and would rather celebrate their unique cultural differences.

### Acculturation

In order to understand assimilation, one must understand acculturation. Acculturation is the ways in which two cultures can relate with one another. Berry has uncovered four ways in which cultures relate. Integration is where both groups maintain their cultures while maintaining contact with each other (Berry, 1980). This is also called additive multiculturalism (Triandis, 1995) where a person adds skills from interaction with the other culture as opposed to negative multiculturalism in which interaction with the other culture causes the person to lose skills or sense of identity.

Assimilation occurs when a group does not maintain its own culture but does maintain contact with the culture of the other group. Assimilation is the consequence of the melting pot ideology. Separation takes place when the group maintains its culture, but does not maintain contact with the other culture. Lastly, marginalization occurs when neither maintenance of culture, nor contact with the other culture is attempted or achieved. In the case of integration and assimilation, contact with the other culture does occur, and allows the possibility for each culture to adopt cultural features of the other. This adoption is called acculturation.



Thomas (1996) notes that America began to face "the end of assimilation" in the nineties, when people were increasingly maintaining their individual cultures. One possibility for this behavior might be ethnic affirmation. Ethnic affirmation results when a group does attempt contact with the other culture, but is rejected or punished for such attempts. This rejection causes some groups to become more extreme in maintaining the original culture than other groups who have not attempted to relate to the culture (Triandis et al., 1986).

During this time of change, organizations found a dire need to address these environmental trends in order to stay competitive and recruit and retain valuable employees. This need caused diversity issues to rise to the forefront of organizational awareness, making 'diversity' the buzzword of the nineties.

### Definitions of Diversity

After becoming a buzzword, diversity should have immediately become a concern for communication scholars. This negotiation of meaning is what begins to make the diversity situation so complex, as illustrated in the following,

Before long, the word begins to take on a symbolic meaning: It serves as a simple verbal code for the complex problem from which it originated.

And then you have a situation where every person in the country (or so it seems) is using this word to designate the more complex situation, but no one is really sure any longer what it actually means. The word itself—a simple building unit of the English language—has taken on surreal proportions (Thomas, 1996, p.4).

Because many who use the term 'diversity' have different understandings of the meaning, the issue becomes heated in mixed company. However, this isn't a simple clash of connotative meaning; this is misunderstanding at the denotative level. This is because the word 'diversity' has become a "semantic umbrella that encompasses an assortment of" variables including "affirmative action, multiculturalism, understanding differences, and a host of other well intentioned undertakings" (Thomas, 1996, p.5). It is easy to see the difficulties that can arise in conversation about diversity when one is using the word to mean 'affirmative action' while another substitutes the term to represent 'understanding differences.' "Unfortunately, because little time has been devoted to understanding diversity per se, the ongoing discussions have positioned diversity as akin to affirmative action and have caused a substantial amount of confusion" (Thomas, 1995, p.245).

Some believe that diversity by nature should be a broadly defined term because of all that it includes; "difference in age, race, gender, physical ability, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic class, education, region of origin, language...life experience, position in family, personality, job function, rank," etc. (Griggs, 1994, p.6). A major step in this diversity-communication union would be to create working definitions for each disputed term in order to differentiate diversity from affirmative action from culture and so on. However the term is used, it seems as though all agree that all agree that diversity is at its most basic level referring to demographic variation in a given population.

### In the University Setting

In the university setting, diversity is an issue that has been widely disputed. This can be traced back to the landmark court decision that divided the camp. The U.S. Supreme Court's ruling on *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* in 1978 has become the cornerstone of affirmative action and has had an extreme impact on university admissions policies (Chang, 2005). The U.S. Supreme Court was divided on the issue, and Justice Powell cast the deciding vote. His reasoning for his decision has since become known as the 'diversity rationale' (Chang, Chang, Ledesma, 2005). This case has defined the boundaries of race-based admissions, and it was ruled that race-conscious admissions serve a compelling educational interest (Chang, 2005).

More recently, the U.S. Supreme court has narrowed those boundaries after trying cases concerning race-based admissions in both undergraduate (*Gratz v. Bollinger*) and graduate (*Grutter v. Bollinger*) levels. The Court rejected mechanical scoring systems that assign points for race, but also found that the university's interest in diversity compelling enough to justify the use of race as a benefit in admissions decisions (Chang et al., 2005).

As a result of these rulings, many researchers have sought to discredit the diversity rationale, by publishing results of studies that fail to support the idea that diversity is beneficial to the university student body (Rothman, Lipset & Nevitte, 2002). These failures also result from a disagreement on what diversity is and how it is achieved. These studies found that as admission diversity increased

satisfaction with education decreased. However, this type of study would define diversity in a way similar to Bhawuk and Triandis (1996), rather than Levine (1991). Although Levine's (1991) studies of universities concluded that demographic difference is only half of the way diversity should be defined, these are the only differences analyzed in a study of admission diversity. Levine's (1991) definition includes the elements of interaction and multiculturalism as well—elements many believe determine the success of any diversity initiative.

Both sides seem to agree that increasing the amount of diverse students at a university does not lead to automatic benefit to the student body. However, there isn't notable agreement on exactly what processes *do* increase the benefit. Those who believe in the diversity rationale admit that it "provides no guidance for campuses on assembling the appropriate means to create environments conducive to realization of the benefits of diversity or on employing the methods necessary to facilitate the educational process to achieve those benefits" (Chang et al., 2005, p.13). Those who disagree claim that "any educational consequences of campus racial diversity most likely depend on how such diversity is achieved" (Wood & Sherman, 2001, p.72). It is possible that the answers lie in further diversity research in the area of communication theory.

### Communication Theory and the Study of Diversity

Though the study of diversity has much to contribute to many different communication contexts, surprisingly little research has been conducted in this area. Some obvious areas in which diversity could enrich communication theory

include interpersonal, small group and cultural/intercultural communication (Arai et al., 2001). In the interpersonal context, diversity research can further the understanding of code and culture (Carver & Livers, 2002; Wierzbicka, 2004). In group communication it is important to understand how groups construct and negotiate their own reality of diversity through different communicative avenues including Social Identity Theory (Castor, 2005). It is also important to understand how communication stands to disadvantage diverse groups (Riedlinger et al., 2001).

The study of communication and diversity is perhaps most important in the organizational communication context. Because of the increasingly global shift in technology and trade, America's industry depends on being current with these trends. "Whereas the strength of many of the nation's competitors is their homogeneity it is America's diversity that represents both its biggest crisis and its greatest opportunity" (Louw, 1994, p.15). The ability of the American organization to adapt to a global market will assure its survival. Therefore, organizational communication theory must also adapt to include studies of diversity to remain current and useful to the researchers that use theory as tools for organizational progress. Communication is often viewed as a basic management tool; however, it is one of the most complex elements of managing diversity (Arai et al., 2001). Communication is important at the levels of language, style and process.

One important issue to consider when examining organizational communication is the element of change. Change is extremely important

because diversity in organizations is the product of the changing workforce. How an organization handles change is ultimately how the organization handles diversity. There are three important ways change management has been studied in the organization: the behaviorist, the cognitivist and the discursivist (Tsoukas, 2005).

The behaviorist view is the oldest of the three, and is still a part of managerialist studies in organizational change. The behaviorist view has four basic tenants:

1. Change is episodic and occurs in successive states.
2. There is no internal relationship between the change agent and the object undergoing change.
3. The object undergoing change has a structure and when known can be altered.
4. The structure of the object can be objectively defined.

The behaviorist sees organizations as being populated by individuals, structures, systems and processes, and believes these can be deliberately altered.

The cognitivist view became popular in the 1980s and early 1990s—right around the time diversity was becoming an issue of importance. This view believes the study of behavior is not sufficient when examining organizational change. The cognitivist view realizes that people may behave differently over time, and seeks to understand why. Behavior cannot be understood until the mental processes underlying that behavior are examined. Meaning becomes important and is understood as the cognitive maps of the individuals. In the

cognitivist view, change is still considered episodic and influenced by objective knowledge of the inter-connected cognition of the individuals within the organization.

The discursivist view places meaning at the center of change. This perspective believes human behavior can only be understood by the underlying meanings as well—although meaning is not understood to be just in the mind or cognitive map. It is manifested in the actions of the organizational members (p.98). Organizational change is not episodic—it is a process of constructing and sharing new meanings and interpretations where “combinations of speech acts help bring about change...” (Tsoukas, 2005, p.99).

### Communication Principles That Impact Diversity Culture

When an organization needs to implement, change, measure or adapt any element within its organizational culture, it should immediately turn to communication theory. Many theories already address elements within the organizational culture that get at the heart of what diversity researchers are longing to fix. In fact, communication principles are what create, develop, adapt, negotiate and manipulate the culture of an organization.

Similarly, these same principles can be employed to the culture of diversity of an organization. It is erroneous to believe that communication principles can have any direct impact or effect on diversity because, as we have uncovered, the most widely accepted definition of diversity applies to the actual

demographic makeup of groups of people. Communication principles when used in an organization cannot realistically change the racial makeup (or gender, sexual orientation, ability, origin, etc) of any population. Though it is possible that some communication elements (such as rhetoric, persuasion, code, decision making, etc) may attract certain diverse people to an organization this is not terribly useful in a universal application, as some organizations are struggling with diversity concepts in areas where outside factors prevent or discourage inclusion at the attraction level. Therefore, there is more to be learned about which communication principles create and maintain the diversity culture of an organization. With this knowledge it is possible to aid the organization with the construction of the culture they wish to foster, and/or measure the acculturation of the members into this diversity culture.

This idea isn't far-fetched: communication has always been utilized to develop organizational culture. This is because organizations have groups of individuals which must be organized to achieve a common goal. Communication is "the central means by which individual activity is coordinated to devise, disseminate, and pursue organizational goals" (Jones et al., 2004, p.722).

It is also not too much to ask of communication theory that it adapt to include diversity culture. This is because organizations are constantly changing to adapt to various external pressures. "This state of continual change means that communication processes are also changing, both to create and to reflect these new structures, processes and relationships" (Jones et al., 2004, p.723).



Though diversity is an important addition to organizational communication theory-- "researchers should include diversity in every study of organizational communication, whether at the interpersonal, intergroup, or organizational level" (Jones et al., 2004, p.740) – communication theory is a vital and necessary addition to diversity research. Because diversity is considered to be in a developmental stage, it is important for diversity practitioners to better understand their field. Arai et al found that this area still needs vast improvement and stated, "Most diversity training emphasizes communication theory and practice without including important research, methodologies and practice from the communication discipline...the discipline has much to offer and members need to take more responsibility" (Arai et al., 2001, p.453).

Because diversity practices, training, initiatives, etc, are best housed in the organizational culture of communication theory, it is important to understand the ways in which organizational cultures are created and projected upon the organization. Next, we must understand which specific communication principles must be facilitated within the culture in order to impact diversity—or in other words, create a diversity culture.

### Organizational Culture

The notion of organizational culture has been defined as "the practices, values, metaphors, stories, vocabulary, ceremonials, rites, heroes, and legends that are held by a group of people" (Gibson & Papa, 2000, p.70). The organization must move to immerse its members into its culture through

identification. Burke (1950) originated the construct of identification as the most important element in the dialectic between segregation and congregation.

Cheney (1983) later extended the theory, based on the belief that identification of any sort is a necessary and basic process that is important to all individuals. He states that identifications are what aid us in making sense of experience, organizing our thoughts, achieving decisions, and in anchoring the self. Most importantly, identification allows people to persuade and be persuaded. He lists many reasons why the study of organizational identification is important, including understanding work attitudes and socialization. Cheney's (1991) work on managing multiple identities, he examines organizational rhetoric—how the organizations “speak” to and enlist the “voices” of individuals through persuasion. In order for this persuasion to be effective, the organizational members must identify with the culture of the organization.

Organizations induct members through the process of identification. The organization communicates its values, goals, and information in the form of decisional premises in hopes that the employee will complete the identification process by making decisions that are best for the organization based on the adoption of these premises (Schrodt, 2002). When dealing with multiple audiences within a single organizational culture (which is always the case with a diversely populated organization) the organization must identify which subgroups are within the general culture. The organization must then identify which interests the subgroups share. The joining of interests takes place primarily through the power of language. “The failure of such a merger is at the root of

racism, nationalism, sexism, and ethnocentrism" (Cheney, 1991, p.18). The risk of this failure makes identification of even higher importance to the organization.

In order to assist the process of identification, the organization must have a culture of which the members may become a part of. The concept of organizational culture has been widely studied, and has many definitions. Basically, organizational culture can be defined as what a group learns over a period of time, and such learning is simultaneously a cognitive, behavioral, and affective process (Shein, 1990).

Research has established a link between organizational culture and the various behaviors and experiences of the members. Six components have been identified as being central to any organization's culture: teamwork, climate-morale, information flow, involvement, supervision, and meetings (Schrodt, 2002). Researchers have studied the perception of the members of their own identification with the organization, and how that affects them and their decisions. Cheney's (1991) studies on member's ideas about identification found much similarity across employees. Employees found that their monthly meetings encouraging members to speak their mind and air their problems greatly increased their level of identification with the organization. It made them feel as though the company was empathetic to their feelings, and would give in to any requests that it had the ability to grant. Each employee in this study considered length of employment as an indicator of identification as well. Loyalty was viewed as being able to positively identify with the organization. Studies on these variables have gathered conflicting results: Barker and Tompkins (1994)

found that identification did in fact increase with years of employment, though a study by Bullis and Bach (1989) found these two variables to have an inverse relationship (Schrodt, 2002). Because of these conflicting results, it is possible to say that member perceptions of enculturation and identification with their organization are greatly based on the organization itself, and that each has unique elements that must be considered in order to reach a conclusion. This is why it is of great importance for the organization to invest in some measure of culture and identification of its members in order to work effectively in its environment.

To determine the culture of an organization is to say that the organization has a "symbolic reality" conceived as patterns of meanings and expectations. We must now focus on the communicative processes of creating, maintaining, and transforming organizational symbolic reality (Bantz, 1993). This definition of organizational communication suggests four things: that creating of meanings and expectations lie in the collective perception of the members, that meanings and expectations must be maintained in order to endure, meanings and expectations can be modified by the members, and that meanings and expectations can become either clear or confusing as they are disseminated among organizational members (Bantz, 1993). This suggests that all organizational communication needs to be cognitive of the meanings and expectations of the organization, its members and environment at the formation stage and beyond.

The organization forms and disseminates its culture through the use of a variety of communication principles. One theory that has found substantial support is the theory of unobtrusive control. Though this theory focuses on the control and power an organization has on its members, it is important here because it has identified specific communication principles that act as 'vehicles' for organizational communication. Using this theory, we can look at the contribution of other similar principles that also disseminate elements of culture to an organization.

### The Theory of Unobtrusive Control

The theory of unobtrusive control describes the subtle tactics by which organizations control their members (Kassing, 1997). Created by Philip Tompkins and George Cheney (1985), the theory does a very complete job in identifying the process by which an organization creates and employs control. The theory seeks to explain the effectiveness of concertive control by studying the rhetorical power of the enthymeme on decision making, and the importance of organizational identification with the organizational culture (Kassing, 1997).

Tompkins and Cheney (1985) felt that concertive control was the newest control mechanism because it stresses teamwork, coordination, flexibility, innovation, flat hierarchy and face-to-face interaction. In concertive control, members are not completely controlled by managers, machines, or rules; instead the members themselves become responsible for maintaining order in the organization. When concertive control is in effect, members of the organization

become immersed into the organizational culture- they have "acceptance and identification with an organization and/or group" (Gibson & Papa, 2000, p.71). Once they have this identification, group members can be depended upon to make decisions based on the interests and core values of the organization. (Tompkins & Cheney, 1985) "When concertive control works effectively, members share the belief in the organizational mission and share common assumptions regarding organizational reality, and they can be counted on to behave in the best interest of the organization" (Bullis, 1991, p.256). Thus, the members of the organization identify with and believe in the values of the organization and enforce them with the decisions they make. This makes concertive control the most unobtrusive of all types of control. This is of interest because diversity initiatives often rely on the active adoption of a diversity mission or plan in order to be successful.

To obtain this member/organization identification agreement, Tompkins and Cheney have identified a few important elements. The organization must effect the decisions of the members, and assimilate the members into the culture. This is done rhetorically through the use of the enthymeme, and the adoption of the organization's decisional premises in individual decision making.

The Enthymeme is a form of deductive reasoning originated by Aristotle. It is constructed of an observation, a generalization and an inference, yet most scholars agree that the enthymeme omits at least one of the three parts. The remaining part, in turn, is supplied by the audience, or in this case, the organization members (Aden, 1994).

Enthymemes can be a powerful source of persuasion, as they suggest that there is no "gulf between reason and emotion, between argumentative and persuasive discourse, and between belief and action" (Fisher, 1964, p.202). In fact, Aden studies the impact of the enthymeme in political campaigns, and how only an observation was needed in David Duke's gubernatorial campaign to guide audiences to specific conclusions. He suggests by Duke's observation alone that "government actions, especially welfare and affirmative action, hurt whites economically and socially," led first to the generalization that "minorities are the cause, and recipients, of these government programs," and secondly to the inference that "minorities are the cause of the social and economic problems suffered by whites." In this example, the audience supplied both the generalization and the inference. Aden's study identifies other examples of enthymemes working in similar political cases as well (Aden, 1994).

Once a person or an organization has effectively converted personal interests into an enthymematic premise, it can be used as a powerful persuasive tool. If effective premises are working correctly, members of an organization will make their "own" decisions, but the decision will be based on the supplied premises, therefore limiting the possible outcomes of their decisions. This way, members do not feel as though the organization has control over the "whole decision" (Tompkins & Cheney, 1985). The enthymeme is extremely important when studying diversity issues, because of its similarity to the behavior of stereotyping—supplying a conclusion based on a generalization and an inference. Most (if not all) scholars of diversity training at some point discuss the

importance of the stereotype and how to overcome it (Fernandez, 1998; Griggs & Louw, 1995; Thomas, 1996; Triandis, 1995).

The organization must adapt the premises as the environment of the organization changes. Unanticipated changes in the environment or the members create a state of antithesis in which the organization experiences risk, making the old premises inadequate. New premises must be established to create a new synthesis in order to reduce risk to the organization (Hall, 1996). In the organizational setting, there are risks associated with diversity. As the environment changes, organizations that fail to adapt will be seen as outdated, narrow-minded, or worse—racist. These risks can include member unrest within the organization, and/or negative impact to the bottom line.

Some research has focused on why members would accept the premises of an organization on their own. Barnard (1968) has identified three reasons why this might occur. First, the member must sacrifice a degree of autonomy when they participate in organizational life. Second, the acceptance of decisional premises should be in exchange for incentives from the organization. This is because members who feel that they are compensated by the organization will usually continue to use organizational premises as guides for making work-related choices (Barnard, 1968). Third, is the perception of legitimate power. Authority is a perception of the receiver. Barnard's studies of receivers of directives found that if the receiver accepted the directive (or premise) then the source had perceived authority. This perception of authority is easier when legitimate power is obviously delegated, as in the case of an employee and a



supervisor. Still, it is even more important that the member making the decision feels comfortable with the interests of the organization. Participants may feel the need to 'believe in' the organization in order to work on its behalf (Bullis & Tompkins, 1989). Therefore, in order for the member to adopt the organizations' premises, they must identify with the culture of the organization itself.

### Metaphor

Other communication principles have similar effects on organizational culture. The metaphor is a linguistic device that can construct cultural aspects similar to the enthymeme. "Cognitive theorists now argue vigorously for metaphor's central role in the construction of the social order" (Santa Ana, 2002, p.21). It is this ability to construct that is important for the creation of the diversity culture. Henze's (2005) study on metaphor examines how school leaders "use metaphors that convey as well as construct concepts of diversity, intergroup relations and equity" (pg.243). Henze (2005) examines the metaphors used by school administrators to reveal how these leaders actually construct the notions of diversity throughout the school. Henze (2005) believes that by analyzing these diversity constructions, school administrators can understand how to use language to perpetuate or foster the diversity culture.

Metaphor is similar to the enthymeme, because the metaphor can become a frame in which organizational members use with which to view their surroundings. Metaphor curbs people's view of the world and may be used to reconceptualize world views (Santa Ana, 2002). Like the enthymeme, once an

organization has selected and initiated its metaphor (as a world view), organizational members who adopt this view will be more likely to identify with the organizational culture.

Changing the metaphor of an organization is very effective in changing its culture. Pepperdine University focused on harnessing the generative power of metaphor to transform its campus diversity approach (Smith, 2003). The university organization found the new metaphor to cause a shift from viewing diversity as a 'set of activities' to 'seeing diversity as an organizational learning tool' (Smith, 2003). The university reports that this shift improved the cultural climate in a variety of ways.

Other researchers also see the potential of the metaphor in diversity culture of schools and organizations. Henze (2005) also believes that language and discursive study for educational leaders could "encourage new leaders to use language more consciously in support of the desired goals of equity and social justice in education" (p.265). She also believes that critical language awareness for these leaders could, "provoke a number of positive changes, including awareness of how language reflects ideologies, how bias is structured into our language, and how changes that eliminate bias can be consciously initiated by those in leadership roles." (Henze, 2005, p.265) Because metaphor is such a powerful discursive tool, it could be effectively used for the creation and maintenance of the diversity culture.

Just as decision making premises are important in the formation of a culture, there are other communication principles that have great impact on

decision making processes. The process of sensemaking, along with many varied discursive elements all impact organizational decisions that are used to construct the diversity culture.

### Sensemaking

When attempting to make sense of diversity, an organization must first understand Weick's concept of requisite variety. An organization is efficient when it has enough internal diversity to capitalize upon the external diversity within the environment (Weick, 1979). Weick (1979) states, "It's because of requisite variety that organizations have to be preoccupied with keeping sufficient diversity inside the organizations to sense accurately the variety present in ecological changes outside it" (p. 188). Diversity is an equivocal issue, and "organizational processes that are applied to equivocal inputs must themselves be equivocal" (p. 189). He later puts this in simpler terms: "complicate yourself if you want to understand complicated environments" (Weick, 1995, p.56).

### Assembly Rules & Cycles Assembled

When making decisions, organizational members follow what Weick identifies as assembly rules. These rules are the recipes that members use when making decisions or engaging in discourse. "Assembly rules can be viewed as procedures, instructions, or guides that members use to mobilize several double interacts into larger processes that are directed at inputs" (Weick, 1979, p.113). The assembly rules an individual member of an organization chooses to use can be provided from the organizational culture. Weick states

that, "the content of these recipes and the degree to which they have the force of regulations vary among organizations" (pg. 113). Therefore, the organization can narrow the selection and effectiveness of rules through its culture.

Dominelli (1989) has identified five strategies organizations use to avoid addressing racism. By nature, these five strategies can provide as examples of possible assembly rules provided by organizations that wish to avoid issues of race and diversity. The strategies of denial, color-blindness, patronizing, decontextualization, and avoidance can become absorbed into the organization's diversity culture. For example, an acculturated member of an organization that commonly practices denial would be likely to assemble cycles of discussion that say, "That doesn't happen here," or "We don't have any race problems in this organization." These people would be less likely to speak to those who believe there are race problems, and might automatically disregard information that points to such a problem. It is important for an organization to understand the assembly rules of its own culture when addressing diversity issues.

The assembly rules of the organization will directly impact the cycles of discourse that are assembled. These cycles can become vehicles of change or shackles of repetition. This is because racism and diversity issues can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviors of an organization (Miller, 2002). Tamasese and Waldegrave (1993) identified three types of member responses when rules such as Dominelli's strategies are being enacted in an organization. They identified that members may feel paralyzed and do nothing, which can be the result having so many assembly rules that no talk is possible

(as assembly rules increase, cycles assembled decrease). Members may become individualized, in which case they become paragons of equality. These members assemble cycles in order to take personal responsibility for change in their organization. Members might also become patronizing, making themselves the spokesperson for their own culture or gender (p. 32). Instead of looking at double-interacts as the source of problems for a diversity culture, organizations should see these as symptoms of unhealthy assembly rules that are in fact created by the culture. Changing these assembly rules will ultimately impact the cycles assembled, and can help the organization perpetuate a healthy diversity culture.

### Discursive Elements

Because cycles assembled refer to the actual discussions and conversations that take place within an organization, it is important to understand the many different discursive elements that effect diversity culture. For example, word choice has an extreme effect on the creation of policy and decision making. Not only is word disputing very common in policy discussion, it is an effective strategy for managing conflict (Tracy & Ashcraft, 2001). Choosing the correct word in expression is important for many reasons. In his essay on interpretation in the human sciences, Charles Taylor discussed the importance of maintaining a distinction between meaning and expression. He believed that,

A set of words can never be more than a positioned and contestable attempt to capture the meaning of a text or event. At the same time, although situated meanings are always beyond particular words, they can

be arrived at only through particular words. Words, then, stand in a complex relationship to policies and their meanings (pg. 311).

Tracy and Ashcraft (2001) followed a school board's six-month discussion of their diversity strategic plans. They found that the group would use frameworks of word disputes in order to move towards agreement. For example, Tracy and Ashcraft observed the frame of wordsmithing. Wordsmithing refers to the belief "that a word or phrase can be found that will capture the degree and shade of agreement on an issue over which people have differences" (p. 305). The group would constantly change and shade different words in the policy in order to reach agreement.

In order to improve the diversity culture, the organization should be trained to recognize the distinctions between expressions and meanings, and the shades of meaning in a single word. According to Arai et al. (2001), "Without awareness of nuances in language and differences in style, the potential for garbled communication is enormous when interacting with others" (p.450). This is obviously increased when working in a diverse environment, as members should have, "knowledge of words and expressions that are appropriate and inappropriate in communicating with diverse groups—and develop an awareness of stylistic elements of communication" (p.450).

Many researchers have studied various discursive elements that impact diversity culture in general. Tompkins and Cheney (1985) note the importance of accounts in decision making. Arai et al. (2001) examine communication style including, "modes of interaction, reference points, authority bases, degree of self-

disclosure, modes of expression, methods of support, methods of disagreement, vocal characteristics, methods of assertion, physical proximity, and reliance on protocol" (p.450) Narrative is also an important discursive element with the ability to construct a culture (and thus a diversity culture) in an organization (Carver & Livers, 2002; Castor, 2005; Furlong & Randall, 2005; Jones, 1973). The stories and legends organizational members tell often speak directly to the culture of the organization. Narratives have shown to be promising cultural indicators for researchers.

#### Diversity in the University Organization

"Diversity now touches nearly every aspect of campus life" (Chang, 2005, p.6). The issue of reverse discrimination in the university setting is quite large, especially considering the ruling in Brown vs. Board of Education that eliminates the favor of race in education. Now students "found guilty of living the perfect storybook existence of middle-class virtue" (Parks, 2003, p.14), have fought back, claiming it is not fair to be denied admission into school when less-qualified minority students are accepted. Parks, a lawyer who successfully challenged affirmative action at the University of Georgia, goes on to suggest a new system independent of race be utilized in university admissions—one that awards bonus points based on factors such as overcoming poverty, or enrollment in under-performing high schools. He claims that though this system would be color-blind, it would most likely benefit minorities. However, it is difficult to believe this system would appease both sides, as white students would still stand the chance

to be passed over in favor of a "less-qualified" student, since the original problem is posed as one of academic merit. The mere suggestion of this alternative system reveals the hidden agenda of anyone who claims to be fighting against discrimination against qualified students, yet would suggest a system that would still also penalize those from the "middle-class story book existence."

So what is the answer? Does enrollment diversity improve education? Diversity advocates in the education field have often claimed that diversity can improve education and are met with controversy because of the implications of this on non minority students. These advocates would argue that, yes there is a benefit, and can support this claim. It is difficult to make the claim that enrollment diversity improves education because by its very definition, diversity alone can have no direct meaningful impact on education. To say this would be to claim for example that as more students of color are admitted, the average GPA of all students' increases. Studies of this type have often yielded no statistical significance.

Some studies of diversity have actually found that with increased diversity there was an increase in dissatisfaction, and perceptions of person discrimination and racial tension (Rothman et al., 2003). However, education scholars expect this trend, and welcome it as a necessary step towards progress. Saha (2003) states, "racial diversity can be considered a prerequisite to racial tension, particularly for white students, many of whom have never experienced racial discrimination because they have not been exposed to members of other racial groups to any significant degree" (pg.377).



Others relate this finding to stereotypes and racism. In regards to Rothman et al. (2003) suggests that students and administrators who view their college as being a prestigious and campus-centered institution, Barton (2003) posits the question, "Does the presence of larger proportions of black students symbolically violate the stereotype of the prestigious, campus-based, "historically-white" institution?" (Barton, 2003, p. 383) Barton goes on to extrapolate interesting information from the Rothman et al (2003) findings:

1. The higher proportion of black students, the fewer students the faculty and administration regarded as academically ready for college.
2. The more black students, the less both students and faculty rate students as "hardworking".
3. The more black students, the more white students report that they personally have been treated unfairly; however there is no such correlation among black students. He asks, "Does this sense of unfairness help explain white student dissatisfaction on more diverse campuses?" (p. 383)

It is not enrollment diversity that should be the focus of study on educational benefits, but instead the diversity culture of the university. The same communication principles a university employs to create a diversity culture will work towards increasing educational benefit over time. This is because communication is the key. Examine the following statement:

Those who posit that diversity is beneficial to the educational process do not naively believe that the mere presence on campus of students from

different ethnographic backgrounds will lead to better educational outcomes for all. The benefit of diversity are thought to arise from interracial interaction, dialogue, sometimes even conflict, all of which, if they occur in a setting that promotes mutual respect, can lead to true integration and improved cross-cultural understanding. (Saha, 2003, p.374)

In this quote we see that communication principles (interaction, dialogue) impact the diversity culture. However, if the culture promotes respect, these communication principles will facilitate *integration* that will allow even conflict to progress towards educational benefits. Without communication, diversity is *not* a benefit to university education. Without carefully executed communication, the culture for diversity wouldn't exist. Still, some level of structural diversity is needed to provide the opportunity for positive effects in the first place. One cannot attend to one element while neglecting the other. Research shows that increasing campus diversity without attending to the cultural climate can cause problems for students of all races (Summers, Svinicki, Gorin, Sullivan, 2002).

Integration must occur on the individual level, but is also important at the group level. Findings show that communication and interaction between organized groups of students is very low (Rouse & Howard, 1997). Because student groups and programs are very segmented, a competitive environment is created where similarities among students are de-emphasized while differences are exaggerated.

Those who might still believe that diversity's benefit to education or intergroup relations is a 'myth' (Parks, 2003) there is quite a bit of evidence to support the contrary. In fact, when making his decision, Justice Powell found a connection between diversity and public issues, and believed that in order for students to be successful in fulfilling their professional and civic responsibilities, their educational experience and interactions should reflect diversity (Chang, Chang, Ledesma, 2005). Powell believed that a diverse student body broadens the range of viewpoints collectively held by students and allows the university to provide an atmosphere that is "conducive to speculation, experiment and creation – so essential to the quality of higher education." He believed this type of atmosphere would enhance the training of the student body and better equip the institution's graduates (Chang, 2005).

The National Center on Post Secondary Teaching, Learning and Assessment echo this belief with the following results (Pascarella, 2001):

- There is a clearly established link between diversity of an institution and the likelihood of engaging in diversity experiences (this expresses the positive aspect of enrollment diversity)
- A number of different diversity experiences appear to positively influence growth in critical thinking during college:
  - 1) Exposure to challenging people, ideas and perspectives
  - 2) Serious discussion with students with opposing political opinions (white women in four-year institutions only)

3) Racially-oriented diversity experiences are particularly important for white students

4) Attending a racial or cultural awareness workshop (white men and women only)

- Treating all students as a monolithic group masks important differences in impact and experience

This study also found that the first year in college is extremely important to cognitive growth and that diversity experiences at the beginning of college may have a positive effect throughout the entire college experience. Students can even reap these positive effects from generic classroom exposure and interaction with diverse students (Chang, Astin, & Kim, 2004).

Long-term positive effects beyond college have also been found. One study on students who participated in the program on *Intergroup Relations, Conflict and Community (IGRCC)*, a dialogue group of diverse members, found the following:

Students describe a deep and lasting impact that the program had on their personal and professional lives, their relationships with others, and their commitments to social justice. They describe developing awareness and more complex understandings of their own and others' multiple identities and their roles as individuals and group members in systems of oppression. They describe learning to value the role of conflict, critical compassion, and empathy in building communities within and across difference. Research also suggests that they are using the

communication, conflict and facilitation skills they learned in the program to translate their learning into action in a variety of settings (Scalera, 2001).

These findings illuminate the positive benefit diversity can provide the university education, and the role of communication in this benefit. Practitioners of diversity and educational leaders understand how important diversity culture is to the student body. This is why more research needs to uncover the communication-diversity relationship in order to increase this benefit.

Universities are missing the possibilities communication theory has to offer them in dealing with this equivocal data. Chang (2000) believes that though almost all campuses are sincerely interested in addressing changes associated with shifts in cultural composition, they frequently pursue this endeavor with uncharacteristic naiveté. Understanding the communication principles that impact diversity would give educational administrators a powerful tool with which to build their diversity cultures.

Many studies have documented measurable benefits of diversity and education in the following areas:

- Greater cognitive development (Astin, 1993; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado & Gurin, 2002; Hurtado, 2001)
- Positive academic self-concept (Chang, 1999; Gurin et al, 2002)
- Increased graduation rates (Bowen & Bok, 1998; Chang, 1999)
- Increased cultural awareness and understanding (Bowen & Bok, 1998; Chang, 1999)

- Increased levels of civic interest (Gurin, 2002; Hurtado, 2001)
- College satisfaction (Astin, 1993; Chang, 1999)

However, these benefits are associated with higher levels of cross-racial interaction, supporting the belief that interaction is the most powerful educational resource in higher education (Chang, Astin, Kim, 2004).

Other studies have also examined the impact of race on education. It is a common finding in racial research of this type to uncover suggestions that majority and minority students perceive campus climate very differently. Minority students, especially African American students, report significantly lower comfort levels or sense of belonging than Caucasian students (Rouse & Howard, 1997). These findings probably explain the amount of effort spent towards African American student programs and student involvement. This effort has also been found to trouble majority students, as some feel as though the additional effort is unnecessary (Flowers, 2004).

By studying how communication impacts diversity in universities, school administrations could learn to improve their diversity initiatives in order to receive the full benefit they desire. Other organizations wishing to improve the effectiveness of their diversity programs will also benefit from this study. Though there are many aspects that could be examined to understand the impact of communication, this study seeks to examine the following research questions:

RQ1: Are the diversity efforts of the university being communicated to the entire student body?

RQ2: Are there differences in how different groups of students obtain and interpret diversity information?

RQ3: Do students believe that interaction with diverse students provides educational benefit?

These questions were selected as the focus of this study because they offer the university a starting point at which to understand the effectiveness of their diversity communication. By realizing the differences in how students obtain and interpret information, the administration can better understand the audience of their diversity messages. Some universities may choose to target select groups of students, while others attempt to reach all students; however, typical diversity studies fail to examine who actually receives the messages and how those messages are received. Determining if differences exist in how different students obtain information will ultimately impact which sources universities use to reach the student body. By reducing waste, universities can be more effective in reaching their diversity goals.

The third question seeks to examine the perceived benefit of diversity in the organization. This study will uncover whether students believe there is a benefit to be found in interaction with students from diverse backgrounds, and will also attempt to measure the benefit perceived by the presence of diverse students on campus (enrollment diversity). If it is found that the organizational members do not believe to benefit from diversity, the organization will have to deal with issues of recruitment (of members with similar values), and organizational assimilation and identification (to create messages that help the

members identify with the organization). Identifying whether students believe a benefit exists in presence and/or interaction will also help the creation of future diversity messages, programs and training.



## CHAPTER TWO

### METHODS

In order to attempt to address the research questions, this study used both quantitative and qualitative research techniques. Surveys were used to examine the general student body while intensive interviews were conducted with active, knowledgeable student leaders to provide further insight.

#### Quantitative Survey

A survey was conducted with a sample of 230 university students. Students selected were enrolled in a five-week communication module course in one of the following areas: group decision making, public speaking, and interviewing. These courses were selected because they are mandatory for graduation and enrollment thus varies across all possible majors available at the university. Students in these courses also have varied enrollment status (first-year, sophomore, junior, senior, transfer, non-traditional) which allows a broader sample. Each module course begins with a basic overview of communication theory, therefore, every student in the study had recent instruction in this area.

The sample was 42% male, and included 14% of respondents that considered themselves members of an ethnic minority. Although years of enrollment varied, 75% of the students sampled had attended their current university for two to three years. Of the students surveyed, 27% reported they were often involved in the school, and 12% reported being very involved, while only less than 6% of respondents reported no involvement. On knowledge of campus issues, almost 62% of respondents reported an average knowledge and 23% reported an above average knowledge in campus issues.

The survey was administered to students by their course instructors. Students were given a brief description of the purpose of the study, and allowed to complete the survey overnight and return it to their instructor the next class period. Students were asked to complete the survey by circling the answer that best fit their response. The survey instrument had fifteen questions, most measured with five-point Likert scales. The survey instrument is included in the appendix.

The first question, 'how long have you attended your current university,' gave respondents an option between '5 years or more,' '4 years,' '3 years,' '2 years,' and '1 year or less.' The second question, 'how would you rate your involvement in your university (for example, rate your involvement in areas such as student government, organizations and clubs, volunteerism, etc), was measured with the items, 'very involved,' 'often involved,' 'somewhat involved,' 'seldom involved,' and 'never involved.' The third question, 'how would you rate your knowledge of campus issues compared to most other students,' was

measured with the items, 'high,' 'above average,' 'average/moderate,' 'below average,' and 'low.'

The next section of the survey asked respondents to answer the following questions in regard to their use of particular resources of information utilizing the following scale: SA=strongly agree, A=agree, N=neither agree nor disagree, D=disagree, and SD=strongly disagree. The questions listed were as follows:

4. I get information about race relations from the campus newspaper.
5. I get information about race relations from university email alerts.
6. I get information about race relations from interaction with other students.
7. I get information about diversity events being held on campus from the campus newspaper.
8. I get information about diversity events being held on campus from university email alerts.
9. I get information about diversity events being held on campus from interaction with other students.

Two questions were asked to measure student perceptions of how diversity benefits the college education, also measured using the same scale listed above:

10. I believe the presence of people of diverse backgrounds on this campus can enrich my educational experience.
11. I believe interaction with people of diverse backgrounds on this campus can enrich my educational experience.

Three questions were asked to measure student knowledge on university diversity initiatives and were measured using the same scale:

12. I believe my school promotes diversity.

13. I am familiar with my university's general position on diversity.

14. I am familiar with my university's diversity mission statement.

The final two questions attempted to measure important demographic information of respondents. Question 15 asked, 'I consider myself a member of an ethnic minority group,' measured on a true or false scale. Question 16 asked, 'my gender is,' and had possible responses of male and female. These demographic questions were included at the end of the survey, due to their sensitive nature and in order to increase the likelihood respondents would complete the entire survey. A complete copy of the survey instrument may be seen in Appendix A.

### Qualitative Interviews

In order to get specific information, 10 student leaders were interviewed. Student leader was defined as an undergraduate or graduate student who spends a significant amount of time involved in student organizations, student government or volunteerism, and has a firm understanding of important campus issues. Snowball sampling was used where interviewees were recommended by other student leaders or faculty of the university (Broom & Dozier, 1990).

Though snowball sampling did not allow a representative sample of the larger population, this technique was most appropriate in order to find

respondents who best fit the previous definition of student leader. Of the students interviewed, four were non-minority students, four were African American, and two were of mixed race. Time committed to campus involvement ranged from 4 hours to 48 hours a week. Students interviewed were also involved in a range of activities including Residence life, Greek fraternities and sororities (both traditional and historically African American), student government, black student union organizations, Bible study, mentor programs, university athletics (both club and varsity), and volunteer organizations including Big Brothers/Big Sisters and Habitat for Humanity. All respondents believed that their student involvement required them to be aware of a variety of campus issues, including financial/economic, racial, hazing, sexual assault and diversity.

The majority of the interviews were done face to face, however two interviews were conducted over the phone. All interviews were taped, and the tapes were identified with a number. Interviewees were told the purpose of the study, how they were selected for participation, and that their responses would be kept confidential. The average interview length was approximately thirty minutes, although a few interviews spurred conversation that lasted well over an hour.

The interview guide (included in the appendix) included questions designed to determine the students' involvement on campus and knowledge of issues, perceptions of diversity on campus, and main sources of information. The first objective, involvement and knowledge of issues, was determined by asking respondents to list the activities they are involved in on campus, the

average time commitment of these activities per week, the years they have attended this university, the campus issues of which their student leadership requires them to be aware, and how often they are confronted with diversity issues.

The second objective, perceptions of diversity on campus, was measured by asking respondents about how their school promotes diversity, how the administration positively impacts race relations of the student body, what more if anything is needed, what is the administration's role and the students' role in promoting unity on campus, how members of their university describe or talk about diversity, how sincere they believe the university is in promoting diversity, and whether presence or interaction with students from diverse backgrounds add benefit to their university education.

The final objective in the interview, sources of information, was measured by asking students where they receive information about race relations and diversity events, what source they would use to find the university's position on diversity, and what differences, if any, exist in the current communication of diversity information to all students. A complete copy of the interview guide may be seen in Appendix B.

Although the same interview guide was utilized in each of the interviews, some questions were omitted or adapted due to the previous responses of the respondent, and/or the ability of the respondent to answer the question. Spontaneous probes were often used when little information was given by the

respondent, or in order to examine interesting information included by the respondent that was not addressed in the formal interview guide.

Interview data were transcribed and coded using the source domains identified by Henze (2005). Source domains identified included Fixing Things, Mind & Body, Spatial, Struggle, Seeing, Possessions, Community and Language. The domains of Health, Time, and Gap were created to identify additional metaphors used in the findings of this study. Every instance of the source domains was then counted in order to determine the frequency of each. Examples of each type of source domain are included in the Results section.

The adoption of organizational premises to facilitate individual decision making was measured by the identification of enthymematic structures used by interview respondents. In order to identify these structures, interview responses were examined for premises in the form of general statements, facts or conclusions that match the best interests of the university administration.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESULTS

The results of the survey created a picture of general student perspectives, while the interviews allowed further insight into important areas. Both quantitative and qualitative data are used to examine each of the three research questions.

**RQ1: Are the diversity efforts of the university being communicated to the entire student body?**

When examining the general student body survey, the means reported for how minorities and non minorities felt in terms of familiarity with their school position on diversity was similar. In response to question #13, "I am familiar with my university's general position on diversity," minorities reported a mean of 3.23 and non minorities a mean of 3.39. Although the means indicate that non minorities were more likely to report feeling familiar with their school position on diversity, this difference was not significant ( $t = -.94$ , sig. = .35) and non minorities overall reported little familiarity.

This is similar to the findings of the means reported by minorities (2.72) and non minorities (2.83) on familiarity with the school diversity mission statement. In response to question #14, "I am familiar with my university's



diversity mission statement," non minorities were more likely to report being familiar with the mission of the university, although this was not a significant difference ( $t = -.47$ ,  $\text{sig.} = .64$ ).

The only significant difference found was in the means reported from minorities and non minorities on their belief that their school promotes diversity. An independent-sample  $t$  test was used to determine this difference in response to question #12, "I believe my school promotes diversity." The test did not violate homogeneity of variance. Results from the test found  $t = -2.15$ ,  $df = 228$ ,  $\text{sig.} = .03$ , and the means for minorities = 3.29 and non minorities = 3.61. The means show that non minorities reported more often that they agree that their school did in fact promote diversity while minorities neither agreed nor disagreed with this topic. No significant differences were found in means reported for any of these variables based on gender, years attended school or rate of involvement. The means for the responses of these three questions are illustrated in Table 1.

Overall, the survey illustrates that respondents feel that they know very little about their school's position on diversity and its mission statement. Respondents' lack of conviction regarding their school's promotion of diversity suggests that either their school does not promote diversity, or the students are not aware of what the school is doing to promote diversity.

TABLE 1

## Awareness of School Position on Diversity

## Group Statistics

	Ethnic minority	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
I am familiar with my school position on diversity	Ethnic minority	35	3.2286	1.08697	.18373
	Non minority	195	3.3897	.90354	.06470
I am familiar with my school diversity mission statement	Ethnic minority	35	2.7429	1.01003	.17073
	Non minority	195	2.8256	.95267	.06822
I believe my school promotes diversity	Ethnic minority	35	3.2857	.78857	.13329
	Non minority	195	3.6051	.81416	.05830

The interview responses point to the latter of the two conclusions.

Interview respondents all assumed that they were familiar with the university position on diversity. All but one respondent believed the university was completely sincere in its diversity efforts, and could think of at least one way that the university promoted diversity. Respondents identified university efforts including, "Promoting several diverse clubs," "promotes diverse admissions," and stating that the university pays, "particular attention to hiring diverse RAs, (and promoting) black and Latino organizations through easy funding." The ability to recognize these varied efforts suggests that, though the school is trying to promote diversity, the student body is generally unaware of these efforts.

**RQ2: Are there differences in how different groups of students obtain and interpret diversity information?**

In order to determine if there are differences in the ways different groups of students obtain information, the survey responses for questions #4-8 looking at information on race relations and diversity events obtained from the campus newspaper, university email alerts, and interaction with other students were examined first based on race. In the case of information about diversity events being held on campus, both minority and non minority students obtain more information about diversity events being held on campus from email messages, more than from newspaper or even interaction with other students. Non minority students reported getting more information from newspaper than did minority

students, while minority students got more information from both email and interaction than non minorities by a small percentage as illustrated in Figure 1.

When asked about sources of information about race relations on campus, students reported interaction as their main resource. The numbers reported by both minority and non minority students were similar, with minorities reporting slightly less information gained from newspaper and slightly more from email as illustrated in Figure 2.

These slight differences were explained in greater detail during the interview sessions. Minority student leaders expressed a distrust of the student newspaper that led them to doubt this as a source for diversity or race relation information. When talking about the newspaper coverage regarding a recent hate-related incident one respondent said,

The newspaper article was completely pro-university. It didn't have any of the facts. I know the editor of the school newspaper and I spoke to him about it and he said that was the only information they could find available to print. Everything else was covered up.

Other minority student leaders that were interviewed often discussed email notices from the multicultural office on campus as their main resource of diversity events. When asked about the sources of information, respondents answered, "Diversity office email 100%--this is the only place I have ever seen a diversity event advertisement," and "Email, both from the cultural office and the student activities office." One non minority student leader actually admitted to ignoring emails, citing this as the reason she obtained information in other ways.

FIGURE 1

## Diversity Information

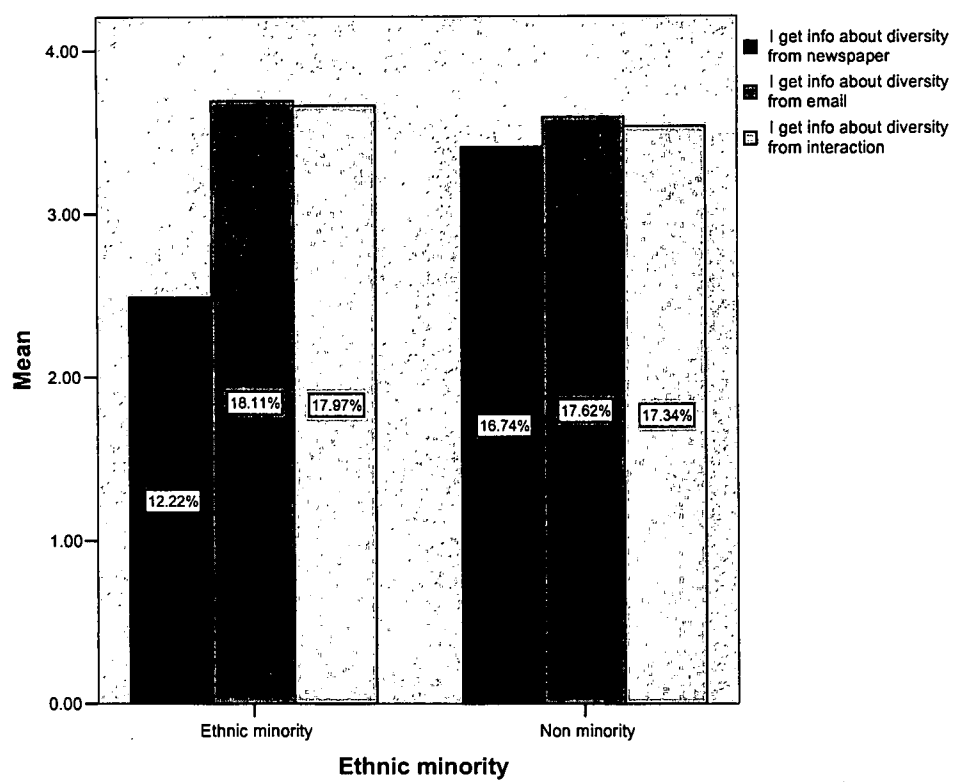
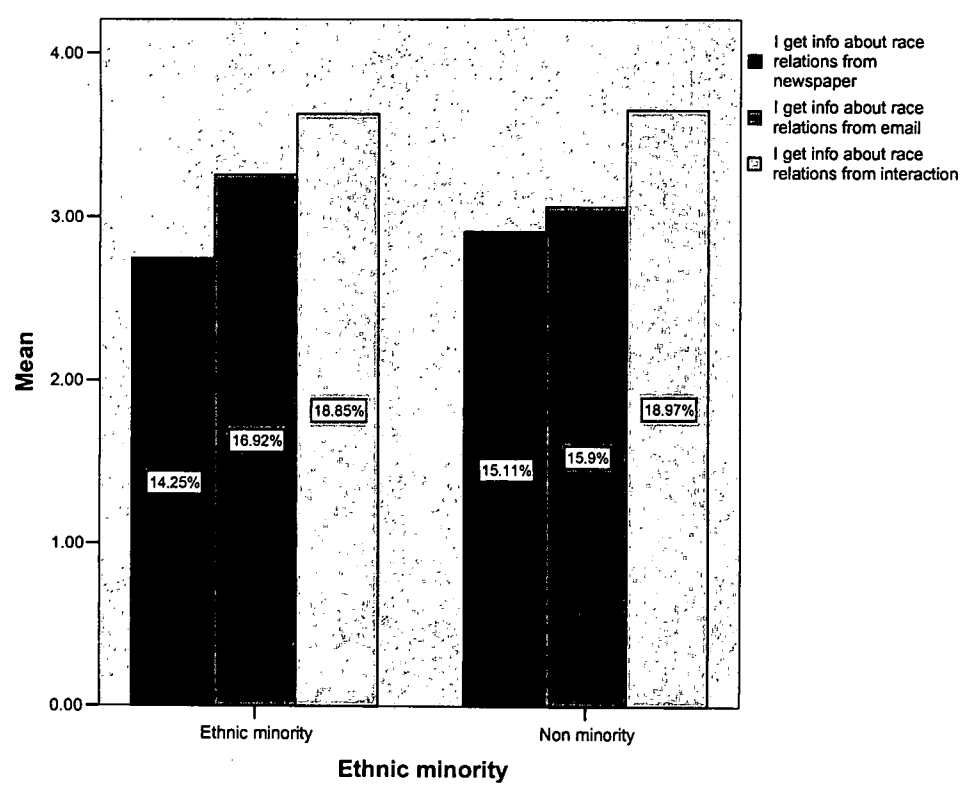


FIGURE 2

## Race Relation Information

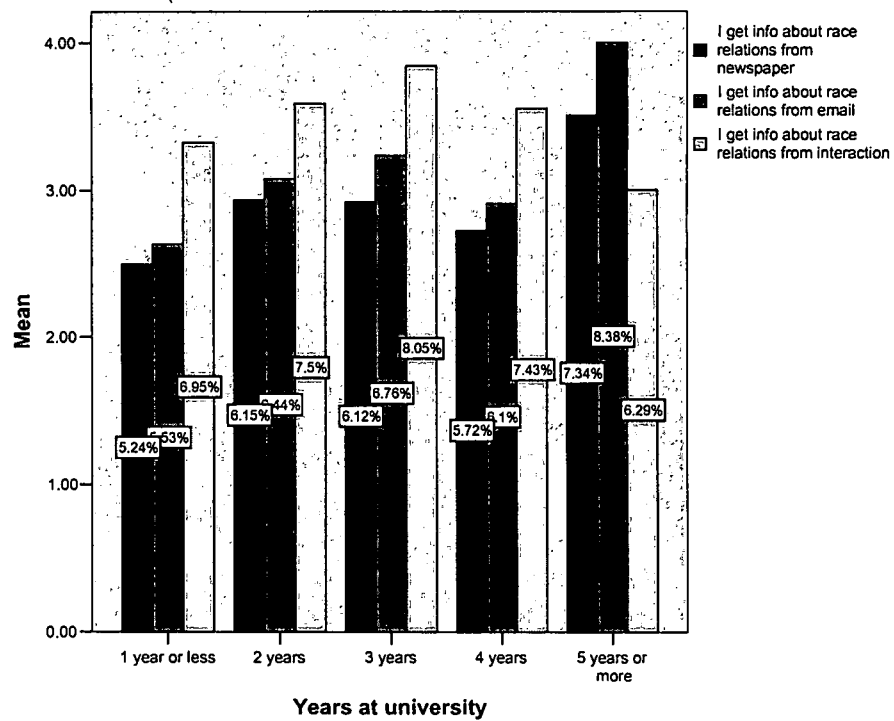


Also, many of the minority student leaders used the safety advisories sent to all students about crime as an indicator of race relations. "I look at the race reported of the offender and the victim to gauge what is going on with race relations." It is important to note that this response was provided with embarrassment—when probed, the respondent admitted that she always checked the race even when the crime was not labeled as a racial incident. "They always report the race, so it is only natural to check." Another African American respondent had a similar response. She admitted to opening these safety advisories for the sole reason of checking the race and said, "It gives me an idea of what is really going on. Even when they don't label it a hate crime, I like to get the facts for myself. Sometimes, the incident looks more like a hate crime than they are willing to admit."

It is also important to look at differences in student groups that go beyond race. The survey results show that males and females obtain the same amount of information from newspaper, although females get more information from interaction and email by less than 2%. More significant were the amount of years a student has attended the university and the reporting of information resources. As illustrated in the following figure, students who have attended the university for five years or more report a significant drop in obtaining information from interaction with other students. These students rely much more upon the newspaper and email to provide them with information about diversity as represented in Figure 3.

FIGURE 3

## Race Relation Information by Years





A paired sample *t* test was used to compare means reported for the sources of race relation and diversity event information. The pairs of variables for the test were as follows: Pair 1, *I get information about race relations from the campus newspaper* and *I get information about diversity events being held on campus from the campus newspaper*; Pair 2, *I get information about race relations from university email alerts* and *I get information about diversity events being held on campus from university email alerts*; Pair 3, *I get information about race relations from interaction with other students*, and *I get information about diversity events being held on campus from interaction with other students*. The complete results of the *t*-test are found in Tables 2, 3 and 4.

In a two-tailed test, a significant difference in means was reported for Pair 1 with mean difference of  $-.38$  ( $t = -6.06$ ,  $df = 229$ ,  $sig. = .00$ ). The means reported for race relation information from newspaper was 2.88, and the means for diversity events from newspaper was 3.27. These findings signify that students report using newspaper significantly more for diversity events than for information about race relations.

The two-tailed test also found a significant difference in means for Pair 2, with a mean difference of  $-.51$  ( $t = -6.84$ ,  $df = 229$ ,  $sig. = .00$ ). The mean reported for race relation information from email was 3.09, and the means for diversity event information from email was 3.60, finding that students report using email more often to obtain information about diversity events than race relation information.

TABLE 2

## Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	I get info about race relations from newspaper	2.8826	230	.90566	.05972
	I get info about diversity from newspaper	3.2652	230	1.02122	.06734
Pair 2	I get info about race relations from email	3.0913	230	1.00887	.06652
	I get info about diversity from email	3.6000	230	.94661	.06242
Pair 3	I get info about race relations from interaction	3.6478	230	.84748	.05588
	I get info about diversity from interaction	3.5478	230	.93214	.06146

TABLE 3

## Paired Samples Correlations

	N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1 I get info about race relations from newspaper & I get info about diversity from newspaper	230	.511	.000
Pair 2 I get info about race relations from email & I get info about diversity from email	230	.336	.000
Pair 3 I get info about race relations from interaction & I get info about diversity from interaction	230	.489	.000

TABLE 4

## Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences							
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	I get info about race relations from newspaper - I get info about diversity from newspaper	-.38261	.95837	.06319	-.50712	-.25809	-6.055	229	.000
Pair 2	I get info about race relations from email - I get info about diversity from email	-.50870	1.12821	.07439	-.65528	-.36212	-6.838	229	.000
Pair 3	I get info about race relations from interaction - I get info about diversity from interaction	-.10000	.90293	.05954	-.01731	.21731	1.680	229	.094

When looking at interaction as a source of information, the paired sample test did not find a statistically significant difference between race relation information and diversity events. The test found a mean difference of -.1 ( $t = 1.68$ ,  $df = 229$ ,  $sig. = .094$ ). Individual means reported for race relations was 3.65, and for diversity events was 3.55, finding that students reported using interaction similarly for obtaining information about both race relation information and diversity event information. This difference, however, was not statistically significant.

The student leaders were asked if they believed that diversity information was communicated in an even, similar manner to all students in the university. Non minority respondents were either unable to answer this question, or neutral about the manner of communication. One responded, "The information is equally accessible to all students. Students have the choice for active involvement. They have the choice to go out and get the information on their own."

Minority respondents felt much differently about this question. Answers ranged from disparity regarding when diversity information is communicated—"Diversity is only communicated during major months like black history month—otherwise it is not even highlighted," and, "Diversity information is only communicated when something happens; only after racial incidents. The time information is given is not consistent"—to whom diversity information is communicated to—"People are targeted in awareness emails about events. All diverse emails are sent to a targeted group", and, "Minority students get

information. Everybody should get information about diversity, not just minority students."

Interviewees were also asked if they believe there *should* be a difference in how different groups of students are targeted for diversity information. To answer this question, many respondents tried to list positive reasons why the administration might actively target different groups of students to give diversity information. Answers included many positive ideas such as, "Information should be given to campus leaders because one person can touch others in their organization and get the ball rolling." Others found positive reasons to target ethnic minorities to be the main audience of diversity information;

It allows diverse students to invite others to come in—there are not enough 'other' students involved. This may be a way for the diverse students to get involved and more comfortable with similar people of their own culture and allow them to feel at ease.

This goal to making students feel comfortable is a general concern of university administration. According to Elam and Brown (2005), minority students often have difficulty or no interest in assimilating into the culture of the university. This may lead them to feel frustrated or isolated on campus. Many universities try to negate this isolation by the creation of more organizations for minority students, or through increased communication with these students. One respondent suggested, "They probably give information to minority students to tell them, you're not out here by yourself. Someone else is going through what you're going through. Students feel 'I'm not the only one'."

Though the respondents found more positive reasons to target specific groups for diversity information, negative ones were also mentioned. In direct opposition to the idea that student leaders should receive information, one student responded, "Student leaders should not be targeted for diversity information. They are not necessarily interested in diversity information." Others discussed the implications of targeting only minority students, and how this would widen the gap between students of color and non minority students. For example, "Without this information, students will remain in their sheltered bubble," and, "white students don't understand. They don't hear how others feel. We don't get on the same page (when only minority students are targeted)."

**RQ3: Do students believe that interaction with diverse students provides educational benefit?**

The survey data show that respondents believe both the presence of diverse students and interactions with these students provides an educational benefit. For this research question, responses to survey questions #10, "I believe the presence of people of diverse backgrounds on this campus can enrich my educational experience," and #11, "I believe interaction with people of diverse backgrounds on this campus can enrich my educational experience" were examined. While nearly 88% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that presence provided educational benefit, as illustrated in Figure 4, almost 93% agreed that interaction provided benefit, as illustrated in Figure 5.

There was no significant difference in the means of how respondents of different ethnic background, gender or years at university viewed the educational benefit provided by diversity.

The views regarding educational benefit were also illustrated in the interviews with student leaders. Most of the respondents believed that interaction was the only way, or the most significant way to achieve educational benefit from diverse student enrollment. Respondents provided different ideas about the importance of interaction in answers such as, "Classroom participation creates benefit to students," and, "Interaction is needed to delve in and see what is really going on." Some respondents believed that only interaction provided benefit, saying, "You can put different people together in a room and nothing will happen. Open minds come from learning and interacting." Other respondents felt that a mix of presence and interaction was necessary for educational benefit to students, "A little of both is needed. They need to be present for people to know about them. But interacting with them is most important."

#### Communication Principles Used to Construct Diversity Culture

By examining the answers used by respondents, it is possible to see what metaphors are being used to construct the issue of diversity in the university. Interviews were transcribed and coded using the source domains uncovered in Henze's (2005) interviews of educational leaders. Because there were other



FIGURE 4

## Diversity Presence and Educational Benefit

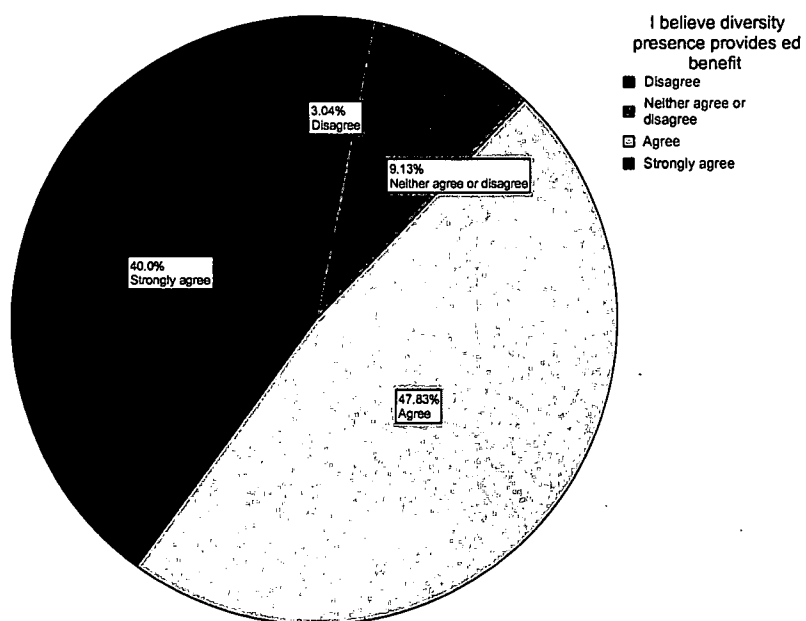
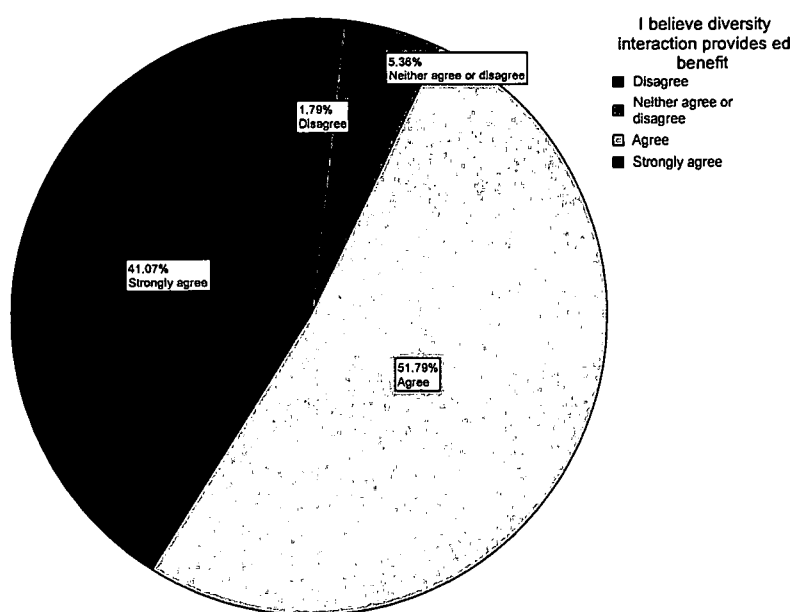


FIGURE 5

## Diversity Interaction and Educational Benefit



metaphors also in use, it was necessary to create codes for at least three more categories. After coding all of the interview responses, though many source domains were uncovered, the following metaphor groups that were identified most often are illustrated in Table 2.

The interview respondents used metaphors that were most often descriptive of spatial elements. Lines such as being "stuck in the clique", "confined to your own comfortable bubble", and being contained in a "middle-class shell" were used often by many respondents. Language metaphors were also present, which is fitting in that these respondents believe that interaction is a very important part of a diverse education. Language metaphors were used to describe the lack of communication from the administration to the student body, but also for the lack of communication between organized groups of students.

Community metaphors were used when discussing how things should be, or how students or administration want things to be in terms of diversity. Possession metaphors were most often used to ascribe a specific stereotypical aspect of a culture to a group of people, or to describe the belongings of a race, for example, "the black table" at the cafeteria and going to the "black party". Metaphors were also often used to describe gaps and the struggles between groups on campus. Again, these metaphors were used to describe interaction between the administration and the student body, and between groups of students.

TABLE 5  
Metaphor Source Domains

<i>Source Domain</i>	<i>Example of Metaphor Use</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Spatial	"The bottom line," "stuck in bubble"	25%
Language	"Lip service," "talk the talk"	19%
Community	"We are a family", community, traditions	15%
Possessions	"the black party", "the Puerto Rican table"	12%
Gap	"Not on the same page"	11%
Struggle	"Beaten to death", "pushing to become..."	8%

Although these metaphors are interesting in and of themselves, by examining all of these together, one can begin to reconstruct the existing diversity culture on campus. The abundance of spatial metaphors seems to suggest that student leaders are feeling confined within their organizations in terms of diversity. Respondents continued to describe themselves or others as being stuck or contained within shells, bubbles, boxes, zones, etc. Minds were described as being either open or closed. Consider this spatial element along with the assignment of possessions to each race. One respondent, when talking about the segregated tables at the cafeteria said she didn't sit at tables that belonged to other races because, "I felt as though invading their table would cause them to lose some of their identity." Metaphors are usually considered as elements of language that enable us to make sense of our experiences so we can interact with others (Kirby & Harter, 2002). However, metaphors used in this way can actually construct divisions that make interaction difficult, or even impossible.

The other metaphor constructions increase this difficulty. Metaphors describing the lack of communication between these confined groups highlight the isolation of the groups. Gap and struggle metaphors further this isolation, constructing the idea that the isolation is permanent, or difficult to undo. The one respondent who felt that presence alone of diverse students was enough to provide an educational benefit reported,

At this university, presence is enough. Large amounts of students who attend here have never had presence (of students with different ethnic backgrounds) and will return to lives that will never have it again, and that presence will be enough. Love is enough. Attraction, curiosity about people, presence will inspire wonder, even if it doesn't create interaction.

This respondent's views best illustrate the isolation of student groups.

In an attempt to measure the metaphors used by the administration to define diversity and race relations, respondents were asked what words or phrases are used at their school to describe these terms. Only one respondent was able to identify any ways the administration speaks of diversity or race relations, citing their movement away from the word "ghetto" towards "student neighborhood" when speaking of the student area of off-campus housing. All other responses were words or phrases respondents used or hear used by other students on campus. All responses were either negative—"overdone," "beaten to death," "confusing,"—or used to describe a stereotype of another group of students "don't sit at the plastic table (blonde, tan girls), that is the black table, that is the Puerto Rican table." The respondents are describing a culture that has a very low level of assimilation.

The failure to assimilate is often a symptom of a culture that places too much responsibility on the people of diverse backgrounds to change. Diversity becomes 'their problem,' *they* being the diverse people. According to Thomas, founder of AIMD (The American Institute of Managing Diversity), this is a common practice of traditional diversity efforts. "Blacks, Hispanics, women, and

immigrants are dropped into a previously homogenous, all-white, all-Anglo, all-male, all native-born environment, and the burden of cultural change is placed on the newcomers" (Goldberg, 1994 p. 45). One respondent approached this idea directly when discussing the role of the students in promoting unity on campus.

This isn't the student's job (to promote unity on campus). Students shouldn't have to do a lot. Telling them they have to do something about race relations is wrong. The school is supposed to create the environment where students are valued and feel safe. They are supposed to educate the whole person.

Other respondents demonstrated confusion with the role of the administration and the students when discussing the sincerity of the school administration's efforts to promote diversity. "They have good intentions. The administration wants to promote diversity but that has to flow down to the people who actually make the environment safe and participate in the environment." And again, "They want to be (sincere). It isn't catching on as much as they would like it to. There is a gap. Just because something exists doesn't mean anything is getting accomplished." The student leaders interviewed seemed confused as to whom should be working the hardest for diversity—the administration, the students or both.

Even within individual interviews, discrepancies and contradictions about roles and responsibilities provided insight to this confusion. This is best illustrated by one respondent who, when answering the question, 'what is the student role in promoting diversity on campus,' replied, "It isn't the students' job,"

and finished this answer with, "we have to play educators. We have to (promote unity) through answering tough questions."

This confusion explains why little evidence was found of organizational language being used as the premise in individual decision making. In order for such a premise to be used in decision making activities, the members of the organization must agree with it. Without being able to agree on these roles, there is little room for the adoption of any such premise; however there were a few instances that provide useful information.

One student employee of the admissions office repeated throughout the interview that, "Diversity doesn't happen overnight. Diversity takes time, it is not overnight. This school is not diverse but the university admissions office realizes that it won't take overnight." Here, this student was employing the premises of the admissions office:

Major Premise: Diversity doesn't happen overnight

Minor Premise: This school is working towards enrollment diversity

Conclusion: This school will be racially diverse, *eventually*

In order to understand the importance of this structure, other responses of this specific individual must also be considered. This particular respondent felt there was nothing more the administration could do at this time to promote unity or increase positive race relations, and believed it is now time for the students to increase participation to further the work of the administration. These responses illustrate the respondent's agreement with the organizational premises that diversity doesn't happen overnight, and that the success of the university's



diversity efforts will not be known for a long time. Until then, the students must do their part to complement the efforts of the administration.

Another premise with which the majority of students seem to agree (on both survey and interview responses) is the idea that diversity provides an educational benefit at all. Other universities have more difficulty getting the student body and other audiences to agree upon the benefit of diversity and the efforts being made by the administration to achieve and promote unity. Every student leader was able to identify examples of how the administration promotes diversity, and each of these was considered to have positive effects on the student body. For example, students claimed that the university is, "good at teaching communication skills with those who don't speak English," "helpful in bringing minority students together," and was described overall as, "very supportive." These student leaders are clearly basing these descriptions on a general premise that diversity *is* beneficial to the student body.

Respondents illustrate an adoption of this premise in decision making when they decide that teaching communication skills to non English speakers is something beneficial, or they believe that bringing minority students together does promote unity on campus. Positive words like 'supportive' illustrate the positive feeling students have about diversity and that it is deserving of support by their administration. Claiming that the university is "supportive" displays a belief in the administration's desire and ability to support diversity. Even though students report little knowledge about the actual mission or position of their university, they were able to agree with the idea that the university was trying to

promote diversity and unity on campus. The structure might be broken down as the following:

Major Premise: Diversity has a positive impact on university education.

Minor Premise: This university administration supports diversity.

Conclusion: This university administration is positively impacting this university through its support of diversity programming.

Though students were unable to identify the specific elements of the minor premise by reporting low familiarity with the mission or position of the university, they were still able to reach the final conclusion because of the adoption of the major premise of the university and from their own personal experiences and observations of diversity programming and support.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DISCUSSION

This study identified the need for more research in the area of communication when examining diversity issues. The idea of the diversity culture was introduced and defined using Levine's (1991) diversity dimensions in colleges and universities. By examining how diversity efforts are communicated to the student body, how students obtain and interpret this information, and how the benefit of diversity on education is perceived by students, this study gives universities a starting place at which to examine and reconstruct the way messages are created and dispersed to the student body. By doing this, this study offers any organization that believes in the benefit of diversity a new way to determine the effectiveness of their diversity initiatives.

In regard to the first research question, '*are the diversity efforts of the university being communicated to the entire student body*', these preliminary data seem to indicate that the diversity efforts of the university are *not* being communicated to the entire student body. Findings from the student survey reveal that, on average, no student, minority or non minority, felt familiar with either the mission statement or the general position of the administration in

regard to diversity, although these students reported active involvement and knowledge of other campus issues.

Even though the interview respondents believed that minority students are currently targeted for the bulk of diversity information, these same minority students reported significantly lower agreement that their school promotes diversity. Because the student interviews revealed that the school does in fact promote diversity in a variety of ways, the inability to agree to this statement suggests that the promotion of diversity by the administration is not being communicated to the student body.

In regard to the second research question, *'are there differences in how different groups of students obtain and interpret diversity information'*, a few differences were found. First, minority students reported obtaining more information from email and interaction than non minority students, and reported much lower levels of information obtained from the newspaper, along with a general mistrust of newspaper information. This is important for university administration leaders to understand for a variety of reasons. Although the administration should be concerned about the lack of credibility of the school newspaper, university officials should enjoy this direct email contact with minority students. Although non minority student leaders admitted in interview sessions that they ignore the emails sent to them, the minority students in general continue to read and use the information they receive through this outlet. This university seems to understand the success of this medium, as it is being used effectively.

Also interesting in this study were the findings of the impact of years the student has attended the university and how information is obtained. Although students all believe that interaction is the best way to get information and seem to use this as their major resource, students who have attended the university for five years or more rely significantly more on newspaper and email for information. It is possible that these students become isolated after remaining at the university longer than their original peer group, and the university should make efforts to keep these students engaged.

Student interviews revealed that the university seems to target minority students as the main source when they communicate diversity information. Although interview respondents were able to suggest many positive reasons for this strategy, the negative ones undercut the very goal of diversity communication in the first place. What is created by uneven communication is a community of people who are generally unconcerned and unknowledgeable about diversity issues, and the burden of diversity is placed on the shoulders of the minority members. Although it is important to reach out to minority students, shouldn't it also be essential that non minority students be included in diversity issues? Because diversity in the university setting includes the *exchange* of diverse ideas and experiences, administrators should consider the inclusion of non minority students in communications, and ensure they are invited to attend and host events that celebrate diversity in order to receive the benefit of a diverse student enrollment.

The university must work to communicate its position on diversity clearly to the entire student body, and more explicitly articulate that it is not "their problem," but an issue that concerns everyone. This is apparent from the statement of one non minority respondent that believed, "Student leaders should not be targeted for diversity information. They are not necessarily interested in diversity information." This same student agreed that leaders should be well aware of all issues on the campus that affect their leadership in their organizations. Asserting that student leaders might not be interested in diversity information suggests that diversity information may not be important to all student leaders, or more specifically, to non minority student leaders. The university has communicated that diversity is an issue that is only important to those affected by diversity—minority students. By separating the student body in terms of diversity communication, diversity becomes viewed first as a problem, and second as a problem that only concerns a small group of people. As stated in one interview, "if information was widespread, it wouldn't be odd." Once diversity information is given to all students consistently over time, students will not believe that it is an issue that is problematic, or reserved for special others. It will become a solid piece of the organizational culture that need not be explained in order to be credible.

The third research question was included for this study because it seems to be at the heart of the debate in current diversity research. It seems most logical to suggest that the organization decide if diversity provides it or its members a benefit on a case by case basis. This would give future researchers

in this area an opportunity to focus upon how to receive the fullest benefits of diversity for the organization, and less time trying to determine that a benefit exists. For this organization, the university administration has already stated that it believes there is a benefit to be gained from diversity, therefore, student perceptions were measured instead. When asking, '*do students believe that interaction with diverse students provides educational benefits,*' this study found that students overwhelmingly agree that interaction with diverse students provides a benefit to their university education. These students also believe that the very presence of others from diverse backgrounds provides educational benefit as well. Although this finding is not consistent with past research findings on the direct relationship between enrollment diversity and educational factors, this supports the idea that diversity benefits should be weighed differently for each organization, depending upon their organizational goals and values.

This surprising finding can also be explained by examining this specific organization. Because of its demographic makeup and traditional and religious values, this group of students believes that the presence of others different from themselves can somehow enrich their educations. Though previous studies examined academic success in relationship to diverse student enrollment and found no significant impact, it is possible that this university might attract students that already feel as though it is beneficial to share the campus setting with others from diverse backgrounds; the university may also teach this to the students as they begin to assimilate into the organizational culture.

The findings of this study provide universities, and other organizations concerned with diversity issues, some valuable information. The majority of diversity research to this point has examined the ways diversity is created, how to improve diversity training and courses, and the value of diversity in organizations. This study goes beyond these previous methods, and examines the way diversity is communicated, how effectively diversity is communicated, and the communication principles that can increase the benefits of organizational diversity. University administrations that seek to improve diversity education tend to look either to their enrollment and admissions practices, their training of faculty and staff in ethnic sensitivity, and the creation of courses, organizations and events that teach the value of diversity. Although these are all very important aspects of diversity, without the proper communication system in place, these efforts will be fruitless over time.

How successful is a university in promoting diversity if the students are unaware of this promotion? A great amount of money, time and effort are spent in building and strengthening the diversity of a university so that students do receive educational benefit. However, these efforts are lost when the communication between the administration and the student body fails. It is as though two systems are in operation on the same campus—one where diversity is enjoyed, maintained and constantly improved, and another where diversity is misunderstood, fraudulent and constantly sought. Universities that spend considerable time and money to create a strong diversity environment must take



the step to communicate to the students the successes they currently enjoy, and the areas that are in need of improvement.

This study also sought to examine how diversity metaphors used by the administration are interpreted by the student body, although the student's complete lack of awareness of administrative communications prohibited the obtainment of useful information. In fact, the lack of understanding how the administration talks about diversity is the most important issue of relevance for discussion. The university does currently have metaphors in place in which they choose to construct diversity communication in practice (as observed by the researcher while studying in the university setting—i.e., the university as a *community*) however, the students were unable to recall any of these. Students interviewed were only able to recognize derogatory comments or stereotypes when asked “how do faculty, administration and students from your university talk about diversity.” Instead of responses such as, we value diversity, or we are a family, or we are color-blind, responses were negative and generally limiting.

The discursivist view looks for patterns in the use of words in order to achieve understandings of meaning (Tsoukas, 2005). These metaphor patterns and relationships build a discursive box in which diversity is placed. The spatial metaphors effectively separate and contain different groups of students based on race. The possession metaphors used attributed certain qualities, messages and social activities to each group. Struggle metaphors place these separate groups in conflict with one another. Finally, the negative language metaphors can be

viewed to express the lack of communication between the groups. Without this communication, the groups will find it impossible to unite.

It is important to understand that it is not the communication or the intention of the administration that is creating this predicament among the student body. However, without understanding the impact and interpretation of diversity messages by the different student groups, the administration cannot hope to remedy the current situation. All four dimensions of the diversity culture must be understood and examined before changes can be effective.

#### Limitations & Implications for Further Research

This study only looks at the student perception of what is being communicated. Although this was an explicit choice because the students are the foremost audience for the information being communicated, the research is limited by not including any perceptions of the administration.

A discursivist view seeks to understand how messages are created and shared to bring about organizational change. This study examines only how these messages are received and interpreted by the audience in order to determine the success of how the messages are shared. Without examining the administrative perceptions, it is difficult to know how these messages are being created and what efforts are being made to share these messages. The communication gap that exists between the administration and the student body could be due to the wrong types of messages being constructed, problems with disseminating intended messages to the students, or some mixture of both.

Although this study provides support that the communicative structures currently in use are not being utilized successfully, research needs to be done on the administrative processes in place that attempt to communicate these issues student body. Studying these processes can give any organization a better understanding of its diversity culture. An organization that seeks to fully understand all aspects of its diversity culture using a discursivist view should examine the construction of the messages they seek to use to initiate change, the processes and systems by which these messages are communicated to the intended audience, and the interpretation of the messages by the audience. Failure to examine all three of these elements increases the possibility that an incomplete snapshot of the diversity culture will be created.

The qualitative sample of this study is limited in the size of the interviews conducted. More interview subjects would have allowed the gathering of more information about the precise communication principles operating at the university.

Though this study found few significant differences in the ways students of different racial backgrounds interpret information, future studies could possibly learn more by taking a more specific sample of students. Instead of sampling a population that is representative of the university, as this study did, future samples could be divided by race, and attempt to sample the same numbers of minority and non minority students. Though this would not be a representative sample (and the minority student sample might have to reach the point of saturation in order to create a pool of comparable numbers) this would give

researchers a much clearer picture of differences that exist in the minority population. The survey conducted for this study begins to suggest slight, although meaningful, differences, further illustrated by the student interviews. There is clearly a need to seek larger numbers of minority students in order to understand these differences.

The survey was also limited in its failure to measure the major of respondents. Student majors have been found to have predictive power on racial attitudes of students (Umbach & Milem, 2004), which would have provided more insight into the interaction between student groups. Though this study chose not to look at the major of the students surveyed, future researchers may find interesting information by using the predictive power of a student's major on racial attitudes and the effects of this on the way students view the benefit of diversity on their education and the way they obtain and interpret diversity information.

One final limitation of this study was in its failure to address credibility in regard to different media. Findings of this study show minority students report a significant drop in use of newspaper for both diversity and race related information. Non minority students report high levels of newspaper use and lower use of email for this same information when compared to minority students. Interviews with minority student leaders revealed distrust in print media (especially newspaper information) which would be better understood if levels of media credibility were measured. Though findings also show that non minorities use less email than newspaper information, specific reasons for this difference

were not uncovered through interview sessions. It is difficult to accurately understand the distrust reported for minority students because non minority students may in fact share this feeling and the lower levels are the product of other factors.

Without measurement of credibility, no accurate comparisons can be made. Media credibility is generally important to these findings as many variables in this study were defined by the media usage of respondents. Further studies on the media sources used by different groups of students to obtain diversity information should included a scale of media efficacy in order to determine the impact of this variable on media selected by students.

This study provides future researchers a map to help to chart the course of communication across the diversity terrain. There are implications for research across and including many communication contexts from this study alone.

### Mass Communication

This study suggests that differences exist in the sources various groups of students use to obtain information. More research could specifically examine print advertisements/flyers, newspaper, television, email, and radio as media for diversity messages based on their use and efficacy across racial, cultural and gender lines. Studies of this type could help organizations understand how to reach different segments of its multiple audiences, possibly using Cheney's (1991) theoretical framework of creating messages for multiple audiences.

### Organizational Communication

This study uses Tompkins and Cheney's (1985) theory of control to examine organizational culture and Weick's (1979) theory of organizing to examine organizational decision making. The findings suggest that more research be conducted in the areas of organizational change and development, and persuasion theory to understand how organizational messages are created to initiate and maintain cultural assimilation. Discourse analysis and action-implicative discourse analysis (Tracy, 2005) and studying the organizational practice of wordsmithing (Tracy & Ashcraft, 2001) could also generate useful information about the organizational creation and selection of diversity messages.

### Group Communication

Group communication research implicated by this study could include both intergroup relations (examining the communication between groups of organized members and between groups of members and the organizational leaders or administration), and intragroup relations (examining the communication within organized groups of members). Communication researchers in this area should also seek to understand barriers to communication within and between groups, identify root guards that prohibit organizational change, and address the communication of stereotypes of the groups and how these affect the organization as a whole. Accommodation theory might also provide useful insight into the ways groups communicate with each other.

### Interpersonal Communication

At an interpersonal communication level, the findings of this study suggest that more research be undertaken to analyze the role of metaphor in the creation, dispersion and interpretation of messages. These findings implicated metaphor as an important discursive element in the construction of the diversity culture. Again, accommodation theory could be used in discourse analysis to gain understanding of who organization members communicate with, and how and when that communication occurs. There are many types of studies in the interpersonal arena that could be conducted, including narrative analysis and further examination of premise adoption and decision making. These studies could measure individual responses to diagnose the diversity culture of the organization.

Almost every study in diversity calls for further research in the area of communication. Though this study was conducted to answer that call, it ends with a similar conclusion—more research is needed at every level of communication in order to understand organizational diversity. This study provides a doorway, or, perhaps, a window into this exciting and promising field. Once this window is opened, diversity will no longer be considered a buzzword, but instead will be seen as an important, vital organizational element, that spurs innovation and allows every person to feel like an essential part of the organization structure, and that their ideas are a welcome and necessary top the very existence of the organization itself.

## APPENDIX A

**This survey is being conducted by a graduate student at the University of Dayton. The information collected will remain anonymous and will be used for completion of a Master's thesis project. Please answer the following questions by circling the choice that best fits your response.**

1. How long have you attended your current university?

5 years or more      4 years      3 years      2 years      1 year  
or less

2. How would you rate your involvement in your university (for example, rate your involvement in areas such as student government, organizations and clubs, volunteerism, etc)?

Very involved    Often involved    Somewhat involved    Seldom involved    Never  
involved

3. How would you rate your knowledge of campus issues?

High      Above average      Average/Moderate      Below average      Low

**Please answer the following questions in regards to your use of particular resources of information.**

**SA=Strongly Agree    A=Agree    N=Neither Agree nor Disagree    D=Disagree  
SD=Strongly Disagree**

4. I get information about race relations from the campus newspaper.

SA                      A                      N                      D                      SD

5. I get information about race relations from university email alerts.

SA                      A                      N                      D                      SD

6. I get information about race relations from interaction with other students.



SA                      A                      N                      D                      SD

7. I get information about diversity events being held on campus from the campus newspaper.

SA                      A                      N                      D                      SD

8. I get information about diversity events being held on campus from university email alerts.

SA                      A                      N                      D                      SD

9. I get information about diversity events being held on campus from interaction with others students.

SA                      A                      N                      D                      SD

10. I believe the presence of people of diverse backgrounds on this campus can enrich my educational experience.

SA                      A                      N                      D                      SD

11. I believe interaction with people of diverse backgrounds on this campus can enrich my educational experience.

SA                      A                      N                      D                      SD

12. I believe my school promotes diversity.

SA                      A                      N                      D                      SD

13. I am familiar with my university's general position on diversity.

SA                      A                      N                      D                      SD

14. I am familiar with my university's diversity mission statement.

SA                      A                      N                      D                      SD

15. I consider myself a member of an ethnic minority.

True                      False

## APPENDIX B

### Interview Guide

#### Interviewee:

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**Purpose of Interview:** To identify student leaders, gauge their perceptions on diversity on campus, and identify the sources they use to obtain information.

**Introduction:** Thank you for taking the time to be interviewed today. I am currently working to complete my Master's Thesis project looking at the impact of communication principles on diversity initiatives in university settings. For this study, I am conducting a survey to get a glimpse into some of these issues as they affect the general student body. I am conducting these interviews to find more in depth information and shed even more light on communication and diversity. Please answer the questions to the best of your ability, and feel free to ask for clarification at any time if needed. Although this interview is tape recorded, the information gathered will be kept completely confidential. You have been chosen for this interview because you have demonstrated the qualities of a student leader. My definition of student leader is an undergraduate or graduate who spends a significant amount of time involved in the campus or community through student organizations, student government, or volunteerism. I would like to begin today by gathering some details of your student involvement.

**Involvement & Knowledge of Issues**

1. Please list some examples of how you are involved on campus and in your community.

P. What is the average time commitment you devote to these activities per week?

2. How long have you attended this university?

P. (If student transferred to current school) In what ways were you involved at your previous school?

3. What types of campus issues does your current involvement in school require you to be aware of (for example social, economic, religious, safety)?

4. How often are you, as a leader on your campus, confronted with issues of diversity?

P. What types of diversity issues must you face? (Examples)

**Transition:** Now that I have a better understanding of your role as student leader, I would like to continue in the area of diversity in order to get your perceptions on the subject.

**Perceptions of Diversity on Campus**

5. In what ways do you believe your school administration promotes diversity?
6. What has the school administration done that positively impacts the race relations of the student body?

7. What more, if anything, do you believe is needed?
8. What actions can be taken by your school administration to promote unity throughout the student body?
9. What actions can be taken by students of your school to promote unity throughout the student body?
10. What words or phrases would you or someone from your school use to describe diversity and/or race relations on campus?
  - P. Give me some examples of what your school administrators, faculty and students say about diversity and race relations
11. Are you familiar with your school administration's general position on diversity?
  - P. If yes, do you agree with your school administration's position on diversity?
12. Do you believe your university is sincere about promoting diversity?
  - P. Why do you feel that way? What has led you to that decision?
13. Do you believe the presence of students from diverse background can enrich your education, or does this educational benefit only come from interaction with these diverse students?

**Transition:** The interaction we are speaking of is only one communicative principle that is important in the study of diversity. Before we conclude, I would like to ask some questions about the sources you use for different types of information in order to gauge the ways diversity is communicated on your campus.

### **Sources of Information**

14. Where do you get information about campus race relations – (examples if necessary--newspaper, stories from other students, advertisements, personal experience)?

P. Pose this as a hypothetical question if respondent cannot answer.

15. Where do you get information about diversity events being held on campus – (examples if necessary--newspaper, conversation with other students, advertisements, university-sponsored websites or emails)?

16. What source would you use to find out the university's position on diversity? – (Mission statement, faculty members, other students, personal experience)

P1. This question could be phrased as such: "If your position in your student organization required you to know and understand the university's position on diversity, what source would you use to obtain this information?"

P2. Have you every used this source before? How familiar are you with this source?

17. Do you believe that information about diversity and race relations is communicated in an even, similar manner to all students at the university?

P. If no, where do you see the differences in this communication?

18. Do you believe there should be differences in how these issues are communicated to different groups of students?

P1. What are the possible benefits of this strategy?

P2. What are the possible losses?

**Conclusion:** I would like to thank you for giving me the time to interview you today. Not only was your participation in this interview greatly appreciated and valuable to me, your responses will also be of value to this research, and will hopefully impact research in the future. Do you have any questions that I can answer at this time? (If not...) Thanks again for giving me this time and good luck in your future endeavors.

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