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Wayne State University College of Education

Boris Baltes, Interim Dean

Since its beginning as a teacher's college in 1881, Wayne's College of Education has grown to offer professionally-accredited, award-winning, nationally recognized bachelor's, master's, education specialist and doctoral degree programs in 29 specialty areas with 39 degree and certificate options to nearly 4,000 students each year. Unified by the theme of, "The Effective Urban Educator: Reflective, Innovative and Committed to Diversity," a diverse community of faculty, staff and students continually demonstrates its commitment to educational excellence, inclusion and social justice.

Cover Photo: The University's College of Education Building, constructed in 1960, is the second of four buildings that Minoru Yamasaki designed for the Wayne State campus. Located directly across Gullen Mall from the MacGregor Memorial Conference Center, the striking four-story white concrete structure is set on a platform and features narrow, pointed windows on all four sides of the building. These deeply inset windows are similar to those found on the Prentis Building, another Yamasaki-designed building on the WSU campus. It is a clear example of Yamasaki's vision for the campus—*an urban university free from the distractions of the city*. At the time of its construction it was hailed by one local newspaper as ". . . a bright oasis in the center of the city."

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Are Your Hiring Practices Inclusive? The Impact of Hiring Practices on the Selection and Retention of Blacks in Higher Education

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Introduction

Many cringed when the words of Charles Scharf, Wells Fargo CEO went viral. Scharf indicated in a June 18, 2020 company memo published by Reuters, "While it might sound like an excuse, the unfortunate reality is that there is a very limited pool of black talent to recruit from" (Murphy, 2020). Although Scharf's words made us cringe, these are words that have been uttered by many in higher education leadership positions. While a pipeline problem could be the case in very specialized fields, that isn't the case in higher education administration.

In fall 2001, only 4.9% of those employed in higher education were in management/administrator positions; of those, one in five were people of color (POC), with over 14,000 being Black (Snyder et al., 2004, NCES 2003: Table 228). However, in fall 2020, over 3.8 million people were employed in higher education; of those, 6.9% were in management/administrator positions (de Brey et al., 2022, NCES 2021: Table 314.40). Thus, nearly one in four people employed in higher education management/administrator positions were people of color, and about 28,000 were Black (de Brey et al., 2022, NCES 2021: Table 314.40). The increase in POC in management/ administrator positions indicates progress, but there is much room for growth. A pipeline can be provided through the mentoring, training, and promotion of POC who are currently employed in higher education. For instance, in fall 2020, nearly one in three (approximately 355,000) employees in higher education were POC (de Brey et al., 2022, NCES 2021: Table 314.40) which includes those in management/administrator positions. Thus, providing a pipeline of over 300,000 POC to groom into the next generation of management/ administrators.

Another myth from the business sector that is repeated in higher education is the difficulty of retaining people of color, especially in leadership positions. For instance, Google, Fortune's 2017 number one company of 100 best companies to work for (Fortune Magazine, n.d.), indicated they had difficulty retaining people of color. In a 2017 diversity report, Google indicated they had the greatest difficulty retaining Black and Hispanic staff (O'Brien, 2018). What is the source of this difficulty in retaining people of color, specifically Black employees in higher education?

Purpose

The purpose of this exploratory study is to examine the experiences of Blacks in higher education to identify reasons why there is difficulty with the hiring and retention of Blacks at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). Predominantly White Institutions are higher education institutions in which 50% or more of the students served are White (Brown II & Dancy II, 2010, pp. 524-526). This distinction is vital because at PWIs, people of color such as Blacks, often are the minority. However,

there is the assumption by many that the mere existence of Blacks in higher education positions means there is equity and PWIs are welcoming.

Historical Factors Impacting the Hiring and Retention of People of Color in Higher Education

Institutions of higher education, like corporate America, have expressed difficulty recruiting and retaining people of color. Research on the recruitment, selection, and retention of faculty, staff, and administrators of color dates back over 20 years. For a review of research on faculty hiring, see Turner, Gonzalez, and Wood (2008). There is much consistency in the issues that plague faculty recruitment, hiring, and retention, as they also impact staff and administrators of color.

Light (1994) identified 15 obstacles (see p. 168) to recruiting people of color into higher education faculty positions. Some of these reasons also apply to recruiting POC for staff and administrator positions. For instance, starting the search late or near the start of the semester, treating diversity as something that you comply with, requesting that overworked minorities serve on your committee, overselling the institution, determining what a "quality" candidate looks like based on your views, continuing the search for a more diverse candidate even if you've found the top candidate, and squabbling over pay. In addition to these and other barriers to recruiting faculty of color, Light indicated that the campus culture was also a significant barrier and that a search shouldn't even begin unless the culture of the institution and department are in support of a diverse candidate as well as willing and able to provide support for diverse employees. Lastly, Light (1994) concluded that to successfully recruit POC, higher education institutions would have to value and seek out candidates who are different from those currently in the institution, noting that students of color are different; therefore, seeking out different is good for the institution.

Many PWIs of higher education lack diversity and need ways to better equip university search committees with the necessary tools to combat biases, while attracting and retaining diverse faculty and staff. Kayes (2006) examined biases in the hiring process for faculty and staff of color at PWIs. Kayes (2006) found that many people on search committees have biases that hinder their judgments of candidates. While there is a false assumption that one's educational level nullifies this bias, that isn't necessarily the case. Awareness and training are necessary to ensure this bias doesn't have a negative impact. The training should take intercultural sensitivity as well as cultural and racial identity into consideration. Kayes (2006) went on to provide four paradigms for impacting the recruitment, hiring, and retention of diverse faculty and staff. These paradigms are 1. "Five Dimensions of Faculty Staff Diversity, which includes education/scholarship, community connections, climate/culture, and representation/voice" (p. 67). 2. The representation of diverse faculty and staff in leadership positions or positions of power. 3. The impact of the educational culture of the organization and how culture impacts how one is treated in the institution. 4. "Individualism/Collectivism-Relational Dynamics, which explores how both verbal and non-verbal communication style differences can result in miscommunication, misunderstanding, and intercultural conflict" (p. 68).

Other researchers cite numerous reasons why retaining faculty, staff, and administrators of color in higher education is difficult, especially at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). For instance, Jones (2001) provides a compilation of articles explaining why higher education institutions have

difficulty retaining Black students, faculty, and administrators. Reasons include an unwelcoming campus climate, discriminatory practices in tenure, discrimination in promotion, a campus culture that perpetuates Whiteness, a lack of intentional retention practices for POC, and others. Allen et al. (2000), Settles et al. (2019), and Steele (2018) cite issues such as hostile work environments, tokenism, and a lack of opportunity for advancement as reasons for difficulty in retaining POC such as Blacks in higher education. Researchers Loyd and Murray (2021), and Hakkola and Dyer (2022) cite factors such as racism, a lack of commitment to diversity, and an implicit culture that perpetuates Whiteness, as reasons why higher education institutions have difficulty retaining POC.

In a 2015 article, Wolfe and Dilworth conducted a meta-analysis of the recruitment, selection, and hiring of Black administrators in higher education. Wolfe and Dilworth concluded that more research is needed on the conditions for helping Black administrators persist in higher education. They also recommended the following for improving the recruitment, selection, and hiring of Black administrators in higher education, eliminate the disparity between Black and White administrators in which Blacks are viewed and treated as outsiders; include POC in shaping the recruitment, selection, and retention efforts impacting Blacks in higher education; campus cultures must be more inclusive; provide mentors of color, role models, and professionals organizations for networking; and addressing the intersectionality of demographic factors which create glass or concrete ceilings, such as race, gender, social status, etc.

More recently, in 2020, Inside Higher Ed published a comprehensive review of articles on the challenges institutions face in recruiting and retaining diverse faculty and administrators in higher education. In an article titled “The Challenges of Recruiting and Retaining Diverse Faculty and Administrators” common challenges institutions face include implicit bias and rigid job postings that exclude diverse applicants (Lederman, 2020). Suggestions for combatting these and other challenges faced by higher education institutions include describing jobs in broad terms; clearly expressing institutional values within the job description and on the institution’s website; designing search processes with the explicit goal of increasing diversity; cluster hiring; and controlling for implicit bias (Lederman, 2020).

Framework for Examining Hiring Practices in Higher Education

The first part of the framework for this study is the similar-to-me effect, also known as the similar to me bias or the in-group effect or similarity bias. Research on the similar-to-me effect in employment dates back to the 1970s, such as Frank and Hackman (1975) and Leonard (1976), in which researchers looked at the impact of similarity in hiring decisions. Rand and Wexley (1975) provided some early research on the similar-to-me effect by examining the impact of biographical similarity, applicant race, need for affiliation, and racial prejudice on employee selection. Results of the 160 simulated interviews confirmed that biographical similarity such as race, was a major determining factor in employee selection decisions. This was especially true for middle-class white people who served as interviewers in the study (Rand & Wexley, 1975). From this study, Rand and Wexley concluded that biographical information is a source of error in employee selection decisions, therefore providing support for the similar-to-me effect.

Researchers such as Lin, Dobbins, and Farh (1992) examined similarities between interviewers and predominantly (96%) minority interviewees regarding race and age using structured panel and

situational panel interviews. Lin et al. found same-race bias for both interview types such that interviewers rated interviewees who were more similar to them in race more favorably than interviewees who were of a different race. This finding provided support for the similar-to-me effect. A stronger similar-to-me effect was found for the structured panel interviews. According to research by Sears and Rowe (2003), the similar-to-me effect as it applies to employment interviews posits that "rater-applicant similarity on various demographic and attitudinal variables will tend to inflate (bias) rater judgments" (p. 13). Sears and Rowe examined the impact of the similar-to-me effect on applicant affect ratings, competence, and job suitability. They found that raters high in conscientiousness tended to rate applicants who scored high in conscientiousness, higher in competence and job suitability (Sears & Rowe, 2003). The similar-to-me effect has been examined regarding race, gender, age, and personality (Sears & Rowe, 2003).

A second part of the framework for this study is Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Critical Race Theory originated in the legal field in the 1970s and is credited to founding scholars (in alphabetical order) Derrick Bell, Kimberle W. Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, Lani Guinier, Charles Lawrence, Mari Matsuda, and Patricia Williams (Taylor, 1998). It then transcended into other fields such as higher education. The basic tenets of CRT are 1. Racism is normal; meaning racism is an ordinary part of everyday American life, 2. Valuing whiteness over color; meaning our system of white-over-color is beneficial for the dominant group (a.k.a. interest convergence or material determinism), 3. Race is a social construct; meaning it was created to differentiate between groups, 4. Race creates differential racialization; meaning dominant groups may treat minority groups differently based on external factors, 5. Minority groups must educate the majority on the minority experience; meaning that because of their history of oppression, people in minority groups must educate the dominant group on their experiences of oppression (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

The CRT tenants relate to the selection and retention of Blacks and other POC in higher education in the following ways. Race and therefore racism, promote the acceptance of treating others differently based on demographic characteristics. This can be seen in disparities in diversity among faculty, staff, and administrators in higher education. This disparity is often justified and accepted as ordinary. In racism being ordinary, it has impacted every aspect of society including the cultural, social, political, and economic (Hiraldo, 2010), which in turn impacts policies and procedures, therefore fueling systemic racism.

The current study brings Critical Race Theory and similar-to-me effect together indicating that members of the dominant racial group may tend to treat people of color differently based on their membership in a minority racial group, while treating members of the dominant group or those perceived to have similar traits such as race and personality more favorably during the hiring process.

Study Participants

To gather data on the lived experiences of Black faculty, staff, and administrators in higher education, the researcher posted in private groups on social media, reached out to various colleagues in academia, and asked participants for referrals. Blacks are the focus of this study because Blacks tend to be the largest of the underrepresented groups (i.e., Blacks, Hispanics, and

Native/Indigenous Americans) employed in higher education. Participants in this study were 20 faculty, staff, or administrators whose primary race was Black, and who had served on at least one hiring committee in 2017-2020. Hiring committee experience was examined to determine factors impacting the selection and hiring of POC. Study participants who indicated that their race was two or more, but indicated Black was their primary race, or who indicated their peers perceive them as Black being their primary race, are counted as Black. Most of the participants were female (65% or 13/20), and most (75% or 15/20) were from four-year institutions. Participants had worked at their institution for at least one year when they served on the hiring committee. More seasoned Black employees tended to serve on hiring committees more often than less seasoned ones. For instance, several participants who had been at their institutions for 10 years or more were constantly being asked to serve, indicating that they typically served on two or more hiring committees each year.

Participants are grouped into regions based on institution location. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2019), the Midwest region includes North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin. The South region includes Delaware, the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, Tennessee, Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas. The Northeast region includes Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019).

Table 1

Black Employees by Census Region, Status, & Gender

	N	%
Midwest	12	60%
Northeast	2	10%
South	6	30%
Faculty	7	35%
Staff	5	25%
Administrators	8	40%
Male	7	35%
Female	13	65%
Total	20	

Note: Administrators include mid-level administrators such as Deans and Directors; as well as executive leaders such as Vice Presidents and Provosts. Managers are counted as staff.

Hiring Experiences of Black Employees at PWIs

Typical Hiring Practices. Participants described the process followed by the hiring committee they served on. Some institutions had structured and clearly stated hiring policies. Some institutions required one or more diversity interview questions. Some institutions had structured interview questions. Some institutions used a rubric to rate candidates. Some hiring committees required at least one person from outside of the department. The hiring committees that followed the hiring

policies had fewer issues. However, despite these clear hiring process components, the human element was a great opponent.

For instance, with all the staff and administrator hiring committees, the hiring committee was chosen. Hiring committees for faculty positions varied, but typically the entire department served on the committee. However, there were instances where people volunteered or were chosen. Another human element that impacted the hiring processes examined in this study was the influence of the perceived expertise in content knowledge or the politics of the status of the hiring committee members. For instance, several participants who identified as staff, who served on hiring committees with administrators, felt their voice was unheard at times. They felt pressured not to go against the administrators out of fear of making enemies or being retaliated against. For faculty and staff hiring committees, the person outside of the department was intended to provide diversity in thought. However, the person outside of the department often felt pressured to go with the rest of the group, as they were not experts in the field. Two participants noted the power dynamic with faculty on a hiring committee with one or two Assistant Professors on hiring committees with full professors. They felt pressured to go along with the majority opinion of their peers who could influence their tenure outcome, or they were less likely to speak out against inconsistencies or issues with the hiring committee.

Another element that impacted the hiring process was the lack of diversity in the applicant pool due to the diverse applicants being screened out or the lack of diverse applicants. For instance, some participants indicated that the hiring committee chairs had screened out diverse applicants, some of which the participants had encouraged to apply for the position. Several participants indicated that if the applicant pool wasn't diverse, it was likely due to the institution's location, the institution's reputation, or where the job was posted. In most instances, Human Resources determined where to post the jobs, which was typically to more known platforms, with little or no regard for how diverse the platforms were. While some institutions had clear hiring policies, at least a fourth of the participants noted that their institutions didn't have clearly defined policies, and people pretty much followed the norms of their departments. This meant that whoever chaired the hiring committee determined the rules of how the committee would operate.

What Institutions Say as Compared to What They Do: Policies vs. Practices. When speaking of differences between institutional hiring policies (written rules) and institutional practices (unwritten rules) that are followed in the hiring process, participants varied widely in their answers. Only two of the 20 participants indicated that there were no differences between the policies and the practices. The 18 participants who indicated that there were differences, provided 30 responses for the differences. The top difference was that while most institutions claimed that their policies were fair and equitable, they actually weren't. In fact, 36.7% of respondents indicated that what was practiced didn't give people of color a fair shot during the hiring process, and they had to speak up to ensure that POC weren't unjustly excluded. For example, excluding candidates based on the university they attended or the journals they published in or their prior employers or who knew a candidate or had heard things about candidates. These exclusions disproportionately impacted POC, leading to them being excluded more often than White candidates. Over a fourth of respondents indicated that implicit bias was a blatant issue for the hiring committee on which they served.

Biases often appeared in the form of asking about a candidate's "fit" within the department or institution and asking "innocent questions." Fit was used as code for "like us or not," which is a product of the similar-to-me effect, and led to some candidates being excluded because they lacked sameness. "Innocent questions" were used in interviews to discredit and challenge the competency of POC. For instance, during a faculty hiring process, a white female hiring committee member kept asking a Black candidate questions about her research, going as far as to tell the candidate that she was misinterpreting her data. For example, if the candidate researched why women don't jog in the inner city at night, the candidate would say it was because of safety concerns. However, the White female hiring committee member would ask if the candidate considered women preferring to jog during the day due to health benefits such as sunlight which gives them vitamin D and prevents aging. There were many instances of "innocent questions" about the candidate's research to the point of several committee members feeling uncomfortable, as well as the candidate. These innocent questions, which were to gauge "fit" were an indication of the similar-to-me effect at play because the "innocent questions" were being used to show how different the candidate was from the committee.

Another similar-to-me effect was sameness or the desire to maintain the status quo, which also was a factor 13.3% of respondents indicated caused a difference between hiring policies and practices. A few participants noted that while they were required to have at least one person who brought diversity to the hiring committee, they were merely there for visual representation or to check a box. Their opinions were ignored as the other committee members were focused on hiring someone like them. Over a third (35% or 7/20) of participants indicated that the racial/ethnic and gender composition of the hiring committee negatively impacted the hiring process, and a fourth of the participants (5/20) indicated that the racial/ethnic and gender composition of the hiring committee negatively impacted the hiring outcome. Such that the White members of the hiring committees typically favored White candidates over candidates of color, and White male committee members often favored White male candidates followed by White female candidates, often citing trivial reasons.

Two participants noted blatant racism. For instance, a highly qualified Black candidate experienced a different hiring process as compared to her White peers, and despite the recommendation of the hiring committee, the hiring committee chair offered the position to a White female who wasn't qualified for the position. Human Resources (HR) had to intervene at the insistence of the Black committee member.

Another participant noted that the hiring committee recommended a highly qualified POC for the position, but since there was hesitation about hiring her, a lesser-qualified White male was also hired on a temporary assignment to smooth things over in the department. Note, that the hesitation wasn't due to the candidate's qualifications, but rather to ensure that department staff felt comfortable. At that time, the department was majority white males (e.g., 4/5), with only one person of color other than the recommended candidate. The study participant indicated that this was a common practice in her division and typically occurred when and if a POC was hired.

Institutional Challenges to Retaining People of Color in Higher Education. The second focus of this study is to identify the challenges faced by higher education institutions that negatively impact retention, thus contributing to the turnover and turnover intentions of faculty, staff, and

administrators. Most (95% or 19/20) of the Black participants in this study indicated that they had thought about leaving their institution.

Table 2
Black Employee Turnover Follow-Through Status

	N	%
Thought about leaving, but haven't applied or left	2	10.5%
Thought about leaving and applied, but haven't left	14	73.7%
Thought about leaving, applied, and left	3	15.8%
Total	19	

Note: Administrators include mid-level administrators such as Deans and Directors; as well as executive leaders such as Vice Presidents and Provosts. Managers are counted as staff.

The top three reasons why respondents indicated they thought about leaving are, being underpaid, undervalued, and a lack of opportunities for advancement (19.4%); the institution's culture and climate are unwelcoming or hostile toward POC (6.5%); and there is fakequity which is equity talk without action (Fakequity.com) since diversity efforts lack resources (4.8%). Instances of participants being underpaid and undervalued include a participant who was promoted but paid considerably less than his peers with the same experience and title. They claimed it was because of his education, but they still didn't pay him fairly even when he got his doctorate. When he left, they paid his replacement over $30K more than the study participant made. Several Black female participants indicated that they were given considerably more responsibility, but when they asked for a title change and raise, they were denied. At the same time, others in their institution were promoted to new positions with raises, and even temporary staff or new employees were hired in their departments with similar titles to the participants' existing titles who made more money than them despite having less education and or experience. As one of the female participants noted, "There is a difference between granting someone an opportunity to do something more and taking advantage of people by giving them a lot of extra work and responsibilities without the extra money or change in title or support." A Black Male Administrator at an institution in the Midwest indicated, "There is a deep-rooted feeling in higher education that you don't have to pay POC and women the same as White males. It's as if they think we should just be glad to be employed." This sentiment was held by a few other participants who also indicated that they enjoyed their jobs and the students they worked with, but their institutions were unbearable at times.

The unbearableness of the institution was due to the institution's culture and climate, which were unwelcoming or hostile toward people of color. The participants noted that the oddity of the institution's culture was that it was projected as welcoming, however either their efforts were for show or produced the opposite effect. For example, colleagues who go out of their way to speak to POC, but don't speak to everyone else, made the Black employees feel singled out. Another example was a White employee making a point to tell a Black participant about their Black friend or half-black relative. A third example was the White employee who would tell Black employees about the diversity training they'd taken or seminars about diversity they'd attended. These instances

were experienced by several of the participants and made them feel both awkward and at times alarmed. Were these attempts to connect genuine, or were they for show? Sadly, some were for show, as the participants had heard several of these same White colleagues' off-color remarks and microaggressions. These interactions produce emotional labor for Black employees in higher education and add another layer of complication which must be managed in addition to doing their jobs. As several participants indicated, it's hard to be one's authentic self at work and deal with racialized experiences, especially the subtle ones.

Fakequity or equity talk without action (Fakequity.com) was the third reason Black participants indicated they had thought about leaving their PWI. Nearly all the participants indicated that their institutions talked about diversity, but the implementation lacked substance. For instance, diversity campaigns and events, but no real diversity initiatives. Another instance is diversity initiatives that weren't intentional or strategic, but more like a throwing spaghetti at the wall approach. Everyone was doing something, but nothing was clear or connected. A third example is lots of talk about diversity, but no real action that produced real results. Meaning you couldn't see or tell the impact of the initiatives, because as one participant stated, "They don't have any focus or teeth."

Other factors Black participants identified as challenges in recruiting and or retaining people of color were the reputation of the town/area in which the institution is located, a lack of belonging and a sense of community, and the extra work that Blacks and other POC are expected to do. Several participants indicated that location matters. The location is especially an issue if the institution is in a mostly White town or rural area or red political state or if the institution has made the news for political unrest or if there have been protests in the town or area. Institutions must figure out a way of countering the area in which they are located. As several participants noted, people of color who work at PWIs typically know what to expect, but after a while, you get tired of being the expert on Blackness or expected to contribute to DEI initiatives.

A lack of belonging and a sense of community are directly impacted by the support provided to people of color and mentoring opportunities. As one participant indicated, inviting me to lunch or out to drinks, doesn't make me feel like I belong. Try something more authentic such as ensuring that there are other Black people or POC in the institution who connect with the new employee at onset. During the hiring process, there should be someone of color there to greet the person and take them on a tour. There should also be institution or community associations or organizations for faculty, staff, and administrators of color. In addition to collegiality, mentoring is also important. Having a mentor makes a huge difference. For instance, one Black participant indicated that he felt the impact of a lack of mentoring at his institution. His White colleagues had people take them under their wing and guide them, while he had to figure things out on his own. This was the experience of several participants and why some were leaving their institutions. This lack of support is a clear indication of wanting visual diversity in numbers, but not diversity that has a campus impact.

Mentoring faculty, staff, and administrators is important because they also mentor or assist students of color. Being one of a few people of color at a PWI is often the case for many. Therefore if you are visible, people reach out to you and ask you to take on extra work. Extra work typically includes assisting students and DEI initiatives. Several faculty noted that they spent a lot of additional time helping students outside of their classroom time and office hours. Several staff

indicated they helped students and their parents, in navigating the institution. For instance, they helped them with registering, disputes with instructors, obtaining services, and financial aid issues. Committee work such as serving on the Diversity Council or several committees in addition to their jobs was another issue for most of the Black participants. Several of the participants noted this hidden pressure and expectation to help with all things Black, even if it wasn't related to their job. They indicated that they were often contacted to do additional work without additional pay or without a time release. This too was exhausting and the reason some of the Black employees thought about leaving.

Recommendations for Selecting and Retaining Black Employees and Other People of Color

In addition to the previously identified hiring practices that some of the participants' institutions followed and challenges institutions faced, in this section, the recommendations for improving the selection and retention of Black employees and other employees of color will be provided.

1. Have hiring processes and practices which intentionally and strategically focus on diversity. If your policies aren't intentional, then people are more likely to wander off the path and pursue their own agendas. If you don't have clear policies that focus on diversity, then it's not perceived as a priority.

2. Ensure hiring committees are racially/ethnically diverse, and not just gender diverse. On hiring committees, diversity of thought is most important in preventing sameness. If the hiring committee hires people that look and act like them, then you'll just maintain the status quo. Beware that sameness begets sameness so don't hire a prototype or stereotype. Conformity is the enemy.

3. Consistency is key across interviews. Have a rubric with criteria and clear explanations of what scores mean, for evaluating candidates. Have hiring committees do an interrater reliability check by having them rate a short sample resume on a few criteria.

4. Provide and require diversity questions that are changed every few years, plus provide key points that should be included or provide a definition of what diversity means at your institution.

5. Gatekeepers are crucially important. The person who writes the job posting is a gatekeeper because he/she determines if there is diverse language in the posting that will attract or exclude people of color. The person who determines where to post the job is also a gatekeeper because this person impacts the diversity of the applicant pool. Who you put in charge of the hiring process and or chairs the hiring committee, determines who you'll hire. That person is a gatekeeper and heavily influences your diversity or lack thereof.

6. Check in with your current Black faculty, staff, and administrators, as well as those who recently left. See how they perceive the institution. Ask them their perceptions and what can be done better. Satisfied employees invite others to join the institution. Dissatisfied employees sour the reputation of the institution which will deter other POC from wanting to work there. Show

Blacks and other POC that you value them by paying them equitably, providing mentoring, supporting the development of a faculty and staff association for Blacks or other POC.

7. Show, sell, and tell the benefits of your institution and its location. How quickly you can get away from your location is NOT a selling point. For example, “we’re a few hours away from X major city” isn’t a good selling point. What does your institution offer POC that others are lacking?

8. Partner with diverse professional organizations to find more diverse candidates. Require job posting sites that candidates apply through, to provide data showing how diverse their applicant pool is. Have someone in HR check the applicant pool for diverse representation.

9. Review the salaries of current people in the same level of position, when bringing in new people. There shouldn’t be large pay gaps between the newly hired and people who are currently in the position.

10. Provide a safe way to report misconduct on hiring committees. Take reports of misconduct seriously and ensure that the ramifications for such misconduct are severe rather than a slap on the wrist.

11. Beware of institutional norms and practices that lead to unfair or unequal treatment. For instance, who you know shouldn’t get you preferential treatment in place of qualifications.

12. Provide money and resources for diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives so that employees can clearly see that you value these efforts. Connect DEI to the strategic plan.

13. Change the language on job postings to be more inclusive. Hint, the standard “XYZ institution is an Equal Employment Opportunity Employer” isn’t enough. Increase inclusivity by only including the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to do the job as requirements. Put any others under desired.

14. The roles in which your current Black and other people of color are employed in the organization makes a big difference. If most of your POC are employed in staff roles such as grounds, maintenance, facilities, housekeeping, or cafeteria, this a clear sign that you don’t value POC. Also, be careful that by tradition, you don’t earmark certain positions for people of color. For instance, the DEI person and Student Affairs/Services shouldn’t be the only places you see people of color.

Conclusion

If higher education institutions such as Predominantly White Institutions are serious about diversity efforts, then they must begin with having an inclusive campus environment that supports and sustains diversity as well as fosters belonging. A major way to do this is by having intentional policies and practices such as those that impact hiring and retention. The hiring process can be intentional by focusing on diversity from start to finish; beginning with where jobs are posted, who is selected to serve on the hiring committee, the training the hiring committee receives, and checks

and balances to ensure the committee is doing what it should be doing. Additionally, it is essential to address biases, such as the similar-to-me effect, which perpetuate sameness or status quo environments in higher education institutions. Conformity is the enemy of diversity.

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Perceptions of Collegial and Uncollegial Behaviors After a University Consolidation: A Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis of How Faculty Viewed Members of Their New Academic Units

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Much has been written about collegiality in academe, most notably by Cipriano (2011), Buller (2006, 2012), and Cipriano and Buller (2012, 2017), Flaherty (2013). Concomitantly, awareness has increased about instances of abusive supervision (Gere, 2020), incivility (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), microaggressions (Sue & Rivera, 2011) bullying and mobbing (i.e., group bullying) in the workplace and in higher education (Cowan, 2009), Duffy (2009), Lutgen-Sandvik (2006), Lutgen-Sandvik and Tracy (2012), Heeman (2007), Lutgen-Sandvik & McDermott (2011), and Taylor (2012). Instances of incivilities have continued to be a concern as evident in the journal article in *Nature* titled*:* "Astronomers victimized colleagues—and put historic Swedish department in turmoil," in which Witze (2021) reported that two high ranking faculty members (one male, one female) were investigated and found responsible for bullying at Lund University. Bullying in the academy is not confined to one country, one discipline, or one gender.

Based on a review of the literature on university consolidations and on collegiality in academic settings, the research team found that there was a gap in the literature regarding how participants of a university consolidation (sometimes called mergers) perceive their environment in a departmental (or equivalent unit level), especially a "new" unit that has been formed because of the consolidation of two or more units from previously existing (legacy) institutions. Cipriano and Buller (2012) have used the CAM (Collegiality Assessment Matrix) and/or the Self-Assessment Matrix of Collegiality (SAM), proprietary instruments, to measure the "collegiality" of individuals in academic departments. However, there has not been an assessment of collegiality from a "departmental or equivalent unit" level perspective. This study, therefore, addresses this "gap" in the research. Moreover, this study expands the discussion of collegiality to include the identification of perceived uncollegial (conflict) behaviors of incivility, microaggressions (such as misogynistic statements), bullying, and mobbing.

Review of the Literature

Consolidations and Mergers in Higher Education in the US. A January 31, 2018, article in the *Academe Blog: The blog of Academe magazine*, noted that "The higher education community is noticing with increasing interest and some alarm, the growing number of mergers and acquisitions that occurred in American higher education in 2018" (Mitchell, 2019). In a *Commentary* in *The Chronicle of Higher Education,* Spinelli (2018) noted "…there is little doubt that higher education is

in a state of disruption, and most likely approaching consolidation." Why? The answer is usually "mounting fiscal pressures on higher education institutions (Seltzer, 2017). More recently, in a July 14, 2021, article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Kelderman (2021) described how "Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education's Board of Governors unanimously voted to "consolidate six of the system's 14 universities into two institutions" to address financial and enrollment concerns.

Although research studies on "mergers" are often associated with corporations, there is a need to examine academic mergers and how they impact the faculty who are "transitioned" to a newly merged or consolidated academic institution. This is especially important given that Skogstad et al., (2007) identified four antecedents that give rise to uncollegial behaviors, namely bullying, in the workplace---including situational variables such as "organizational change/restructuring". In a *Chronicle* article (2021), the author states that "the two institutions that result from the merger will be led by a single president and leadership team…and a unified faculty with academic programs shared across all of the three combined campuses in each college." Unifying a faculty and staff is a daunting task unless it is done with great care. In Pennsylvania, "60 percent of the faculty members who responded to a public posting of the plan were opposed" to the plan to consolidate.
Given the upheaval produced by consolidating two academic universities and their faculties and professional librarians: How do faculty members and librarians in their respective legacy units respond to new colleagues? This was one of the questions that led the research team to examine how these professionals would rate the overall collegiality of their respective units approximately 8.5 months after they were first "consolidated" into one "new university," and how they would describe their experiences or interactions within their units.

Collegiality. Much of the work in creating an operational definition of collegiality and in debating the need to assess collegiality in the academic workplace has been conducted by a handful of researchers. In his book, *Facilitating a Collegial Department in Higher Education*, Cipriano (2011) spent his first chapter defining and giving examples of what collegiality is and is not (pp. 15-17) as well as pointing out why collegiality is important to healthy departmental functioning. In addition, Cipriano (2011) described what collegiality is not in the following way: "Collegial behavior does not imply mindless conformity or absence of dissent. Rather, operationalizing collegiality as either a noun or an adjective enhances productive dissent, a basic tenet of the academy" (p. 15). Later, Cipriano and Buller (2017) argued that to prevent collegiality from becoming weaponized, behavioral expectations of what collegial behavior involves should be clearly described (p. 54).

Additional work on collegiality has also been supported by Buller (2013) and Riccardi (2013). Cipriano and Buller (2012) created the CAM (Collegiality Assessment Matrix) to measure a colleague's collegiality and the S-AM (Self-Assessment Matrix) to measure one's own collegiality. Although it is generally agreed that collegiality is an important dimension of higher education workplace functioning (Miles et al., 2015), there has been much debate about whether collegiality should be used as a criterion to assess faculty performance in the academic setting. In other words, should "collegiality" be added as a discrete dimension to assess in formal evaluations of a faculty member's teaching, research/creative activity, and service (Buller, 2013). These debates have led the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) to issue its statement "On Collegiality as a Criterion for Faculty Evaluation," a statement that was approved by the AAUP's Committee on Academic Freedom and Tenure and subsequently, in November 1989, adopted by the AAUP's

Council (2006). That statement, in no uncertain terms, decries the use of collegiality in evaluating a faculty member, and it warns that the use of this criterion as a discrete element of the total evaluation process could lead to a serious threat to academic freedom (AAUP, 2006). The statement, however, does not exclude the possibility of using collegiality *as part of* (emphasis added) a well-integrated, thoughtful evaluation on the faculty member's teaching, research/creative activity, and service (2006).

Uncollegial Communication Behaviors: Incivilities, Microaggressions, Bullying, and Mobbing in Higher Education. In this section, it is important to briefly define and describe the diverse types of uncollegial behaviors that have been discussed in higher education literature. These behaviors have been labelled in the literature as: incivility, bullying, mobbing, and microaggressions. Fox and Keashly (cited in Andersson & Pearson, 1999) defined "incivility" as "Low intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect. Uncivil behaviors are characteristically rude and discourteous, displaying a lack of regard for others."

Sue & Rivera (2011) have discussed microaggressions as "covert bullying." Microaggressions are defined as "brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to certain individuals because of their group membership." These groups are not limited to racial, ethnic, and religious minorities but can include women, individuals with disabilities or any other social identity (Sue & Rivera, 2011).

According to Samnani and Singh (2012) bullying has been a research topic since 1990 when Leymann published his seminal article entitled "Mobbing and psychological terrorism at workplaces" in the journal of *Violence and Victims.* The term mobbing has come to mean a group of workplace bullies (Farmer, 2011; Hillard, 2009). Numerous researchers have adopted the definition of workplace bullying developed by Einarsen (1999) and refined by Einarsen, et al. (2003, p. 15):

> Bullying at work means harassing, offending, socially excluding someone, or negatively affecting someone's work tasks. For the label bullying or mobbing to be applied to a particular activity, interaction, or process, it must occur repeatedly and regularly (e.g., weekly) and over an extended period (e.g., about six months). Bullying is an escalated process during which the person confronted ends up in an inferior position and becomes the target of systematic social acts.

Escartin et al. (2011) explored whether perceptions of workplace bullying were "gendered" or not. In other words, they hypothesized differences between how men and women perceived bullying. They found that "Women are more likely to include person-related forms of bullying (emotional abuse and social isolation) in their definitions of bullying;" and "Men are more likely to include work-related forms of bullying (the other categories) in their definitions of bullying" (p. 61). It is interesting to note that women were more likely to mention being professionally discredited compared to men (p. 61). In addition, Escartin et al. (2011) found that women rated the severity of bullying as more severe than men even when the bullying took different forms.
Fox and Keashly (personal communication, April 27, 2011) cited Ontario's Brock University's web statement that explains what behaviors do not constitute bullying:

> [Bullying] does not include legitimate, constructive, and fair criticism of a faculty member, staff member or student's performance/behaviors or the legitimate (i.e., not discriminatory, arbitrary, or abusive) exercise of academic freedom, freedom of thought and inquiry, and expression in teaching and research. The University will not condone bullying under the guise of 'strong management' but, conversely, regards an assertive management style as acceptable if faculty, staff, and students are treated with respect and dignity.

Several researchers (Buller, 2006; Cipriano, 2009; Cipriano & Riccardi, 2010; Higgerson, 1996; Higgerson & Joyce, 2007) have identified the critical role that department chairs play in creating a healthy workplace environment. Cipriano (2011) and Higgerson, & Joyce, (2007) spend much time in their respective books discussing the critical skills (communication skills, conflict management skills, and leadership skills) necessary to foster a collegial department and giving suggestions on how to deal with difficult situations and difficult faculty members such as "pot stirrers" (Higgerson & Joyce, 2007, pp. 183-195), "prima donnas" (Higgerson & Joyce, 2007, pp. 196-212), and "confrontation junkies" (Higgerson & Joyce, 2007, pp. 213-224).

According to Matthiesen and Einarsen (1999), bullying involves deliberate or unconscious "repeated actions" that target a group or an individual and that cause "humiliation, offense, and distress" to that group or individual. However, the role of the department chair is only one factor in promoting departmental and campus climate change. Lutgen-Sandvik & Tracy (2012) have argued that solutions or interventions may need to be directed at three levels: the macro-level, the meso-level, and the micro-level.

At the macro-level, Lutgen-Sandvik and Tracy (2012) pointed out that the researchers must examine "the intersections of health and organizational communication" to address "workplace bullying…" They advocate public health campaigns to achieve the goal of bringing this topic to the consciousness of the academy.

In addition, at the meso-level, there is a need for improving policies on campuses so that they address workplace behaviors from a wellness standpoint. In other words, what are the acceptable behaviors in this workplace? What are the characteristics of a healthy workplace? As Lutgen-Sandvik and Tracy (2012) stated, there is also a need for more research on how policies are interpreted by diverse groups of employees. The need for policies is also addressed by Duffy (2009), who stated that "The development of anti- mobbing/antibullying organizational policy that is based on current research and scholarship and that takes into account the complexities of the phenomenon of workplace mobbing/bullying holds promise as one means of preventing workplace bullying/mobbing and fostering a positive or high care work environment" (p. 260). Lutgen-Sandvik and Tracy (2012) have also concluded that micro-level solutions to workplace bullying have remained understudied, i.e., How have individuals handled workplace incidents of incivility, bullying and/or mobbing?

Recently, a *Journal of Applied Communication* forum made up of scholars who study bullying, weighed in on various aspects of workplace bullying and on approaches to ameliorate or respond to the problem of bullying in the workplace (Tye-Williams, et al., 2020). Their conclusion was that much more work needs to be done in examining the problem of bullying from multiple

perspectives. Therefore, the current study sought to explore the perceptions of faculty and professional librarians about collegial and uncollegial behaviors in their academic units at a recently consolidated university with multiple campuses spread out over a large region in the southwestern US.

Hypotheses

The current study was primarily designed to quantitatively address the following hypotheses (H1-4) about perceptions of collegiality from a department or equivalent unit level perspective.

> H1: There will be differences between male and female participants' perceptions of collegial behavior in their units.
>
> H2: There will be differences between & among the various faculty ranks/classifications (lecturers, assistant professors, associate professors, full professors).
>
> H3. There will be differences between and among the participants based on different lengths of service (0-6 years; 7-12 years; 13-18 years; 19 years and longer).
>
> H4. There will be differences among participants based on which, if any, "legacy institution" (LI) with which they were previously affiliated.

Research Questions

In addition to the above hypotheses, there were three research questions (RQ1-3) that the researchers wanted to explore as subsidiary issues related to collegial and noncollegial behaviors. These questions were explored by constructing open-ended questions that allowed participants to express their feelings, thoughts, and ideas about a variety of issues.

> RQ 1. Will the qualitative comments describe instances and/or incidents of uncollegial behaviors that can be classified as incivility, bullying, mobbing, and/or microaggressions at the unit level?
>
> RQ 2. Will the proposed solutions/interventions generated by participants align with the three levels (the macro-level, the meso-level, and the micro-level) identified by Lutgen-Sandvik and Tracy (2012)?
>
> RQ 3. What themes will emerge in the types of recommendations the participants made regarding ways to improve the workplace environment and interactions with colleagues?

Methods

Participants. The total sample size for this study consisted of 164 males (48.5%) and 167 females (49.4%) females and 7 participants (2.1%) who did not report their gender/sex.

Demographics of Sample. Of the participants, 201 (59.5%) reported being from Legacy Institution "A" (LI-A) while 100 participants identified Legacy Institution "B" as their Legacy Institution (LI-B). Eight (8) participants identified Legacy Institution "C" (a health sciences center) as their Legacy Institution (LI-C)

Rank. When asked to identify their faculty rank, 150 (38.9%) of the participants reported holding tenured positions; 64 (16.6%) reported being tenure track; 42 (10.9%) reported holding 3-year instructor positions; 39 (10.1%) reported holding a One Year Appointment (OYA); 25 (6.5%) identified themselves as clinical or "professors in practice" faculty. Finally, 24 respondents (10.9%) did not report their rank. Professional librarians do not have faculty status since this designation was phased out.

Years of Service. When asked the number of years in service, 139 participants (41.1%) had between 1 and 7 years of service. Ninety-four participants (27.8%) indicated they had between 8-14 years of service, and 37 participants (10.9%) indicated they had 15-22 years of service. Thirty-eight respondents (11.2%) reported having over 22 years of service at a legacy institution; and finally, three respondents did not report their years of service.

Affiliation with a Legacy Institution. 201 (59.5%) participants reported their previous affiliation with Legacy Institution A (LI-A). 100 participants reported their previous affiliation with Legacy Institution B (LI-B). 8 (2.4%) reported an affiliation with Legacy Institution C (LI-C); and 25 (7.4%) reported no affiliation with any legacy institution.

Instrument. In 2014, the researchers received a $5000 Faculty Development Grant from one of the legacy institutions to purchase the Collegiality Assessment Matrix (hereafter, CAM). The CAM, a proprietary instrument, uses a Likert response scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree). The researchers first obtained permission from Robert Cipriano to adapt the Collegiality Assessment Matrix instrument to one that examined collegiality at the Department/Program level. A copy of the proposed revisions was sent to him, and he gave his approval to use the revised instrument. For this study, the instrument will be called the Unit Analysis Matrix (UAM). However, since it is adapted from a proprietary instrument, the form will not be provided.

In addition to the UAM, Likert scale items were added to rate the participants' overall perception of their departmental and college climates. Open-ended questions were added after each UAM item and to the additional Likert scale items to provide participants an opportunity to add their own comments and recommendations. The instrument concluded with an open-ended question asking participants to contribute ideas for addressing the instances of lack of collegiality that they have observed. Questions were framed in positive terms to encourage participants to consider how a healthy workplace can be supported, enhanced, or promoted throughout the university community.

Collegiality Scale Reliability. Two reliability analyses were conducted on the 14 items from the UAM (Unit Analysis Matrix) scale. A Cronbach's *alpha* of .958 was found across 325 participants (some were not included due to missing data). Another reliability analysis was conducted on

participants who answered "neutral" to at least one of the scale items. For those 164 participants, the Cronbach's *alpha* was .910, indicating that their answers tended to be closer to neutral for all 14 scale items; however, the reliability was not as strong as that which considered participants who had not responded "neutral" to at least one item.

Procedures. After receiving IRB approval, the UAM was sent to a listserv of about 1500 full-time faculty and professional librarians. The list was compiled by going through the University's Directory of full-time employees. Only faculty, regardless of rank, who had full-time appointments were selected to receive the study. Full-time professional librarians were also included since they are also represented by the Faculty Senate, the University's elected governing body. However, due to the small number of librarians in the sample, their comments were not specifically identified in the analysis.

Results

Sex/Gender – H1: There will be differences between male and female participants' perceptions of collegial behavior.

> Fourteen separate t-tests were performed on the data related to the UAM (items numbered 7-20) to determine if males and females differed in their perceptions of the climate in their units. Several significant differences were found for seven questions wherein females reported lower agreement (Mean M >2.5) with each of the UAM items, 7, 8,11,12, 14,17 and 18. See Table 1.
>
> Hypothesis 1 was, therefore, supported by data for seven out of the fourteen items (or 50%) of the items.

Faculty Rank/Classification – H2: There will be differences between & among the various faculty ranks/classifications (lecturers, assistant professors, etc.).

> Fourteen separate analysis of variance tests were performed on each statement to determine if participants of different ranks (1-year lecturer, 3-year lecturer, tenure track, or tenured faculty) perceived the climate of their unit differently.
> For item 9, (Colleagues in my unit actively contribute to the work of the unit by "stepping up" when needed by agreeing to serve on committees, task forces and other work groups.), there was a significant difference among the ranks, $F(5,321) = 3.28$, $p<.01$. A Tukey HSD *post-hoc* analysis indicated a significant difference between the perceptions of the three-year lecturers and the one-year lecturers, with the 3-year lecturers reporting less agreement with the statement (M=2.95, SD=1.37) than the 1- year lecturers (M=1.94, SD=1.03), $p<.05$. The tenure track and tenured ranks did not differ significantly from each other, or from the other groups, but had average agreement levels that fell in between the 3-year lecturers and the 1-year lecturers.
>
> For item 10, (On committees, task forces, and other groups where you have observed colleagues from your unit, they are collaborative and make valuable

contributions.), a *post hoc* analysis revealed a significant difference among ranks, $F(5,317) = 2.48$, $p<.05$. A *post hoc* analysis determined the difference existed between the 3-year lecturers and the 1-year lecturers. The 3-year lecturers (M=2.61, SD=1.31) reported less agreement than did 1-year lecturers (M=1.76, SD=.86), $p<.05$. The tenure track and tenured ranks did not differ significantly from each other, or the other groups, but had average agreement levels that fell in between those of the 3-year lecturers and those of the 1-year lecturers.

Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was partially supported.

Table 1

T-test Results for Unit Analysis Matrix Items

Item #	Females	Males	*t* values, *p* values
Item 7: Colleagues in my unit speak to one another in a professional manner.	M=2.68 SD=1.38	M=2.34 SD=1.35	*t*= -2.233, *p*=.026
Item 8: Colleagues in my unit behave in a professional manner.	M=2.69 SD=1.38	M= 2.27 SD=1.32	*t=2.840, p=.005*
Item 11: Colleagues in my unit follow through on professional tasks and deadlines so as not to inconvenience others.	M=2.63 SD=1.21	M=2.29 SD=1.61	*t=2.59, p=.01*
Item 12: Colleagues in my unit respect the decision-making processes of my unit.	M=2.77 SD=1.29	M=2.38 SD=1.29	*t=2.74, p=.007*
Item 14: In general, colleagues' relationships with others in my unit may be described as constructive.	M=2.57 SD=1.31	M= 2.22 SD=1.29	*t=2.39, p=.017*
Item 17: The climate in my unit is collegial, and I feel comfortable speaking up in meetings.	M=2.79 SD=1.40	M= 2.38 SD=1.44	*t=-2.58, p=.01*
Item 18: My unit climate is collegial, and I feel comfortable speaking to colleagues if there is a disagreement.	M=2.77 SD=1.30	M=2.41 SD=1.31	*t=-2.47, p=.014*
Item 20: My unit climate supports addressing problems in a transparent, equitable manner.	M=2.97 SD=1.43	M=2.54 SD=1.37	*t=2.67, p=.008*

Years of Service – H3. There will be differences between and among the participants based on different lengths of service (0-6 years; 7-12 years; 13-18 years; 19 years and longer).

Separate analysis of variance tests were performed on each question to uncover whether participants with varying levels of service at their legacy institution differed in their perceptions of unit climate.

For item 9, (Colleagues in my unit actively contribute to the unit by "stepping up…"), a significant ANOVA result was found/yielded, F(4, 326) = 5.02, *p* .01. Tukey HSD *post hoc* analysis found that there was a significant difference between those who had served between 8-14 years (M=2.72, SD =1.42) and those who had served over 22 years (M=1.97, SD =.97). The Tukey HSD *post hoc* analysis also revealed that those who had served less than one year (M=1.68, SD=.94) agreed more with this item than those who had served 8-14 years (M=2.72, SD=1.42), *p*<.05.

For item 10, (On committees and taskforces…), a significant ANOVA result was found, F (4,323) = 4.57, *p*<.01. A Tukey HSD *post hoc* analysis identified a significant difference between those who had served 8-14 years (M=2.60, SD=1.29) and those who had served over 22 years (M=1.95, SD=.73, *p*<.05). The analysis also found that those who had served less than one year (M=1.72, SD=.98) reported more agreement with the question than did those who had served 8-14 years (M=2.6-, SD=1.29), *p*<.05.

For item 12, (Colleagues in my unit respect the decision-making processes of my unit), an ANOVA yielded a significant result, (F (4,328) = 4.69, *p*<.01). Tukey HDS *post hoc* analysis found a significantly higher level of agreement with this statement from those who had served 0 years (M=1.84, SD=.99) than from those who had served 1-7 years (M=2.64, SD-1.33), p<.05. There was also a significant Tukey HSD result when comparing those who had served 0 years, (M=1.84, SD=.99), with those who had served 8-14 years (M=2.95, SD=1.40), *p*<.01. A third significant difference was identified between those who had served 8-14 years (M=2.95, SD=1.40) and those who had served over 22 years (M=2.24, SD=1.05), p<.05.

For item 20, (My unit climate supports addressing problems in a transparent, equitable manner.), a significant ANOVA result was yielded, F (4, 313) = 2.81, *p*<.05. A Tukey HSD *post hoc* analysis revealed a significant difference between those who had served 0 years (M=2.20, SD=1.50) and those who had served 8-14 years (M=3.11, SD=1.47), *p*<.05. Thus, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

Affiliation with Legacy Institution – H4. There will be differences among participants based on which, if any, "legacy institution" (LI) with which they were previously affiliated.

Separate ANOVAs were conducted on each UAM item to determine if participants from different legacy institutions perceived the collegiality climate in their units differently.

For Question 9, (Colleagues in my unit actively contribute to the work of the unit by "stepping up."), a significant ANOVA was found, F (3,326) = 4.00, p<.01. Tukey HSD post hoc analysis determined that the statistically significant difference was

between LI-A participants and participants who did not have a legacy institution. That is, LI-A participants (M=2.57, SD=1.32) showed less agreement with the statement than did participants who had not belonged to one of the three legacy institutions (M-1.65, SD=.94), p<.05. The other groups did not differ significantly from each other. LI-B and LI-C respondents reported more agreement with the statement than LI-A respondents, but less agreement than participants who had not served at a legacy institution, although these differences were not statistically significant.

Statistical significance was also found for Item 12, (Colleagues in my unit respect the decision-making processes of my unit, F (5, 328) =2.73, p<.05. A Tukey HSD post hoc analysis indicated that LI-A participants (M-2.69, SE=1.36) agreed less with the statement than did participants who did not belong to a legacy institution (M=1.87, SD=1.01), p<.05. The other groups did not differ from one another in a significant manner; LI-B and LI-C participants reported less agreement than participants who did not belong to a legacy institution, but more agreement than the LI-A participants.

Qualitative Theme Analysis – This study posed three research questions. Open ended questions solicited comments at the end of each UAM item. There were also open-ended questions to address each of the three research questions. Strauss and Corbin's (1990) coding protocol was used as a guide for the analysis.

Research Question 1: A theme analysis of the narratives/comments revealed that the participants used terms such as: incivility, bullying, mobbing, microaggressions and misogyny to describe instances of the "toxic" environment in their units.

1) Overwhelmingly, most participants seemed to acknowledge that their units were collegial except for one or more individuals (sometimes referred to as "bad apples") who contributed to the "toxicity" or hostile environment of the unit.

2) The non-collegial behaviors were described in many of the comments. These included the following observations:

a. the (faculty member's) absence or lack of engagement or an unwillingness to volunteer/contribute meaningfully on committees and the work of the department;

b. uncivil verbal and nonverbal behaviors included, but were not limited to dismissive comments, contemptuous remarks, disparaging remarks, inappropriate sexual comments; "routine" displays of anger; disrespectful behavior toward staff and faculty colleagues.

3) Much of the feedback also contained references to administrators not only at the unit level (chairs and program directors) but also to deans and senior administration.

The following negative behaviors of chairs (or their equivalent positions) were described in most comments with only a few saying they worked in a unit with a chair who did a "good" job. These negative unit leader behaviors were described as:

1) exhibiting favoritism; building cliques;

2) favoring "sycophants" while marginalizing or ignoring respectful dissenters;

3) issuing "chain of command" directives instead of fostering open discussions;

4) being disrespectful to faculty by not valuing their input and time;

5) turning a "blind eye," i.e., not confronting inappropriate behavior when it happened in the unit; in other words, using avoidance tactics in conflict situations;

6) making "*ad hominem attacks*" rather than engaging in civil disagreement;

7) engaging in underhanded, sneaky, or potentially unethical behavior;

8) engaging in passive-aggressive behaviors such as ignoring emails, refusing to meet with faculty; not acknowledging or greeting colleagues unless a supervisor was within earshot;

9) failing to assign tasks to colleagues who were "known to not follow through thereby creating an undue burden on those who are known to follow through with assigned tasks;

10) favoring faculty from one campus instead of unifying the unit under a shared goal or purpose.

In addition to chairs, senior leadership were the other large group criticized by participants for the following perceived commissions and omissions:

1) perceived abuse of power and lack of transparency in communicating why decisions were made;

2) perceived control/gatekeeping over resources, e.g., one faculty member stated s/he was told not to bother applying for..." (a position).

3) perceived concern with relationships with politicians to the absence of concern with the campus community (students, staff, and faculty) "We put on a nice face for the outside."

4) perceived lack of leadership on the issue of how to unify campuses;

5) perceived lack of leadership to ameliorate and improve hostile environments in departments and between and among different campus constituencies;

6) perceived administrative actions that foster a culture of "Leadership by Intimidation" instead of "Leadership by Inspiration." In other words, although the administration has been aware of problems at the department levels and above, there have been no proactive steps to address these.

7) perceived lack of judgment due to selecting unskilled chairs for positions and not providing them with timely and appropriate training for them. The perception was that chairs were selected for their ability to perform administrative tasks without question (of the administration). The participants expressed a need for chairs/program directors who were skilled in conflict management, leadership, and effective, transparent communication.

8) perceived administrative inaction by top leadership to address issues that had been raised and administrative statements that placed the blame on faculty and placed the responsibility for the campus climate on faculty while eschewing their own responsibilities for the climate.

9) perceived administrative attitude that views staff and faculty members as disposable and replaceable; therefore, communication messages do not mention valuing them, their contributions, and their time.

10) perceived lack of trustworthy administrative structures or offices where faculty and staff can get assistance with issues of perceived hostile environments, bullying, unfair treatment. This was also connected to the lack of perceived options for redress which therefore led to comments about seeking other employment or just making themselves "invisible" so as not to attract attention.

RQ 2. Will the proposed solutions /interventions generated by participants align with the three levels (the macro-level, the meso-level, and the micro-level) identified by Lutgen-Sandvik and Tracy (2012)?

An analysis of the comments revealed that, not surprisingly, no comments aligned with the Macro-level of Solutions (Lutgen-Sandvik & Tracy, 2012). Approximately 73 comments referenced Meso-level Solutions in direct and indirect ways. The comments suggested mediation, an ombudsperson, interventions from Chairs or Deans, better leadership, punitive measures toward "bullies" such as negative annual evaluations and terminations, team building for departments, and the acknowledgement of a problem by Administration. Thirty comments alluded to the need for colleagues to "act professionally" and be respectful, for chairs to step up and "confront" bad behavior, for "email etiquette" standards to be developed, for colleagues to be "grownups," and for

administration to provide training on how to assertively respond to others instead of avoiding or ignoring their remarks. When the comments classified as "Meso-level" solutions were analyzed further, 9 comments specifically indicated the need for leadership at the Chair's level with more than one commenting that the Chair or the Senior Administration were the problem. The suggestion in some cases was new searches for chairs who were uncollegial or who did not provide appropriate leadership. Here are some sample comments:

> "Most of the non-collegiality comes from the mid and upper administration. They are disparaging of faculty, disregard their viewpoints, and are easily angered. They seek to suppress our voices."

> "I think they (instances of non-collegiality) have to be addressed by chairs, who should confront non-collegial behavior immediately and directly and provide models for alternative ways of handling ourselves professionally."

RQ 3: What themes can be identified in the comments about the workplace environment and interactions with colleagues?

Considering the results in RQ1 and RQ2, it is not surprising the themes of RQ3 were described as disappointment with perceived administrative inaction, distrust of the administration, and disappointment with the lack of training provided to unit leaders (e.g., chairs), who were described as conflict avoidant, unprepared, and untrained to address conflict. One participant bluntly blamed the administration for creating a hostile working environment based on low pay and the merit system that had been implemented. This person said: "A merit system which pits faculty against faculty, as ours does, for a few meager dollars does not enhance collegiality." Other participants believed that the merger between the two main campuses was not well thought through, and transition processes were "inefficient" or "chaotic."

Discussion

Discussion of Quantitative Findings. Using the Unit Assessment Matrix (UAM) adapted from the Collegiality Assessment Matrix (CAM), this study explored faculty and librarians' perceptions of collegial behaviors among members of their respective units at a newly "consolidated" university. Significant differences in perceptions of collegiality within the unit were found based on gender, rank, years of service, and previous affiliation with a legacy institution. Overall, 50% (7 items) of the items in H1 received support. Females were more likely to express less agreement (in other words, more dissatisfaction) with items related to how respectful colleagues speak to one another, how professional the behaviors of colleagues appear to them, and whether their colleagues contribute to the timely completion of tasks. In addition, they expressed dissatisfaction with how colleagues relate to one another during disagreements and decision-making processes, and they expressed less agreement with feeling comfortable expressing their opinions in meetings (Items 7, 8, 11, 12, 14, 17 and 18).

Females in the academy, have in general, described the academic environment as more favorable to males. In fact, they have also described the environment as hostile and as presenting them obstacles that are not presented to their male colleagues. Salary studies have also noted there have been gender equity issues in the academy (AAUP, 1997 cited in Hearn, 1999, p. 395), and this type of inequity may contribute to noncollegial working environments within units. The researchers need to take the current quantitative and qualitative data, re-code it for male and female comments, and conduct more in-depth quantitative and qualitative analyses of the data to provide greater insight as to what the perceptions may be based on. The current limitation of not being able to separate the qualitative data by gender and link it to the quantitative data will need to be resolved to enable this more in-depth analysis.

It was interesting to note that there were no statistically significant differences between and among ranks, except for the 1-year and 3-year lecturers. One-year lecturers, by virtue of being in a "temporary" and usually "new" position, may not have had extended opportunities to experience the unit dynamics as fully as the 3-year lecturers. Since many "one-year" lecturers are subsequently reappointed without benefit of a 3-year appointment, it would be interesting to gauge their perceptions after multiple One-Year Appointments (OYAs).

The most agreement to the items were expressed by those participants who had less than 7 years of service and more than 22 years of service. The participants who had between 8 and 14 years of service expressed the least agreement with the items. Part of this lack of agreement may also be attributed to the fact that many of these individuals could be in the "middle" of their careers at Legacy Institution A and had only received one salary raise in a 9- year period. Therefore, for the variable years of service, H3 was supported in that significant differences were found between and among participants depending on their years of service.

In the area of affiliation with a legacy institution, LI-A participants (the largest institution) expressed the least agreement with Items 9 and 12. The fact that the previous President of LI-A, a much beloved person who enacted shared governance processes, may account for the comments where participants expressed a return to the openness, transparency, and shared governance of that previous administration. The LI-B participants expressed less agreement with items that had to do with current processes of "respecting decision-making" of the unit. Those participants had come from a culture of top-down decision making under the previous senior administrator in charge of Academic Affairs. The perceived and actual differences in campus cultures may have contributed to the lack of agreement.

Discussion of Theme Analysis Findings. Collegiality. Overall, the data indicated that the participants had mixed feelings about the collegiality of their colleagues. The general perception was that "most" colleagues were professional and contributed to the functioning of the department by stepping up and assuming appropriate responsibilities. However, the comments about toxic colleagues, colleagues who did not follow through on responsibilities or who chose to disengage from the department (sometimes physically and sometimes by not engaging in departmental duties) were far more common. Some participants were also wary of the possible "weaponization" of using the term "collegiality." They expressed reservations about the validity of using the criterion, a subject that has also been addressed by the AAUP (American Association of University Professors, 2016).

Leadership. Two issues emerged that were related to leadership and administration. These were the dissatisfaction with "senior leadership," i.e., deans and above, and the participants' perceptions of department chairs who lacked training and who lacked skills in leadership, conflict management, and who did not have the skills to unite faculty and staff from different campuses. There was also dissatisfaction expressed, albeit not as frequently, about faculty salary issues, faculty workload, and perceived administrative bloat.

As the literature about campus consolidations has stated, there are many pitfalls that await institutions that, for whatever reason, decide to undertake a consolidation. The road is fraught with potholes and the leadership needs to be prepared to guide the "new" institution through these rough patches. This study bore out those warnings. Dissatisfaction with the perceived lack of leadership and with the lack of clear, transparent processes was most evident. Additional analyses of these qualitative data suggest that Chair training in conflict management skills is critical to improving the department/unit climate and reducing the cases of uncollegial behaviors by addressing them as they happen rather than being perceived as ignored. In addition, a strategic plan to promote checks and balances of communication regarding the processes and step-by-step results may alleviate some of the perceived lack of transparency, feelings of isolation and improve overall performance.

Implications for Policy. The need for collegiality within departments/units will continue to be a source of both concern and conversation in the years ahead. This exploratory study has supported previous research in collegiality, and it has explored how behaviors ranging from mild incivilities, perceived microaggressions and perceived incidents of bullying and mobbing are uncollegial behaviors that have unfortunately found a home in the academic setting. As resources for higher education become scarcer, the need for consolidating educational institutions of higher learning to leverage resources and survive will continue. "Can't we all just get along?" This question must be addressed in direct ways by all stakeholders (faculty, chairs, and senior administration). Open, honest communication, and addressing the issues as they happen may contribute to developing a more collegial environment. All levels of administration can play a role in mapping strategies to assure open, transparent communication while ensuring all levels not only receive the information but are encouraged to participate in the solutions.

To assist in developing a more collegial working academic environment, the authors recommend using a micro, meso and macro approach to ensure that policies are in place that address the desired prosocial and professional behaviors of all members of the academy at the macro level (Lutgen-Sandvik, et.al., 2012). At the meso level, department chairs, deans, and other administrative personnel should receive training in conflict management and assertive communication. At the micro-level, all faculty and staff should also receive similar training when being onboarded. Additionally. There should be online training available in a video format with skills training assessment to gauge the skills development of participants in the training. Sadly, most "training" at universities involves information sharing and not actual skills development. Providing this training will aid in retention efforts. As Pifer, et al, (2021, citing O'Meara et al, 2014) found: "The majority of respondents who had left their institutions indicated having done so due to problems located with work units, such as uncollegial behavior, lack of department leadership, and academic bullying (p.542).

Another recommendation is that the faculty and administration engage in parallel training to gauge perceived collegiality on campuses. To maintain validity, this should be advertised to all ranks of faculty with assured anonymity. A group of volunteer faculty would be selected to represent each unit keeping in mind the various forms of diversity of gender, race, national origin, religion, age, years of service, rank, sexual orientation, and other categories as appropriate to the campus community.

This group would report back to their units the findings at the micro level. They would open discussions on their individual unit situations and develop departmental policies and procedures to ensure appropriate and collegial behavior is included in the various faculty reviews. They would also report back to the group on the thoughts and concerns of the faculty of their individual units for the meso level. This group would compare the various recommended policies and procedures and arrive at the verbiage that would be supported by the institution. After vetting these policies and procedures through the various faculty organizations and processes of shared governance, the resulting policies and procedures would be recommended to upper administration for further vetting, approval, and adoption. It is important to remember to include all levels and types of faculty and administration to make the changes identified in the survey.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations can be identified in this study.

1) The listserv list of faculty and librarians may have contained at least some part-time staff since we had one participant identify him/herself as a part-time adjunct faculty member. That response was eliminated. However, we do not know if any other adjuncts or part-time faculty may have inadvertently been included.

2) We asked for self-reported perceptions, and we need to ask ourselves if those who responded were those who were most highly dissatisfied with the consolidation and with their units.

3) A few participants mentioned fearing that their responses could be traced back to them due to the demographic data that were requested. In fact, several participants declined to complete sections of the demographic data.

4) In the analysis of themes, there was an abundance of negative comments that may have "drowned out" or obscured the message that units were often described as containing collegial colleagues and a few "bad apples."

5) The survey instrument itself contained 2-3 items that were "double-barreled" items, as pointed out by some of the participants. The participants were correct to point out that two issues were not related, and any subsequent surveys need to have those items correctly worded to avoid that weakness.

6) Finally, all authors were members of the newly consolidated university. They did not participate in the study, but they were all involved in the transition.

Suggestions for Future Research

Most universities and university systems have codes of conduct and/or role expectations in their Regents Rules. However, how many universities include those expectations in their "onboarding" processes for faculty and staff? If they include them, how are they included? Also, there is a need to move past collegiality as it has been conceptualized and debated. It is time for the operationalized behaviors to be communicated as expectations for faculty, administrators, and staff. When acquiring a new job, there is usually a hopeful expectation of entering an enjoyable work environment. However, when the workplace becomes hostile or toxic, those same employees have had their expectations violated by those who exhibit uncollegial and sometimes abusive behaviors. More research should be done on effective ways to educate members of the academy about professional courtesies, behaviors, and expectations. The benefits of retaining promising faculty outweigh the cost of losing many faculty who flee their hostile workplaces. Their exit interviews may say they are seeking "better opportunities." However, they are seeking peace and a collegial space where they can thrive.

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Digital and Social Media Use Among Graduate Students and Their Implications for Strategic Communication by Graduate Schools

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Knowledge of digital and social media diffusion and use among college students is important to leaders in institutions of higher education. Such information allows them to strategically use social media to connect with their stakeholders and develop social media policies. Digital and social media are diffusing rapidly, especially among the younger generations. A national survey conducted by the Pew Research Center shows that the leading social media are YouTube with 73% of the US adults using it, and Facebook with 68% of all adults in the United State using it (Smith and Anderson, 2018). The study also showed that 35% of US adults use Instagram, 29% use Pinterest and 27% use Snapchat, 25% use LinkedIn and 24% use Twitter. In the 18-24 age group, 78% use Snapchat and 71% use Instagram, and 45% use Twitter (Smith and Anderson, 2018). Globally, 2.62 billion people are estimated to use social networks (Statista, 2018).

Very few studies exist that examine digital and social media use by master's and doctoral students. Knowledge about social media use and communication habits of master's and doctoral students and their disciplines enables graduate schools to use appropriate platforms to provide pertinent information to current graduate students in order to increase graduate student engagement and success rates. Further, identifying the level of access, types of platforms (such as Facebook and Twitter) accessed, types of uses, and types of information accessed by graduate students may lead to the employment of successful communication strategies pertaining to Web 2.0 to reach current graduate students.

The purpose of this research was to understand the social media and communication habits of master's and doctoral students in order for graduate school administrators to strategically communicate with these stakeholders. This research also explored whether knowledge of and exposure to graduate-studies-related information and resources was related to graduate students' perception that such information helped them to succeed in their program and made them feel part of the campus community.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Uses and gratifications theory has been widely applied to the study of digital and social media (Baran and Davis, 2015). This theory assumes the active participation of media users who are able to both send and consume information and have the potential to build community (Sundar and Limperos, 2013). The uses and gratifications of communication media have been studied since the 1940s (McQuail and Windahl, 1993) to understand among other things why audiences prefer to use

certain media rather than others, what appeals to them, what needs they are looking to satisfy, and why this is so. According to Ruggiero (2000), "by and large, U & G has always provided a cutting-edge theoretical approach in the initial stages of each new mass communications medium…" (p.27).

Katz et al (1973) argued that uses of media are connected with social roles and individual dispositions. For example, the researchers state the type of needs the media fulfill and the functions they serve would depend on whether users opt to use media as individuals or as members of an organization. They found that different media serve different needs. For example, at the time of their publication, newspapers were top-ranked for strengthening knowledge, obtaining useful information and understanding the world, whereas, television was top-ranked for experiencing culture and tradition and strengthening contact with family (Katz et al, 1973).

Digital and Social Media Use. Since the influx of social networking sites starting in the early 2000s that continue to evolve, researchers have identified various uses and gratifications of social media such as information sharing and entertainment (Khan, 2017), enjoyment (Ledbetter et al, 2016), a sense of belonging (Pai and Arnott, 2013), and connecting with others (Chen, 2011). Researchers have also established that different digital and social media platforms are used for different purposes. Organizations have mainly used websites to provide information (Sriramesh et al, 2013). Karapanos et al (2016) found that relatedness predicted intensity of use for WhatsApp, while self-esteem motivated the use of Facebook. Ferris and Hollenbaugh (2018) report that factors such as being part of a virtual community, relationship maintenance and passing time predict Facebook dependency. Snapchat users communicate more with individuals to strengthen emotional ties with friends and family rather than with groups and with fewer people compared with Facebook (Piwek and Joinson, 2016). Those who use Twitter more frequently and over a period of time are more likely to feel more gratified about their need for social connections (Chen, 2011).

Shane-Simpson et al (2018) examined college students' preferences for using social media and found their top choice for connecting with their social group was Instagram. They also found that younger students preferred to use Twitter more than older students and that older students chose to use Facebook. Their study indicated that while more women preferred to use Instagram, more men chose to use Twitter and Facebook. Shane-Simpson et al (2018) state that these preferences were based on the tools available to interact such as text and visual imagery.

Researchers have found that students predominantly use social media for personal purposes. For example, Mehta et al (2015) surveyed hybrid and face-to-face doctoral students of a specific graduate program at a large Midwestern university to measure the impact of social media use and found that doctoral students in educational technology mainly used social media for personal purposes but that they preferred Twitter over Facebook for academic uses such as course and research-related activities. They did not find any significant differences between students enrolled in hybrid and face-to-face programs with regard to social media use.

Past research has shown that few students look for university or study-related information on social media (Galan et al, 2015). Galan et al attribute this to lack of availability of such content due to limited engagement by universities. They researched postgraduate students' social media use in their educational decision-making process and found among other things that most students used

social media to know more about student life. The most popular platforms were Facebook, YouTube and blogs.

Research has also demonstrated that cognitive use of social media is a significant factor connected to improved academic performance (Alshuaibi et al, 2018). Alshuaibi et al analyzed 218 surveys personally administered to business undergraduate and graduate students in Malaysia and found that learning from various social media platforms enhanced students' knowledge of the subject matter.

Clark et al (2017) state that one way to establish and maintain quality relationships with students is by engaging with students via social media platforms. They state that, "in order for universities to remain viable in the long term, it has become imperative for these institutions to form and maintain positive relationships with their stakeholders, specifically students," (Clark et al, p.42). They surveyed undergraduate and graduate students at a four-year public university and found that following a higher number of social media sites was positively related to an enhancement in the relationship quality of the student with the university.

With the increasing use of social media by educational institutions, Eaton et al (2012) stress the importance of developing and posting policies pertaining to institutional use of social media. They examined the websites of 48 universities in the United States and found that about 87 % of the schools had links to various social media tools from their main website but only seven schools had posted policies pertaining to social media. These policies clearly differentiated between institutional and personal use of social media.

Graduate School Success. Past research has indicated that lack of awareness and access to information about resources and support services can impact graduate school success as well as perception of a sense of community**.** For example, Greene (2015) found that there was gap between the availability of support services and the students' knowledge of such services. Further, she found that doctoral students whom she interviewed felt that inadequate support impacted their persistence in the program. Tran et al (2016) found that there was less awareness of campus student support services among Latinos/as compared with non-Latino/a students. In order to reduce the barriers to their program success, the researchers recommend that institutional resources be better identified, and the access increased. Hardré and Pan (2017) carried out a survey of 1,480 masters and doctoral students and recent graduates to find out what factors promote or hinder their success. One of the challenges subjects reported was inadequate access to timely information and not knowing where to go for accurate information. The researchers stress that institutional support be provided to midpoint graduate students who are grappling with procedures and paperwork outside of their program. Milman et al (2015) examined perceptions of online master's students' institutional resources and support and found that although students rated most support services highly, they rated micro-level support including interactions with faculty higher. Milman et al think that it may be due to their need for a sense of belonging. They state that the macro-level services including university-wide support services are equally important and play a crucial role in student retention and success. They recommend that program administrators and faculty provide adequate support and make sure that their students "know how and when to access them," (p.62). Given this prior research, it is not surprising that the Council of Graduate Schools, the umbrella organization for all graduate schools and colleges in the United States, in their guide on

the organization and administration of graduate education stresses that "communication across the graduate community is vital to ensure that graduate students know how to access the resources they need" (CGS, 2019, p. 60). For this reason, maintaining social media accounts, webpages, blogs, newsletters, and other online forms of communication are considered as a best practice by CGS (CGS, 2017; Denecke et al, 2017)

Sense of Community. Creating a sense of community with opportunities to connect and network with others has been found to impact graduate student retention. Researchers emphasize the importance of creating awareness of such opportunities. According to Scheepers et al (2014), "A sense of community is reflected in and promoted by individuals' interactions and behaviors," (p.26) and that "…individuals' behavior in engaging with social media is driven by a sense of community," (p.30). They state that there is increasing evidence that social media platforms facilitate enhanced potential to build communities and relationships through information exchange. Further, they state that social media promote information-seeking activities and provide enjoyment to individuals. Due to the blurring of boundaries between work-related and personal use of digital communication, the researchers recommend that knowledge of individual social media use is important in understanding an organization's adoption and use of such technology (Scheepers et al, 2014). The Internet's interactive applications allow for strategic communication between and organizations and their stakeholders (Sriramesh et al, 2013) and to effectively develop long-term relationships with them (Alsufyan and Aloud, 2017). Sriramesh et al studied the websites of 78 for-profit and not-for-profit organizations and found that most organizations used Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and other social media and some organizations embedded e-surveys and e-polls for feedback purposes. However, overall, they found that the websites offered limited scope for interaction. Based on the fact that several organizations posted alerts and tips for secure online communication on their websites, the researchers conclude that while digital and social media allow them to build positive relationships with their publics, they may be careful to avoid potential negative online interactions that might impact their reputation. O'Meara et al (2017) administered a survey to graduate students from four public doctoral and comprehensive universities to examine factors leading to a student's sense of belonging. They found that the factor contributing most to the graduate sense of belonging was professional relationships. They recommend improving professional networking skills among students. They state that by knowing what factors influence graduate students' perceptions of sense of belonging, they would be better able to provide resources that would lead to an increase in the retention rate of graduate students. Fujita et al (2017), examined international student engagement with university-initiated social media and found that interacting with others at the university via social media enabled them to feel that they were part of the university community. In order to enhance their shared experiences, the researchers state that providing relevant information in a timely manner is crucial. One way for academic and administrative units to increase awareness of the support services is by providing this information on websites with appropriate links (Greene, 2015).

Most studies on digital and social media use at universities have focused on educational aspects and few have examined the issue from a management perspective (Alsufyan and Aloud, 2016). There are also very few studies that focus on the organizational communication between universities and their graduate students. With increasing diffusion of social media, it is imperative that graduate schools be aware of digital and social media use by graduate students as stakeholders at a university in order to more effectively communicate with them. O'Meara et al (2017) state that

although sense of belonging has been found to impact retention and academic success among other factors, this concept has been not been widely addressed in relation to graduate education and has received little attention in research. Few studies have focused on communication by graduate school administration and its connection with perceptions of graduate student success and sense of community. Such studies are needed to ensure retention and success rates of master's and doctoral students and to promote a positive experience and a sense of belonging.

Research Goals and Methods

Our study aimed to explore the broad spectrum of digital and social media use, purposes of use, frequency of use among graduate students, and differences in use between different graduate student groups. Additionally, the Graduate College's digital newsletter provides graduate-studies-related information and links to various resources. Our research examined the connection, if any, between the frequency of exposure to this digital newsletter and graduate student perceptions of knowledge of such information, graduate program success, and sense of belonging to the university. Our study also looked at the relationship between the frequency of accessing Graduate College social media and perceptions of knowledge of graduate-studies-related information, program success, and sense of belonging. Based on past research, this exploratory study posited the following questions and hypotheses aimed at finding both descriptive and analytical data:

Research Questions

Q1: What types of digital and social media do graduate students use?

Q2: For what purposes do graduate students use digital and social media networks?

Q3: Are there any differences in the frequency of use of social media between different demographic groups?

Q4: How often do graduate students read the Graduate College digital newsletter and what information do they find useful?

Q5: How do graduate students prefer to receive information? What platforms do they use in order to access graduate studies-related information?

Hypotheses

H_1: Frequency of reading the graduate newsletter is related to the graduate students' perception that they know where to find graduate program information and related information that pertains to them.

H_2: Frequency of reading the graduate newsletter is related to graduate students' perception that the graduate-studies-related information available via various Graduate College sources helps them to succeed in their graduate programs.

H_3: Frequency of reading the graduate newsletter is related to the graduate students' perception that the graduate-studies-related information available via various Graduate College sources helps them feel that they are part of a larger campus community.

H_4: Frequency of accessing information pertaining to graduate studies via Graduate College social media is related to the graduate students' perception that they know where to find graduate program and related information that pertains to them.

H_5: Frequency of accessing information pertaining to graduate studies via Graduate College social media is related to graduate students' perception that the graduate-studies-related information available via various Graduate College sources helps them to succeed in their graduate programs.

H_6: Frequency of accessing information pertaining to graduate studies via Graduate College social media is related to the graduate students' perception that the graduate-studies-related information available via various Graduate College sources helps them feel that they are part of a larger campus community.

Methodology. This research was carried out at a large southwestern university in the United States. In the last few years, the Graduate College at this university has redesigned their website, introduced social media such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and a blog, and introduced a weekly digital newsletter for graduate students. Although analytics are available to find out how many people read the newsletter, tweet, or have joined their Facebook page, these data do not provide answers to questions such as why graduate students do or do not use digital or social media platforms, which ones they prefer the most, and why they read or do not read the newsletter. These metrics also do not address whether knowledge of and exposure to graduate studies-related information, based on frequency of reading the newsletter and accessing Graduate College social media, leads to a positive perception of where to find such information, graduate success, and a sense of belonging.

A Qualtrics survey was created with 20 questions that addressed types of uses, reasons for use, and frequency of use of both social media in general and social media specifically pertaining to the Graduate College of this university.

Frequency of reading the graduate newsletter was measured on a 4-point scale (more than once a week; every week it is sent; every other week or less frequently; and never). Frequency of accessing social media was measured on a 6-point scale (several times a day; once a day; 4-6 times a week; 2-3 times a week; once a week or less frequently; and never).

The weekly electronic newsletter is an online publication that is delivered via email to all enrolled graduate students and can be read via any platform on which students access their email, including smartphones, notepads, and computers. The newsletter contains timely information, announcements, deadlines regarding degree programs, funding opportunities, professional development workshops, and other useful information along with links to various relevant Graduate College and university-wide resources. The newsletter tries to foster a sense of

community by focusing on the various needs of current graduate students. The Graduate College's social media allows user interaction and engagement, and includes Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and blogs. The icons and links for these are provided in every edition of the weekly newsletter. In addition, mini e-polls are sometimes carried out via the newsletter to get graduate student input on various services provided to them. The newsletter is also archived on the Graduate College's website.

The dependent variables consisted of the following three statements that were measured on a 10-point scale with 0=strongly disagree and 10=strongly agree:

> "I know where to find graduate program and related information that pertains to me."
>
> "The graduate-studies-related information available to me via various Graduate College sources helps me to better succeed in my graduate program."
>
> "The graduate-studies-related information available to me via various Graduate College sources helps me feel that I am part of a larger campus community."

The survey was sent to all the 3973 graduate students enrolled in graduate programs during the fall 2017 semester. Six hundred responses were received for a return rate of 16%. Respondents could participate in a drawing for a chance to win a Kindle Reader. The survey was open from October 19—31, 2017, and two reminders were sent. The research proposal was approved by this institution's review board prior to conducting the research.

Descriptive data were obtained from Qualtrics. SPSS version 26 was used to analyze comparative data.

Findings

Six hundred students participated in the survey. Of the respondents, 26% were males and 73% were females, with 1% choosing the "other" category. Sixty five percent of all graduate students at this university were female at the time data were collected. The average age of the respondents was 31. A majority of the graduate students (85%) were master's students and 15% were doctoral students. Most students were second semester or continuing students (69%), with 31% being first semester students. Fifty-one students (9%) said that they were pursuing an online-only program while the rest of the students were pursuing on-campus programs. While 46% of the students were residents of the two campus towns where they pursued their graduate program, 54% of the students were commuters. Ten percent of the respondents were international students (See Table 1). These demographic characteristics of the participants correspond to the demographic make-up of the overall student population of this university.

Students used a wide range of social media to communicate including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat, Tumblr, LinkedIn, YouTube, and podcasts. Other social media used included WeChat, WhatsApp, Reddit, Gab, Tinder, and GroupMe. However, as Table 2 indicates, the top

Table 1

Demographic Distribution of Respondents in Percent

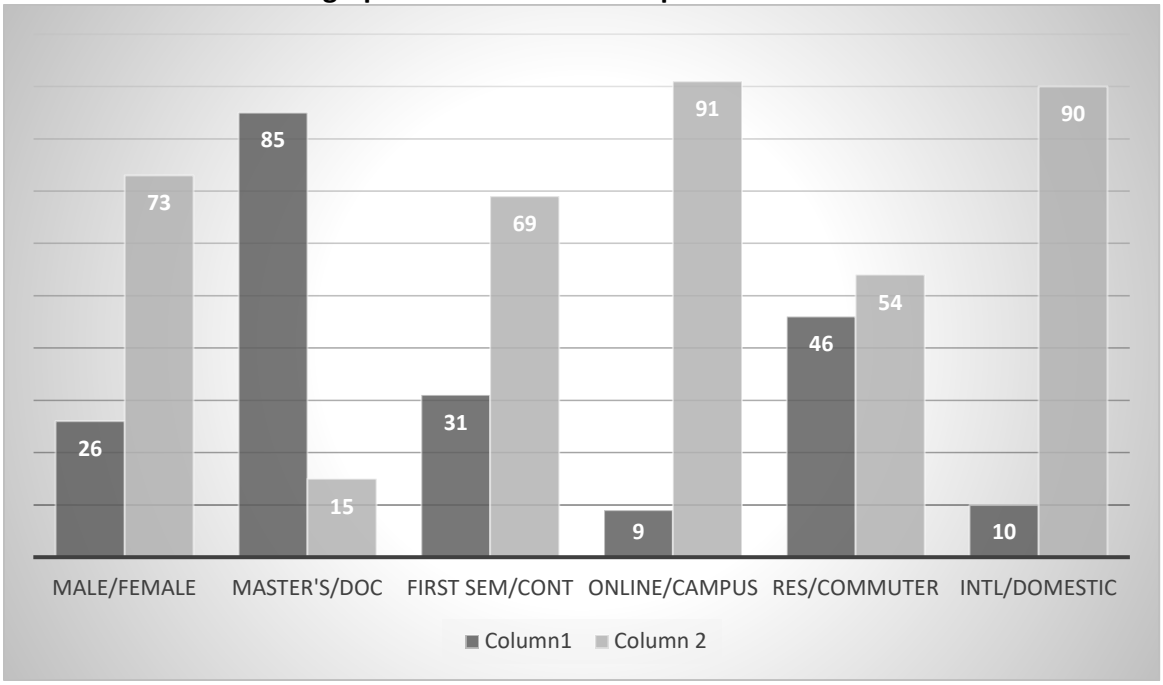
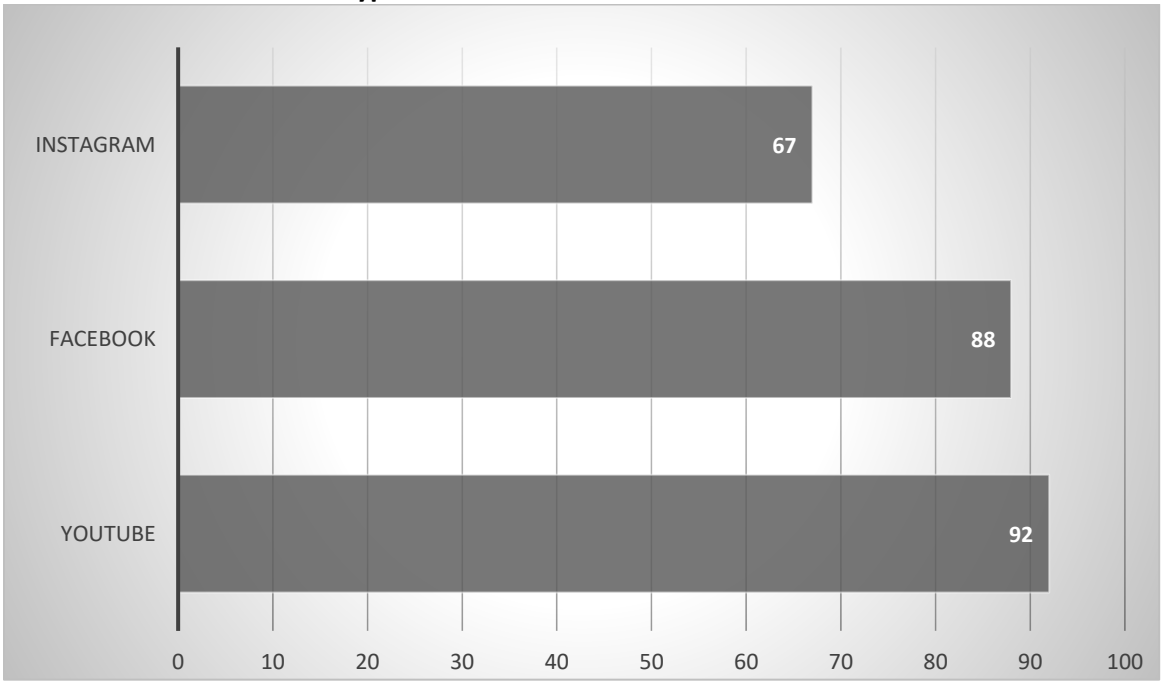


Table 2

Types of Social Media Used in Percent

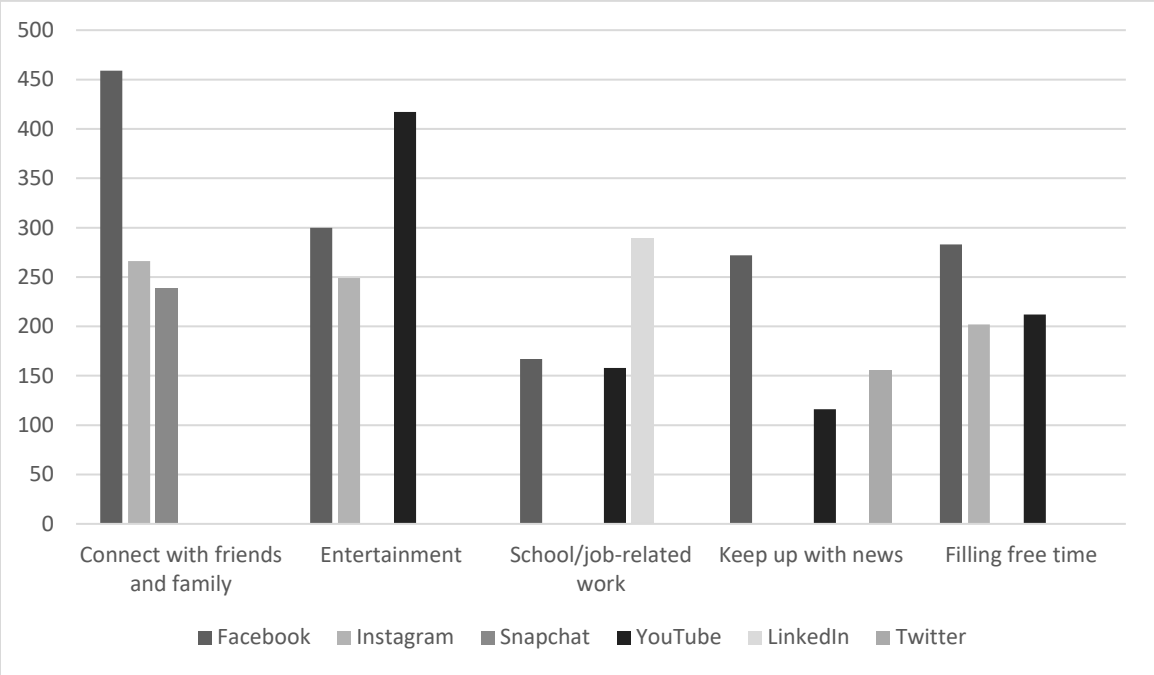


three social media platforms used were YouTube (92%), Facebook (88%) and Instagram (67%). Twitter was never used by 56% of the participants.

In response to the question “Why do you use social media?” respondents could check all of the choices provided that applied. The highest number of responses (459) was for using Facebook to connect with family and friends, followed by Instagram (266) and Snapchat (239). YouTube was used for entertainment by more respondents (417) than Facebook (300) and Instagram (249). LinkedIn had the highest number of users (289) for school/job related work, followed by Facebook (167) and YouTube (158). To keep up with current news, 272 students said that they used Facebook, followed by Twitter (156), YouTube (116), and podcasts (102). Facebook also had the highest number of students (283) using it to fill free time. This was followed by YouTube (212) and Instagram (202). The largest number of students (442) did not use Tumblr, followed by podcasts (297) and Twitter (292; See Table 3).

Table 3

Purposes of Social Media Use in Numbers

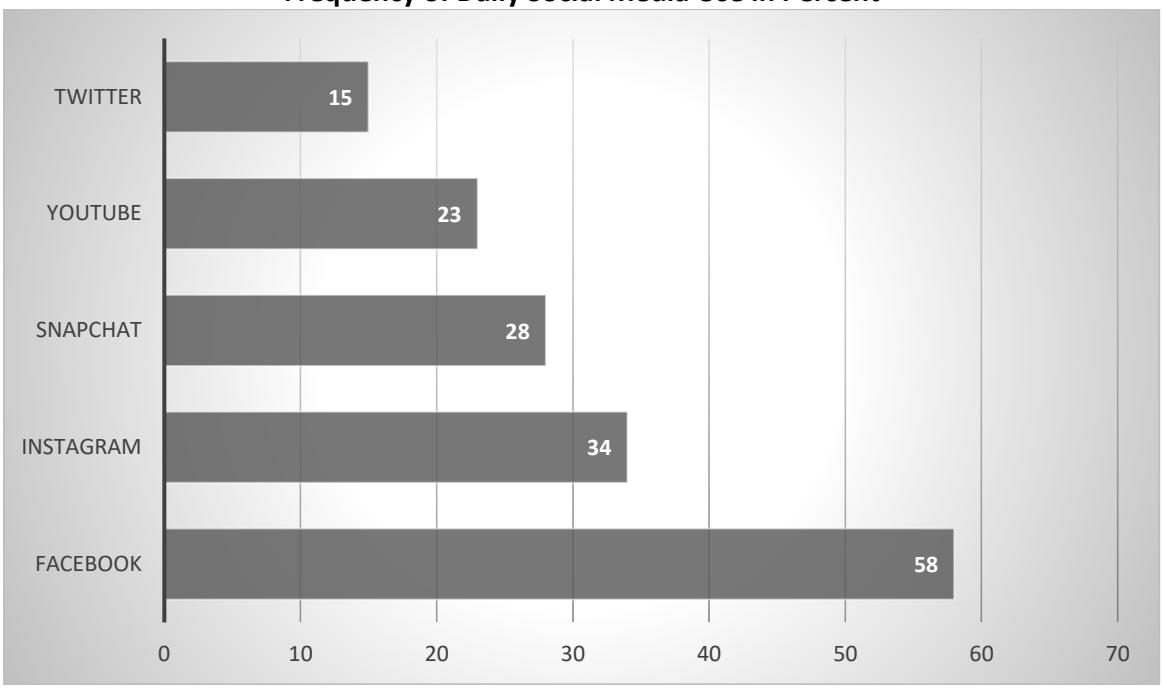


Most students claimed not to use the Graduate College social media channels such as Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook to access information pertaining to graduate studies. Of those who did use the Graduate College Facebook and/or Twitter accounts, most preferred to receive text along with pictures. About 65% of respondents reported using the Graduate College website once a week or less frequently to several times a day to access Graduate College information. Most students also preferred to see the Graduate College information updated once a week or less frequently.

Overall, as can be seen in Table 4, Facebook was the most frequently used social media platform, with 58% of the respondents using it several times a day. Instagram was second (34%), followed by Snapchat (28%), YouTube (23%), and Twitter (15%). There were differences in the frequency of use of some social media platforms between various demographic groups. Frequency of use was measured on a scale ranging from "several times a day" (1) to "never" (6). It was found that people in their 20s accessed Instagram (mean score=2.82) more frequently than those in their 30s or older (mean score=4.06). Those in their 20s also tended to use Snapchat (mean score=3.10) and YouTube (mean score=3.27) more frequently than older students. LinkedIn was accessed more frequently by those 40 and older than those under 40. Facebook was accessed 4-6 times a week or more frequently by respondents in all age groups.

Table 4

Frequency of Daily Social Media Use in Percent



In order to determine whether there were differences in the frequency of social media use between gender groups, *t*-tests were carried out. Respondents who opted for either "male" or "female" categories were included, and those who chose the "other" category were not considered due to their small number (7, or 1.2% of the sample). It was found that female students used Facebook, $t(568)=2.23$, $p=.026$, Instagram, $t(566)=4.54$, $p=.000$, Pinterest, $t(564)=7.92$, $p=.000$, and Snapchat, $t(567)=2.54$, $p=.011$, significantly more frequently than did males. Males used LinkedIn, $t(569)=-2.31$, $p=.021$, and YouTube, $t(569)=-6.08$, $p=.000$, significantly more frequently than did females.

Significant differences were also found among master's and doctoral students. Master's students used Instagram, $t(573)=-4.89$, $p=.000$, Pinterest, $t(571)=-2.7$, $p=.007$, and Snapchat, $t(572)=-5.43$, $p=.000$, significantly more frequently than did doctoral students. First semester students accessed Snapchat significantly more frequently than did continuing students, $t(573)=-2.52$, $p=.012$.

International students accessed LinkedIn, $t(573)=-6.31$, $p=.000$, and YouTube, $t(574)= 6.63$, $p=.000$, significantly more frequently than did domestic students but accessed Snapchat, $t(572)=2.26$, $p=.024$, and podcasts, $t(572)=2.37$, $p=.018$, significantly less frequently. The only differences between on-campus and online students were that students in on-campus programs used Twitter, $t(573)=2.58$, $p=.012$ and YouTube, $t(574)=2.73$, $p=.007$, significantly more frequently than did students pursuing online programs.

To the question how often they read the weekly Graduate College newsletter, about 46% of the respondents said that they read it every week that it is sent. About 35% of the respondents said that they read it every other week or less frequently. About 4% of the respondents said that they read it more than once a week, and 15% said that they never read it. Those who did not read the newsletter were asked to explain why this was so. Responses to this open-ended question included not knowing that it existed, not being interested, and not finding it directly relevant or program-specific. Those who read the newsletter were asked how useful they found the various types of information in the newsletter. About 54% of the respondents found deadline information very useful, followed by events announcements (34.91%), funding opportunities (34.92%), and workshop/shop talk announcements (34.03%).

The top-ranked choice for the way students preferred to receive information about graduate studies was via email, with 70% of the respondents opting for this choice. This was followed by the Graduate College newsletter sent via email, with 37% of the respondents ranking this second, and the Graduate College website, with 39% of the respondents ranking this third.

Most respondents (57%) preferred to check information on the Graduate College via their computers (laptops/desktops), while 41% of the respondents preferred to use their smartphones. Only 2% said that they used tablets. A higher percentage of doctoral students (62.35%) used laptops and desktops to check Graduate College information compared to master's students (55.34%), while a higher percentage of master's students used smartphones (42.95%) compared to doctoral students (31.76%). Those in the 20-29 age group preferred using their smartphones to access information, while older students preferred to use computers (i.e., laptops and desktops).

Hypotheses Testing. One-way ANOVAs were carried out in order to test the six research hypotheses. The goal was to determine if frequency of accessing Graduate College social media (Facebook, Twitter, Blog, and YouTube) and frequency of reading the digital newsletter were related to students' perceptions of knowing where to find graduate program and related information; students' perceptions of graduate-studies-related information as helpful in succeeding in their graduate programs, and students' perceptions that such information helps them feel that they are part of a larger campus community. These six ANOVAs therefore represented the complete crossing of two independent factors with three dependent variables. Accordingly, there were six factor levels for three of the ANOVAs, with the levels corresponding to how frequently students accessed Graduate College social media (several times a day; once a day; 4-6 times a week; 2-3 times a week; once a week or less frequently; and never). There were four factor levels for the remaining three ANOVAs, with the levels corresponding to how frequently students read the newsletter (more than once a week; every week it is sent; every other week or less frequently; and never).

The ANOVA corresponding to H_1 was found to be statistically significant. The relationship between the frequency of reading the graduate newsletter and perception that respondents knew where to find graduate-program and related information was significant, $F(3, 514)=4.630$, $p=0.003$. As can be seen from Table 5, those who accessed the newsletter every week it is sent rated their perception of knowing where to find graduate program and related information highest on the 10-point scale (8.05). Surprisingly, those who never accessed the newsletter rated themselves higher (7.48) than those who accessed it more than once a week or every other week or less frequently.

Table 5
Frequency of Reading the Digital Newsletter and Knowledge of Where to Find Graduate Studies-Related Information

	Frequency of reading graduate studies-related information via the digital newsletter	N	Mean	*sd*
Knowledge of where to find graduate program and related information	More than once a week	17	7.00	2.89
	Every week it is sent	249	8.05	2.10
	Every other week or less frequently	181	7.26	2.49
	Never	71	7.48	2.67
	Total	518	7.66	2.38

$F(3, 514)=4.630$, $p=0.003$

A statistically significant relationship was also found between the frequency of reading the graduate newsletter and perception that this helped respondents to better succeed in their graduate programs, $F(3, 503)=14.186$, $p=0.000$. The null hypothesis was rejected and H_2 was retained. As can be seen from Table 6, those who accessed the newsletter every week it is sent rated their perception of program success highest on the 10-point scale (7.27), followed by those who accessed it more than once a week (6.82). Those who accessed it less frequently or never accessed it had lower ratings for their perceptions of graduate success.

A significant relationship was found between the frequency of reading the graduate newsletter and the feeling that respondents are part of a larger campus community. The null hypothesis was rejected and H_3 was retained, $F(3, 492)=9.559$, $p=.000$. It can be seen from Table 7 that those who read the graduate newsletter every week that it is sent or more than once a week rated their perception of being part of the campus community higher than those who read it less frequently.

Frequency of accessing information pertaining to graduate studies via social media was not significantly related to graduate students' perception of knowing where to find graduate program and related information that pertains to them. H_4 was not supported. However, those who accessed Graduate College Facebook 2-3 times a week had the highest mean score of 8.43 on a scale of 10

Table 6

Frequency of Reading the Digital Newsletter and Graduate Program Success

	Frequency of reading graduate studies-related information via the digital newsletter	N	Mean	*sd*
Graduate studies information available to me helps me to better succeed in my graduate program	More than once a week	17	6.82	2.88
	Every week it is sent	250	7.27	2.33
	Every other week or less frequently	178	5.93	2.65
	Never	62	5.37	3.29
	Total	507	6.55	2.70

F(3, 503)=14.186, *p*=0.000

Table 7

Frequency of Reading the Digital Newsletter and Feeling of Being Part of the Campus Community

	Frequency of reading graduate studies-related information via the digital newsletter	N	Mean	*sd*
Graduate studies information available to me helps me feel that I am part of a larger campus community	More than once a week	17	6.24	2.70
	Every week it is sent	246	6.38	2.74
	Every other week or less frequently	175	5.34	2.82
	Never	58	4.43	3.28
	Total	496	5.78	2.91

F(3, 492)=9.559, *p*=.000

indicating that they knew best where to find graduate program and related information. Most students accessed Graduate College Twitter once a week or less frequently. This group also had the highest mean score of 8.21. Students who looked at blogs 2-3 times a week had the highest mean score of 9.6 followed by those who checked blogs once a week or less frequently (8.54) showing that they knew where to find graduate program and related information. With regard to YouTube those who saw it once a day (n=3) had the highest mean score (9.67) and those who said they accessed it four to six times a week (n=2) had the lowest means score (5.0). Most people accessed it once a week or less frequently (28) and had a mean score of 7.75.

H_5 was found to be partially supported. Frequency of accessing Graduate College Facebook, *F*(5, 490)=2.629, *p*=.023, and YouTube, *F*(5,499)=2.259, *p*=0.048, was found to be significantly related to students' perception that the graduate-studies-related information available via various Graduate

College sources helps them to succeed in their graduate programs. The group that accessed Facebook 2-3 times a week had the highest average score of 7.56 on a scale of 10, and the group that never accessed it had the lowest score of 6.23. Students who accessed YouTube once a day (3) had the highest mean score of 9.33 and those who saw it four to six times a week had a mean score of 3.5. However, frequency of accessing Twitter and Blog was not significantly related to perception of student success.

Accessing Graduate College Facebook, $F(5,490)=2.63$, $p=0.023$, YouTube, $F(5,487)=2.36$, $p=0.039$ and Blog, $F(5,483)=3.166$, $p=0.008$, were significantly related to graduate students' perception that the graduate-studies-related information available via various Graduate College sources helps them feel that they are part of a larger campus community. However, accessing Graduate College Twitter was not significantly related to their sense of being part of the campus community. H_6 was partially supported.

Discussion

This research contributes to the sparse literature that is available on master's and doctoral students' use of digital and social media, particularly from a managerial perspective (Alsufyan and Aloud, 2016). The findings of this research have theoretical as well as practical implications in furthering the best practices of strategic communication of information that promotes awareness of resources, graduate student success and a sense of community. These factors play an important role in student retention.

Although this study was conducted at a single southwestern university, the sample size of 600 was diverse and the findings about social media use support those found in national surveys. For example, our finding that YouTube and Facebook are the top social media platforms used by graduate students is consistent with the findings of Pew Research Center's national study reported by Smith and Anderson (2018). Our study found that graduate students in their twenties accessed Snapchat and Instagram more frequently than did their older counterparts. This supports the Pew Center's research (Smith and Anderson, 2018) that shows 18-24-year-olds use Snapchat and Instagram more than the general adult population does. In this study, on average, older students tended to use LinkedIn, but Facebook was accessed by those in all age groups. As social media diffusion and use patterns across different age groups may change due to the rapid and continuing evolution of social media uses, it is recommended that studies be regularly carried out to better understand the diffusion and use patterns of social media by graduate students and to strategically communicate with them.

This study found significant differences in the frequency of social media use between different groups of graduate students. Knowledge of such differences would be useful while attempting to reach out to different groups of students and to use appropriate channels to disseminate information based on students' preferred ways to access social media. For example, this study found that international students preferred to use LinkedIn, a platform that universities could use to recruit international students. Contrary to expectations that online students may be using social media platforms more frequently, it was found that the only significant differences were in the use of Twitter and YouTube both of which were used more frequently by on-campus students. Due to

the various differences in the frequency of use of social media platforms, using a variety of social media platforms to get a message across might be effective.

Providing relevant resources to support graduate students is important and ensuring that the students are aware of how to access such information is equally important (CGS, 2019; Milman et al, 2015). Not having adequate knowledge of such access can be a challenge to graduate success (Hardré and Pan, 2017). In this study, the finding that frequency of reading the Graduate College's digital newsletter was significantly statistically positively related to awareness of where to find graduate studies-related information and the perception that such information helps them to achieve graduate program success indicates that the newsletter plays an important role in linking students with important information and resources and increases their perception of graduate program success. Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that graduate schools that do not have a digital newsletter to connect with their graduate students need to consider starting one. This study found that although the weekly newsletter is a successful form of communication, many graduate students said that they did not read the newsletter. Based on their comments, it is recommended that the content of the newsletter should be interesting, interactive and directly relevant to students across the disciplines. It is suggested that graduate school administrators create awareness at various events such as the graduate student orientation that reading the newsletter regularly is very important for student success. Graduate faculty across the campus could reiterate its importance to their graduate students.

Based on the finding that Graduate College Facebook and YouTube access is significantly related to graduate students' perception of student success, graduate schools can consider encouraging graduate students to use their graduate school's Facebook and YouTube. Posting short videos of various graduate-studies-related resources would enable students to make better use of such resources that are needed for them to succeed in their programs. Researchers have found that students lack the knowledge of how and when to access timely information (Hardré and Pan, 2017) and the Council of Graduate Schools has stated that effective communication within the graduate community would help disseminate such information (CGS 2019). We recommend that appropriate social media be used to inform students how to access information about graduate resources and deadlines.

This study addresses the gap in literature that pertains to graduate students as stakeholders of a university community. A feeling of a sense of belonging and community has been found to affect student success and retention but has not been adequately studied among graduate students (O'Meara et al, 2017). According to Clark et al (2017) it is essential for universities to maintain a positive relationship with the student body. They recommend using social media as one way to establish such a relationship. Scholars have also stated the need to create better awareness of the opportunities to interact with others (Scheepers et al,2014). In this study we found a statistically significant positive relationship between frequency of reading the graduate newsletter and the perception of being part of the campus community. While promoting the readership of the newsletter among graduate students, administrators can also think of branding it as a community tool of the graduate community. In our study, we also found that accessing social media (Facebook, YouTube and blog) contributed significantly to making students feel a sense of belonging to the campus community. Those who used social media platforms preferred to receive pictures along with text. This would suggest that universities could better connect with students to build

community by using visual and textual information with some entertainment value via social media platforms.

Uses and gratifications theory has identified needs that motivate media use such as emotional needs, cognitive needs, social needs and habitual needs (Wang et al, 2012). Media use depends on social roles and the needs met by the media (Katz et al, 1973). In this study it was found that social media was used mainly to connect with friends and family and for entertainment purposes and not as much for accessing graduate-studies-related information supporting past research findings (see for example, Mehta et al, 2015, and Galan et al, 2015). However, many graduate students who used Graduate College social media had more positive perceptions of student success and a sense of belonging to the campus community. We recommend that the university administration actively promote the idea that social media accounts of universities are used to disseminate information that is relevant to the members of the university community, promote student success and foster a sense of belonging.

Although most students in our study accessed social media platforms mainly to connect with friends and family, the online content they generate has a bearing not only on their future or current professional lives but also on the institution. For example, content generated by stakeholders such as students can also lead to issues and controversies. Educational institutions need to make sure that they have policies for institutional and personal use of social media use and post these on their websites. Eaton et al (2012) urge universities to be proactive in developing a social media policy and training people to use it.

Conclusion

This research examined digital and social media uses among graduate students and based on the findings made recommendations for strategic use of these media by graduate school administrators. This study's recommendation of using social media, digital newsletters and other forms of online communication to increase graduate student awareness of resources, achieving student success, and being part of a community is in keeping with past research (Tran et al; Clark et al, 2017; and Milman et al, 2015) as well as best practices of graduate administration (CGS, 2017; Denecke et al, 2017). Hence, it may be beneficial for graduate schools to regularly carry out similar studies to better understand graduate students' communication habits and to harness the findings to establish a stronger communication with these stakeholders and to better serve their needs.

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Diffusion of Innovation: An Exploration of Institutional Financial Resources and Test-Optional Admissions Policy Adoption

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Higher education is the "business" of progress—knowledge creation, idea generation, and solution development (Buller, 2014). However, higher education is also characterized by deeply held traditions that are often reflected by a resistance to change (Bok, 2015; Buller, 2014; Christensen & Eyring, 2011; Kirp, 2003; Lombardi, 2013). Landmark events in recent history, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, have forced many institutions to adapt to a rapidly evolving landscape (Turk et al., 2020). Despite unforeseen conditions that provoke change, some institutions are recognized for making groundbreaking decisions that distinguish them from peers (Christensen & Eyring, 2011; Kirp, 2003). We use innovation diffusion theory (Rogers, 1962) to consider several financial factors that may help explain why some institutions are leaders in adopting innovative practices and policies, while others lag behind.

Since the emergence of higher education in America, financial disparities between institutions have persisted resulting in a stratified postsecondary educational system (Labaree, 2017; Taylor & Cantwell, 2018, 2019; Winston, 2004). Institutional resources and expenditures have been associated with rankings (Hazelkorn, 2015), prestige (Bowen, 1980; McClure & Titus, 2018; Volkwein & Sweitzer, 2006), admissions selectivity (Taylor & Cantwell, 2018, 2019), and educational outcomes (Pike et al., 2010). Increased administrative spending has been directly linked to an institution's pursuit of greater prestige and legitimacy within the higher education marketplace (McClure & Titus, 2018). As institutions acquire greater prestige through the output of administrative spending, they experience an increase in status thereby generating new and renewed access to financial resources (McClure & Titus, 2018). This system maintains a status quo environment in which a small cohort of the nation's wealthiest and most selective institutions organically maintain a distinctive status by amassing institutional resources (Hearn, 2013). Less, however, is known about how institutional financial resources relate to institutional decision-making such as policy development and implementation.

The adoption of test-optional admissions policies in the United States is not a new phenomenon. Bowdoin College is widely considered the first institution to adopt a test-optional policy when it made the submission of standardized test scores such as the SAT non-mandatory for undergraduate admissions applicants in 1969 (Test Optional Policy, n.d.). Many selective liberal arts colleges followed by adopting test-optional or test-free policies (FairTest, 2022a; Furuta, 2017). Test-optional policies allow admissions applicants to decide whether to submit test scores as part of their application for admission while test-free policies forgo the consideration of test scores for admissions.

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the adoption of test-optional and test-free admissions policies has proliferated (Elias, 2022). As of November 2022, more than 1,835 institutions adopted a test-optional policy for Fall 2023 admissions, with approximately 1,450 of these institutions extending test-optional policies at least through the Fall 2024 admissions cycle (FairTest, 2022a). Given the growth in test-optional policy adoption, even prior to COVID-19, scholars have examined institutional rationalizations for implementing test-optional policies (Furuta, 2017) and their effects on important admissions indicators such as application volume, admissions selectivity, and the composition of the student body (Paris et al., 2022; Belasco et al., 2015; Bennett, 2021; Rubin & González Canché, 2019; Saboe & Terrizzi, 2019; Sweitzer et al., 2018; Syverson et al., 2018). Test-optional policies have been associated with increased volume of admissions applicants (Paris et al., 2022; Belasco et al., 2015; Hiss & Franks, 2014; Sweitzer et al., 2018; Syverson et al., 2018), a valuable objective among institutions that seek to increase tuition revenue, admissions selectivity, or institutional ranking, and thereby generate resources and enhance institutional prestige (Paris, 2022; Belasco et al., 2015; Furuta, 2017; Lucido, 2017; McClure & Titus, 2018). Despite the increasing prevalence of test-optional admissions policies, prior research has not investigated the extent to which these policies serve as a market innovation nor the potential associations between test-optional policy adoption and institutional financial resources. Accordingly, we consider institution-level financial factors that may help explain the timing by which institutions adopt test-optional admissions policies[1].

Diffusion of Innovation Theory

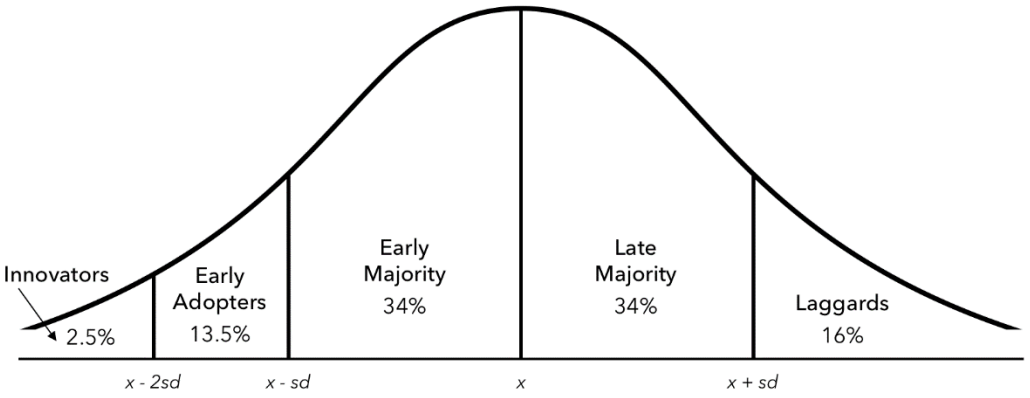
Diffusion of innovation (DOI; Rogers, 1962, 2010) is considered a chronology and a discipline-transcendent theory that explains how individuals and organizations adopt an innovation, technology, or idea relative to the broader marketplace across time. DOI suggests how individuals and organizations may differ based on the timing of their adoption of an innovation. The theory posits that the adoption of a specific innovation is distributed across a "diffusion curve" (i.e., Rogers' Adoption Curve) that consists of phases, each of which corresponds with the timing by which a group adopted the innovation (see Figure 1). Diffusion curve phases include innovators (2.5%), early adopters (13.5%), early majority (34%), late majority (34%), and laggards (16%). These phases total 100% which reflects the total adoption of the innovation and a complete saturation of the marketplace (Rogers, 2003). According to Lund et al. (2020), "By using these adopter categories as a demographic variable for a population, it may be possible to examine how different categories of adopters view emerging topics differently" (para. 12). Accordingly, we employ the DOI phases as an institutional characteristic (and our outcome of interest) to explore how varying levels of institutional financial resources may explain differences in the timing by which institutions adopt test-optional policies. While DOI has previously been utilized in higher education research to study the adoption of innovative teaching practices (Pinho et al., 2021; Scott & McGuire, 2017), prior research has not used DOI to examine policy adoption among higher education institutions.

As DOI pertains to the study of test-optional admissions policy adoption, the theory suggests that early entrants to the test-optional marketplace may not realize the same outcomes as later adopters because prospective students are unlikely familiar with how test-optional policies work

[1] We use the term "test-optional admissions policy" to refer to institutions that adopted a test-optional or test-free admissions policy.

Figure 1

Relationship between Types of Adopters Classified by Innovativeness and Location on Rogers' Adoption Curve



Note. Source: Rogers (2010)

and their associated benefits. However, as the test-optional marketplace becomes saturated, institutions will realize diminishing returns as policy adoption does not produce the same intended effects.

Current Study

We hypothesize that institutions with greater financial resources (e.g., endowment assets) and less dependence on tuition revenue as a source of core revenues have greater financial stability and autonomy, and therefore are better positioned to implement innovative policies and practices than institutions with fewer resources and greater dependence on tuition revenue. Guided by DOI, we address the following research questions (RQs) to advance an understanding of the relationships between institutional financial resources and the timing by which institutions adopt a test-optional admissions policy:

1. Is endowment assets per full-time equivalent (FTE) student a statistically significant predictor of institutions' test-optional admissions policy adoption phase?

2. Is tuition revenue dependence, as approximated by tuition revenue as a percentage of core revenues, a statistically significant predictor of institutions' test-optional admissions policy adoption phase?

Methods

We addressed our research questions by analyzing a panel of data collected from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) for reporting years 2001 through 2019. Using cumulative odds ordinal logistic regression with proportional odds (Liu & Koirala, 2012), we

examined whether several institution-level financial variables are statistically significant predictors of an institution's test-optional policy adoption phase, when controlling for institutional characteristics, acceptance rate, and the percentage of students receiving institutional grant aid.

Sample. We used the National Center for Fair and Open Testing (FairTest, 2022b) test-optional growth chronology to identify (a) institutions with test-optional policies, and (b) the season (i.e., fall, spring, summer) during which an institution adopted a test-optional policy. Our sample included 290 IPEDS-submitting non-profit public and private institutions located in the United States. Each of these institutions adopted a test-optional policy between 2004 and 2019. We excluded institutions that adopted test-optional admissions policies since March 2020 given the variable impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on higher education institutions (Turk et al., 2020). Using listwise deletion, we removed two cases (.69%) for missing acceptance rate data resulting in an analytical sample of 288 institutions. We had complete data for all other variables. Table 1 presents descriptive statistics on the institutions included in our sample.

Procedures. Using Rogers' Adoption Curve, we assigned one of the following adoption phases to each institution based on the year and season it adopted a test-optional admissions policy: innovator, early adopter, early majority, late majority, and laggard. Table 2 presents the adoption phases for the institutions in our sample. Then, we calculated a three-year average for each predictor variable using IPEDS data from the three years immediately prior to an institution's adoption of a test-optional admissions policy. For example, for institutions that adopted a test-optional policy in 2015, we calculated a three-year average for each predictor variable and covariate using IPEDS data from years 2012, 2013, and 2014. We used National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO) historic endowment study data (NACUBO, 2021) to supplement missing IPEDS data for endowment assets per FTE student. We created a composite variable for Basic Carnegie Classification by grouping institutions into three categories: Baccalaureate Colleges and Special Focus Institutions, Doctoral Universities, and Master's Colleges & Universities. We then dummy coded this variable using Master's Colleges & Universities as the reference category. We computed the common log of full-time first-time undergraduate enrollment headcount and endowment assets per FTE student to ensure our continuous data conformed to lognormal distribution, thereby enhancing the validity of our analyses and interpretation of our findings.

Variables. Our study included several institutional-level variables used to explain the potential relationships between institutional financial resources, institutional characteristics, acceptance rate, percentage of students receiving institutional grant aid, and test-optional policy adoption phase, our outcome variable of interest.

Predictor and Outcome Variables. We included two predictor variables for institutional financial resources: endowment assets per FTE student (RQ1) and tuition revenue as a percentage of core revenues (RQ2). We included endowment assets per FTE student as prior research suggests that an institution's measure of financial well-being, best expressed as overall endowment value, is characterized by its ability to provide financial aid to students with demonstrated need (Ehrenberg & Smith, 2001). Endowments assets per FTE student was a continuous variable that reflected the year-end market value of total endowment assets per FTE student. We adjusted this variable to hold it in constant 2019 dollars using the U.S. Census Bureau inflation calculation methodology (U.S.

Table 1
Institutional Characteristics

	n	Percentage
Institutional Control		
Private	240	82.8
Public	50	17.2
Basic Carnegie Classification		
Baccalaureate Colleges and Special Focus Institutions	109	37.6
Master's Colleges and Universities	116	40.0
Doctoral Universities	65	22.4
Full-time First-time Undergraduate Student Headcount		
41 – 303	73	25.2
304 – 508	73	25.2
509 – 913	73	25.2
914 – 7,896	71	24.5
Acceptance Rate (Percentage)		
8 – 59	70	24.3
60 – 68	68	23.6
69 – 76	76	26.4
77 – 96	74	25.7
Students Receiving Institutional Grant Aid (Percentage)		
10 – 71	72	24.8
72 – 92	73	25.2
93 – 98	80	27.6
99 – 100	65	22.4

Note. n = 290 for institutional control, Carnegie Classification, student headcount, and institutional grant aid. n = 288 for acceptance rate. Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Census Bureau, 2021). Tuition revenue as a percentage of core revenues included all tuition and fees assessed against students (net of refunds, discounts, and allowances) for educational purposes (IPEDS, 2019). This variable reflected the extent to which an institution depended on tuition and fees as a source of core revenues. Adoption phase (innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards) served as the outcome variable on an ordinal scale and reflected the timing by which an institution adopted a test-optional admissions policy. We coded adoption phase as follows: innovators (1), early adopters (2), early majority (3), late majority (4), and laggards (5).

Table 2

Roger's Diffusion of Innovations Model and Composition of Institutions in the Study Sample

	Percentage of Institutions	
Categories of Innovations in Roger's Model	Standard Innovation Diffusion Model	Institutions in the Study Sample
Innovators	2.5	2.8
Early Adopters	13.5	12.5
Early Majority	34.0	34.7
Late Majority	34.0	34.7
Laggards	16.0	15.3

Note. n = 288

Covariates. We included several institutional characteristics as covariates including institutional control (i.e., public, private), Basic Carnegie Classification, full-time first-time undergraduate enrollment headcount, acceptance rate (i.e., the percentage of applicants admitted), and the percentage of students receiving institutional grant aid. We used these variables in our analyses to account for the potential effects of fixed factors and the variability in institutional characteristics and typology on our outcome of interest. Specifically, we included institutional control to account for differences in tuition revenues, and the disproportionate number of private institutions in our sample. We included acceptance rate as a covariate to account for the propensity of institutions to adopt a test-optional admissions policy to decrease acceptance rate and thereby increase admissions selectivity. Based on the findings of prior research, we hypothesize that institutions with a higher acceptance rate may opt to introduce a test-optional admissions policy to attract a greater volume of applications and thereby appear more selective (Belasco et al., 2015; Bennett, 2021). We included the percentage of students receiving institutional grant aid as, *ceteris paribus*, financial resources may provide institutions with the financial flexibility and cushioning needed to subsidize tuition (Hearn & Rosinger, 2014) in an effort to shape the composition of the student body (Brooks, 2015; Brown & Gross, 2015; Gross, 2015) in ways similar to the stated objectives of test-optional admissions policy adoption (Paris et al., 2022; Belasco et al., 2015; Hiss & Franks, 2014; Saboe & Terrizzi, 2019; Sweitzer et al., 2018; Syverson et al., 2018).

Data Analysis. We tested our data to confirm whether they met the assumptions of ordinal regression analysis. We computed descriptive statistics to contextualize our findings. Next, we conducted correlational analyses to examine the strength and directions of the relationships between our predictor and outcome variables (see Table 3). Last, we developed cumulative odds ordinal logistic regression models with proportional odds (Liu & Koirala, 2012) to address each of our research questions (Models 1 and 2). For robustness, we also developed a combined model using both predictor variables (Model 3).

Limitations. Readers should be aware of several limitations of our study. First, the years of our data range from 2001 to 2019 and therefore our study does not include some of the earliest adopters of test-optional admissions policies. Accordingly, our assignment of adopter categories to the

Table 3

Correlation Matrix

Variable	M	*sd*	Instl Control	Carnegie Class	Acptnce Rate	First-time Students	Instl Grant Aid	Endwmnt Assets
Institutional Control			—					
Carnegie Class			-.101	—				
Acceptance Rate, Logged	1.8126	.116	-.147*	-.183**	—			
First-time Full-time Students, Logged	2.727	.381	-.509**	.337**	-.064	—		
Institutional Grant Aid, Logged	1.888	.179	.641**	-.029	.221**	-.425**	—	
Endowment Assets per FTE, Logged	4.595	.920	.315**	.175**	-.238**	-.092	.079	—
Tuition Revenue, Logged	1.753	.163	.534**	-.244**	.231**	-.210**	.429**	-.329**

Note. n = 288. ** p < .01, * p < .05. Institutional control: 0 = public, 1 = private. Carnegie Classification: 1 = Master's Colleges and Universities, 2 = Baccalaureate Colleges & Special Focus 4-year Institutions, 3 = Doctoral Universities. The variable "institutional grant aid" refers to the percentage of students receiving institutional grant aid. The variable "tuition revenue" refers to tuition revenue as a percentage of core revenues.

institutions in our sample does not capture the entire test-optional movement as the years of our data panel do not span 1969 to present. Further, the adoption of test-optional admissions policies does not follow a normal distribution as envisioned in Roger's model. However, our assignment of adoption phases to the institutions in our sample allowed us to consider how test-optional policy adoption was distributed across the study years (2001-2019).

Our study does not distinguish between the various type of test-optional policies (e.g., test-free, test-flexible). Each type of policy has a potential set of unique implications for higher education. However, our exploratory interest in test-optional admissions as a policy innovation does not warrant differentiation between these policy types. Although a valuable contribution to the literature, a comparison of institutions that adopted test-optional policies prior to and amid the pandemic is beyond the scope of our study. Despite these limitations, we believe our study captures the chronology of the pre-COVID-19 test-optional movement, but not its historic origins.

Results

We confirmed that collinearity statistics were within accepted limits (Tolerance = .220 – .669, VIF = 1.494 – 4.555) indicating that there were no issues of multicollinearity among our variables. However, the assumption of proportional odds was violated for Models 1 and 2, as assessed by a full likelihood test and comparison of the results of separate binomial logistic regressions on cumulative splits of the adoption category outcome variable, $\chi^2(21) = 33.002$, $p = .046$ (Model 1); $\chi^2(21) = 45.371$, $p = .002$ (Model 2). The assumption of proportional odds was met for Model 3, as

assessed by a full likelihood ratio test comparing the fit of the proportional odds model to a model with varying location parameters, $\chi^2(24) = 14.314$, $p = .939$ (Model 3). We present the results for each model in Table 4 and discuss our findings for Model 3 with a word of caution about analyzing our variables of interest as separate predictors as we did for Models 1 and 2.

The Pearson goodness-of-fit test indicated that the combined model (Model 3) was a good fit to the observed data, $\chi^2(1140) = 1167.496$, $p < .279$. The model explained approximately 25.0% of the variance in test-optional adoption category, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .250$. The final model statistically significantly predicted test-optional adoption category over and above the intercept-only model, $\chi^2(8) = 77.005$, $p < .001$.

Our first research question asked whether endowment assets per FTE student is a statistically significant predictor of test-optional admissions policy adoption phase. In the combined model (Model 3), endowment assets per FTE student was a statistically significant predictor ($p < .001$) of adoption phase. An increase in endowment assets per FTE student was associated with a later adoption phase, with an odds ratio of .425, 95% CI [.302, .599], Wald $\chi^2(1) = 23.882$. That is, for every one dollar increase in endowment assets per FTE student, the odds of an institution adopting an earlier adoption phase decreases by .425 times.

Our second research question asked whether tuition revenue as a percentage of core revenues is a statistically significant predictor of test-optional admissions policy adoption phase. In the combined model (Model 3), tuition revenue as a percentage of core revenues was not a statistically significant predictor of adoption phase, Wald $\chi^2(1) = 1.185$, $p = .276$.

In Model 3, an increase in the percentage of students receiving institutional grant aid was associated with an earlier adoption phase, with an odds ratio of 87.207, 95% CI [13.689, 555.571], Wald $\chi^2(1) = 22.368$, $p < .001$. That is, for every 1% increase in the percentage of students receiving institutional grant aid, the odds of an institution introducing a test-optional policy during an earlier adoption phase increases by approximately 87 times.

Discussion

In summary, our ordinal regression analyses produced three noteworthy findings. First and most notably, the percentage of students receiving institutional grant aid was a statistically significant predictor of test-optional admissions policy adoption phase, as an increase in the percentage of students receiving institutional grant strongly increased the odds that an institution introduced a test-optional policy during an early phase of the adoption cycle. Second, endowment assets per FTE student was a statistically significant predictor of an institution's test-optional admissions policy adoption phase as an increase in endowment assets per FTE student is associated with a later adoption phase. Third, tuition revenue as a percentage of core revenues was not a statistically significant predictor of test-optional adoption phase. This suggests that an institution's dependence on tuition revenue as a percentage of core revenues may not be associated with the decision to adopt a test-optional admissions policy.

Table 4

Ordinal Regression Predicting Adoption Phase

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3 (Preferred)		
Variable	OR	95% CI	*p*	OR	95% CI	*p*	OR	95% CI	*p*
Public	4.086	(1.644, 10.155)	.002	14.028	(4.973, 39.575)	< .001	2.630	(.780, 8.863)	.119
Master's Colleges and Universities	.826	(.432, 1.580)	.563	.915	(.479, 1.748)	.789	.863	(.450, 1.656)	.658
Baccalaureate & Special Focus Colleges	.576	(.287, 1.155)	.120	.513	(.256, 1.027)	.059	.563	(.280, 1.132)	.107
Acceptance Rate, Logged	.178	(.021, 1.525)	.115	.129	(.014, 1.203)	.072	.279	(.029, 2.673)	.268
First-time Full-time Students, Logged	.969	(.446, 2.105)	.937	.744	(.343, 1.615)	.455	1.048	(.476, 2.306)	.908
Institutional Grant Aid, Logged	88.656	(13.975, 562.430)	< .001	117.964	(117.964, 734.088)	< .001	87.207	(13.689, 555.571)	< .001
Endowment Assets per FTE, Logged	.472	(.356, .625)	< .001	—	—	—	.425	(.302, .599)	< .001
Tuition Revenue, Logged	—	—	—	8.615	(1.409, 52.671)	.020	.291	(.031, 2.688)	.276

Note. n = 288. OR = odds ratio, *Exp(B)*. CI = confidence interval.

We caution treating endowment assets per FTE student and tuition revenue as a percentage of core revenues as separate predictors of test-optional policy adoption phase. Our findings suggest that these variables do not have an identical effect at each cumulative split of test-optional adoption phase. We believe this is because of the inherent relationship between endowment size and dependance on tuition as a source of core revenues. That is, the larger an institution's endowment, the less it relies on tuition revenue to fund its operating budget (NACUBO, 2021). Accordingly, in our combined model (Model 3), the assumption of proportional odds held for each predictor variable, thereby indicating a similar distance between each adoption phase compared to Models 1 and 2 for which we used each variable as a separate predictor.

Implications for Policy and Practice. Our finding that an increase in the percentage of students receiving institutional grant aid is associated with a substantial increase in the odds of an institution adopting a test-optional admissions policy early in the adoption cycle suggests that tuition discounting and adopting a test-optional admissions policy may be complementary strategies for increasing student enrollment and net tuition revenue. Jalal and Khaksari (2019) found that tuition discounting helps institutions enhance their short-term operating surplus and increase admissions yield (Jalal & Khaksari, 2019). However, heavy reliance on tuition discounting is associated with key indicators of financial risk including more financial leverage, less equity, and lower liquidity and asset turnover (Jalal & Khaksari, 2019). Therefore, we suspect institutions that heavily discount tuition or provide tuition discounts to a large percentage of enrolled students may turn to test-optional admissions policies more readily than peer institutions less reliant on tuition discounting as an enrollment management strategy.

Our finding that an increase in endowment assets per FTE student is associated with an increase in the odds of an institution adopting a test-optional admissions policy later in the adoption cycle suggest that institutions with larger endowments may less readily adopt test-optional policies as a means of increasing student enrollment. Endowment assets help ensure institutions maintain financially sustainable operations over time, protected from transitory declines in enrollment and tuition revenue (Baum & Lee, 2019). Endowment income serves as an annual revenue source, providing the institution with additional financial resources than what otherwise would be available from tuition, fees, and other revenue sources (Baum et al., 2018). However, endowment assets also provide financial security for institutions to pursue academic initiatives that may threaten the status quo (Baum & Lee, 2019). Therefore, our finding is less conclusive about whether endowment assets position institutions as early adopters of emerging policies or practices.

Future Research. DOI has primarily been applied to consumer behavior (the adoption of emerging innovations) and not to organizational or institutional market innovation. Rogers' Adoption Curve traditionally is used to understand repeat consumer transactional experiences. However, undergraduate study is not often a repeat consumer transaction. Therefore, we encourage further research using DOI to lend insight into its applications for understanding transactional experiences in higher education that may relate to or inform organizational decision-making. For example, future research may examine the development and implementation of policies that facilitate students' continued studies (i.e., repeat consumer transaction) through dual enrollment or accelerated dual degree programs. Each of these examples can be considered a marketplace innovation with a particular set of implications for higher education policy and practice. However, research has not applied DOI as a means of understanding the implementation of programmatic

pathways for continued studies and how institutional financial resources may relate to the timeframe by which institutions introduce them.

Our study does not utilize an experimental design, and accordingly, we examined the relationships between institutional financial resources and policy adoption, but cannot claim causality (i.e., an abundance of institutional financial resources *causes* test-optional policy adoption). Additionally, we utilized a subset of institutional financial resources as predictors of test-optional policy adoption. However, there may be other institutional-level financial variables that are predictive of policy adoption, and more specifically, advancements in college admissions policy and practice. We encourage research that employs additional financial and academic variables to advance a deeper understanding of the profile of institutional early adopters of test-optional admissions policies, particularly compared to institutions that adopted test-optional policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conclusion

We used the innovation diffusion framework to uncover trends that we believe are useful to higher education scholars and practitioners and provide a direction for future analysis. COVID-19 has contributed to the acceleration of test-optional admissions policy adoption. Although our study addresses the timing of policy innovation prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, we believe the relationships illustrated in our study yield important insights into the continued movement of test-optional admissions policies and may contribute to understanding how institutional financial resources may relate to policy innovation in higher education. Further, our findings suggest the possibility that DOI can be applied to the study of policy implementation in addition to what research has previously established regarding its use for examining technological adoption among consumers and organizations.

If it is possible to make predictions about resources and innovation, higher education scholars and practitioners can better understand future trends in the field. Undoubtedly, higher education will continue to evolve, and therefore, understanding how institutional resources bolster or inhibit innovation among institutions may lend insight into future institutional practices and policymaking.

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The Goldilocks of Leadership: Finding the "Just Right" in Workloads, Budgets, and Time Management

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You likely recall the classic fairy tale, *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*. Walking through the forest, Goldilocks discovers the unoccupied home of the Three Bears. She enters and tastes the porridge of the home's inhabitants. Papa Bear's porridge is too hot. Mama Bear's is too cold. But, to Goldilocks' delight, Baby Bear's porridge is "just right". Goldilocks proceeds to sit in the bears' chairs and then lie in their beds, again finding them to be too hard or too soft, or too big or too small, before locating Baby Bear's, that each time is "just right".

Fairy tales were crafted both to entertain children and to teach them morality. Even amidst today's media onslaught, classic children's fairy tales endure. Might Goldilocks teach us something about academic leadership? Let's consider the challenge of finding "just right" in three domains: workload, budgets, and time.

Workload

Goldilocks was satisfied only when something was "just right", but she was fortunate to discover Baby Bear's items. Balancing our professional workloads is far more challenging. Most often, we find ourselves on the "too much" side of the equation. We have too much to do, and not enough time.

The solution may lie in a related, and often trickier question. Where do your direct reports fall on the workload balance? If they tend to fall on the "too little" side, you may have a problem with delegation of tasks and duties. Are you passing enough of your own tasks to others? Alternatively, you may have too many staff members. Are you spending your resources wisely for personnel support?

If both you and your direct reports have too much to do, then aspirations may outweigh reality. Can you postpone, cancel or redirect some initiatives? Or alternatively, can you hire more personnel to get the work completed?

Two other points arise. First, in most academic settings workloads ebb and flow seasonally. We may face high demand toward the start and end of semesters, and lower workloads in summer. Anticipate the downtimes and identify large tasks that can be postponed then accomplished when the office hub-bub quiets. Second, staff efficiency (as well as our own) is variable. Some staff members conduct excellent work but complete it slowly. Others are efficient but produce subpar products. As you consider your team's workloads (as well as your own), be conscious to

differentiate the workloads of people from the workloads of positions. Not every person accomplishes the same job with the same quality or efficiency.

Budgets

Novice leaders may perceive budgets as scientific rather than artistic in nature. You robotically enter numbers into a spreadsheet, manipulate some columns and formulas, and the figures magically balance out to zero. Goldilocks achieves her "just right".

In reality, of course, budgets require artistic caressing. Yes, there are objective numbers, but they rarely balance precisely to zero. Costs for supplies, fringe benefits, or travel may increase. Staff may retire or leave, creating unexpected surpluses. Estimates are just that: estimated. Finding the "just right" of a budget requires attention and care.

For those who find they are spending too much, the risks are grave. You can very seriously jeopardize your unit or university. Frequently leaders have difficulty saying "no" to requests and want to please the people they work with. But saying "no" is part of a leader's responsibility and obligation, and it is necessary to balance a budget. Mistakes can be costly and impact the unit for years as it rebuilds out of a debt situation.

For those who are spending too little, risks are equally concerning. You are letting money sit unused, preventing growth and opportunity. Fiscal conservatism is wise, but fiscal caution or fear is foolhardy because it stalls growth, modernization, and expansion.

The solution is threefold. First, understand your budget. Budgets are not complicated math; in most cases, they involve simple addition, subtraction and multiplication. Study, learn and understand what your budget has (and does not have) in it. Make adjustments as needed and follow what has been planned. Second, learn to decline requests professionally and with explanation. You cannot purchase endlessly; you must spend and save based on strategic priorities. Third, learn to spend what you have available. Avoid leaving excessive money stagnant and unused.

Time

Time management curses many academic leaders. How much time should you devote to a particular task? Should you attend X meeting or Y committee? Balancing one's time to achieve the Goldilocksian "just right" overlaps closely with balancing one's workload and budget, but it likely represents the most challenging of the three topics.

Time is finite, and a leader who obsesses over small details of an administrative task may fail to devote adequate time to bigger-picture needs like strategic planning and strategic action. Similarly, a leader who spends excessive time in meetings will never focus on getting tasks done. And leaders who work 100+ hours/week risk burnout, fatigue and failure.

Finding the "just right" of time management tends to be personal. What flexibility does your job offer to delegate, prioritize, and postpone? What can you "offload" and what must you address

yourself? How can you achieve the right work/life balance for your personal situation, and where is time flexible or inflexible?

Through careful self-examination, determine answers to these questions and use some degree of trial-and-error to discover the "just right" solution to succeed on each task, each day, and each semester. Don't be afraid to delegate, postpone, or streamline in an attempt to optimize the time you have to accomplish the tasks you face. Remember that it is possible to be a competent and skilled leader who occasionally finds free time on your hands. In fact, that situation is healthy; it suggests you have achieved something close to a balance and sometimes have too much free time but other times too little.

Conclusion

Retellings of the Goldilocks fairy tale conclude in various ways, but most commonly involve Goldilocks disappearing into the woods, never to be seen again. Regrettably, we academic leaders cannot permanently disappear into a forest!

Instead, we must take purposeful action to balance our workloads (and those of our direct reports), our budgets, and our time to achieve prioritized strategic objectives. Conscious attention to each domain and directed action to find balance will help us achieve success, just as Goldilocks enjoyed Baby Bear's comfortable bed and tasty porridge.

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Over-Tenured Colleges: Demarketing of Tenured Positions

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Higher education and the tenure system have received increasing scrutiny in the last two decades. From the well-publicized *Profscam* (Sykes 1988) to charges of mismanagement (Barrett and Greene 1994 and Brennan 1996) and administrators' acquiescence to a spoiled and pampered faculty (Sowell 1994a), critics are challenging the traditional arrangements and composition of institutions of higher education (Villa and Blum 1996 and Raber 1996). At the core of most of the criticism is that administrators have little power to change the system when faced with a highly tenured, well-entrenched faculty: "Power not only comes from the bottom up in academia, it comes from people with tenure, who pay no price for being wrong" (Sowell 1994a, p. 85). Given this situation, administrators face the problem of streamlining and modernizing their institutions while not undermining and alienating the major producers of their products--the faculty.

Although higher education has been criticized for decades, the current wave started in the early 1980s with the realization that costs were getting out of control and the student pool would shrink and not recover until the late 1990s. Class sizes were increased and graduate teaching assistants were more common, even while tuitions were raised well beyond the inflation level. This, of course, drew more scathing criticisms (e.g., Barrett and Greene 1994 and Sowell 1994b).

While the range of attacks was and is broad, the target of many of the critics is the tenure system (Premeaux and Mondy 1996 and Simon 1991). The statement made in the *Faculty Report* about tenure debate is as apt in 2022 as it was in 1973: “old arguments have been repeated, earlier arguments have been adapted to new context, and new arguments have emerged from concerns not central in earlier periods of crisis in the history of tenure” (Keast and Macy, 1973).

The current debates in support of tenure elimination or reform hold that academic freedom should be assured to all faculty irrespective of their tenure status; granting tenure fosters mediocrity and “deadwood”; tenured faculty members, being among highly paid faculty, impose financial burden upon universities in times of budget restriction like the present time; the tenure system has a tendency to encourage perpetuation of established schools of thought and exclude new approaches and subject matters; highly tenured faculty restricts the adjustments administrators can make responding to the complex and changing environment.

On the opposite side of the debate, tenure is deemed essential for the promotion of academic freedom; an effective means for attracting and retaining highly qualified faculty with a strong long-term commitment to the universities. Critics argue that a highly tenured faculty restricts the adjustments administrators can make responding to this complex and changing environment.

Having the above debates in view, little has changed since Vaupel made these observations in 1981: "*It is thus understandable that university administrators are striving to maximize their flexibility in determining the composition of their work force—to respond to shifts in student interest, to trim dead wood, and to seize opportunities to hire transcendent new Ph.D.'s. The employment guarantees of tenure make it harder to achieve this flexibility. Most universities, however, are entering a period of retrenchment with more than three-quarters of the faculty holding tenure*" (Vaupel 1981, p. 904).

This paper focuses on the problems of and possibilities for reducing the proportion of total faculty that is tenured. Given the availability of "transcendent new Ph.D.'s," some administrators believe they have available a qualified, flexible workforce that allows them to better react to demands and changes in the environment. Use of this transcendent workforce, however, raises many questions, both ethical and practical. The assumption of this paper is that small changes downward in the ratio of tenured faculty is a more preferred solution and is desirable to the extent that it does not diminish the institution's ability to teach, research, and serve consistent with its mission. This means, simply, that while administrators may need to reduce the proportion of tenured faculty for a variety of reasons, they need do so without hurting their relevant constituents (students, faculty, and society). The question, then, becomes how to accomplish these apparently conflicting goals.

This problem is tantamount to "demarketing" tenured faculty positions. "Demarketing" (Kotler and Levy 1971) refers to a strategy of reducing demand temporarily without having an impact on total demand in the long-run. For example, oil companies facing the embargo of the early 1970s were faced with discouraging oil consumption selectively while not undermining long-term demand or profits. Similarly, higher education administrators need to selectively discourage targeted tenured faculty without making academic life unattractive to competent, motivated incumbents and candidates. Accomplishing this "demarketing" requires an understanding of the strategic and tactical possibilities and consequences associated with reducing tenured faculty.

Fortunately, Vaupel (1981) has described the mathematics of reducing the ratio of tenured faculty to total faculty. Vaupel's description gives the administrator a powerful analytical tool for dealing with the problems described above but suffers from two shortcomings: 1) Vaupel's description used hypothetical cases to demonstrate the impact of policy variables on the tenured faculty ratio; and 2) Vaupel addressed neither behavioral nor normative implementation obstacles and issues associated with reducing the tenure ratio in a real academic setting. This paper attempts to eliminate those shortcomings by applying and building on the work of Vaupel. The results should help institutions of higher education better deal with the issue of managing the ratio of tenured faculty.

Reducing the Ratio of Tenured Faculty

Many institutions have turned to increased use of part-time faculty to improve administrative flexibility. This practice is not without costs and problems (see Academe 1993) and clearly is not always the optimum solution. Reduction in the tenure ratio as an objective makes necessary a clear understanding of the possibilities beyond the use of part-time faculty. The Vaupel model provides such an opportunity. The purposes of this paper are to: 1) explain the mathematics of reducing the tenure ratio using a real division within a university as an example; 2) assuming a reduction in the tenure ratio

is desirable, demonstrate the alternatives available to the administrator using the example division discussed in the following pages; and 3) based on faculty reaction in the test case, address normative issues and implementation obstacles associated with a reduced tenure ratio.

The Vaupel Model. Vaupel argues that administrators have three variables available for manipulation to change the proportion of faculty that are tenured: 1) the proportion of untenured faculty granted tenure; 2) the attrition rate of tenured professors; and 3) the average length of time before tenure is granted (Vaupel, 1981, p. 905). Vaupel derives a rule concerning the overall ratio of tenured faculty in equilibrium described by the following equation:

$$r = 1/ (1 + au/p) \quad (1)$$

where r is the ratio of tenured faculty to total faculty; *p* is the proportion of newly-hired untenured faculty, who can be expected to eventually become tenured; *u* is the average number of years untenured faculty stay at the university until they either are tenured or leave; and *a* is the attrition rate of tenured faculty.

To the administrator, this equation means that the desired tenure ratio can be obtained by changing the policy variables (*a, u,* or *p*). For example, if, on average, new faculty at a university or college stay for five years (*u*) (some may leave before being considered for tenure), and eventually 60% of its new faculty are tenured (*p*), and one out of 25 (4%) tenured faculty leave each year (*a*), then:

$$r = 1/ (1+ (.04)(5)/.60)$$
$$r = .75$$

This simply means that if the three variables are not changed, the college or university will gravitate toward an equilibrium tenure ratio of .75. If for some good reason administration desires to reduce *r*, several options are available in the form of the policy variables *a, u*, and *p*.

The *au/p* Rule: A Case Study. Below is presented a case study where a division (college) within a university used the Vaupel model to explore options for reducing the tenure ratio. The mathematics and implications of manipulating each of the policy variables are presented within the context of the case study.

The division selected for the case study was a college within a fairly large (student population of 20,000) state-supported university in the Midwestern United States. Table 1 shows the tenured and untenured faculty by rank in the five departments that compose the college.

Historical data yield the following values for the policy variables in the college: $a = .028$, $u = 6$, $p = .9$. These data mean that the college is gravitating toward a tenure ratio of $r = .84$. Currently, the ratio is approximately .81.

The dean of the college has been interested in reducing the tenure ratio for two reasons. First, due to a general decline in the student population, the college is making a concerted effort to maintain or increase its share of available students in a very competitive environment.

The dean has had difficulty in getting some tenured faculty involved with innovative or, in some cases, merely current teaching pedagogies (e.g., functional area integration through team teaching

Table 1

Distribution of Tenure Status, By Rank

	Tenured			Untenured			
Department	Full	Assoc.	Assist	Full	Assoc.	Assist	Tenure Ratio
M	3	2	6	0	0	0	11/11 = 1
A	1	1	6	1	0	2	8/11 = .73
E	7	1	6	0	0	1	14/15 = .93
MK	1	2	4	0	1	5	10/13 = .54
I	4	2	6	0	0	4	12/16 = .75

Overall Tenure Ratio: 52/66 = .79

and use of new communication and computer technologies). The dean believes that a lower percentage of tenured faculty would give administration more leverage with faculty and increase the probability that faculty will be current in their disciplines and education-related technologies.

Second, the college currently enjoys a favorable recruiting market. The number of highly qualified new faculty substantially exceeds the job openings available. The dean expects the excess supply of faculty to last well past the end of the decade. The candidate situation puts the college in its best position in years with respect to faculty recruiting. For these reasons, the dean believes the time is right to reduce the equilibrium tenure ratio to about .70.

Three courses of action are available to the dean: 1) he could hire more non-tenure track "transcendent new PhD's." and non-PhD's; 2) he could manipulate the policy variables in Vaupel's equation; or 3) he could use some combination of the two. The first and last actions have the advantage of being able to be implemented quickly. As each attrition opportunity presents itself (retirements, resignations, illnesses), that tenure track faculty member could be replaced by a non-tenure track Ph.D. or other qualified person by using from one- to five-year appointments. This solution has the obvious disadvantages of reducing morale and undermining scholarship due to interruptions in research streams and collaborative scholarship efforts. Moreover, if a substantial number of non-Ph.D.'s are hired in the college, this solution creates and accentuates a two-class system and could threaten accreditation due to possible terminal degree ratio declines. The dean concluded that manipulating the policy variables is the best long-term method to reach the desired tenure ratio of .70.

The .70 ratio was not arbitrary. The dean looked at the current tenure ratio of .81 and then analyzed faculty productivity using the standard faculty portfolio analysis variables of teaching and research (see Borna and Arndt, 1993). The dean used the usual measures of these components. His conclusion was that approximately 10-12% of the faculty were substandard when both teaching and research were considered (the lower right or low producing cell of the Borna and Arndt (1993, p. 38) portfolio analysis) and could be replaced without a reduction in productivity. In fact, the dean was optimistic that if policy changes had the desired impact, the tenure ratio could be reduced and productivity could be increased. That outcome would be achieved only if the manipulation of the policy variables had the desired psychological effects on faculty, both new and not new.

The next step for the dean was to decide which policy variable or combination of policy variables should be manipulated to achieve the desired equilibrium tenure ratio. The decision maker must consider the impact and feasibility of possible new levels of a, s, or p. Each has a different impact on r, different feasibility in the short term, and different psychological and behavioral implications.

Policy Alternative One: Making Tenure Harder to Get

The first consideration for the administrator under this strategy is: how difficult will it have to be to get tenure in order to reach the desired tenure ratio of .70? Simple manipulation of equation (1) can show that:

$$p = aur/(1- r) \qquad (2)$$

If the desired tenure ratio (r') is substituted for r, then we can calculate the proportion of newly-hired untenured faculty that can be expected to eventually become tenured (p') by solving the equation:

$$p' = aur' / (1- r') \qquad (3)$$

or

$$p' = (.028)(6)(.70)/(1 - .70)$$

$$p' = .392$$

Therefore, to achieve a tenure ratio of .70, *ceteris paribus*, the proportion of faculty being tenured would need to be reduced to .392.

Reducing *p* to the level necessary to achieve the desired tenure ratio would require a dramatic increase in teaching, research, and service standards. In this particular college, tenure decisions are based on, with almost no exceptions, teaching and scholarly productivity. Because of an already strong emphasis on teaching, the dean had very little room for raising that standard. This placed the entire burden on scholarly productivity for reducing *p*. The current publication expectation was about one top or second tier journal article per year for untenured faculty. In the past, several paper presentations and/or proceedings publications could be substituted for a journal publication in some, but not all, of the probationary years. Looking at past tenure candidates, the dean estimated he would have to raise that standard to at least two journal articles per year to reduce *p* by the necessary amount. He viewed this as an extremely difficult standard given the teaching demands of his college. Another concern the dean had was that some untenured faculty would try to meet the standard by aiming lower with their publications, thus increasing quantity but reducing quality.

Complicating matters with this policy variable are some of the other behavioral factors associated with such a dramatic increase in the difficulty of getting tenure. The variable *p* results from the number of untenured faculty that stay for the entire probationary period (in this case seven years) and those that do not and the proportion of those combined groups that get tenure. A reduction in the percentage that stay for seven years and get tenure will influence the percentage that stay for seven years. In other words, if a faculty member perceives his or her chances of getting tenure as being low, he or she may look for alternatives before the probationary period is over. This behavioral phenomenon is very difficult to describe or predict and is interrelated with job market conditions or other alternatives available.

Such a dramatic change also could have a dampening impact on the morale of junior faculty and make it more difficult to recruit even in the "buyers" market that currently exists. Moreover, with significantly greater research demands, the need for research support in the form of summer grants, course releases, and release time becomes greater. These, of course, may come at the expense of the primary mission of this college--teaching. Complicating matters even more in this case is the different job market conditions and different levels of existing performance and tenure rates by departments. For example, raising tenure standards for a fully tenured department (Department K in Table 1) will not be efficacious. And last, the dean had to consider the ethics of changing the "rules of the game" (possibly by department) for faculty that currently are probationary. While facing no legal barriers, he considered this to be immoral and unfair. If only new faculty face the new standard for p, the amount of time needed to get to the desired tenure ratio would be considerable (more than seven years). Because all these factors will probably vary by discipline within the college and change over time and because *p* had to be reduced so dramatically, the dean perceived great difficulty focusing solely on this variable.

Policy Alternative Two: Increasing Attrition Rate

The second consideration for the dean was the attrition rate: how much will attrition have to be increased to reach the desired tenure ratio of .70. Again, simple manipulation and substitution of r' can show that:

$$a' = (p/u)\,(1 - r')/r' \qquad (4)$$

then,

$$a' = (.90 / 6)(1 - .7)/.7$$
$$a' = .064$$

Attrition of .064 means that the rate must more than double. The dean has several alternatives available to achieve this objective. Vaupel describes the attrition rate as a function of several factors (pp. 907-908):

$$a = a_1 \bullet (1 - f) \bullet (1 - h_1) + a2 \bullet f \bullet (1 - h_2)] \qquad (5)$$

where a_1 and a_2 are the attrition rate of tenured associate and tenured full professors, and h_1 and h_2 are the proportion of tenured associate and full professors hired from outside the university, and f is the proportion of tenured faculty who are full professors. Because in this case the proportion of tenured associate and full professors hired from outside the university has been negligible (one in the last 15 years), the dean can assume that the values of h_1 and h_2 are zero. The equation can then be rewritten:

$$a = [a_1\,(1 - f) + a_2 f] \qquad (6)$$

The proportion of tenured faculty who are full professors (f) currently is 32/61 = .52. To increase the value of a to .064, the dean could increase a_l and/or a_2 or reduce f. Increasing a_l and a_2 obviously would be best achieved by getting less productive faculty to retire or leave the university early. "Costs" of staying at the university could be increased to encourage such an outcome.

For example, teaching schedules and loads could be altered, merit raises could receive increased emphasis, graduate assistants could be withheld, and summer support and teaching could be

restricted for the targeted faculty. More positively, an attractive early retirement could be made available.

Referring to Equation 6, the value of *a* can be increased by adopting selective policies for tenured associate professors. The college could increase a_l (and decrease *f*) by making promotion to full professor more difficult. This could result in a more productive faculty, but runs the risk of alienating the better associate professors as well as the weaker ones. Attrition among better associate professors, who may have some mobility, could be disastrous. An even more disastrous result would be if better associate professors leave and weaker ones give up trying to make full professor, but stay because they have little mobility and are protected by tenure. These possibilities mean that in this case, the dean would have to rely heavily on increasing the "costs" of staying to "demarket" tenure positions.

The least risky strategy for the dean, in this case, was making early retirement attractive, assuming of course that it would be more attractive to weaker associate and full professors whose other "costs" of staying have been increased. This alternative proved difficult to implement at the divisional or even university level because of the state retirement system bureaucracy. The system was slow reacting or, in some cases, insensitive to problems or solutions at the college level.

Policy Alternative Three: Increasing Time to Tenure

The last policy alternative open to the administration is increasing the time before tenure is granted. The current probationary period for untenured faculty is six years. Using the desired tenure ratio (*r*'), the equation for *u*' is:

$$u' = (p / a)\ (1 - r')/\ r' \qquad (7)$$

then assuming the current values for *p* and *a*,

$$u' = (.90/.028)\ (1 - .70)/.70$$
$$u' = 13.78$$

Achieving the desired tenure ratio in this case requires an increase in the time to tenure to almost 14 years.

Increasing the probationary period for tenure has some advantages. The dean presumably would have more leverage over untenured faculty. Untenured faculty will compete with each other and perhaps set higher standards for teaching and research. Some research streams take time to yield significant results. Some untenured faculty, therefore, might prefer a longer probationary period to have a better chance to prove themselves.

In this case, such a dramatic increase in the time to tenure would put the college out of step with the university and would probably draw the ire of groups representing faculty interests. Although some probationary faculty may prefer a longer probationary period, few, if any, would want to wait 14 years. Additionally, this approach would require periodic reviews to determine whether to retain marginally performing faculty members during such a protracted probationary period.

Policy Alternative Leverage

Examination of the mathematics of the tenure ratio and the policy possibilities in this case were elucidating to the dean. To make decisions, however, the dean needed information about the differential impact of the policy variables on the tenure ratio. Simple manipulation of the policy equations can shed light on this issue.

The following equation identifies the rate of progress or change in the tenure ratio given a new tenure ratio after one year of policy change(s):

$$\boldsymbol{\pi} = (r_0 - r_1) / (r_0 - r') \quad (8)$$

where r_0 is the current tenure ratio (.81), r' is the desired tenure ratio (.70) and r_1 is the ratio one year after the new tenure policy variable(s) is manipulated.
For example, if r_1 is .79, the value for $\boldsymbol{\pi}$:

$$\boldsymbol{\pi} = (.81 - .79)/ (.81 - .70)$$

$$\boldsymbol{\pi} = .18$$

This merely indicates that 18% of the interval between the current tenure ratio and the desired ratio is achieved in the first year. From this we can calculate the relative contribution of the policy variables. Manipulation and substitution can show that:

$$\boldsymbol{\pi_a} = a' / (1 - r') \quad (9)$$

and

$$\boldsymbol{\pi_u} = p/u'r' \quad (10)$$

and

$$\boldsymbol{\pi_p} = p'/ur' \quad (11)$$

where $\boldsymbol{\pi}_a$, $\boldsymbol{\pi}_u$, and $\boldsymbol{\pi}_p$ are the relative contributions of the policy variables, *a, u, p*. substituting then yields $\boldsymbol{\pi}_a = .2133$, $\boldsymbol{\pi}_u = .093$, and $\boldsymbol{\pi}_p = .093$.

For the dean in this case these are the most revealing numbers. The $\boldsymbol{\pi}_a$, value indicates that increasing the attrition rate to .064 would mean that more than one-fifth of the desired reduction could be accomplished in one year. Increasing the time to tenure to almost 14 years or making it more than twice as difficult to get tenure would result in less than 10% of the objective being met in the same one-year period. Attrition rate, therefore, provides more than twice the leverage of either of the other two policy variables for achieving the desired tenure ratio.

Discussion

Armed with a better understanding of the mathematics of changes in policy variables, the dean of the college in this case study examined alternatives and tried to factor in behavioral and normative dimensions. His first conclusion was that the very common policy of trying to make tenure more difficult to get for the purpose of reducing the tenure ratio is shortsighted mathematically and probably fraught with behavioral by-products. The mathematics of tenure demonstrate that making tenure harder to get has less than one-half the impact on the tenure ratio of increasing the attrition rate. Moreover, this variable is difficult to implement uniformly across departments.

The dean concluded that reducing the chances for tenure also may have unintended behavioral outcomes. Changing this policy variable can cause more untenured faculty to leave before the

probationary period ends. This change, of course, has the desired effect of reducing the tenure ratio, but also increases recruiting costs and possibly lowers morale. The dean concluded that this policy should increase faculty quality if it discourages marginal faculty. If, however, only highly qualified faculty apply, it will be difficult to maintain *p* at a lower level. If *p* is maintained at a lower level given the self-selection of faculty candidates, the morale of junior faculty would be adversely affected. Vaupel also points out that the more difficult "...it is to get tenure, the more attractive tenured faculty would appear to other institutions" (p. 912) at least partially offsetting any increased faculty loyalty of those that do get tenure.

The dean also concluded that increasing the time to tenure could not be used alone to achieve the desired tenure rate. Going to a 13 or 14-year probationary period would put the college far out of line with other institutions. This policy change also would require more review of faculty during probation. Additionally, the dean could not live with a system that would allow unproductive faculty to stay for the whole probationary period. That would require a series of several reviews to prevent weak probationary faculty from milking the system for too many years. Given the current seven-year time to tenure, realistically, the probationary period could only be increased one or two years. Changing this variable, therefore, could only be done in concert with other variables for the college to reach the desired tenure ratio.

The mathematics and psychology of tenure ratio reduction point to one glaring conclusion: the variable with the most mathematical leverage also is the variable with the fewest undesirable by-products. Increasing the attrition rate works the fastest, is probably the fairest, and can be good for morale. The dean in the example case gets more than twice as much leverage from increasing the attrition rate. The by-products of this strategy will only be undesirable if high performing rather than weak faculty choose to leave. The best combination to implement an increase in *a* is attractive early retirement packages and an increase in the "costs" of staying for weaker faculty. The dean, unfortunately, has little control, at least in the short run, over creating desirable incentives for early retirement. Increasing costs to low performing tenured faculty may be the only means to increasing the attrition rate. A less attractive teaching schedule may not have enough impact on a low producing faculty member. Increasing teaching loads could have significant leverage but results in more students being exposed to weak performers or incompetence. Implementing an increase in attrition is difficult, but no more so than changing the other two policy variables.

Complicating the whole decision for the dean in this case was the realization that the policy variables are not independent of one another. The dean believes that changing the time to tenure can impact the proportion who get tenure. Changing either or both may have long term implications for attrition. The conclusion in this case was that efforts to increase attrition are most desirable when combined with a proposal to faculty to increase *u* by one or two years. For example, if the college increases time to tenure by only one year to seven years, an attrition of 5.5%, rather than 6.2%, is needed to reach the desired tenure ratio. If this were combined with a decrease to .80 in the proportion who get tenure, then the target attrition rate necessary drops to 4.9%. Obviously, the dean could easily examine other combinations of the policy variables, keeping in mind the different leverages the variables have and the behavioral and psychological impact of each.

The dean got an interesting reaction from faculty after apprising them of the possibilities he was considering. The faculty seemed most concerned with the target tenure ratio, not with the

manipulation of policy variables. They understood, and for the most part agreed with, how to get to the target, but were less than sanguine about the target itself. The faculty wanted to understand the mathematics and logic used to determine the new tenure ratio more than how to get there. The dean could have turned to an analysis of faculty productivity using the Borna and Arndt (1993) Portfolio Model to justify the target, but not without recognizing that the boundaries of the quadrants in that model also are somewhat arbitrary. The dean had some success convincing faculty that by any objective standard, about ten percent of the faculty was not producing at acceptable standards. The lesson is that administrators should carefully map out a rationale for their ratio objective as well as their policy variable changes.

Conclusion

The above example demonstrates that the mathematics of the tenure ratio allow administrators to know exactly what levels of policy variables are associated with equilibrium targets. A common and normal assumption made by administrators and faculty is that increasing the difficulty of getting tenure is efficacious for reducing tenure ratio. The Vaupel model and the above example establish the short-sightedness and over-simplicity of this assumption. The point is that decision makers, assuming that a reduction in the tenure ratio is justified, should have a complete and clear understanding of all the dimensions of that decision. Then and only then can administrators make changes that will have dramatic effects on the lives of faculty and students.

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Collegiate Esports and Nonviolence

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Esports, the shorthand term for electronic sports, refers to the competitive playing of video games. Once a mere pastime, esports have become increasingly popular with players and fans at both the professional and collegiate levels, and now constitute a big business, both on and off college campuses. Individual players or teams compete in many of the same video games that are commonly marketed and sold for private, at-home use. It is difficult to say precisely which are the most popular, because various metrics, such as sales revenue or the number of players, can be used to assess popularity, and these change rapidly over time. But by any measure, some of the most popular games include Battlegrounds, Call of Duty, Counter-Strike, Overwatch, League of Legends, Defense of the Ancients (Dota) 2, and Fortnite.[3]

At the professional level, the games are shown to live audiences on a jumbotron or a series of large video screens in an arena or stadium, while simultaneously being streamed to viewers around the world. Thus, revenue comes from tickets sales, concessions, and branded merchandise, as well as broadcast advertising. The rate of growth has been astonishing: between 2014 and 2019, the fan base for professional esports roughly doubled, while revenues grew by a factor of five (Willingham, 2018). Statista.com estimates that tickets, concessions, and merchandise alone generated more than $32.5 million in 2021, with a projection of $63.08 million for 2023; total revenue, including income from simulcasts, exceeded $1.1 billion in 2021, and is expected to exceed $1.86 billion by 2025.[4] Tristao (2022) estimated that more than 500 million fans would watch esports in 2022, roughly half of them classified as esports enthusiasts, or frequent viewers. Mainstream sports and entertainment broadcasting companies, including both Disney XD and ESPN have signed multi-year contracts to broadcast competitions in the Overwatch League (Willingham, 2018). Professional esports players receive league salaries and tournament prize money, as well as collecting commercial endorsements, with the most successful players garnering seven-figure incomes (Willingham, 2018).[5] Five selected esports (auto racing, baseball, cycling, rowing, and sailing) were featured in an Olympic Virtual Series in 2021, and an Olympic Esports Week has been scheduled for June of 2023.[6]

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[3] See for example, https://www.rookieroad.com/esports/top-10-esports-games/, https://sportskhabri.com/most-popular-esports-games-in-the-world/, https://influencermarketinghub.com/biggest-esports-games/, https://www.esportsearnings.com/games, and https://blog.acer.com/en/discussion/202/10-most-popular-esports-games-2022?utm_source=community&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=comm_rss.
[4] https://www.statista.com/statistics/1129579/esports-revenue-tickets-merchandise/; https://www.statista.com/statistics/490522/global-esports-market-revenue/.
[5] A list of top earners and earnings can be found at https://www.esportsearnings.com/players.
[6] https://olympics.com/ioc/news/ioc-confirms-singapore-as-host-of-first-olympic-esports-week-in-june-2023.

The popularity of esports has also exploded on college campuses. As of 2022, 175 colleges and universities had officially recognized varsity esports teams—a figure which does not include intramural or club teams.[7] Varsity esports competitions are overseen by the National Association of Collegiate Esports (NACE), a governing agency that operates as a video game counterpart to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). Additionally, an increasing number of institutions are now offering academic curricula, degree programs, and scholarships to students interested in majoring in esports.[8] Worldwide, Jenny, *et al*. (2021) found 95 academic degrees, minors, certificates, or diplomas being offered, mostly in the U.S. Understandably, the lure of potential enrollments and sponsorships from donors has made the esports phenomenon appealing to colleges and universities seeking to attract students, especially in an increasingly competitive era of declining numbers of college-age students. But there are also significant challenges.

The remainder of this paper outlines the benefits and controversial aspects of collegiate esports, and offers suggestions for addressing the most negative features.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Collegiate Esports

There are a number of benefits for both players and educational institutions involved with esports. Individual players acquire better motor skills, especially hand-eye coordination, and develop strategic thinking and the ability to respond rapidly to exogenous changes or moves by opponents (Yin, *et al*., 2020). As team players, they practice teamwork and interaction (Halbrook, *et al*., 2019), and may acquire new friends. Esports also have the benefit of inclusivity of non-athletes, especially differently-abled students; they do not, for example, require the ability to run, jump, swim, kick or throw a ball, or exhibit other physical skills (*Disability Horizons*, 2019). And unlike most collegiate athletic competitions, which are segregated by gender, there is also the potential for males and females to compete together in the same contests, though in practice, most esports players are currently male (Rogstad, 2022). As a major new industry, esports have opened up new internship and career opportunities as well, for both players and video game designers. Students majoring in esports design can aspire to jobs creating new video games, while varsity players can aspire to careers as professional gamers.

As a consequence, colleges and universities that offer esports as a varsity or intramural activity or as an academic curriculum leading to a degree, minor, or other credential may be more attractive to prospective students interested in video games, either as game designers, players or fans; such institutions may thus benefit from higher enrollments. Additionally, they may be able to attract donors interested in providing scholarships, equipment, facilities, or sponsorships for esports.

But there are drawbacks as well. For example, unlike athletic competitions, esports involve essentially no exercise; rather, they require hours to be spent in a sedentary position, watching a screen while manipulating controls. This can lead to a variety of health problems, including eye

[7] https://www.ncsasports.org/college-esports-scholarships/varsity-esports

[8] https://www.esports.net/wiki/guides/university-esports/ There are even esports curricula for middle school and high school students, including proprietary lessons sold by educational companies; see for example, https://www.nasef.org/curriculum and https://www.varsityesportsfoundation.org/curriculum.

strain and vision problems, weight gain, and overuse injuries such as carpal tunnel syndrome, as well as stress and sleep disorders (Yin, *et al*., 2020).

For present purposes, however, our focus is on the violent nature of many popular esports. As a working definition, we take violence to mean the deliberate exertion of physical force against others. Although nonviolent video games exist and others could easily be developed, games such as Call of Duty, Fortnite, Counter-Strike, League of Legends, and Overwatch are explicitly violent. Indeed, when sold for private use, most of these games now carry warning labels for consumers. A nonprofit industry association, the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB), assigns ratings to video games to indicate the ages for which they are deemed suitable (much like the Motion Picture Association rates films). These include E (everyone), E 10+ (everyone ten years and older), T (teens), M (mature players 17 years and older), and AO (adults 18 years and older only). The ESRB also provides summaries and content descriptors which help explain how the ratings were determined. These include "Violence: Scenes involving aggressive conflict. May contain bloodless dismemberment" and "Intense Violence: Graphic and realistic-looking depictions of physical conflict. May involve extreme and/or realistic blood, gore, weapons and depictions of human injury and death" as well as separate categories that include "Blood and Gore: Depictions of blood or the mutilation of body parts", "fantasy violence", "cartoon violence", and "violent references".[9] Some popular esports are listed in Table 1 along with their ratings, descriptions, and summaries from the ESRB. In addition to the general violence, there are gender-specific attacks on women in some games and there have been strong accusations of harassment of female players (Ruotsalainen and Friman, 2018; Rogstad, 2022).[10]

The violence that appears in movies and television shows has long been linked to aggressive real-world behavior (Paik and Comstock, 1994). The dangers are compounded in video games, however, because rather than passively observing the scenes of violence, the gamers are actively engaged as participants in the violence. A quarter-century ago, Dill and Dill (1998) reviewed the extant literature and found a preponderance of evidence suggesting that prolonged exposure to violent video games increases aggressive behavior. More recently, Carnagey, *et al*. (2007) and Lai, *et al.* (2019) found that violent video games desensitize players to real-world violence. Prescott, *et al*. (2018) conducted a meta-analysis of two dozen empirical studies, which covered more than 17,000 participants, and found that video game violence is significantly related to physically aggressive behavior. Thus, there are legitimate reasons to worry about the well-being of the players and the safety of society at large.

A number of states, including New York, California, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Oklahoma, and Washington, as well as several cities, have passed laws restricting access to violent video games by minors, but those have been largely overturned by courts (Barrett, 2008). In the landmark case *Brown v. Entertainment Merchants Association*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled 7-2 that video games are a protected form of free speech under the First Amendment to the Constitution (Wuller, 2012). Federal bills, such as the Video Game Health Labeling Act (H.R. 231)

[9] https://www.esrb.org/ratings-guide/.

[10] To further enhance their realism, many video games now include characters designed to mimic actual celebrities, several of whom have sued manufacturers over concerns that their reputations are being damaged by association with such violence; see, for example, Dimita, *et al*. (2020).

Table 1

Popular Esports and Their ESRB Ratings, Descriptions and Summaries*

Game	Rating	Descriptions	Summary
Call of Duty: Warzone 2.0	M	Blood and Gore, Intense Violence, Strong Language, Use of Drugs	This is a first-person shooter, set in the Call of Duty universe, in which players engage in a variety of multiplayer combat events (e.g., battle royale, plunder-style skirmishes/DMZ). Players use machine guns, shotguns, sniper rifles, and explosives to kill enemy soldiers in frenetic combat. Battles are highlighted by realistic gunfire, screams of pain, blood-splatter effects, and explosions. A handful of weapons/attacks result in decapitation/dismemberment. Finishing moves sometimes depict dramatic stabbings and headshots, with close-up blood and gore effects.
Counter Strike: Global Offensive	M	Blood, Intense Violence	N/A
Fortnite	T	Violence	This is an action game in which players build forts, gather resources, craft weapons, and battle hordes of monsters in frenetic combat. From a third-person perspective, players use guns, swords, and grenades to fight skeleton-like monsters (husks) in ranged and melee-style combat. Players can also defeat enemies by using various traps (e.g., electric, spikes, poisonous gas). Battles are highlighted by frequent gunfire, explosions, and cries of pain.
League of Legends	T	Blood, Fantasy Violence, Mild Suggestive Themes, Use of Alcohol and Tobacco	This is a multiplayer strategy game in which players assume the role of magical “summoners” who settle political disputes with arena-based battles. From a 3/4–overhead perspective, players control animal- and human-like warriors who use swords, arrows, guns, and magic attacks to kill opponents' minions in melee-style combat. Higher kill counts result in additional achievements (e.g., “leveling up”). Battles are accompanied by slashing sounds, colorful projectiles, and red blood splashes; one vampire warrior's attacks cause larger blood-pooling effects.
Overwatch	T	Blood, Use of Tobacco, Violence	This is a first-person shooter in which players join an international task force trying to restore peace to the world. Players use a variety of firearms (e.g., pistols, machine guns), arrows, and futuristic weapons (e.g., laser blasters) to attack enemies in team combat objectives. Combat is frenetic with realistic gunfire, cries of pain, and explosions. Splashes of blood briefly appear with each successful hit.

PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds	T	Blood, Violence	This is a multiplayer action game in which players can participate in "last-man-standing"-style shootouts while collecting supplies/weapons /armor around an island. From a third-person perspective, players parachute onto an island and search for items, vehicles, and supplies that they must defend from other players; characters can engage in fistfights, and use weapons (e.g., machine guns, rifles) to shoot and kill opponents. Successful hits are accompanied by brief splashes of blood; characters fall to the ground when killed, as their items become available to other players. Players can also use vehicles (e.g., motorcycles, trucks) to run over opponents.
Rainbow Six Siege	M	Blood, Drug Reference, Strong Language, Violence	This is a first-person shooter in which players control members of an elite counter-terrorism unit through various missions. Game modes allow players to eliminate terrorist cells, defuse bombs, and extract hostages. Characters use firearms (e.g., pistols, machine guns, shotguns), explosives, and traps (e.g., electrified barbed wire, robots with tasers) to kill human enemies. Gunfights can be frenetic and are highlighted by cries of pain, explosions, realistic gunfire, and blood-splatter effects. Cutscenes also depict instances of violence: an explosion that kills two characters; a man shot in slow-motion.
Valorant	T	Blood, Language, Violence	This is a first-person shooter in which players compete in team-based multiplayer matches. Players use an assortment of firearms (e.g., pistols, machine guns, sniper rifles) and special abilities (e.g., poison gas attacks, electric arrows, ninja-star throws) to kill opponents to complete mission objectives. Battles are frenetic and are accompanied by realistic gunfire, large explosions, and screen-shaking effects. Characters emit spurts of blood when shot, and quickly collapse to the ground when killed.

* Source: https://www.esrb.org/ratings-guide/, accessed December 19, 2022.

proposed in 2009-2010 and the Violence in Video Games Labeling Act (H.R. 4204) of 2012 would have imposed labels reading "WARNING: Excessive exposure to violent video games and other violent media has been linked to aggressive behavior" on games rated T or higher, while the Video Games Ratings Enforcement Act (H.R. 287) of 2013-14 would have penalized sales of video games to underage buyers, though none of these bills have been enacted into law.[11] Even those opposed to

[11] See https://www.congress.gov/bill/111th-congress/house-bill/231/text; https://www.congress.gov/bill/112th-congress/house-bill/4204?s=1&r=42; and https://www.congress.gov/bill/113th-congress/house-bill/287#:~:text=Video%20Games%20Ratings%20Enforcement%20Act%20%2D%20Prohibits%20shipping%20or%20distributing%20in,Software%20Ratings%20Board%20(ESRB).

warning labels or legal restrictions on access, however, would be hard pressed to deny the violent nature of the games in question. Although, as noted above, a limited set of nonviolent esports were offered as the Olympic Virtual Series, International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Thomas Bach has avowed, "If you have egames where it's about killing somebody, this cannot be brought into line with our Olympic values" (BBC, 2018).

While the violence in esports is of general concern at a societal level, it should be particularly troubling for educational organizations whose institutional values espouse nonviolence. This includes many faith-based institutions of higher education. The colleges and universities sponsored by the Sisters of Mercy, for example, are guided by five Critical Concerns, one of which is nonviolence.[12] More broadly, Butigan (2019) and Tumeinski (2020) contend that nonviolence should be a core value of all Catholic colleges and universities, of which there are approximately 250 in the United States alone, according to the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.[13] Likewise, many colleges operating in the Quaker and Mennonite traditions, such as Earlham College, Wilmington College, William Penn University, George Fox University, Goshen College, and Eastern Mennonite University, also include nonviolence or peacemaking among their stated values. Even some public universities explicitly eschew violence. Middle Tennessee State University, for example, includes a "commitment to nonviolence" among the values held by its university community.[14]

Seeking a Balance

Social norms evolve over time. The ancient Romans regarded battles among gladiators as a sport, but modern civilization rejects fighting to the death as entertainment. Yet, even in the context of modern athletic competitions, one can reasonably argue that there are varying degrees of violence, or deliberate physical force exerted against others, involved in many real-life contact sports, such as boxing, wrestling, fencing, football, and rugby. But each of those sports has rules that limit and penalize violence, such as the penalties for "roughing the kicker", "roughing the passer", and "unnecessary roughness" in football. This begs the question of what constitutes acceptable, as opposed to unacceptable, levels of aggression in sports.

Without attempting to resolve that issue for collegiate sports in general, we propose the following simple threshold for collegiate esports: what would (not) be acceptable as a sport in real life is (not) acceptable in virtual reality. For convenience, we will refer to this standard as the reality-equivalence paradigm. Accordingly, if an educational institution would not sanction as an actual sport the behavior that is depicted in the virtual reality of an esport because of its violence, then the extent of the game's violence is deemed excessive and should not be endorsed for curricular, varsity, or intramural purposes. Thus, video games that replicate actual sports, such as soccer, football, or auto racing, for example, and that incorporate the same safeguards against violence as

[12] The Critical Concerns are women, immigration, nonviolence, the earth, and racism; see https://foundingtheinstitute.com/movingforwardtogether/direction-statement/.
[13] See https://www.accunet.org/Catholic-Higher-Ed-FAQs#HowMany and https://www.usccb.org/committees/catholic-education/catholic-colleges-and-universities-united-states
[14] The university's four values include honesty and integrity, respect for diversity, engagement in the community, and commitment to nonviolence; see https://www.mtsu.edu/trueblue/community-values.php.

their real-world counterparts, would be regarded as legitimate esports. Presumably, however, no educational institution would regard armed combat as a sport or athletic competition; consequently, the simulated war in video games such as Call of Duty or Overwatch would not be deemed a valid esport.[15] This distinction is consistent with the IOC's inclusion of simulated sports in the Olympic Virtual Series and its exclusion of esports that involve the portrayal of killing from the actual Olympic Games.

Applying such a criterion would require colleges and universities to withhold support from collegiate esports tournaments and curricula that involve violent video games. Broadly disallowing participation in esports leagues or tournaments, however, could be quite costly to those institutions in terms of foregone enrollment, tuition revenue, and donations. It would also mean foregoing the several genuine benefits of esports outlined above (the development of motor skills, teamwork, strategy, and inclusivity). Thus, a general proscription against esports is probably neither feasible nor advisable for most educational institutions. In view of this, several universities that purport to endorse nonviolence have nonetheless sanctioned esports that include some of the most violent video games.

As an alternative, we propose the creation of a separate collegiate league dedicated exclusively to nonviolent esports—that is, those games that are sufficiently nonviolent that, by the criterion above, they would be deemed legitimate sports if they existed in reality. Examples might include the types of esports that were permitted in the Olympic Virtual Series. This would require a league constitution that explicitly eschews violence and a Board of Directors whose members commit to supporting the nonviolent nature of the league. The Board would need to determine, agree upon, and publicize specific criteria for the inclusion and exclusion of video games. The selection criteria could potentially include the reality-equivalence paradigm outlined above and could perhaps incorporate elements of the ESRB ratings scale, as well as considering the IOC decisions on which esports are suitable for the Olympics. The criteria would then be used to select appropriate existing games and new games as they are developed.

Establishing a separate league would allow colleges and universities, especially those institutions whose organizational values explicitly espouse nonviolence, to participate in the esports boom while maintaining integrity and differentiating themselves from other institutions of higher education. For the purpose of branding, a name such as the Pacific League that connotes nonviolence would offer a clear signal about the purpose of such a league. It could potentially encompass secondary as well as collegiate levels of competition, and might also motivate the creation of new nonviolent esports; thus, academic curricula that promote video game design could focus on nonviolent games as well.

The creation of a separate league is not without precedent. Certainly, separate divisions and conferences exist within the NCAA so that teams from similar institutions can compete against each other. Separate athletic and nonathletic leagues exist at the secondary or collegiate level to

[15] This criterion could also be applied to the games that are set in science fiction and fantasy worlds. Suspending disbelief about the actual existence of creatures such as zombies, dragons, monsters, and aliens from outer space, if slaying or battling such creatures would not be regarded as a sport with entertainment value if it were to occur in real life, then neither would it be regarded as a legitimate esport.

encourage participation by specific groups. In Washington, D.C., an Alternative Education League was established for nontraditional student-athletes earning GEDs or high school diplomas, and a Chicago Area Alternative Education League provides athletic opportunities for at-risk and special-needs students outside of mainstream schools.[16] The National Catholic Forensic League (NCFL) oversees high school speech and debate tournaments that are separate from the National Forensic League and state-affiliated leagues; it is not limited to Catholic high schools, as teams from public schools are welcome to participate in NCFL tournaments.[17] A regional Catholic High School League for athletics operates in Detroit and Toledo (McCabe, 2022). Certainly, a Pacific League for nonviolent esports would be inclusive of players and teams from any type of educational institution, whether public, private secular, faith-based, or other types of institutions.

The principal challenges for such a league would be ensuring that it was perceived as a viable option and competing against the established collegiate esports leagues for students, donations, and other resources. But the very fact that video game violence engenders public controversy and legal challenges over warning labels and the restriction of access for minors demonstrates that there exists a sizeable segment of society that finds esports violence unacceptable and would likely gravitate toward an alternative collegiate league.

By way of analogy, the investment industry has offered social choice funds, or socially responsible investments (SRI), for several decades. These funds establish criteria to screen out financial investments in potentially objectionable goods or services, such as pornography, tobacco, or weapons. Numerous studies have been conducted to determine whether such funds underperform conventional portfolios in terms of the rate of return on investment—that is, whether there is a cost to consciously investing for the greater good; the findings generally suggest that there is a nominal cost, but the risk-adjusted rates of return on SRIs and conventional portfolios are similar (Renneboog, *et al*., 2008; von Wallis and Klein, 2015). More importantly, SRIs have existed in their current form for roughly half a century, and have grown dramatically in popularity—despite earning returns that are less than or equal to those of conventional portfolios (von Wallis and Klein, 2015). This indicates that a sizeable minority of investors is willing to pay a price to adhere to certain principles. If the population of potential college students, parents, donors, administrators, and other higher education stakeholders is similarly motivated, there should well be enough interest in nonviolent esports to establish a viable alternative to existing leagues.

Conclusion

In business, education, government, and other walks of life, there is nearly always a cost to standing up for principles, especially when those principles are in opposition to the prevailing preferences of society at large. Given the popularity of violent esports, colleges and universities whose institutional values endorse nonviolence are confronted by a choice. They can uphold the value of nonviolence and opt out of existing esports tournaments that tolerate video game violence, or set their principles aside and participate in the current esports competitions. As a third alternative, they can elect to pursue nonviolent esports exclusively through intramural competitions. To broaden the set of options, we propose the creation of an entirely new, nonviolent esports league.

[16] See https://www.aelsports.org/ and https://caael.org/.
[17] https://www.ncfl.org/about.html.

Such a specialization in nonviolence would facilitate differentiation and branding both for esports competitions and academic curricula related to video game design. While that approach might make some institutions less appealing to the broad population of potential students, by strengthening brand consistency, colleges and universities that are committed to nonviolence may become more attractive to their constituent base—the stakeholders who self-select into institutions that behave in a socially responsible manner.

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Accreditation: Assessing the Assessment

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As an economics faculty member, in the arts and sciences college, my involvement with accrediting agencies would likely be limited at most to Middle States, the regional accreditor for the entire University. Middle States requires a comprehensive overview of the university every 10 years, periodic reports in between, as well as approval applications for substantive changes being proposed. A relatively macro approach. But, as we know, accreditation at a university is more than regional. Looking at the overall university, you will often find dozens of individual area/discipline accreditors and more pending. Accreditations come in all sizes and shapes. Some are required to enter a profession, others recommended but optional and others totally discretionary. There are those that are highly prominent and prestigious (such as the LCME accreditation in medicine and the ABA/AALS accreditation in law) as well as many others, also known, coveted, and sought after, plus at least as many others bordering on the unknown, except in their specific area. Sought after is the company you would like to be in and the programs and schools you would like to be compared to. For more general information, the CHEA website provides a valuable comprehensive listing of the wide world of accreditation.

Specific school or area accreditors are often very micro in their orientation and very detailed in what they are looking for. For example, in looking at the faculty, it is not unusual when dealing with area accreditation to scrutinize the learning goals of their courses and the success in meeting these goals. It is also not unusual to scrutinize the scholarly or clinical productivity of faculty, person by person, including an assessment as to whether the person has the continuing productivity to be qualified to teach what they are teaching. If the learning goals are not met and/or if the person has little or no scholarship or clinical practice, these faculty provide limited support in meeting accreditation standards. With a micro look at all aspects of an accredited discipline or a program, the involvement of faculty members is more substantive, including much more detailed reporting of credentials, publications, clinical practice, discipline related accomplishments, plans and outcomes. Very micro, relatively macro and everything in between describes the accreditation landscape of today, but the direction is toward greater micro scrutiny, especially when you consider outcomes assessment is now inextricably interwoven with accreditation.

As a person who served 28 years as Provost and 12 years as Dean and dealt regularly with more than 20 national accreditations, how do I feel about accreditation and how did I feel about meeting the different standards of almost two dozen academic accrediting agencies? Very positive. Accreditation, which in many cases is not required to offer degrees or programs in the involved area, is an important third-party verification of quality, and I am a fan. In my opinion, the more accreditations, if they are meaningful, the greater the overall quality of the university (and the more quickly provosts tend to age). And please note that even if not required, having a known accreditation provides a reputational boost.

Being a fan comes with one caveat. Economics in a liberal arts college lacks any specialized accreditation. In general, most programs in the liberal arts have no accompanying specialized accreditation. Looking at the latest NCES data regarding the largest majors, programs such as business and health professions have widespread accreditation, and other large majors such as the social sciences as well as (undergraduate) psych and most areas of communication have no such support. When it comes to allocating resources, there is no level playing field when some programs have major known accreditations, and others do not. Accreditation helps establish clear goal posts for quality and guidance to assure continuous improvement. Resources are easier to secure under these circumstances. A dean can do this on their own, but it becomes more achievable in the framework of accreditation. Accreditation also serves as a powerful lobbyist on behalf of the program involved. If certain resources are missing, accreditation can be in jeopardy. Positive action to resolve the issue or issues is therefore likely. If the program does not have specialized accreditation, missing resources will likely require waiting until resources are available more generally. As provost, I would try to minimize this disparity, but it remains a reality.

Being positive about accreditation doesn't mean that you shouldn't be measured in making decisions regarding accreditation. Not every accreditation makes sense. There needs to be a cost benefit analysis before you embark on adding any accreditation. How known is the accreditation; how prevalent is the accreditation; and what are the costs involved? If most programs in the area are not accredited, if schools you compete with do not have the accreditation, and if the costs are not commensurate with the benefits, the decision needs to be very carefully weighed. What exactly are the costs and what, in measurable terms, are the expected benefits? Being at the cutting edge in terms of adding an accreditation can be beneficial but it can also be a waste of scarce resources.

I wasn't always positive about accreditation. Immediately after becoming the acting dean of the business school early in my career, I was totally consumed by preparing for the school's reaccreditation. Subsequently, shortly after being chosen as business school dean, I was asked to also serve as acting dean of the school of education and here too was totally consumed with accreditation. This was not the fault of the accrediting agency involved. Preparing for a report/visit is always challenging but more so when you start late and look to document after the fact the data that should be compiled on an ongoing basis. Lesson number 1 in accreditation proficiency is to always compile the data, every semester, every facet of what will be involved in the program review. Important data should be gathered routinely; significantly more effort is involved when what should have been done all along is put together at the last moment.

Collecting data routinely is one sign of an insurer rather than a risk taker. But being an insurer, which is a significant positive when dealing with accreditation, requires much more. It requires exceeding rather than just barely meeting standards. From my experience, when you just meet standards and something unforeseen takes place, the program is no longer in compliance. Rather than trying to explain your way out of a non-compliance situation it is better to build in a buffer, a modest margin of safety because there are times that the unforeseen will happen.

The standards noted above and the process itself both have costs. Accreditation and reaccreditation also take time. The self-study is usually a major document requiring months to complete. Unless this work can be incorporated into the schedule of an existing administrative position, you will be compensating someone to work as the report writer. Given the subject matter

involved, that person will likely be a faculty member and the compensation will be released time or a stipend or both for at least a semester and often longer. Having different individuals write different sections is another option. Just remember that the finished product needs to speak with one voice. A report that comes across choppy, with sections that don't connect, can raise additional questions and be counterproductive. For a new or problematic accreditation, it may pay to (also) hire an expert. The expenditure here is an investment in the ultimate success of the effort. If you would prefer not to hire an outside person to aid in this effort, you will need to develop your own accreditation expert. With many accreditations to oversee, having an Associate Provost for Accreditation and Assessment (or similar senior administrator) makes good sense. While there are many differences between accreditations, there are also many similarities. My experience is that the Associate Provost can handle most, but not all questions that arise and that there are times when there is no substitute for an expert who has specialized knowledge of the accreditation being focused on.

Going back to the self-study, not only does the data and analysis need to be accurate, but the report also needs to be well written. Between the report writer, the program director/department chair, dean and provost that should be easy to accomplish but only if the process is not rushed and sufficient time is built in for a critical review and needed fine tuning. Thinking back over decades of accreditation reviews, in those cases where issues arose, more time in preparation would have resolved these issues sooner rather than later.

One especially critical point regarding the self-study and in the entire process is that everything written or stated needs to be honest and accurate. And the accreditation standards need to be followed. Everything should also be stated in the most positive way possible. Early in my career, I was part of a visiting team where the information provided to the team was intentionally or unintentionally inaccurate. The visiting team chair made the discovery, and our entire team was very negative in response to distorted data. So were the leaders of the accrediting agency. As a result, the school involved needed to wait and go through the entire process again. What saved the school/university from total embarrassment and severe economic consequences, is that the process remained confidential. All that was visible to the public was that this program was not accredited.

Not that long ago, I visited a top ranked graduate program to see what I could learn that would be to the benefit of what we were doing. The extensive presentation was a dazzling display of everything being in order, including super impressive student admissions credentials. Later, it came out that the student data was not an accurate reflection of the applicants. Shameful! Honesty, unfortunately, is not a given, either in accreditation or in program rankings. The lure of being ranked number 1 or near the top, but without having earned the distinction, has prompted some very good schools to practice some very bad, very corrupt behavior. In these cases, the penalties should be very harsh both for the individuals involved as well as the schools involved. Even more scrutiny and verification also need to be put in place. The honor system is clearly not practiced universally and those who cheat need to be caught. Please remember that if one school is ranked higher through data manipulation, another school that plays by the rules is ranked lower, through no fault of their own.

Some accreditations also provide a large loophole especially since reaccreditation is often on a ten-year cycle. In such cases, input and output evaluations are based on the self-study semester or the visitation semester, or both, more than anything else. What happens before or after doesn't enter into the equation. Consequently, hiring ramps up for the period under scrutiny and ramps back down afterwards. Evaluating over a longer time period can serve as a deterrent to only meeting standards for a moment in time.

In my half century of involvement with accreditation, the biggest change has been the shift in emphasis from inputs to outputs. Early on, quality was measured by the number and credentials of the faculty in relation to the number of students. If the bodies and degrees were there, you were fine. Alternatively, quality was measured by what percentage of the tuition dollar from the students being served was earmarked for use by that area. If you were above the desired threshold, your accreditation would be more secure. Now, we look carefully at outcomes assessment which is a much more valid gauge of learning. Virtually, all accreditations have gravitated to outcomes and to qualitative measures, but it would be erroneous to state that inputs would no longer be taken into consideration. If the qualitative guidelines are not fully satisfied, your quantitative measures will likely be more thoroughly scrutinized to see if they may be the cause. Accreditations also have become more focused on diversity. Do the faculty reflect the diversity of the students, their future clients and the general population? Are diversity, equity and inclusion important values for the program? I applaud this focus on diversity.

Accrediting agencies usually have an annual meeting and various workshops. It would be a mistake not to participate. It would also be a mistake for accreditation or reaccreditation to involve only a few faculty and administrators. Accreditation, especially when accompanied by assessment, requires buy-in and support from the program faculty in general. Therefore, accreditation should be a topic at all program, department, and school faculty meetings. Not just once, but continuously as the process is followed to hopefully a successful conclusion. For the process to be successful, faculty need to be clear on what is gained by accreditation and what is required. Thy need to buy-in and they need to feel included. We also need to respect their knowledge base and the value they provide in preparing for an accreditation or reaccreditation effort.

Included in accreditation will typically be a visit to the campus by the accrediting team. Deans, Vice Deans, Chairs, Directors and faculty from other accredited programs in the academic field are the knowledgeable pool from which a visiting team is selected. This is a peer review-based process which in my opinion helps assure the fairness of the results. During COVID, this process was through Zoom but now is beginning to be more in-person again. Some teams split up to talk to all faculty, others focus on a sample. The conversation with faculty provides important input. For faculty, and for all of us as previously noted, the responses should always be honest. But also remember, it is important to be as positive as possible while being honest. Needlessly undercutting a program, because you are not happy about a peripheral matter is counter- productive and inappropriate. Also, a team visit is not the time to bring up extraneous thoughts about the chairperson, or thoughts about an individual's salary. Nor is it the time to talk about personal relationships and who you like and who you don't like. Added noise does not increase the clarity of a visit. From my experience, it is the in-person conversations that lend themselves to added noise. For whatever reasons, perhaps a sense of distance or separation, Zoom seems to filter out noise.

Faculty buy-in alone is a necessary but not sufficient condition for a successful accreditation or reaccreditation process. An enthusiastic supportive president and provost are taken for granted and should be demonstrated during the visit. It serves no purpose for a senior administrator to question the value of accreditation. But it does happen, and I have seen it happen. Student support is also a plus. Teams enjoy meeting with accomplished students, our leaders of the future. If the students are positive about their learning experience, especially the experiential aspects, that will be viewed positively by the team.

I have never considered a visiting team as adversarial. Their job is to verify what you have already stated in the self-study demonstrating that the program meets all the required standards. Issues arise when meeting the standards is not a clear conclusion and the team will need to pursue what isn't clear as part of their due diligence. In addition to assessing the meeting of standards, not infrequently, a team will provide invaluable suggestions that can help a program accomplish even more moving forward. There are tremendous potential benefits in having a team of experts assist in enhancing the positive trajectory of your program.

I did at times see a tension between central administration and the program involved and have been part of visiting team efforts to ameliorate the differences collegially. There is clearly a danger of having such an environment. Issues, often related to resources, between central administration and a program standing for accreditation or reaccreditation need to be resolved beforehand. An accreditation visit is the wrong time for intra-university differences to surface.

I have also seen what I would call the Ivy League standard applied by visiting teams and accrediting agencies. If a school is Ivy League or considered as part of that category, there may be a presumption that what you are doing meets the standards even if there are noticeable variations. For a school not in this category, the benefit of the doubt is not always evident.

Many alumni welcome an opportunity to be supportive of the program involved and giving them an opportunity to talk with a visiting team is also a plus. Successful alums are also a proxy for outcomes assessment. So that the alums are comfortable talking about the program or programs up for review, be sure to update them fully before they participate in any visit. Before Covid, many visits started with a dinner for the visiting team. That tradition now seems to be returning. Think about who should be there and, even though it is hard to believe, think about what will be served.

My favorite visit, food wise, was to a school that served a (business dress) full lobster dinner, bib, moist hand wipes, tools and corn on the cob included. The purpose of these introductory dinners is to have a useful oversight conversation between the visiting team and the program leadership. A conversation that can set the tone for the entire visit. Try dissecting a lobster, eating corn on the cob, and not wearing any of it, while having a conversation with individuals sitting next to you and across from you on all sides. Many a lobster was untouched. Unfortunately, the lobster is not able to enjoy this moment.

Benchmarks of quality and guardians of quality help assure a better education. Verification helps make that happen. I will therefore continue to be very supportive of accreditation but at the same time mindful of the concerns I've outlined.

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"Who is Trying to Get Into the Room But Can't?": An Argument for Inclusion of Independent School District (ISD) Representation During Postsecondary Application Development Processes

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When a product—of nearly any kind—is brought to market by a company or organization, a process called NPD, or new product development, is followed. During NPD, a common, seven-step process occurs which allows the company or organization to optimize the success of the product, whether that success is defined by positive user feedback, eager and widespread use of the product for a purpose (the wheel, a pop socket, a washcloth, etc.), or mere profit. This seven-step process includes 1.) idea generation, 2.) research, 3.) planning, 4.) prototyping, 5.) sourcing, 6.) costing, and 7.) commercialization (Sutton, 2021).

Companies around the world spend millions of dollars on idea generation and research-and-development (R&D) teams to explore market trends, measure consumer sentiments, and generate ideas for new products; R&D procedures ensure that the product will be well received and generate profit for the company (Sutton, 2021). However, many products never escape the first step of idea generation. Those that do often experience modest market success, and exceptional products may eventually become a known brand or part of a stable set of products regularly offered by a company (Sutton, 2021). For instance, two of the most famous companies in the world, Coca-Cola and Apple, have rigorously followed this process of NPD when bringing a new product to the market.

Famously, the original formula for Coca-Cola was developed after a man named John Pemberton saw that his community could use a relaxing, refreshing beverage in the post-Civil War South of the 1880s. To develop the recipe, Pemberton created many versions of Coca-Cola and asked community members (his target demographic) to taste test each version and provide feedback: This was Coca-Cola's first NPD process. Ultimately, Pemberton brought the most popular recipe to market, and Coca-Cola was born (Ng, 2018). Akin to Coca-Cola's original NPD, Apple has recruited members of the public for decades to participate in their "Apple Beta Software Program," a program that solicits Apple users to "take part in shaping Apple software by test-driving pre-release versions and letting us know what you think" (Apple, Inc., 2021, para. 1). Here, Apple's NPD specifically recruits Apple's target demographic to provide feedback that ensures that Apple's next round of products is warmly received by its user base.

Like Coca-Cola or Apple goods, a product used by millions of people each year is the college application (Common Application, Coalition for College Application, etc.). However, little information exists on how states or companies engage with NPD processes to develop college applications nor whether the target demographic (high school students and high school counselors) has been involved in the application's NPD process. Across the United States, there are dozens of state system college applications (ApplyMaine, ApplyMontana, the University of Wisconsin System Application, City University of New York Application, California State University System Application, etc.). Yet, investigating these websites to learn about how the applications were developed yields relatively little information. Moreover, most state system applications are authored or published by that system's Board of Regents, Board of Trustees, or the university system's office of the chancellor, president, or commissioner (ex: ApplyMontana), but little detail is offered as to how these administrative bodies conducted the NPD process for their application.

One of the only states in the country to establish a formal governing body over the state-wide common college application process is Texas. As one of the largest and most widely used postsecondary application systems in the country, ApplyTexas was written into Texas law in 1997 as a requirement for all public institutions of higher education to use when facilitating the admissions application process for prospective postsecondary students in Texas and beyond. Under Title 3 of the Texas State Education Code (Sec. 51.762a):

> The [Texas Higher Education Coordinating] board, with the assistance of high school counselors and an advisory committee composed of representatives of general academic teaching institutions, junior college districts, public state colleges, public technical institutes, and private or independent institutions of higher education, and with the consultation of all institutions of higher education that admit freshman-level students:
>
> (1) shall adopt by rule: (A) a common admission application form for use by a person seeking admission as a freshman student to a general academic teaching institution; (B) an electronic common admission application form for use by a person seeking admission as a freshman student to an institution of higher education that admits freshman-level students, other than a general academic teaching institution; and (C) if the board determines that adoption of the form would be cost-effective for nursing schools, an electronic common admission application form for use by a person seeking admission as a student to an undergraduate nursing education program at an institution of higher education; and
>
> (2) may adopt by rule a printed format common admission application form for use by a person seeking admission as a freshman student to an institution of higher education that admits freshman-level students, other than a general academic teaching institution. (Texas Education Code, 2017 Amendment, Ann. § 51.762, 1997)

Although the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) is the party responsible for ApplyTexas and its administration, state law also dictated that the Board seek guidance from "high school counselors and an advisory committee." This committee is the only known committee of its kind in the United States. The only other system to implement a similar process is the University of

California Application, with the University of California System appointing a Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools (BOARS), filled with representatives from each UC System campus and several consultants from various UC System offices. Per the University of California System (2021) website, "The Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools (BOARS) oversees all matters relating to the admissions of undergraduate students. BOARS regulates the policies and practices used in the admissions process that directly relates to the educational mission of the University and the welfare of students," (para. 1). Despite this governing body, the UC System does not appoint the college application's target demographic--college students and high school counselors--to the BOARS (University of California System, 2021). In the UC System's case, it is unclear whether the UC System application was developed with any input from the application's target demographic.

Regarding the advisory committee in the Texas context, Texas Administrative Code dictates how that committee must be formed:

> (A) Membership shall consist of admissions administrators from Texas public institutions of higher education and participating private or independent institutions of higher education, all as defined by Texas Education Code, §61.003, that use the Apply Texas System.
>
> (B) Membership on the committee should include: (1) four representatives from public universities with enrollment of more than 30,000 students in previous fall semester; (2) three representatives from public universities with enrollment between 10,000 - 30,000 students in previous fall semester; (3) three representatives from public universities with enrollment between 0 - 9,999 students in previous fall semester; (4) one representative from public universities using the graduate application in the Apply Texas System not selected from paragraphs (1) - (3) of this subsection; (5) three representatives from public community, technical, or state colleges with enrollment of more than 16,000 students in previous fall semester; (6) four representatives from public community, technical, or state colleges with enrollment between 10,000 - 15,999 students in previous fall semester; (7) three representatives from public community, technical, or state colleges with enrollment between 0 - 9,999 students in previous fall semester; (8) two representatives from participating private or independent institutions; and (9) one undergraduate student representative. (Texas Administrative Code, 2017 Amendment, Ann. §1.130, 2013)

Since the inception of ApplyTexas, the ApplyTexas Advisory Committee (ATAC) "discusses and votes on proposed changes to the ApplyTexas application for the upcoming application cycle. The committee also works on additional initiatives to strengthen student participation and access into higher education" (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2021a). Toward the former purpose, the ATAC has provided the coordinating board with strategic guidance regarding how the application can be better suited to meet the needs of institutions, such as adding or manipulating certain questions, improving the user interface of the application, or advancing the technology of the application (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2021a). However, regarding the latter goal (i.e., "additional initiatives"), the ATAC has only advocated for two major augmentations of the application: the Counselor Suite, an online portal that allows high school counselors to access

student applications; and TREx, an online interface that allows high school staff to electronically submit a student's high school transcripts to their intended institution of higher education within Texas (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2021a). Beyond these two "additional initiatives," there is no evidence that high school students or independent school district (ISD) counselors or staff have ever been involved in the ATAC's work, nor have these constituents been consulted regarding the application process.

In short, the ATAC has not followed the basic principles of NPD in their conceptualizing and ongoing development of the ApplyTexas application. This lack of communication and collaboration arrives in the wake of falling postsecondary applications and reports of ApplyTexas being overly difficult and less user-friendly than the Common Application, a competing postsecondary application system (McGee, 2020). As a result, this essay will discuss a conceptual framework, supporting evidence, and directions forward related to why there must be ISD representation during the development of postsecondary application systems, framing Texas, ApplyTexas, and the ApplyTexas Advisory Committee as a case study.

Conceptual Framework

This essay draws on D.L. Stewart's (2017) framework for understanding diversity in education. Pointedly, this essay engages with Stewart's (2017) critical questions for diversity, equity, and inclusion to ensure equitable educational outcomes at all levels across the P-20 spectrum. Therein, Stewart (2017) posed the following hypothetical scenario:

> Diversity asks, "Who's in the room?" Equity responds: "Who is trying to get in the room but can't? Whose presence in the room is under constant threat of erasure?" Inclusion asks, "Has everyone's ideas been heard?" Justice responds, "Whose ideas won't be taken as seriously because they aren't in the majority?"

For the purposes of this essay, we situate diversity as a strength and one that the ATAC and the THECB must embrace to produce the highest-quality postsecondary application possible. Here, ISD representation is necessary to achieve diversity of perspective and experience on the ATAC, informing how ApplyTexas could be improved or become more student-friendly. Moreover, we believe that Stewart's (2017) question of inclusion has not been answered--it is clear that everyone's ideas have not been heard and that ISD voices have been silenced due to their exclusion from the ATAC in Texas Administrative Code and the THECB's failure to include them on the ATAC through non-legislative means. Finally, we feel that ISDs--especially college access professionals working in these ISDs--are in fact the majority. As of 2020, there are over 100 institutions of higher education which use ApplyTexas, yet there are over 1,200 ISDs across Texas, all of which staff counselors and college access professionals who work directly with the next generation of college students. The fact that the majority of college access stakeholders—students and ISD college access professionals—are not included in the ATAC is puzzling, problematic, and does not answer Stewart's (2017) questions of inclusion or justice. Rather, it promotes exclusion and injustice for Texas' students.

Why the Application Matters

Access to United States higher education has remained an important topic in educational research for decades (Clinedinst & Patel, 2018; Hearn, 1984; Hurtado et al., 1997; Orfield, 1992; Perna, 2006). Work emerging from this body of research has found that knowledge of postsecondary processes—such as how to complete admissions applications, write admissions essays, and apply for financial aid—may be critical barriers for many students to overcome to gain admission to the institution of their choice and successfully enroll (Bettinger et al., 2012; Clayton & Umbach, 2020; Fu, 2014; Pennebaker et al., 2014). Merely having reliable Internet (Dettling et al., 2018) and understanding how to use computer applications has been deemed an "invisible academic prerequisite[s]" for access to the United States higher education system (Goode, 2010, p. 584).

In all, access to and success within the U.S. higher education system has been a stressful, rigorous, and difficult process for postsecondary students for as long as the system has been in place (Pascarella et al., 2004). As access and success have remained elusive, this study posits that one element of accessing the system has remained equally elusive and surprisingly understudied: the difficulty of the postsecondary application itself. Studies related to postsecondary applications have largely focused on how many applications a student successfully completes each admissions cycle (Clinedinst & Patel, 2018) and what drives changes in application patterns (Legatt, 2021). These changes are owed a multitude of diverse and seemingly unrelated factors such as institutional reputation (Alter & Reback, 2014), standardized test score policies (Hurwitz et al., 2017), Affirmative Action (Long, 2004), geographic location and access to social capital (Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004), the success of an institution's athletics program (Pope & Pope, 2009), and most recently, the coronavirus (COVID-19) global pandemic (Smith, 2020; Walsh, 2020). However, beyond studies capturing both quantitative and qualitative data to articulate application trends, very little knowledge exists about the difficulty of postsecondary applications. A myriad of unanswered questions remain, such as:

- How long does it take to complete a postsecondary application?
- Do completion times vary across different applications?
- How long is the postsecondary application by question or word count?
- How readable are postsecondary applications?
- Are postsecondary applications translated into languages beyond English?
- Are postsecondary applications web accessible for people with disabilities?
- Are postsecondary applications mobile optimized to be completed on cellular devices?
- Are postsecondary applications small enough by bit size to be easily downloaded and completed across many Internet-capable devices?

Each of these questions hints at elements that could render a postsecondary application exceedingly difficult to complete. Consider first-generation in college students, English language learners, students with disabilities, students living in rural areas or areas without access to high-speed Internet, or any students who hold a combination of these intersectional identities. Here is what we do know.

Postsecondary Application Volume on the Rise. Descriptive research has found that the average student has been completing more postsecondary applications than ever; most prospective postsecondary students complete applications to at least three institutions, with the most privileged and wealthy students completing upwards of a dozen applications (Clinedinst & Patel, 2018). This phenomenon is likely due to the rising popularity of common, national postsecondary application systems such as the Common Application (The Common Application, Inc., 2021), the Universal College Application (Applications Online, LLC., 2021), and the Coalition for College Application (Coalition for College, 2021). Despite the effects of COVID-19 on postsecondary application numbers, many elite and prestigious institutions are reporting increases in applications for the Class of 2025; for example, Harvard University reported a 42% increase. However, less-prestigious, public institutions and many small, private, liberal arts institutions have experienced marked declines in applications, and many institutions have considered year-long rolling admissions cycles to drive yield (Jaschik, 2021).

Minoritized Students Less Likely to Complete Postsecondary Applications. Nearly fifty years of research into U.S. postsecondary application patterns has found that students of Color (Welton & Martinez, 2013), low-income students (Means & Pyne, 2017; Perna, 2006), first generation in college students (Pascarella et al., 2004), rural students (Nelson, 2016), English-language learners (Kanno & Cromley, 2013), and students from other minoritized backgrounds (Kezar et al., 2020) do not apply to and access U.S. higher education at the same rate as their peers. In an analysis of postsecondary application processes, Holland (2013) found that many U.S. colleges and universities do not adjust their messaging and information streams to low-income prospective students, nudging these students to apply to "undermatched" institutions (p. 154), revealing their absence of "college knowledge" (p. 121) necessary to successfully complete postsecondary applications.

Most Postsecondary Content is Difficult to Read. Emergent research in higher education has found that many postsecondary materials, including admissions instructions, are often written above the 14th grade English reading level (Taylor, 2017, 2018, 2019b, 2020), rendering this content very difficult for traditional high school students and the average U.S. adult to read and comprehend. Current literacy statistics suggest the average U.S. adult reads and comprehends English language text between the 7th and 8th grade (middle school) levels (Center for Plain Language, 2017; Clear Language Group, 2021). Moreover, many studies have identified either "college knowledge" (Holland, 2013, p. 121) or college jargon that complicates postsecondary materials at the word level, beyond difficult readability of postsecondary materials at the document level (Ardoin, 2013; Taylor & Bicak, 2020).

Most Postsecondary Content is not Translated Beyond English. Related research has found that access information for the U.S. higher education system is predominantly English (Kanno & Varghese, 2010; Núñez, 2014; Taylor, 2018), meaning that very little postsecondary access information is accessible to English language learners (ELL) or English as a second language (ESL) students. However, decades of research have called for the widespread translation of U.S. higher education access information, including translated admissions applications (Ceja, 2006; Pérez & McDonough, 2008; Núñez, 2014; Taylor, 2018). Of course, this lack of linguistic equity is likely partially responsible for the equity gaps between native English speakers and ELLs and ESLs in their access of the U.S. higher education system (Great Schools Partnership, 2014; Kanno & Cromley, 2013; Taylor, 2018).

Most Postsecondary Content is not Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) Compliant. Historically, people with disabilities have not accessed U.S. higher education at the same rate as their peers (Kutscher & Tuckwiller, 2019; Petcu et al., 2017). Though technology has changed to allow for web-accessible postsecondary information for these audiences, researchers have found that most U.S. postsecondary institutions do not publish web accessible communications for prospective students with disabilities (Erickson et al., 2013; Hackett & Parmanto, 2009; Taylor & Bicak, 2019). Although no prior studies have analyzed whether postsecondary application systems are web accessible for people with disabilities, Taylor's (2019a) exploratory analysis of the ApplyTexas, Common Application, Coalition Application, and Universal College Application found that no application was entirely ADA-compliant, with ApplyTexas being most compliant (97 web accessibility issues) and the Common Application being least compliant (325 web accessibility issues).

The Digital Divide Restricts Access to Postsecondary Applications. As postsecondary access processes (i.e., applying for admission, financial aid) become increasingly digital and Internet-based, researchers have found that low-income and rural students often struggle with access to high-speed or otherwise adequate Internet to successfully complete these processes (Jones et al., 2009; Scott et al., 2016; Sundeen & Sundeen, 2013; Venegas, 2006, 2007). Dettling et al. (2018) examined the relationship between prospective student access to high-speed Internet and college application rates, finding that "students with broadband in their postal code perform better on the SAT and apply to a higher number and more expansive set of colleges" (p. 260). Moreover, the researchers learned that the availability of broadband Internet generally improved application rates, yet this improvement was concentrated in high socioeconomic areas, perhaps exacerbating pervasive inequities related to poverty, Internet access, and postsecondary admission (Dettling et al., 2018). Recently, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) established the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program which provides a $50 monthly subsidy to help purchase standard Internet services and equipment, addressing how the COVID-19 pandemic and the "turn to virtual learning" has negatively impacted postsecondary access for low-income individuals (Federal Communications Commission, 2021, p. 2).

The Modern U.S. Postsecondary Student Embraces Cellular Technologies. Cell phone use among U.S. postsecondary students is ubiquitous (Harvard University, 2021; Lee et al., 2017; Lepp et al., 2015a, 2015b), with the average U.S. postsecondary student using their cell phone for at least nine hours per day (Cumberledge, 2017). Research focusing specifically on postsecondary students and cell phone usage has found that modern, digital-native postsecondary students are quite literally addicted to their cell phones (Roberts et al., 2014). However, unless prompted by an instructor, students are more likely to use their cell phone for leisure than academic tasks (Lepp et al., 2015b), suggesting that institutions of higher education should balance mobile- and desktop-focused information processes related to postsecondary access and success. Yet, both national—Common Application (The Common Application, Inc., 2021) and Coalition for College Application (Coalition for College, 2021)—and state-level applications—ApplyMaine (University of Maine System, 2021), University of California System (The Regents of the University of California, 2021), and University of Wisconsin System (Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System, 2021)—have published mobile-optimized versions of applications to entice prospective students to use their cell phones to apply to an institution of higher education, whereas ApplyTexas has resisted that change.

ISDs Not Involved in the NPD Process for Postsecondary Applications

Surprisingly, given the relatively widespread and common process of NPD that consumer goods and services often undergo, there is little evidence that postsecondary application systems involve their target markets and end users—high school students—in NPD. For example, one nationally known application is the Common Application, founded in 1975 to simplify the postsecondary access process by centralizing postsecondary applications to allow students to apply to many schools using one application (The Common Application, Inc., 2021). However, in the history of its existence, the Common Application has not documented its NPD process, nor has it had a high school student or parent provide strategic guidance regarding the application's development or improvement. There is, however, school district representation on the Common Application's Board of Directors as of 2021: one college counselor from Highland Park High School in Highland Park, Illinois and one Vice President from KIPP Public Schools, a nationwide public charter school district (The Common Application, Inc., 2021). All other board members currently work for institutions of higher education.

The same lack of ISD representation during NPD for postsecondary applications applies to the Coalition for College application as well: Only one Director of College Counseling from Clayton School District in St. Louis, Missouri serves on the Board of Directors. As of 2021, all other board members currently work for institutions of higher education (Coalition for College, 2021). Even more troubling, the Universal College Application, another nationwide postsecondary application system used by hundreds of institutions of higher education in the United States, operates as a limited liability company (LLC) and does not need to appoint a publicly known board of directors or any leadership. As a result, the Universal College Application does not publish information about NPD for their application system, nor do they publish information about who provides strategic guidance for how their postsecondary application is developed or improved (Applications Online, LLC, 2021).

After a search of postsecondary application systems across the United States, it appears that no state-level postsecondary application system is developed by an ISD in the United States. As previously mentioned, state-system applications such as the University of California system application (Regents of the University of California, 2021) and the University of Wisconsin system application (Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System, 2021) do not publish information regarding their NPD processes. The same can be said for The City University of New York application (The City University of New York, 2021), Apply Montana (Montana University System Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education, 2021), and Apply Maine (University of Maine System, 2021): None of these state-system applications publish any information about their NPD process or publicize partnerships with ISDs when developing their application.

Focusing on Texas and ApplyTexas

As one of the largest and most widely-used postsecondary application systems in the country, ApplyTexas was written into Texas law as a requirement for all public institutions of higher education when facilitating the admissions process for prospective postsecondary students in Texas and beyond. Originally, the ApplyTexas application was introduced in SB150 in the 75th Texas Legislative Session in 1997 led by Representatives Bivins and Maxey. SB150 sought to make the

application process to public colleges and universities in Texas more efficient. Instead of applying to multiple colleges with separate paper applications, an electronic application was created to eliminate the need to duplicate repetitive information, allowing Texas students to easily apply to many of Texas' institutions of higher education (Texas State Senate Research Center, 1997). This consolidation works to keep Texas students in Texas throughout their postsecondary career at multiple levels, as many institutions of higher education outside of Texas staff regional admissions counselors to recruit Texas students toward out-of-state institutions (Louisiana State University, 2021; University of Florida, 2021).

Under Title 3 of the Texas State Education Code (Sec. 51.762a), Texas public colleges and universities are required by law to accept ApplyTexas applications, and they pay an institutional fee, determined by the size of the school, to the THECB. Early iterations of ApplyTexas were written as the Texas Common Application, and the first web version of the State of Texas Common Application for Admissions was developed and implemented for the Summer 1999 and Fall 1999 terms. According to the ApplyTexas website, ApplyTexas was created "through a collaborative effort between the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) and the colleges and universities represented on the site" (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2007, para. 1). ApplyTexas also allows students to complete such tasks as:

- Apply for admission to any Texas public university and to participating community and private colleges.
- Apply for undergraduate, international, and graduate admission.
- Copy a submitted application to another institution.
- Submit your application essays online.
- Apply for scholarships from participating universities.
- Search for and view both general and university specific information. (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2007, paras. 3-8)

As a result of competition and the COVID-19 global pandemic, postsecondary enrollment in Texas declined roughly 3% during the 2020-2021 academic year, with two-year institutions suffering a sharper decline, at roughly 9% (McGee, 2021). These declines, and other situations related to the COVID-19 pandemic, led many Texas institutions to waive standardized testing requirements (Hoover, 2021), adopt other application systems beyond ApplyTexas (The University of Texas at San Antonio, 2020), and waive application fees (McGee, 2020). To move ApplyTexas further toward more contemporary technology, the THECB launched a chatbot named ADVi which "uses artificial intelligence to provide on-demand support to Texans looking to attend or return to higher education" (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2020, para. 2), allowing students to text with the bot to learn more about Texas institutions to "complete their certificates or degrees at Texas colleges and universities" (para. 9). These shifts embrace an ethos of keeping Texas students in Texas, yet little attention has been paid to whether ApplyTexas is as simple and intuitive as possible for Texas students—the ApplyTexas end users—to lower the bar for information and access and allow Texas students to begin their pursuit of a degree or credential from a Texas institution.

Uniquely, state of Texas legislation created an advisory committee to guide the THECB while it developed—and continues to develop—ApplyTexas. As previously mentioned, within state law, the

ATAC can only encompass professionals working in institutions of higher education, with no formal, codified involvement with ISDs in Texas (Texas Education Code, 2017, §61.003). Moreover, the THECB website for ApplyTexas provides no information about whether ISD representation or voices are included during its publication or drafting process.

To remedy this issue, in 2015, SB1813 was introduced with the intent to include high school counselors and representation from a private or independent institution on the Apply Texas Advisor Committee. In the original proposal language, the Texas State Senate sought to add high school counselors to the ATAC: "To address this issue, S.B. 1813 seeks the inclusion of high school counselors and a representative from a private or independent institution of higher education in the advisory committee," (Texas State Senate Research Center, 2017, p. 1). This was the first known legislative attempt at including ISD representation on the ATAC, codifying an ISD voice on the committee for one of the largest postsecondary application systems in existence.

However, the SB1813 Bill Analysis as filed on April 13, 2017 reflects that SB1813 was amended to remove the high school counselors from the ATAC, but it still included private or independent institutions on the committee. Instead, SB1813 was submitted and approved to Texas Education Code as the following:

> Sec. 51.762. COMMON ADMISSION APPLICATION FORMS. (a) The board, with the assistance of high school counselors and an advisory committee composed of representatives of general academic teaching institutions, junior college districts, public state colleges, public technical institutes, and private or independent institutions of higher education, and with the consultation of all institutions of higher education that admit freshman-level students.

It is important to note that high school counselors were previously allowed to contribute to the ATAC as ad-hoc or audience members during ATAC meetings, but these counselors were never allowed to formally join the ATAC to provide strategic guidance. As a result of the final, published SB1813 language, high school counselors are separate from the advisory committee, codifying the fact that high school counselors—critical ISD representatives in Texas's college access landscape—will not be allowed to formally contribute to the committee and future iterations of ApplyTexas. Furthermore, there is no additional information on the THECB website as to why the original SB1813 language was not approved and high school counselors were denied access to the ATAC.

Ultimately, ApplyTexas is a necessary component of the postsecondary process for students in high school, especially in Texas. Students in grades 10-12 can use the Apply Texas application to submit admissions applications to their local community colleges for dual credit coursework. Students in 12th grade represented 57% of all college and university applications in Fall 2019, 61% in Fall 2020 and 60% in Fall 2021 (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2021b). For many high school students, help navigating the college admissions process is received from a college access professional or guidance counselor. K12 staff are uniquely positioned to share real-time experiences of students (and their own) related to the college application and admissions process. However, higher education institutions have limited interaction with applicants to their institutions and the high schools these students attend. Outside college and career days or recruitment days, postsecondary institutions spend limited time on high school campuses. This lack of interaction

disadvantages students from minoritized populations and communities that have limited opportunities to experience or learn about higher education institutions.

Therefore, in the following section, we suggest that postsecondary institutions should commit resources and personnel to building (or strengthening) pipelines to high schools, and more importantly to the educators who work within them. When it comes to the college application process, input from educators experienced with the college admissions process should have a strong voice and/or more seats at the table when it comes to decisions and discussions about the implementation of applications for higher education admissions, such as ApplyTexas. Increased communication and collaboration with K12 stakeholders and students themselves, would allow the the ApplyTexas application to better reflect the needs of the primary end-users of the document and the support staff that assists them.

Implications for Policy, Practice, and Research

With the context of Texas' legislation, the THECB, the ATAC, and the ApplyTexas application itself, it becomes clear that policy, practice, and research could address and continue to address how postsecondary applications can be made more accessible, simpler, and more user-friendly for the most important postsecondary stakeholder: the students.

At the policy level, we strongly believe that Texas' educational policy advocates should lobby the Texas Legislature and the THECB to amend both the THECB bylaws and S.B. 1813 to mandate inclusion of ISD representation on the ATAC. Although many stakeholders may want access to ATAC membership, deciding ISD representation could be as simple as allowing one delegate from each Texas Education Agency (TEA) region to serve four-year terms. Representatives from each TEA region could be decided by each region's governing body, with the stipulation that the representative must work as a college access professional for a public ISD in that region and that the same ISD cannot have an ATAC representative across consecutive terms. This approach would limit the cronyism of appointments and power that certain ISDs may lobby for, allowing ISD voices to be heard at the state-level but power to remain balanced by TEA region.

Then, after this policy is implemented, researchers should investigate a multitude of outcomes related to postsecondary access in Texas. First, once ISDs have ATAC representation, subsequent qualitative inquiry should explore what changes are made and how students respond to those changes within ApplyTexas. Students may advocate for a wide variety of application updates, such as requiring fewer questions, being made simpler to read, being translated into another language, or allowing for other types of collateral to be uploaded into the application, such as a video resume or audio file. Unearthing student voices and listening to their opinions could improve ApplyTexas, driving, in turn, further use of the application. This possibility indicates that students' priorities in their postsecondary application should matter to the THECB, the ATAC, and institutions of higher education in Texas.

Quantitative data to measure the effectiveness of ApplyTexas changes would be relatively simple to compute, as the THECB now runs ApplyTexas on Amazon Web Services, which features a robust, cloud-based data management and analysis system. If students and their ISD support systems were allowed to advocate for ApplyTexas changes, students may be more likely to engage with the

application and finish it, therefore applying to an institution in Texas and staying in the state. Otherwise, students may be deterred from ApplyTexas and use a broader, more nationally focused application system, such as the Common Application or Coalition Application, to apply to an out-of-state institution. Tracking changes within ApplyTexas and exploring their effects on student outcomes in terms of applications completed, student mobility across Texas' counties and other states, and the college-going rate of students could further refine ApplyTexas.

Ultimately, it is difficult to assert that ApplyTexas is optimized if the end-user is not involved in the development process. In short, institutions of higher education should not be positioned to dictate every detail of an application system that they will never use for its intended purpose: to apply to a Texas institution of higher education. Therefore, ISD representation on the ATAC must be prioritized through policy advocacy and research to ensure that student voices are heard, and thus, that ApplyTexas is continuously improved as technology advances and student demographics shift.

Discussion and Conclusion: Who is the End User?

Simply put, throughout Texas, K12 institutions and their students are the end users of ApplyTexas; students are the most important stakeholder in any discussion of ApplyTexas and college access in general. Complicating matters, the colleges and universities who are representative of the ATAC have limited interaction with applicants during the application process, and they primarily support the admissions process aside from the application. Yet, the gateway to admissions is the application itself.

Across the U.S., there has been a concerted move toward standardized, electronic formatting of postsecondary applications. Implementing online college applications has streamlined the experience of students by allowing them to apply to multiple colleges with reduced data entry, one of the main aims of the original conception of ApplyTexas. Consequently, students are now able to apply to one or more colleges using a familiar format across all Texas public colleges and universities. Instead of managing three or four usernames and passwords to access the applications of multiple colleges, students only have to manage a single set of credentials for their college applications. This makes prioritization of ApplyTexas critical, as easing the information burden to completing the application also eases the path toward postsecondary education specifically in Texas, keeping Texas students, and thus, their economic impact, in the state.

Additionally, in the state of Texas, there are over 100 colleges and universities to choose from, but many of students are not aware of institutions beyond their own cities. The ApplyTexas application exposes students to other colleges throughout Texas that they may not have been aware of, again increasing access to higher education for a wide variety of students, including rural students who may be removed from a nearby institution. With the participation of colleges and universities, from rural to urban and small to large, the ApplyTexas application should include different types of students throughout the state. This is another reason why ISD representation on the ATAC is essential for Texas.

Additionally, beyond the student involvement, having a state-wide application system allows K12 college access professionals to access most college application and financial aid application statuses from a single portal (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2021b). This access enables

college access professionals to follow students' progression through applications and to benchmark progress of the senior class towards college enrollment. For instance, many Texas high schools use the college application reports to set up targeted college field trips based on students' selections in ApplyTexas. College access professionals have become even more dependent on the ApplyTexas Counselor Suite for FAFSA data due to H.B. 3, Sec. 28.0256 in the 86th Texas Legislature that mandates a financial aid application be submitted as a graduation requirement, effective 2021-2022 (H.B. 3, 2019). As a result, college access professionals and counselors are tasked with tracking students who have or have not submitted a financial aid application, and the only way to access this information is from the ApplyTexas Counselor Suite. From here, even current legislation encourages ISD involvement in the ApplyTexas development process.

In all, to successfully support students through their journey to higher education, both students and their support networks—including college access professionals—must learn the admissions and financial aid procedures of hundreds of schools throughout the country. For students' support systems, finding information to help students through their matriculation tasks can be tedious and time consuming. Having a single, electronic application for the majority of colleges and universities in Texas, reduces the amount of information that both students and their support networks must be familiar with, allowing them to dedicate more time to their secondary school studies and exploring each institution for the best fit. In short, postsecondary information and processes should not be a burden for Texas' aspiring postsecondary students, but without ISD representation on the ATAC, ApplyTexas is burdensome, evidenced by increasing rates of use of other postsecondary application systems, such as the Texas Tech University system recently accepting the Common Application. Now is the time to incorporate ISD voices into the ApplyTexas conversation and ensure that Texas' higher education system remains strong now and in the future.

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