

Teach Me About Myself: A Case Study Exploring Racialized Institutions

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Thesis

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## **Abstract**

There are clear differences between majority and minority groups when it comes to who goes to college, who can afford it, and who will graduate. Like many primarily White institutions, City University (CityU) historically serves a White population and successfully graduates a primarily White population as well. If it is true that CityU is an institution that is racialized on the meso-level, then it must be true that these incoming students of color and first generation students are facing large barriers to success at the institution. How can CityU and universities like it prepare for the organizational shift that will need to take place in order to successfully retain these students? I explore the racialization of higher education through a case study of City University using the 2021 NSSE data wherein I use linear regression analyses to explore students' perceptions of diversity and inclusion in coursework, institutional emphasis on diversity and inclusion, and institutional environment in regard to diversity and inclusion. I find Asian students report less focus on diversity and inclusion in their classwork relative to White students, they also report less institutional emphasis on diversity and inclusion and an institutional environment that was less diverse and inclusive relative to White students. Relative to straight students, LGBTQ students are less likely, relative to straight students, to report that the institutional environment is diverse and inclusive. Finally, connections with faculty outside the classroom and better quality interactions with university employees increase students' reports of diversity and inclusion on campus.

## **Introduction**

Higher education plays a crucial role in social and economic development and especially in the development of generational wealth (Haveman 2006). Historically minoritized students are met with far more obstacles in terms of academic achievement (Mudge 2011). Currently, about 37% of White college-educated people have a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 22% of the Black population and 17% of the Latino population (Carnevale 2018). Nationally, 11% of Pell Grant recipients entering public colleges do not enroll for a second year of college, and about 80% do not receive a bachelor's degree within four years, while only another 20% earn that over 6 years (Goldrick-Rab 2016). These statistics show that many students who want to attend college and for whom college could be life-changing are systematically excluded and fall out of the degree completion pipeline.

Approximately 20-30% of all enrolled college students in the United States are first generation college students (Pratt et. al 2019). Seventy-one percent of those students are likely to unenroll within their first year compared to their non-first generation counterparts (Ishitani 2003). Overall, any student's lack of financial security, academic competence, and social belongingness can lead to attrition and dropout (Pratt et. al 2019). Disproportionately, this affects first generation college students who often face all three risk factors.

There are clear differences between majority and minority groups when it comes to who goes to college, who can afford it, and who will graduate (Hanson 2022a, Hanson 2022b, IPEDS 2019). Like many primarily White institutions, City University (CityU) historically serves a White population, making up 62% of undergraduates in the fall of 2021, and successfully graduates a primarily White population as well (Internal Data 2021). In recent years, there has been a tilt of the scale as more and more students of color, and first generation college students are being accepted

and matriculated into the university. While the number of students of color increases, the university is seeing a rather quick decline in retention rates from year one to year two, from 75% in 2017 to 61.5% in 2022 (Internal Data 2022). However, increasing diversity alone cannot solve education issues. Colleges and universities need to do more than just seek out and admit diverse students. They must provide knowledge about how to be successful in college, information on financial aid and debt, and help students be able to be successful by effectively integrating students into the campus community. Students all over the country are being pressured by the need to obtain a college education in order to secure a quality career path, but those who are systematically excluded from equitable education often lack the necessary resources and overall ability to persist through their higher education degree. Students looking to pursue higher education are being asked to pay a high price for a system that was not built for their success.

If it is true that CityU is an institution that is racialized on the meso-level (Ray 2019), then it must be true that these incoming students of color and first generation students are facing large barriers to success at the institution. This raises many questions for colleges and universities like CityU, such as how can they prepare for the organizational shift that will need to take place in order to successfully retain incoming students of color and first generation college students? These institutions must also ask themselves, how are they currently doing at assisting historically marginalized students in navigating a higher education system that was not built for them?

Changing demographics, both within higher education broadly and at CityU specifically, lead to questions about the impact of racism in the higher education system and at CityU specifically. Where has CityU failed to name the contours of systemic racism within its own institution? Where has it failed to identify with its changing demographics, and where does it continue to minimize its own part in both present and historic racism? In recent years, CityU has

established an office dedicated to equity and inclusion. However, the institution has only acknowledged the ways that Whiteness and systemic racism create issues and barriers for students on campus. They may acknowledge racial and ethnic disparities and attempt to provide opportunities for students of color to overcome these disparities, but these opportunities are often on an individualized level, through one on one coaching or relationships built by a small, inadequate number of faculty and staff that share their lived experience, and which does not address the systemic nature. While addressing demographic changes in the college-going population (both at CityU and more broadly), there is a fixation on the decreasing number of college-going students, often referred to as “the demographic cliff.” However, in the state, there is an increase in students of color who want to go to college. Is CityU accounting for this potential recruitment opportunity, or has a history of colorblindness allowed them to fail to see students of color as viable candidates? CityU’s institutional commitment to equity and inclusion is, on paper, robust and up-to-date with other universities’ best practices. But how do students’ actually feel about the environment they are in? In theory, CityU looks like a progressive institution, but how have their policies played out for their underrepresented groups?

As a racialized institution with increasing numbers of students of color and first generation college students, how will CityU and institutions like it respond to the changing demographics? Do students of color see themselves in their curriculum? Does the institutional emphasis on diversity and inclusion match the institutional environment? How do students of color feel on their college campuses, and what more can be done to dismantle systems that perpetuate the racialization of higher education?

In order to begin to explore these kinds of questions, I explore the racialization of higher education through a case study of CityU, a small private Midwestern teaching-focused university<sup>1</sup>. CityU is an ideal setting in which to study the racialization of higher education as there is a large first-generation student population (52%, Internal Data 2022), and the student body has become more diverse in recent years. In 2011 the student body was 75% White, and by 2021 that percentage had fallen to 65% (IPEDS 2022). These changing demographics indicate that CityU, along with many other institutions, is now serving a different student body than they have historically. In order to explore the racialization of CityU, my research uses data from the 2021 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and asks, are there differences by race and ethnicity in how students perceive diversity and inclusion at City University? Specifically, I use a series of linear regression analyses to explore student perceptions of diversity and inclusion in coursework, institutional emphasis on diversity and inclusion, and institutional environment in regard to diversity and inclusion.

## **Literature Review**

### **CityU as a racialized PWI with changing demographics**

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (1997:5) introduces a structural interpretation of racism and racialized social systems referring to “societies in which economic, political, social, and ideological levels are partially structured by the placement of actors in racial categories or races (Bonilla-Silva, 5:1997).” Education is one such racialized institution. There are very clear gaps among students of color, when compared to their White peers, at every level of the educational system (Lee 2002). Higher Education is not absolved of racism. The original institutions of higher education only

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<sup>1</sup> In 2019, the university became classified as a Doctoral/Professional University in the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education and was previously classified as a Master’s Large institution. The only doctorate degrees currently offered are a Doctorate of Health Science, a Doctorate of Nursing Practice, a Doctorate of Occupational Therapy, a Doctorate of Physical Therapy, and a Doctorate of Psychology.

allowed White men to be students and faculty and were built with the intention of educating these men to be leaders in society (Byrd 2015). Over time through policy changes such as, Disability Discrimination, Title IX, Race and National Origin Discrimination, Dear Colleague Letters, and various other policies, access to higher education has been expanded to historically underrepresented groups. Despite efforts to create more equity in the education system, there are still many barriers preventing underrepresented populations from gaining a college degree. Victor Ray (2019) theorizes and explains four tenets of racialized organizations; 1.) racialized institutions enhance or diminish the agency of racial groups, 2.) legitimate the unequal distribution of resources, 3.) Whiteness is a credential, and 4.) The decoupling of formal rules from organizational practice is also racialized.

Ray explains **diminished agency** through the use of time, “Individuals’ locations within racialized organizations influence the amount of control they exercise over their time, their ability to plan non-work time, and their ability to plot the future (Ray 2019).” Racial opportunity cost highlights the experiences of students of color in many schools who pursue academic success but lose something in the process (Chambers et al. 2014). In education, how do students of color and first generation students use their time compared to their White, non-first generation peers? Relative to their White and non-first generation peers, students of color and first-generation students work more hours, are more likely to be caregiving, and are more likely to be on academic probation. Racial opportunity cost highlights the experiences of students of color in many schools who pursue academic success but lose something in the process (Chambers et al. 2014). Racialized organizations limit people from acting within their constrained, socially prescribed roles (Ray 2019). When institutions increase the costs of tuition, housing, and meals, fail to provide on-campus jobs that pay students well, and when they require students to fully immerse themselves into

academia in order to graduate on time, they are not considering the ways in which students who cannot afford otherwise are spending their time.

### **Racialized institutions legitimate the unequal distribution of resources.**

There is a long history of unequal distribution of resources in higher education. The first colleges and universities were exclusively open to White men (Byrd 2015). Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) were conceptualized as a response to not being allowed at existing White institutions. However, in today's context, not all students can or want to attend HBCUs. Additionally, across institutions, there is a lack of representation of faculty and staff of color.

Just as these issues play out across institutions of higher education, they can be seen at CityU. CityU is a primarily White institution among 60 other primarily White institutions in the state, while the number of minority serving institutions remains at 3 (U.S. Department of Education 2020C). These minority serving institutions are developed and adapted to support students of color. However, it is not possible for all students of color to receive the necessary resources to be successful from so few available institutions, and expecting these institutions to bear the weight of such an ask would further perpetuate segregation. CityU's increasing minority demographic and the lack of access to critical mass institutions with adequate resources and prestige means that there will be students of color whose best option will be to attend a PWI and that PWI might be City University. The barriers to success are not enforced and brought on by the students themselves but by City U and its racialized policies and practices, both intentional and not.

### **Whiteness as a credential**

Whiteness is a normative structure in society that marginalizes people of color and privileges White people (Cabrera 2017; Feagin 2006, 2010; Omi and Winant 1994). Cabrera speaks

of three central components of the discourse of Whiteness: (a) an unwillingness to name the contours of systemic racism, (b) the avoidance of identifying with a racial experience or minority group, and (c) the minimization of the U.S. history of racism (Cabrera 2017). Because of discrepancies in the educational experience for students of color when compared to their White peers, achievement gaps and inequities are prevalent (Elliot 2020; Valant et al. 2016; Han et al. 2022 ), therefore certain criteria for admission, access to financial aid and support, and access to staff and faculty that look like them are limited. Colorblindness is still very prevalent in academia. Rankin and Reason (2005) empirically demonstrated that White students are significantly more likely than students of color to see campus environments as welcoming and equitable along racial lines.

*Predominantly White institution (PWI)* is the term used to describe institutions of higher learning in which Whites account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment (Lomotey 2010). CityU has always been an institution that falls into this category, and until recent years, has been overwhelmingly White. The identifier “Predominately White Institution” alone indicates an underlying insinuation that CityU is a White place for White academics. While the identifier of PWI is not one that the university necessarily claims with pride, it is an identifier that can be used to describe the institution and is a statement about who is represented on the campus. When universities are PWIs, their staff, faculty, and student body are all primarily White, and therefore students of color are “othered” in programming, coursework, content, and general campus environment as their voices and perspectives are not often represented in spaces where this planning takes place, and they are not the “typical” student at the university.

When thinking of an institution that is primarily thinking about process and implementation in one way, it is possible that the people who experience those processes experience contradictions.

Ray (2019:42) mentions that “**decoupling** occurs when there is a contradiction between existing organizational routines and policies adopted to placate external constituencies.” For example, faculty members recognize that students need to commit 30 hours a week to class and coursework to be successful and therefore require all students to commit 30 hours a week to their education. They also agree that living on campus is the ideal way for students to be successful on campus. Students are charged for housing at a certain rate and required to be in 4-5 classes per week, charged at a certain rate. Though these policies are in place to aid students in their success, they fail to consider a student’s need for agency and create an environment in which students do not have enough time in their day to pay their bills, balance their school schedule and truly reap the benefits of higher education. The students this more often effects are students from underrepresented backgrounds. Therefore, the lack of representation of people from underrepresented backgrounds among the administration, faculty, and staff generates policies and processes that only work for students whose lived experience matches that of their leadership.

CityU’s demographic breakdown in the fall of 2016 enrolled was 67% White students, 9% Black, 5% Latino, 2% Asian, 3% two or more races, and 14% nonalien and race unknown combined. In the fall of 2021, White students have decreased to 61%, Black students have increased to 12%, Hispanic to 9%, Asian to 3%, two or more races to 4%, 10% nonalien, and race unknown combined. CityU’s first generation student population has also increased. The freshman class in the fall of 2017 welcomed 40% first generation students, compared to 52% in the freshman class just 5 years later in 2022 (Internal Data 2022). It’s clear that CityU’s environment is changing quickly, and we can only suspect that we will see steady increases in the population of students who are not adequately represented by the CityU administration and leadership. How does its institutional commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion compare to its environment?

As a racialized institution with increasing numbers of students of color and first generation college students, how will CityU and institutions like it respond to the changing demographics? Do students of color see themselves in their curriculum? Does the institutional emphasis on diversity and inclusion match the institutional environment? How do students of color feel on their college campuses, and what more can be done to dismantle systems that perpetuate the racialization of higher education?

## **Method**

My analyses use data from the 2021 National Survey for Student Engagement. The NSSE is a student survey that annually collects information at hundreds of four-year colleges and universities. It collects data from first-year and senior students and measures their participation in programs and activities that the institutions provide for learning and personal development (NSSE 2021). I limit my analyses to data from CityU. I use variables from the NSSE core questions as well as the Inclusiveness and Engagement with Cultural Diversity Module. More specifically, my analyses explore students' perspectives on inclusion and diversity on CityU's campus via coursework, institutional emphasis on diversity, and the institutional environment in regard to diversity.

## **Measures**

### **Dependant Variables**

My analyses use three dependent variables, coursework, institutional emphasis, and institutional environment, constructed from a series of questions. These three variables are all additive indices. All three indices range from 7 to 28 (higher scores indicate more inclusion and diversity), and all questions included in each of these indices have the following response

categories, very little=1, some=2, quite a bit=3, very much=4. Coursework ( $\alpha=0.93$ ) is measured by a series of questions asking how much of a student's coursework in the current year emphasized developing skills to work effectively with people from various backgrounds (ICD01a), recognizing your own cultural norms and biases (ICD01b), sharing your own perspectives and experiences (ICD01c), exploring your own background through projects, assignments, or programs (ICD01d), learning about other cultures (ICD01e), discussing issues of equity or privilege (ICD01f), and respecting the expression of diverse ideas (ICD01g). Institutional emphasis ( $\alpha=0.92$ ) is measured by a series of questions asking how much your institution emphasizes demonstrating a commitment to diversity (ICD02a), providing students with the resources needed for success in a multicultural world (ICD02b), creating an overall sense of community among students (ICD02c), ensuring that you are not stigmatized because of your identity (racial/ethnic, gender, religious, sexual orientation, etc.) (ICD02d), providing information about anti-discrimination and harassment policies (ICD02e), taking allegations of discrimination or harassment seriously (ICD02f), and helping students develop the skills to confront discrimination and harassment (ICD02g). Institutional environment ( $\alpha=0.94$ ) is measured from a series of questions asking how much your institution provides a supportive environment for racial/ethnic identity (ICD03a), gender identity (ICD03b), economic background (ICD03c), political affiliation (ICD03d), religious affiliation (ICD03e), sexual orientation (ICD03f), and disability status (ICD03g).

### **Independent variables**

The key independent variable for my analyses is the student's self-reported race and ethnicity. I create a series of dummy variables (1=yes, 0=no) for Asian, Black, Latinx, multiracial, and White. I also include variables measuring (strongly disagree=1, disagree=2, agree=3, strongly

agree=4) if students feel they can be themselves at the institution, feel valued by the institution, and if they feel part of the community at the institution.

## **Controls**

My analyses include a series of control variables measuring gender (woman=1, 0=not woman), international student (1=yes, 0=no), class level (1=senior, 0=first year), transfer student (1=yes, 0=no), LGBQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer) student (1=yes, 0=no), if students live on campus (1=yes, on campus, 0=no, off campus), student's age, if students are a first-generation college student (1=yes, 0=no), student's self-reported average grades (higher values indicate better grades), and a series of dummy variables measuring student's educational aspirations (aspire to some college but less than a bachelor's degree, aspire to a Bachelor's degree, aspire to a Master's degree, aspire to a doctoral or professional degree). I also include indices measuring students' connections with faculty outside the classroom ( $\alpha=0.80$ , ranging from 3-12) from a series of questions asking (very often=4, often=3, sometimes=2, never=1) during the current school year about how often have you talked about career plans with a faculty member, worked with a faculty member on activities other than coursework (committees, student groups, etc.), or discussed course topics, ideas, or concepts with a faculty member outside of class. Finally, I include an index measuring students' quality of interactions (from 1 (poor) to 7 (excellent)) with advisors, faculty, staff, and administration ( $\alpha=0.85$ ).

## **Descriptive Results**

Descriptive results can be seen in Table 1 below. Students' perception of their coursework's focus on diversity and inclusion ranges from 7 to 28 (higher values mean more diversity and inclusion) with a mean of 19.20. Students' reports of an institutional emphasis on diversity and inclusion range from 7 to 28 with a mean of 20.79, and students' reports that the institutional

environment is diverse and inclusive range from 7 to 28 with a mean of 21.01. Ninety-one percent of students feel they can be themselves at CityU, 79.43% feel valued at CityU, and 77.11% feel part of the community at CityU. Seventy-five percent of the sample is White, 4% is Asian, 9% is Black, 5% is Latinx, and 6% is multiracial. Seventy-one percent of the sample are women, 4% are international students, 44% are seniors, 8% are transfer students, 15% identify as LGBTQ, 55% live on campus, 44% are first generation college students, and the mean age of respondent is 20.07 (range 16 to 54). Eight percent of students in the sample do not aspire to any degree, 36% aspire to a Bachelor's degree, 36% to a Master's degree, and 20% to a doctoral degree. The range for a student's average grades ranges from 1 (C- or lower) to 8 (As) with a mean of 6.52, which is the B+/A- range. The scale for student-faculty connections outside of the classroom ranges from 3 to 12 (higher values indicate more outside connections) with a mean of 6.62. Quality of interaction with university employees ranges from 4 to 28 (higher values indicate better interactions) with a mean of 21.32.

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics, 2021 NSSE Data**

	Mean/Median	Standard Deviation	Minimum Value	Maximum Value	N
<b>Coursework</b>	19.20	5.43	7	28	260
<b>Emphasis</b>	20.79	5.38	7	28	263
<b>Environment</b>	21.01	5.56	7	28	263
<b>I can be myself at CityU</b>	90.81	0.29	0	1	283
<b>I feel valued at CityU</b>	79.43	0.41	0	1	282
<b>I feel part of the community at CityU</b>	77.11	0.42	0	1	284

**Table 1, continued: Descriptive Statistics, 2021 NSSE Data**

	<b>Mean/Median</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>Minimum Value</b>	<b>Maximum Value</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>White</b>	0.75	0.43	0	1	277
<b>Asian</b>	0.04	0.19	0	1	277
<b>Black</b>	0.09	0.29	0	1	277
<b>Latinx</b>	0.05	0.23	0	1	277
<b>Multiracial</b>	0.06	0.24	0	1	279
<b>Woman</b>	0.71	0.45	0	1	279
<b>International</b>	0.04	0.19	0	1	279
<b>Senior</b>	0.44	0.50	0	1	261
<b>Transfer</b>	0.08	0.26	0	1	278
<b>LGBQ</b>	0.15	0.35	0	1	268
<b>Live on campus</b>	0.55	0.50	0	1	278
<b>First generation student</b>	0.44	0.50	0	1	278
<b>Age</b>	20.07	3.33	16	54	391
<b>Aspire to no degree</b>	0.08	0.27	0	1	280
<b>Aspire to bachelor's degree</b>	0.36	0.48	0	1	280
<b>Aspire to master's degree</b>	0.36	0.48	0	1	280
<b>Aspire to doctorate degree</b>	0.20	0.40	0	1	280
<b>Average grades</b>	6.52	1.59	1	8	281
<b>Student/faculty connections</b>	6.62	2.40	3	12	331
<b>Quality of interactions with university employees</b>	21.32	5.28	4	28	262

### Coursework

Table 2 shows ordinary least squares regression results for diversity and inclusion in coursework. Model 1 shows the independent effect of race/ethnicity on coursework, no results are significant. Model 2 adds variables measuring if students can be themselves, feel valued, and feel part of the community. Relative to White students, Asian students report less (-3.81) of their coursework focuses on inclusion and diversity. Students who feel part of the community report

more of their coursework (3.34) focuses on inclusion and diversity. No other results are significant. Model 3 adds all the control variables. Relative to White students, Asian students report less (-3.70) of their coursework focuses on inclusion and diversity. When students have connections with faculty outside of the classroom, they are more likely to report that their coursework focuses on inclusion and diversity (0.61). Similarly, when students report their interactions with university employees are of better quality, they report more of their coursework focuses on inclusion and diversity (0.28). No other results are significant.

**Table 2: OLS Regression showing relationship between Race and Ethnicity and Coursework using 2021 NSSE Data**

	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>	<b>Model 3</b>
	<b>Coefficient/ (s.e.)</b>	<b>Coefficient/ (s.e.)</b>	<b>Coefficient/ (s.e.)</b>
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b> (reference: White)			
Asian	-3.6029 (1.8423)	-3.8134 * (1.7535)	-3.7670 * (1.7089)
Black	0.5758 (1.1909)	0.64358 (1.1316)	0.2150 (1.2631)
Latinx	0.6193 (1.4477)	0.6209 (1.3836)	1.3478 (1.3821)
Multiracial	-1.9521 (1.4949)	-0.2434 (1.4496)	0.1116 (1.5052)
I can be myself at CityU		1.3053 (1.2735)	-0.3610 (1.4349)
I feel valued at CityU		1.2385 (1.0634)	1.0521 (1.1189)
I feel part of the community at CityU		3.3375 * (0.9852157)	2.0234 (1.1156)
Woman			0.4025 (0.7493)
International student			-0.3763 (1.6518)
Senior			-0.0714

Transfer student	(1.0288)
	1.1416
	(1.4379)

\* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001

**Table 2 continued: OLS Regression showing relationship between Race and Ethnicity and Coursework using 2021 NSSE Data**

	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>	<b>Model 3</b>
	<b>Coefficient/ (s.e.)</b>	<b>Coefficient/ (s.e.)</b>	<b>Coefficient/ (s.e.)</b>
LGBQ			1.2656 (1.0314)
<b>Degree aspirations (reference: aspire to bachelor's)</b>			
Aspire to no degree			1.2849 (1.6291)
Aspire to master's degree			1.3852 (0.8099)
Aspire to doctoral degree			0.0147 (0.9253)
Age			0.3480 (0.2542)
First generation student			0.4261 (0.7173)
Average grades			0.3890 (0.2631)
Student/faculty connections			0.5843 *** (0.1501)
Live on campus			0.5142 (0.7126)
Quality of interactions with university employees			0.2158 ** (0.0758)
Constant	19.3807 *** (0.3851)	14.4516 *** (1.1678)	-2.5002 (5.1340)
F-Statistic	1.53	5.76 ***	5.57 ***
R-Squared	0.0235	0.1404	0.3913
N	258	255	204

\* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001

## Institutional Emphasis

Table 3 shows ordinary least squares regression results for diversity and inclusion in institutional emphasis. Model 1 shows the independent effect of race/ethnicity on institutional emphasis. Relative to White students, Asian students report less institutional emphasis (-3.99) on diversity and inclusion. No other results are significant. Model 2 adds variables measuring if students can be themselves, feel valued, and feel part of the community. Relative to White students, Asian students report less (-4.67) institutional emphasis on inclusion and diversity. Students who feel like they can be themselves (2.85), feel valued (2.85), and feel that they are a part of the community (2.46) report more institutional emphasis on diversity and inclusion. Model 3 adds all the control variables. Relative to White students, Asian students report less (-5.02) institutional emphasis on inclusion and diversity. When students have connections with faculty outside of the classroom, they report more institutional emphasis on inclusion and diversity (.462). Similarly, when students report their interactions with university employees are of better quality, they report more institutional emphasis on inclusion and diversity (.275). No other results are significant.

**Table 3: OLS Regression showing relationship between Race and Ethnicity and Emphasis using 2021 NSSE Data**

	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>	<b>Model 3</b>
	<b>Coefficient/ (s.e.)</b>	<b>Coefficient/ (s.e.)</b>	<b>Coefficient/ (s.e.)</b>
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b> (reference: White)			
Asian	-3.99 * (1.732)	-4.672 * (1.6018)	-5.0219 ** (1.7141)
Black	-1.4628 (1.2006)	-1.2401 (1.1086)	-1.2828 (1.2876)
Latinx	0.21 (1.4309)	0.4283 (1.3289)	0.6761 (1.3853)
Multiracial	-2.39 (1.4309)	-0.5057 (1.3439)	-1.4427 (1.5106)

\* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001

**Table 3, continued: OLS Regression showing relationship between Race and Ethnicity and Emphasis using 2021 NSSE Data**

	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>	<b>Model 3</b>
	<b>Coefficient/ (s.e.)</b>	<b>Coefficient/ (s.e.)</b>	<b>Coefficient/ (s.e.)</b>
I can be myself at CityU		2.8578 *	2.3189
		(1.2217)	(1.4391)
I feel valued at CityU		2.4641 *	2.0657
		(1.0022)	(1.1029)
I feel part of the community at CityU		2.4552 **	1.0851
		(0.9382)	(1.1026)
Woman			-1.1571
			(0.7466)
International student			-0.9759
			(1.6589)
Senior			-0.7778
			(1.0333)
Transfer student			-1.3033
			(1.4959)
LGBQ			-1.5949
			(1.033)
<b>Degree aspirations (reference: aspire to bachelor's)</b>			
Aspire to no degree			-1.4206
			(1.6327)
Aspire to master's degree			0.2769
			(0.8084)
Aspire to doctoral degree			-0.4614
			(0.9160)
Age			0.2292
			(0.2536)
First generation student			-0.3698
			(0.7158)
Average grades			0.1218
			(0.2624)
Student/faculty connections			0.4622 **
			(0.1503)

\* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001

**Table 3, continued: OLS Regression showing relationship between Race and Ethnicity and Emphasis using 2021 NSSE Data**

	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>	<b>Model 3</b>
	<b>Coefficient/ (s.e.)</b>	<b>Coefficient/ (s.e.)</b>	<b>Coefficient/ (s.e.)</b>
Live on campus			0.4968 (0.7129)
Quality of interactions with university employees			0.2754 *** (0.0755)
Constant	21.19 *** (0.3780)	14.5864 *** (1.1195)	3.6658 (5.1394)
F-Statistic	2.19	8.91 ***	5.42 ***
R-Squared	0.033	0.1990	0.3119
N	262	259	206

\* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001

### **Institutional Environment**

Table 3 shows ordinary least squares regression results for diversity and inclusion in the institutional environment. Model 1 shows the independent effect of race/ethnicity on the institutional environment. Relative to White Students, Asian students are more likely to report less (-4.03) diversity and inclusion in the institutional environment. No other results are significant. Model 2 adds variables measuring if students can be themselves, feel valued, and feel part of the community. Relative to White students, Asian students report less (-4.55) diversity and inclusion in the institutional environment. Students who feel valued (2.57), and feel that they are a part of the community (2.45) are more likely to report an institutional environment that is diverse and inclusive. Model 3 adds all the control variables. Relative to White students, Asian students report less (-4.87) diversity and inclusion in the institutional environment. Relative to straight students,

students who identify as LGBQ (-2.46) are less likely to report an institutional environment that is diverse and inclusive. When students report their interactions with university employees are of better quality, they are more likely to report an institutional environment that is diverse and inclusive (0.222). No other results are significant.

**Table 4: OLS Regression showing relationship between Race and Ethnicity and Institutional Environment using 2021 NSSE Data**

	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>	<b>Model 3</b>
	<b>Coefficient/ (s.e.)</b>	<b>Coefficient/ (s.e.)</b>	<b>Coefficient/ (s.e.)</b>
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b> (reference: White)			
Asian	-4.0266 * (1.7910)	-4.5524 ** (1.6828)	-4.8682 * (1.9141)
Black	-0.7614 (1.2171)	-0.5742 (1.1419)	-0.5717 (1.4145)
Latinx	0.9591 (1.5281)	1.2026 (1.443)	0.7632 (1.5886)
Multiracial	-2.1266 (1.4797)	-0.3544 (1.4125)	-0.9591 (1.6861)
I can be myself at CityU		1.6735 (1.2862)	1.9296 (1.6069)
I feel valued at CityU		2.569 * (1.0728)	2.2204 (1.2531)
I feel part of the community at CityU		2.4479 * (0.9931)	2.1895 (1.2493)
Woman			-0.4926 (0.8426)
International student			-1.6723 (1.9669)
Senior			-1.6813 (1.1526)
Transfer student			-0.0733 (1.6114)
LGBQ			-2.4648 * (1.1553)

\* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001

**Table 4, continued: OLS Regression showing relationship between Race and Ethnicity and Institutional Environment using 2021 NSSE Data**

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Coefficient/ (s.e.)		Coefficient/ (s.e.)		Coefficient/ (s.e.)	
<b>Degree aspirations (reference: aspire to bachelor's)</b>						
Aspire to no degree					-0.8799 (1.8229)	
Aspire to master's degree					0.7896 (0.902)	
Aspire to doctoral degree					0.2424 (1.04)	
Age					0.1911 (0.2842)	
First generation student					-0.4745 (0.8025)	
Average grades					-0.2288 (0.2931)	
Student/faculty connections					0.2501 (0.1681)	
Live on campus					0.0295 (0.8025)	
Quality of interactions with university employees					0.2217 (0.0844)	**
Constant	21.3266 0.3918	***	15.6514 1.1771	***	8.8567 5.7435	**
F-Statistic	1.91		6.82	***	3.58	*
R-Squared	0.029		0.1603		0.2911	
N	261		258		205	

\* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001

## **Discussion**

Using data from the 2021 NSSE, I conducted a case study of CityU, a small private Midwestern university, to explore racialization in higher education. Specifically, my research asks, are there differences by race and ethnicity in how students perceive diversity and inclusion at City University? To investigate this question, I use regression analyses to explore racial and ethnic variation in student perceptions of the focus of their coursework on diversity and inclusion, institutional emphasis on diversity and inclusion, and if the institutional environment is diverse and inclusive.

I find Asian students report less focus on diversity and inclusion in their classwork relative to White students. They also report less institutional emphasis on diversity and inclusion and an institutional environment that was less diverse and inclusive relative to White students. I also find that when students have connections outside of the classroom with faculty, they are more likely to say their coursework is focused on diversity and inclusion and that the institution emphasizes diversity and inclusion, but they are not more likely to say that the environment is diverse and inclusive. When students have better quality interactions with faculty and staff, they are more likely to say that the institution emphasizes diversity and inclusion. Finally, LGBTQ students are less likely, relative to straight students, to report that the institutional environment is diverse and inclusive.

My research asks, are there differences by race and ethnicity in how students perceive diversity and inclusion at City University? The answer is yes. There are statistically significant differences between Asian students compared to their White peers across all analyses and some differences between LGBTQ students compared to their straight peers. These findings indicate that students are experiencing diversity and inclusion differently on this college campus. My analyses indicate that CityU is a racialized institution. I review this more thoroughly using the tenets of

Ray's (2019) theory of racialized institutions in the Analysis and Recommendations for CityU sections below.

### **Analysis of Findings for CityU**

After examining my analysis, I believe my results could be possible side effects of a racialized institution and might account for the way these students are experiencing CityU. The following discussion will examine a possible path of action to lessen the impact of racialization and create a more inclusive and welcoming environment for underrepresented students, as well as limitations to my research, implications for the future, and large-scale intervention recommendations. Of note, this discussion is based on my findings, as well as my experience as a student at CityU and an employee working on campus for the last four years in the areas of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

### **Limitations of Using NSSE Findings to Evidence Racialization**

This research finds a disparity between students' perception of racialization using NSSE indicators (only Asian and LGBTQ students indicate it) and evidence of racialization supported by extensive data demonstrating unequal retention and graduation outcomes by racial and ethnic groups (unequal outcomes for Black and Hispanic students compared to Whites). This leads to the question of how well institutional surveys, such as NSSE, are able to reflect the diverse voices of those who are least successful academically and how well these students are able to connect their struggle to their institutional experiences. Note that NSSE is scheduled in the spring which favors students who have been retained through the second semester. If students do not perceive that the institution is racialized, then is it the case that it is not racialized? Should institutions interpret positive scores on NSSE items related to diversity as sufficient evidence of their success in inclusion and equity? No,

this research would support the use of multiple indicators for determining the extent of racialization and institutional change. Student perception is one indicator.

### **Addressing Diminished Agency**

A traditional semester at CityU asks a student to complete, on average, 15 credit hours, with an average course being around 3 credits, to graduate on time in four years. Studies also show that students should study on average 2-3 hours for every hour they are in class. If a student takes 15 credit hours in semester one, and studies on average 2 hours per class, they have devoted 30 hours of their 168 hours per week to class time alone, CityU does allow students to work on campus through Federal Work Study, but at a maximum of 20 hours per week, 19 if they work more than 1 job, and have an average pay of federal minimum wage \$7.25. If a student adhered to the desired class schedule, and worked a part time 20 hour work week, they are already working more than the average full time job, often do not have the benefits of healthcare, paid vacation, etc., and may struggle with housing and food security. An on-campus job at a 20 hour per week rate would generate a maximum gross paycheck of \$290 per pay period. With the total cost of attendance from tuition, room and board, and student fees coming in at \$48,552, students who do not have outside support from parents or who are not interested in accruing student debt are not looking for campus jobs to help them afford their education, though the on-campus job is more ideal for a traditional 40-hour full time work and course load. Instead, they are committing their nights and weekends to jobs that are less accommodating and often conflict with their school work. If CityU is not able to increase on-campus wage, how can coursework and courseload be modified to allow for enhanced agency for underrepresented groups?

With outside stress and pressure to show up in the way their White peers do, students of color might not have time to participate in diversity-related activities, stay after class to connect

with their faculty members, connect with like-minded and familiar cultured peers, and so on. Are underrepresented students free to engage in the way that they need to in order to see themselves reflected in classwork and feel valued and a part of the community?

### **Redistributing Resources Towards Greater Equity**

This tenant could be the most challenging to manage, as it deals with various levels throughout the institution and cannot be fixed with a one size fits all solution. I challenge anyone who reads this to think about equity as giving someone help that caters to their needs. It is not a bandaid that magically stretches to fit the size of any type of wound. Imagine you broke your finger, and someone gives you a bandaid. How will a bandaid help with your broken finger? Sure, you had somewhere to go to get your finger looked at, surely someone listened to your concerns and cares about your experience, and sure, band aids are helpful, but they are not the solution you needed for your problem. Though there is a distinction between equality and equity, equity does not always solve the problem; sometimes, it provides a temporary solution to a recurring problem. University policies and practices are put in place to create fairness and allow for justice to take place when needed, but if a student is seeking justice, or a service, or aid in a system that wasn't built by people who share their lived experience, and if the specific solutions can't be solved by that same system, is there potential to create a system that allows students to utilize their time as they need? If it's not bandaids that they need, and all we have are bandaids, how can we create less of a monopoly in the time market to create more choice in where to go to get their finger looked at?

Merit-based scholarships, an office dedicated to DEI, or a designated counselor for recruiting students of color will all fall short if they are not backed by intentional, individual, and informed customer service. Redistributing equity could look like increasing a student's agency. Reimagining the way classes are scheduled could be an example of redistributing equity through

increasing a student's agency. Instead of asking students to spread their attention across 4-5 classes, what if CityU only asked them to focus on 2-3 courses over an eight-week period? What would that do for a student's GPA alone? Their ability to work and manage other responsibilities? To meet and engage with faculty and staff? To pay their bill? What if there were no classes on Fridays? How could faculty and staff better utilize that time to engage with students, to enrich their practice? What kind of flexibility is there to enhance the way the organization uses time to its advantage?

### **Eliminating Whiteness as a Credential**

When looking into the ways in which Whiteness has been credentialed in CityU, I draw connections to the experience of students of color, in particular in their classwork. As my research shows, Asian students, compared to their White peers, report less focus on diversity and inclusion in their coursework. This could be an area where students are experiencing Whiteness as a credential, as they are being taught by a faculty that is 86% percent White (IPEDS 2022a), and their classes are reflective of that lived experience. My analysis shows that when students have more positive experiences outside of the classroom with their faculty, they are more likely to report more focus on diversity and inclusion in their coursework, as well as when they have quality interactions with university employees. Students might not feel connected to their professors in this way and might not want to engage in the quality connections that faculty and staff do have to offer. If it is not possible that more faculty and staff can be hired at the rate at which this population is growing, it is ever more important that students feel seen by the faculty that are interacting with them, and if those faculty are only talking about a lived experience that is not that of students of color, students fail to see themselves reflected. Enhanced emphasis on diverse populations within the curriculum can only create spaces where students can feel seen and might even feel encouraged to engage and interact with faculty and staff.

## **Managing Decoupling**

My results demonstrate that when compared with their White peers, Asian students did not feel there was a strong institutional emphasis on diversity and inclusion and diverse and inclusive environment, while LBGQ students are less likely than their straight peers to report an environment that is diverse and inclusive. So how does CityU manage this decoupling that is occurring?

Across both the emphasis and environment analysis, students who can be themselves, feel valued and part of the community are more likely to report more institutional emphasis and an environment that is diverse and inclusive. Interactions with faculty outside of the classroom as well as quality interactions with faculty and staff, show potential increased perceptions of institutional emphasis and environment in regard to diversity, equity, and inclusion. The answer seems obvious, encourage more interaction with students, and bring together more opportunities outside of the classroom for students to engage with staff and their peers. In theory, that sounds pretty simple. Though I would argue that any university wants its faculty and staff to engage positively with its students, is there something more intentional that can be done to create the space necessary for not only students from underrepresented backgrounds but also faculty and staff of underrepresented backgrounds as well?

## **Recommendations for City University**

### *Anticipating a changing demographic*

While overall student college-going rates are decreasing especially amongst Black and Latino men (Jaschik 2022), Indiana is seeing an overall increase in its minority populations, specifically the Latinx population. This community is seeing population growth in 89 of its 92 counties (Thelin and Sapp 2016), with five high schools in the state at 50% Latinx. While things are

looking bleak for the state of higher education, especially in Indiana, there is also an increase in the Latino population across 82 of the 92 counties in the state, and a 7% increase in Latinx students in high schools from 4% to 11%, with 5 high schools being over 50% Latinx students (ICHE, 2022). While there is a growth in the number of Latinx college students, not all students are equally prepared for college during their high school careers. Only about 63% of Latinx students in Indiana will graduate with a Core 40 diploma, the Core40 is the number of electives required by the state of Indiana as the minimum requirement for college admission t for the state’s public four-year universities (DOE, 2022), and only about 26% will finish with Academic honors (ICHE, 2022). Latinx students have an overall lower one-time graduation rate compared to completion rates overall, 35%, compared to the Indiana average of 44.4% (ICHE, 2022).

Key efforts could be made to hire and retain faculty and staff of diverse backgrounds and work to engage them in a way that allows for their work to include positive relationships and meaningful connections with their students. How are faculty and staff also asked to spend their time? What is the difference between how faculty and staff of color are spending their time versus their White colleagues?

#### *Pipeline Programming as a means of support and potential funding*

Research has found that providing support for supplemental programs through the educational pipeline was not only cost-effective but yielded the greatest results for underrepresented students (Contreras 2011). Most importantly, when done correctly, a pipeline program has the potential to increase academic preparedness, increase social preparedness, and increase personal preparedness (Contreras 2011; Burke 2013). The idea is that students of targeted backgrounds get engaged and build relationships with key personnel at the university before enrolling.

Students who engage in this sort of pre-college preparation are set on a path to college graduation and given the opportunity not just to graduate but thrive in school and beyond. The dream of college is demystified, and students are able to move forward with the appropriate tools and resources needed to apply for admission and financial aid and eventually graduate successfully.

Research shows that pipeline programming should include a variety of interventions. In terms of content, these programs should include dual credit components, financial aid workshops, reinforce the importance, cultural relevance, and marketability of language and culture, utilize community resources, expose students to various learning opportunities, foster peer to peer connections and group collaboration, and provide extracurricular activities like leadership development, professional development, and networking. Such programs should also provide external support through regular engagement with parents (often and in different ways), multiple forms of assessment, and create connections among school staff and faculty (Gandara and Contreras 2009).

### *High School Edge Scholars as a Pipeline Option*

While working to navigate inherently racist systems, the High School Edge Scholars program works to increase a student's interest in attending college using social justice pedagogy. The program would be facilitated by trained college and career coaches and current student mentors and would begin in a student's freshman year of high school and conclude their senior year of college. They engage in a two-phase program: Phase One: High School Edge Scholars and Phase Two: College Edge Scholars.

During Phase One, students meet with coaches and mentors to discuss and analyze social problems that most impact the world and themselves. They would participate in workshops that teach them how to identify social problems in any field or environment, and then encourage them to

cultivate their own ways of mitigating or eliminating these barriers. Students receive scholarships for their participation in the program as well as specialized housing upon enrollment.

During Phase Two, students enroll in the Edge Institute, an interdisciplinary program offered through CityU's career services. These courses give students opportunities to learn from and work with UIndy faculty, staff, alumni mentors, and professionals in their fields and beyond. Students will have practical and applied learning experiences to pair with their major curricula and will have the opportunity to network beyond their departments. The courses are a series of seven half-credits based on the **National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) career competencies** and designed to prepare students for the workplace. Each course incorporates practical application of skills learned across CityU's curriculum with an eye to knowledge transfer and career readiness (NACE 2022). For more in-depth questions about the Edge Scholars Program, see (Freed 2022).

The High School Edge Scholars program is one way that CityU could engage in the process of deracialization, but also a way that it could capitalize on the changing demographic, increase its enrollment, recruit and retain more qualified students and better engage and maintain students, staff and faculty of color and underrepresented populations. By teaching students about their lived experience and engaging in shared humanity, students might change how they feel about seeing themselves in the curriculum, and might even feel as if CityU's emphasis on diversity and inclusion matches their environment, as more underrepresented students feel valued and part of their university community.

## **Conclusion**

My analyses explore an application of Ray's (2019) theory of racialized organizations and provide a case study of a small Midwestern school, a type of institution not often examined in the literature. Further, my analyses can be replicated at any institution participating in the NSSE to

examine racialized institutions across various university contexts. My analyses are not without limitations, though. The 2021 NSSE sample was less racially and ethnically diverse than CityU is as a whole. It is likely that the most marginalized students did not participate in the survey, and therefore, their perceptions are not captured in these analyses. Further, while I use Ray's (2019) theory of racialization, my analyses cannot directly test if CityU is a racialized institution. Instead I explore symptoms of racialization. My analyses first examine student reports of diversity in coursework, and then student reports of the institution's emphasis on diversity, as well as student reports about the environment of the institution. Future research could potentially focus on one tenet at a time. This disaggregation of the tenets in future research could help identify ways to deracialize CityU and serve as a template or model for other universities like it. I would also suggest that future research look at faculty and staff perceptions of diversity at CityU, for their experience, perceptions, and attitudes about CityU will only translate to the student body. If faculty already feel like CityU is diverse and inclusive, what could be done to encourage more efforts? If not, what could be done to improve their experience on campus?

Despite these limitations, my analyses have made important contributions to the literature. My results offer indirect support that CityU is a racialized institution. Further, I find that there are racial and ethnic disparities in students' perceptions of inclusion and diversity in coursework, institutional emphasis, and institutional environment with Asian students reporting less diversity and inclusion than their White peers. Additionally, LGBTQ students report that the institutional environment is less inclusive and diverse than their straight peers do. When students have more connections with faculty outside the classroom and report a higher quality of interactions with university employees they are more likely to report that the campus is diverse and inclusive across the dimensions of coursework, institutional emphasis, and institutional environment. These findings

have important implications for creating a welcoming and inclusive campus. As colleges and universities compete for smaller numbers of students, campuses that can offer students welcoming and inclusive environments where they can form lasting relationships with faculty and staff are likely to be the winners.

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