

DISSERTATION

GRADUATE STUDENTS OF COLOR: THE IMPACT OF MENTORING AT
PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

GRADUATE STUDENTS OF COLOR: THE IMPACT OF MENTORING AT PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

Despite the increasing diversity of the US population, particularly of Latinx residents, the lack of resources and the underrepresentation of graduate students of color (GSC) are lingering issues in higher education. This dissertation discusses the impact of mentoring at predominantly white institutions (PWIs) for GSC. With Critical Race Theory (CRT) as my lens, I expand on mentoring, mentorship services, counter-storytelling, critical social factors and a historical context of higher education in order to both illustrate the problem and offer specific solutions to the systemic barriers that GSC face every day on college campuses. By leveraging the narrative side of CRT, this study provided the opportunity for additional GSC by creating a qualitative/quantitative survey designed to capture perceptions and experiences at other PWIs.

These stories identify a trend or need for appropriate services in a system where GSC are attempting to navigate. The results offer specific counterstories by and experiential knowledge of GSC on mentoring at PWIs. There were two types: open-ended and Likert-scale. The survey results gave clarity on the specific topics it was designed to address. Respondents' overall attitudes and perceptions of mentoring show that mentees expect mentors to exhibit high levels of accessibility, approachability, trust, interest in a mentee's personal and academic welfare, especially as a person of color. Also, GSC expected at least some level of engagement with the mentee as a junior colleague, not merely as a student. Finally, GSC expected mentors to help

navigate departmental academic support structures and policies as well as professional opportunities.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to all those students of color working on their educational goals and those mentors who have supported them.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Mentoring or mentorship services in predominantly white institutions (PWIs) have various uses and benefits in the educational field as mechanisms to support graduate students of color (GSC) who are underrepresented in higher education. While mentoring provides a platform for GSC, for purposes of my research I grounded this idea within the fundamental framework and methodology of Critical Race Theory (CRT) in order to leverage experiences and provide a race-based perspective that many GSC provide through their respective voices. In the following chapters, I expand on mentoring, mentorship services, CRT and a historical context of higher education in order to both illustrate the problem of and offer specific solutions to the systemic barriers that GSC face every day on college campuses.

This dissertation discusses the impact of mentoring at PWIs for GSC. In Chapter I, I explain the basis behind my research and share the overall statement of the problem of underrepresentation of GSC in PWIs compared to the overall U.S. population. In Chapter II, I review academic literature addressing mentoring and diversity to contextual background for my research and discussion. In that chapter, I provide a historical perspective and milieu on higher education, affirmative action policy, and diversity that will lead into Chapter III, which justifies the need for and use of CRT in education, specifically applied to mentoring GSC. Chapter III also describes the theoretical framework of CRT. I share CRT's origins, its gradual expansion in education, its methodologies, Latinx CRT or "LatCrit" among other minority and ethnically based CRT research. I applied the term Latinx as an inclusive gender-neutral term beyond the gender female-male binary referring to Spanish speaking populations. "The term Latinx is the preferred term to identify this group of people represented in this dissertation; however, other

terms such as Hispanic, Mexican, etc., are used due to their wide use in the literature, statistics, and population data” (Salina & Lozano, 2017). Chapter III provides an in-depth look into the voices of marginalized GSC through narratives and exposes the negative and racially charged climates that exist in the U.S. To conclude the chapter, I connect the two overarching ideas of mentorship and CRT in education and introduce the research study that becomes the real data from GSC described in Chapter IV.

Chapter IV concentrates on my research methodology, study design and implementation. This chapter provides a step-by-step process by which my survey tool was applied at PWIs. Using this survey instrument, I connected with GSC and sought authentic stories and experiences, capturing key demographic, racial, ethnic, mentoring data including critical success factors related to CRT. The research study design was the catalyst to achieve my dissertation goals due to the narrowly defined study participants—GSC at PWIs—whose responses ultimately informed my study. The last section of Chapter IV focuses on results, followed by discussions and conclusions in Chapter V.

In Chapter V, I summarize significant findings from my research and share my own personal interpretations and understanding of the results. I use this chapter to reflect on my time as a GSC in a PWI and to recommend specific mentor-based strategies. The section describes future implications and proposes directions for further research. I recommend strategies for PWIs, key individuals within higher education, mentors and mentorship programs identified throughout the chapters that can ultimately support and guide GSC to be successful, heard and represented.

Graduate school for students of color is an opportunity for the enhancement of learning and scholarship in higher education. Specifically, in the United States, graduate schools have

faced major challenges in terms of recruitment and retention of graduate students of color. “Not only are minority students in short supply at selective research institutions but also the overall number of students of color falls short in relation to the representations of this group in society” (Davis, 2008, p. 278). Many higher education institutions, in fact, have seen persistent underrepresentation of students of color as measured against overall societal proportions.

In 2006, the US Department of Education reported that 23.5 million Latinx were 25 years or older, 40.7% had less than a high school diploma, 41% had graduated from high school, 5.9% held associate’s degrees, and 8.8% held bachelor’s degrees. Furthermore, the attainment level of graduate degrees by Latinx was significantly lower compared to attainment of undergraduate degrees; only 2.4% held master’s degrees while 0.4% held doctorates. While studies on Latinx undergraduate enrollment and achievement are numerous, similar research on graduate students of color needs to be conducted. The percentage of students of color in graduate school remains essentially stagnant, yet—particularly for Latinx students—their total percentage of the U.S population is much higher and increasing, a problematic paradox. Students of color in graduate education compared to the overall U.S population are underrepresented.

The proportion of Ph.D. recipients who are American citizens or permanent residents rose to 55.4 percent in 2013, the highest level since 2008, when it was at 58.1 percent. Minority group representation among doctorate recipients rose for some groups and stayed flat for others in 2013. Asian-Americans received 25.5 percent of all doctorates awarded in 2013, up from 25.2 percent in 2012, and the representation of African-Americans edged up slightly, to 5.03 percent from 4.96 percent. The proportion of Ph.D. recipients who are Hispanic or Latinx dropped slightly, to 5.8 percent from 6.1 percent in 2012. About one in eight recipients of doctorates in 2013 (12.7 percent) had attended a community college. The proportion is almost one in five (19.9 percent) among recipients of education doctorates, and 7.3 percent of engineering Ph.D.s. Nearly 23 percent of Hispanic Americans and 18 percent of black Americans who earned Ph.D.s that year had attended a two-year institution (Lederman, 2014).

Examining trends will help educators and policy makers identify the challenges confronting graduate students of color and take concrete steps toward a more accurate representation of

students of color on college campuses. “Over time, the change in increased minority students’ representation on colleges and university campuses must reflect the change in demographics of the US population” (Matthews, 2010, p. 1).

My study had two overarching objectives. The first objective was to identify the extent of a mentor’s influence on graduate students of color in primarily white institutions (PWI). The second objective was to analyze graduate students of color’s level of expectation of their mentor or mentorship program using a critical race theory (CRT) framework. “The high attrition rate for doctoral students, especially doctoral students of color, has prompted researchers to focus on department characteristics such as mentoring, department expectations, rate of progress, financial support, and peer support” (Rios, 2010, p. 21). Master’s and terminal degree attainment rates for African-Americans and Latinx began to decrease from the previous academic year. The decline of percentages of ethnic minorities doing graduate work is certainly a negative trend, one that does not represent the entire US population and therefore needs to be addressed by higher educational institutions. The breakdown below represents four specific ethnic minority groups (African-American, American-Indian, Latinx, and Asian Americans) and their respective trends in undergraduate and graduate attainment. The focus area is graduate work; however, important undergraduate data trends to graduate work is also featured (Figure 1.1).

Table 1.1: Share of Degrees by Level (Percentages) (2006-2007) Mellion (2010)

Ethnic / Race Groups	Associates	Bachelors	Masters	Doctoral	First Professional
African-Americans	12.5	9.3	10.2	6.1	7.20
American-Indian	1.2	0.7	0.6	0.4	0.8
Hispanic/Latinx	11.7	7.5	5.7	3.3	5.2
Asian-American	5.1	7.0	5.9	5.7	13.1

As Borden (2008) observes:

African-Americans compose roughly 12 percent of the US population and are represented among associate degree recipients at this same level. The level of African-American representation declines to just over 9 percent for bachelor's degree recipients but increases to over 10 percent among master's degree recipients. The downward trend is then notable in the first professional (7 percent) and doctoral degrees (6.1 percent). Hispanics show the consistent downward trend we've noted in past years, ranging from just under 12 percent among associate degree recipients to just over 3 percent for doctoral degree recipients. American Indians represent just over 1 percent of associate degree recipients but less than 1 percent of all other degree level awardees. However, representation among first professional degree recipients is actually the highest at 1 percent. Native-American representation among doctoral degree recipients is at less than one-half of 1 percent. Asian Americans have a much different pattern of representation. They are found in lowest proportion among associate degree recipients (5 percent), in slightly higher proportion among master's and doctoral degree recipients (6 percent and 5.7 percent, respectively), higher still among bachelor's degree recipients (7 percent), and then significantly higher among first professional degree recipients (13 percent) (p. 21).

The low degree to which ethnic minorities achieve graduate degrees as shown above is both a challenge and an opportunity to develop a diverse and educated nation reflecting the demographics of the entire US population. Higher education institutions must “depend on their ability and willingness to recognize, stimulate, and develop the capacities of all segments of society and to acknowledge the needs of those currently underrepresented” (Mellion, 2010 p. 3).

Statement of Problem

The challenge of graduate students of color who are not proportionally represented in higher education compared to white students is a topic that needs further research. In a recent article, Klein (2016) summarized a report by the Government Accountability Office (GAO), a non-partisan agency charged with providing Congress with data recording the extent of racial and economic segregation in the nation's schools. "The GAO found that schools have become increasingly racially isolated for both black and Latinx students. And these institutions also routinely fail to provide students of color with the same resources given to their White counterparts" (para. 3). According to the US Department of Education (2006), "Minority students' graduation rates remain at a lower percentage rate than White students'" (Matthews, 2010, p. 6).

In an article from *The Atlantic* (2014), Wharton professor Katherine Milkman describes one such barrier further exacerbating the problem: Professors are less likely to mentor female and minority students. To determine how professors respond to different students looking for mentoring, Milkman and her colleagues Modupe Akinola and Dolly Chough created fake student emails with names that are representative of different genders and racial groups. These "students" emailed professors at top universities to see if they could meet about their work. Professors were more likely to respond, and respond positively, to white men. Even female and minority faculty are more likely to help the white guys. Milkman explains, "There's absolutely no benefit seen when women reach out to female faculty, nor do we see benefits from black students reaching out to black faculty or Hispanic students reaching out to Hispanic faculty." Faculty bias is particularly entrenched in areas of study that lead to the best-paying jobs, like the natural sciences and business. "'The very worst in terms of bias is business academia,' Milkman

says. ‘We see a 25-percentage-point gap in the response rate to White males versus women and minorities.’” (as cited in Jones, 2014, para. 4).

Schools of Graduate Education continue to be challenged to attract and retain students of color. We argue that effective mentoring within the department can improve multicultural students’ graduate school experience and better position them for success in their postdoctoral careers (Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001, p. 549).

Diversity in higher education, specifically in graduate work, has become a focal point for many universities and colleges as they attempt to recruit minorities; however, graduate enrollment of ethnic minorities still does not mirror the general adult population.

Existing research notes that scholars of color in higher education face isolation, exclusion, marginalization, devaluation, and alienation (Padilla & Chavez, 1995; Turner & Myers, 2000). They are underrepresented and disadvantaged in most aspects of academia including graduate degrees, salaries, and promotions (Allen, 1992; Golde & Walker, 2006; Hoffman, Llagas, & Snyder, 2003; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001; Turner & Myers, 2000). In addition, scholars of color report more interpersonal difficulties and challenges with both students and professors (Turner & Myers, 2000) as stated in Noy & Ray (2012, p. 883).

Alvarez, Blume, Cervantes, and Thomas (2009) identify three factors which have high impact on mentoring graduate students of color: the underrepresentation of persons of color; the need to attend to diverse cultural differences in research, teaching, practice; and the growing multicultural paradigm that influences all areas of psychology (p. 181). Underrepresentation will impact outreach and growth within program departments and professional fields. As minority groups increase, the authors emphasize the importance of mentoring students of color in higher education. As an example, academic and professional fields for graduate level psychology and beyond have experienced shifts in demographics.

As a discipline, psychology is facing demographic shifts in the community at large as well as within the profession itself. With respect to the demographic pressure from the community at large, census data have indicated that the percentage of White Americans has declined every decade since 1940 and is expected to decrease to 50% of the population by 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). In contrast, Latinx and Asian-American communities are expected to triple by 2050. Hence, as the demographic profile of the

country shifts, it seems reasonable to expect that psychologists will be more likely than ever before to come from and work within communities of color (Alvarez, Blume, Cervantes, & Thomas, 2009, p. 181).

The common theme in the literature is the underrepresentation of graduate students of color in higher education. Various disciplines should attract new graduate students of color to prepare for the demographic shifts in the future. This dissertation examines mentoring as one tool to attract more graduate students of color.

Diversity Trends

In addition to the current underrepresentation described above, the future likely will see an increasingly diverse US population in terms of ethnicity. US demographics will see a dramatic reversal as the current minority population groups surpass the baby-boomer generation and become a majority composed of a young, more diverse population. Institutions of higher learning will thus need to adapt their practices and programs to accommodate this demographic shift. As Bollinger (2007) observes, “Universities understand that to remain competitive, their most important obligation is to determine—and then deliver—what future graduates will need to know about their world and how to gain that knowledge” (p. 27-28). Furthermore, this increase in ethnic diversity will challenge institutions of higher education to redefine how they recruit graduate students.

The United States of 2050 will look different from that of today: whites will no longer be in the majority. The US minority population, currently 30 percent, is expected to exceed 50 percent before 2050. No other advanced, populous country will see such diversity. In fact, most of America's net population growth will be among its minorities, as well as in a growing mixed-race population. Hispanic and Asian populations are expected to nearly triple, and the children of immigrants will become more prominent. Today in the United States, 25 percent of children under age 5 are Hispanic; by 2050, that percentage will be almost 40 percent. The US of 2050 will most likely remain the one truly transcendent superpower in terms of society, technology and culture. It will rely on what has been called America's "civil religion"—its ability to forge a unique common national culture amid great diversity of people and place (Smithsonian, 2010, p. 60).

Through July 2012, the census data reflected a nonwhite population increased by 1.9 percent to 116 million, or 37 percent of the US. The fastest percentage growth is among multiracial Americans, followed by Asians and Hispanics. Non-Hispanic whites make up 63 percent of the US; Hispanics, 17 percent; blacks, 12.3 percent; Asians, 5 percent; and multiracial Americans, 2.4 percent (Teixeira, 2013). Accompanying demographic changes in the graduate student population will call for administrators of graduate programs to be comfortable enough with themselves and others openly to take action and make decisions regarding ethnic and cultural diversity (Quarterman, 2008). One interesting variable to consider, although I do not address it in depth, is the potential demographic makeup of university administration in the future and how it may continue to be mostly represented by white people in comparison to the potentially higher minoritized population of students.

Given the present problem of underrepresentation of ethnic minorities in higher education as well as a trend that anticipates even more ethnic minorities entering higher education, this study not only analyzes these issues but describes specific strategies to address them. For example, offering a comprehensive, evidence-based mentoring program in higher education for graduate students of color may increase recruiting, retention, and graduation. “Serious discussion of the mentorship, representation, retention, and educational attainment of underrepresented students would be remiss without consideration of the presence of these groups in academic professions (Davis, 2008, p. 279). Crucial to these remedies is the energizing and catalyzing influence of administrators and students themselves providing leadership to initiate and follow through on meeting these challenges.

Trends and Demographic of Population

Strategic and proactive processes by universities and colleges are paramount as institutions analyze dynamic shifts in US population. Patricia McGuire (2013), president of Trinity Washington University, reported a major shift in demographics in the latest report from National Center for Educational Statistics:

While enrollment of white students will increase just 4 percent, enrollment of Hispanic students will increase by a whopping 42 percent, and for black students the rate of increase will be a rapid 25 percent growth rate. We have known for quite some time that the second decade of the 21st century will see a rapid rise in the participation rates of students of color in higher education as a result of general changes in the national population as well as the effects of the college access movement that began in earnest a decade or more ago. Because of the discriminatory effects of racism and poverty that still afflict too many of America's urban schools and families, the substantial numbers of students of color entering college are also low-income students who face many barriers enrolling in, attending and completing college (para. 3-5).

The trends among graduate students of color compared to those of the national population trends are vital for higher education institutions to understand because they directly relate to students of color entering graduate school.

To summarize these trends, the future will exhibit a more diverse U.S. population. A snapshot of the nation in 2050, particularly regarding its diversity and youthfulness, shows that the U.S. of 2050 will look different from that of today. This picture of ethnic diversity and age in the U.S. will look different from the present, and recognizing this trend is crucial as universities and colleges develop strategic diversity plans.

The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) provides information on master's and doctoral program applications, enrollments, and degrees in the United States. Its most recent survey, in conjunction with Graduate Record Examinations (GRE), was a 10-year analysis from 2006 through 2016 published in September 2017 by Okahana and Zhou (2017). Their report titled *Graduate Enrollment and Degrees* found the following: "Among first-time U.S. citizens and

permanent resident graduate students in the Fall of 2016, about 23.4% were underrepresented minorities, including American Indian/Alaska Native (0.5%), black/African American (11.8%), Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (0.2%), and Hispanic/Latino (10.9%). Despite these healthy increases in first-time enrollment, minority students still remain substantially underrepresented, particularly in STEM fields” (p.4).

This shifting landscape of ethnic minorities in the country requires universities to meet, address, and engage a growing population of underrepresented graduate students of color from various backgrounds and ethnicities. “The most powerful stimulus package that could be provided to this country would be for our universities to continue to send tens and thousands of innovative and technologically fluent graduates into the work force, representing the whole spectrum of American ethnicity” (Qayoumi, 2009, p. 23). “For graduate students on the road to getting a doctoral degree, it is important to receive helpful advice from seasoned scholars on how to stay the course. Also critical are messages of encouragement and the opportunity to connect with other graduate students and future employers” (June, 2010, para. 1).

Significance of Study

Due to the underrepresentation of students of color in higher education, this study analyzed graduate students of color at PWIs, the role of critical race theory in the author’s experiences and those of students of color in higher education, and the success of mentoring for graduate students of color. Mwenda (2010) remarking particularly regarding the importance of faculty in creating mentoring relationships, said:

Faculty-student relationships are important in socializing minority doctoral students into their disciplines and professions. Faculty advisors and mentors are especially important in developing students' academic competencies as well as in preparing them for their professions. In addition, faculty-student relationships characterized by faculty availability, approachability, interest in developing students' academic and professional competence, and support and encouragement are important. Administrators and diversity

professionals on campuses must ensure that organizations and leadership teams are prepared for a rapidly transforming population by instituting a comprehensive initiative that represents ethnic minority groups in higher education. Administrative leaders and students are crucial to the equation spearheading a shift on cultural and ethnic perspective which can lead to information dissemination to universities and colleges across the nation as well as recommendations to increase graduate students of color recruitment, retention, and completion rates in terms of graduation (p. 2).

Aligning graduate students of color with mentorship opportunities and resources can provide support at PWIs. My study analyzed graduate students of color in current or past mentorship relationships (both formal and informal) with advisors, faculty members, or individuals they perceived as mentors, and the outcomes of these mentorship roles or programs during their graduate work. My goal was to document qualitative and quantitative experiences through a mentoring survey instrument for graduate students of color at three PWIs, to use the survey's results to better predict the influence of mentoring for graduate students of color, and to encourage universities and colleges to provide mentorship programs, culturally relevant resources and support systems for graduate students of color.

Summary

The perseverance of students of color beyond the baccalaureate is a positive development, mutually beneficial for graduate students of color and universities and colleges around the country. Graduate schools need to consider strategies to recruit students of color due to the present level and forecasted increase of diversity in the US population. "This diversifying population has inevitably captured the attention of higher education institutions that recognize diversity as an important goal for a range of reasons including social justice, promoting a wider breadth of scholarly inquiry and work" (Rios, 2010, p.20). That being said, minority students are currently underrepresented (Matthews, 2010). As a result, the issues surrounding recruitment, retention, and ultimately graduation among graduate students of color have placed many

institutions at a crossroads. “As the population of the US continues to shift, changes in the overall population will continue to be reflected in those entering the professoriate, attending graduate school, and attending college in the first place” (Rios, 2010, p.19). The changes are both institutional(I)- and student(S)- based and have been tied to mentoring for graduate students of color, explained further in the review of literature. Examples of institutional- and student-based factors pertaining specifically to mentoring are as follows:

(I) Mentoring, lack of guidance, lack of faculty of color, racism, isolation, managing stress, and cultural disconnect

(S) Networking, managing stress, lack of a sense of belonging, isolation and social interaction

My particular study focused on the role of mentoring as it improves retention of graduate students of color as well as discovering associations among mentoring, experiences of graduate students of color, and retention. The purpose of my study was to examine factors that influence graduate students of color at PWIs, particularly identifying how mentoring influences persistence in graduate work.

Research Questions

Using a critical race theory framework, the research topic focused on mentoring, and the study was guided by the following questions.

1. To what degree do graduate students of color utilize available mentoring, both personal (faculty, advisor) and programmatic (mentoring centers) at PWI?
2. How has such mentoring influenced their academic success, their accessibility to professional opportunities, and their overall graduate school experience?

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter begins with an overview of the historical context pertaining to racial and ethnic underrepresented students in higher education. This historical perspective provides a basis for investigating mentoring as a potential diversity outreach philosophy to recruit, retain, and ultimately graduate students of color at PWIs. This chapter also explores literature about university leadership initiatives, affirmative action policy, legislation, economic trends, demographic statistics, and the role of higher education and globalization.

In the terms of economic trends, higher education and mentoring have experienced precarious shifts in the past two decades resulting from financial prosperity to subsequent downturn with the recent great recession. For example, during the mid to late 1990s through 2008, much of the nation was thriving from an economic standpoint reflecting an increase in state and local budgets. During this period, universities, a recipient of state funds, amplified university based initiatives such as faculty growth and diversity based programs. In turn, universities experienced a practical ratio between faculty and students as advisees. This allowed mentors and advisees to establish a realistic sense of connectivity support or mentoring which could address both, academic and personal support.

As the economy collapsed in 2008 from the great recession, higher education institutions underwent a significant decrease in the funding stream from state budgets. Many initiatives related to increasing faculty and other proactive recommendations around mentorship failed to materialize due to subsequent hiring freezes. Faculty's availability to foster mentoring declined as colleges within the university were asked to reduce or eradicate budgets, resulting in the elimination of several positions. One faculty member recalled universities listing over 100

faculty positions per year during the economic growth which dropped significantly to under 30 faculty postings during the great recession. As a result, faculty members were overwhelmed with advisees as the student to faculty ratio increased due to hiring freezes. Advisees and/or mentees experienced an adverse effect due to the lack of connectivity and availability. More so, faculty and advisees had difficulty aligning research interests, ultimately affecting professional growth for students. Given the economic volatility, researchers continued to see the approach of mentorship in higher education with economic trends. The following literature review further highlights these distinct eras with economic stability, downturn and the affects it had on mentoring.

Economic Prosperity (90's - 2000s)

University planning and diversity.

Due to population trends of ethnic minorities, educational institutions in the US have new opportunities for planning, recruitment, accessibility, and outreach for graduate students of color. Ultimately, it is the decision of a university or college to integrate initiatives to manage a variety of programs and priorities. Responsibility and initiative are determined by university leadership, which determines the importance of diversity programs and/or initiatives and allocation of diminishing resources. Columbia University president Lee C. Bollinger (2007) states, "As the President of a private university, I am glad that independent institutions retain the autonomy to support diversity efforts that make our graduates more competitive candidates for employers and graduate schools, as well as better informed citizens in our democracy and the world" (p. 28). Each university must take ownership of and invest in diversity, allowing opportunities for graduate students of color to succeed. In many cases, the diversity initiative must begin with university administrators. This responsibility includes private institutions that may have less

direct relations with federal- and state-based initiatives. Exploring the conceptual framework around the term 'diversity,' educational institutions have the necessary resources to explore mentoring-based programs and assess impact on current and incoming graduate students of color.

Strategies in higher education.

From a historical perspective, diversity outreach and affirmative action policy are two strategies that many universities and colleges are attempting to define and expand (Appendix C). Both topics influence dialogue and policy for higher education. One major difference between the two overarching strategies centers around the idea of new organizational roles and responsibilities that directly focus on diversity in higher education. According to Reynolds and Pope (1994), for PWIs to embrace minority students and promote multicultural initiatives, long range strategies must include the following:

1. Mission statements
2. Institutional structures
3. Practices associated with hiring
4. Policies
5. Curriculum and programs
6. Services offered

Universities and colleges are creating new administrative roles to strategically coordinate diversity initiatives, such as creating partnerships with departments, colleges, advocacy offices, faculty, students, and external stakeholders. A concerted effort must be undertaken by all departments, including student affairs and constituents of PWIs, to recognize the unique and special needs of minority students (Lett & Wright, 2003, para. 7). Diversity initiatives and inter-

departmental partnerships, coupled with affirmative action policies, are attempting to define and broaden the scope of a diverse student body. For my study, mentoring is a component to address the idea of a diverse student body. “Across levels, mentors need to be aware of the additional barriers and mentoring needs faced by those who belong to more than one minority group” (Simard, 2007, p. 2). By incorporating mentoring-based services, students would receive the benefits of these relationships and support systems.

The underrepresentation of ethnic minorities in graduate school signifies a challenge and an opportunity for the US to develop into a diverse and educated nation that reflects the demographics of the population. While PWIs may recognize the importance of recruitment and retention of graduate students of color, they fall short in identifying key characteristics that motivate and/or discourage students of color to pursue graduate work. Hansford et al. (2004) and Brown et al. (1999) taken from Young & Brooks (2008, pp. 399-400), summarize the misconceptions about mentoring:

1. Any senior person can mentor any junior person. Faculty-graduate student mentoring relationships should be carefully chosen and entered into freely by each partner. As mentoring is a dynamic, reciprocal relationship between two engaged partners, it requires a degree of care and commitment rather than a casual or “strictly business” approach.
2. Engaging with students during class, seminars, and scheduled office hours constitutes a sufficient commitment. Instead, mentoring entails an additional set of commitments, which includes social and academic advocacy, career counseling, and a commitment to providing opportunities that can contribute to the mutual success of mentor and protégé.
3. Mentoring is only extra advising. Again, advising is not mentoring. The former is a formal academic arrangement focused on program completion that may or may not be entered into freely; the latter requires a more substantive personal and professional commitment. It is certainly possible, for example, that someone could be an excellent advisor and a poor mentor.
4. Students of color can only be mentored by faculty of color. This assumption is problematic for at least two reasons. First, as scholars of color are not well-represented

in many educational administration faculty units, faculty of color may carry an inordinately large advising/mentoring load in relation to other faculty members. Second, leaving faculty of color to serve as mentors for graduate students of color is an absolution of responsibility and an implicit form of racism. Supporting graduate students of color is the responsibility of all faculty members, regardless of race.

5. Mentor and protégés' research interests, philosophical positionality, and "polisocioecoracial" experiences must be a perfect match (Brown et al., 1999, p. 114). An empathetic approach to the relationship and a commitment to an ethic of care, ethic of critique, ethic of community, an ethic of profession (Brooks & Normore, 2004; Furman, 2004; Starrat, 1997), and a reciprocal approach to success is at least as important.

Successful and influential mentoring programs need long-term support from academic leaders and presidents. Graduate students of color can push for, and seek, a robust mentoring program in their education at their educational institution. Key takeaways from Hansford, Brown, Young, and Brooks encourage the use of mentoring during the economic prosperity period. Graduate students of color need to peruse their research interest through a variety of mentorship opportunities during times when the economy is trending upward. "Ramping up the number of minorities with doctorates is a critical first step toward addressing the low percentage of minority professors nationwide. But enrollment is only the beginning of addressing this problem: "Many graduate programs have tremendous difficulty attracting and keeping female and minority faculty members; consequently, same-gender or same-race mentors are not available to many students" (Johnson, 2002, p. 90). Davidson & Foster-Johnson (2001) identify five factors that diminish the influence of mentoring programs of graduate students of color:

1. Graduate preparation's focus on assimilation rather than cultural inclusion
2. Mentors' assumptions of similarities in occupational experiences between themselves and their protégés
3. Graduate schools' avoidance of culture, race, and ethnicity in course work
4. The impact of cultural differences on student outcomes

5. How race is addressed in cross-race mentoring relationships

One influence for graduate students of color is the role of mentoring on universities and colleges in terms of recruitment, retention, and graduation. “In recent years a growing body of evidence has suggested that institutions of higher education committed to diversity translate that commitment into positive outcomes and benefits for all students” (Rogers & Molina, 2006, p. 143). Literature in the early to mid-2000s recognizes the importance of identifying and retaining female and minority faculty members, which subsequently increases mentoring opportunities for graduate students of color. It further emphasizes the importance of cultural acceptance, increasing diversity, and the crucial role embodied by the institution’s recruitment of students of color and mentoring efforts.

Perhaps it is expected then that at the graduate level, especially for doctoral students, effective mentoring relationships flourish between graduate students and their major professors/advisors. However, minority graduate students often experience more isolation and less access to mentors and role models than their non-minority peers. (Girves, Zepeda, & Gwathmey, 2005, p. 449)

During this period, many university systems had expectations around high quality faculty mentoring and diversity based services for students of color; however, the level of connectivity compared to their non-minority classmates was disproportionate. Social factors and limited experience with mentoring from an early age in the historically underfunded K-12 education system contributed to the lack of mentor use for students of color in higher education.

Your ethnicity is from society, it affects virtually all your experiences. It is part of American society, it is part of the consciousness of Americans. It influences the nature of your experience in graduate school, how you are perceived. It is impossible for me to separate this from graduate education. (MacLachlan, 2006, p. 2)

Hinton (2006) reflects her experience as a mentee on the role of mentorship during an interview with a national survey institution:

While cross-cultural mentoring can be as valuable an experience as any, the opportunity for me to be mentored by a Hispanic and two Black women provided me with what critical race theorists would call counterspaces to tell my counterstories. Counterspaces are those havens where ethnic minorities can go to find not just physical, but emotional and intellectual safety. The teaching, guiding, coaching, protecting, counseling and even friendship that these women shared with me provided the space where my voice was heard and made me more self-efficacious. They believed that investing the time in this scholar, me, would provide a firm foundation for a more promising professorial career. (p. 60)

Here, Hinton connects mentoring to critical race theory as ‘counterstories.’ Counterstories provide a voice for experiences and knowledge of people of color. Counterstories can help address injustices, racism, and inequity by putting a human face to graduate students of color and the barriers they encounter against large systematic organizations such as universities. Counterstories are vital connection points to jumpstart mentorship relationships between faculty and graduate students of color, I explore this notion further in Chapter III.

Mentoring.

Mentoring can be one tool of a comprehensive plan that would bring to bear a diverse base of support systems for ethnic minorities in graduate work. Mentoring development must include buy-in from administrative leaders on university and college campuses across the nation. Both academic and non-academic institutions have discussed mentoring as essential for personal and professional development (Thomas, Willis, & Davis, 2007). The goal would be to provide an inclusive environment for students of color in graduate school, where students feel welcome and are able to achieve success by contributing to the school and to other disciplines within their sphere of interests.

Given minority graduate students’ historical exclusion from institutions of higher education, the persistent group of stereotypes that relate to their academic abilities and competencies, as well their unique cultural perspectives demand that more attention needs to be paid to the qualities needed to effectively mentor this group (Thomas, Willis, & Davis, 2007, p. 181).

Identifying a mentor and/or being a mentor is a start on the pathway to success. Building rapport and connecting with a mentor/mentee can progress into impactful mentoring partnerships with the ultimate goal of graduation. Mentoring is crucial to prevent the feeling of isolation and possible failure in graduate programs. Students from underrepresented or marginalized groups, particularly those in the social sciences and humanities, sometimes find that their perspectives or experiences do not fit into the current academic canons (Weiss, 2007, p. 18). Reaching out to potential faculty for mentorships may become difficult for graduate students of color due to anxiety, fear, feeling of rejection, and nervousness. “Students from historically underrepresented groups can feel particularly isolated or alienated from other students in their departments, especially if the composition of a program is highly homogenous” (Weiss, 2007, p. 20). For example, “If the faculty in your department are ostensibly homogenous, make a case for how diversity will enhance your program” (Weiss, 2007, p. 21). Also, faculty members within a homogenous department and who also advise may not necessarily be the only source of mentoring.

Potential mentors exist in academia; however, many professors may not uncover the potential need and effectiveness of mentoring for graduate students of color. Due to the potential variables that influence students of color, it is a challenge to identify effective retention strategies. In addition, student perspectives will continue to contribute to the overall aspect of diversity and the establishment of a mentoring policy at PWIs for ethnic minorities in graduate schools. “Acknowledgement of these issues is pertinent to further understanding and ameliorating the lack of mentorship and sponsorship experienced by underrepresented graduate students. [Only] limited data indicating best practices for the recruitment and retention of minority doctoral students exist” (Davis, 2008, p. 280). When comparing Minorities and Whites

at the doctorate level, students of color are systematically underrepresented. In the subsequent section, I examine affirmative action, policy, and legislation effects reflected during the mid-90s through the mid-2000s (See Table 1.2). Providing a prospective that, even in a time of economic prosperity, race, class, and other social structures continue to contribute to inequities in mentoring. In this regard, federal legislation was introduced on affirmative action policy as a way to combat racial disparity, which is further explained in the sections to follow.

Affirmative action policy and legislation.

In 1995, President Bill Clinton delivered the "Mend It, Don't End It" speech defending affirmative action. Clinton provided critical moral and political support for affirmative action during a period of heightened attacks by critics of such policy. Months prior to the speech, Clinton had ordered a review of all federal programs involving affirmative action (Matthews, 2009).

As universities and colleges across the country confront litigation that challenges their support for affirmative action and diversity, PWIs are seeking ways to ensure a diverse student body. "[I]n 2003 the Supreme Court in *Grutter v. Bollinger* reaffirmed the use of race in admissions at the University of Michigan Law School. This decision included a caveat that colleges and universities could use race only if they could not create sufficient racial diversity using race-neutral means" (Kahlenberg, 2010, p. 4). In this particular case, the ruling upheld the university's use of race as a criterion for admission to the Law School. The purpose of my study is not to argue the effectiveness of affirmative action policy but rather to understand certain parameters as they relate to graduate students of color in order to identify barriers and/or remedies from the perspectives of both universities/colleges and graduate students of color. Matthews (2009) provides historical context through a legal and legislative timeline depicting the

role of affirmative action in higher education (see Appendix C). Similar information appears throughout the literature, which provides a foundation for discussing minorities intersecting with higher education.

Opponents of affirmative action policy and legislation.

Higher education continues to face challenges, including statewide bans on affirmative action. Public universities and colleges are working to revise recruitment and admissions policies to comply with those restrictions without jeopardizing the diversity of their student population. Opponents of affirmative action seek to redefine its scope and role. In 1990, Michael Williams, head of the US Department of Education Department's Office of Civil Rights in the administration of President George H.W. Bush, declared it illegal for colleges to restrict scholarships based on race or ethnicity. Following protests from colleges, the administration re-examined the issue, yet let the policy stand (Matthews, 2009). Both California and Texas, from 1995 to 1996, pushed strong legislation against affirmative action policies that set precedents for other states. In the California case, the University of California Board of Regents in 1995 banned race- and gender-based hiring and admissions practices, supported the following year by federal judges:

In 1995, the University of California Board of Regents passed SP-1, a ban on race- and gender-conscious affirmative action policies in admissions and hiring in the university system. In 1996, California's Proposition 209—the anti-affirmative action referendum—passed, imposing a ban on race- and gender-conscious affirmative action on all state institutions. Finally, in 1996, the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals decided in *Hopwood v. Texas* that race cannot be used in admissions decisions, causing underrepresented minority enrollment to plummet at Texas schools (Matthews, 2009).

In 2001, the University of California Board of Regents repealed its ban on affirmative action, hoping to send a welcoming message to minority students. Unfortunately, the repeal measure

was a public relations tactic. Proposition 209 continues in force, prohibiting race-conscious hiring and admission criteria in the state.

Institutions are using socio-economic status in lieu of race as admittance criterion to a university or college. For several years, the University of Texas employed three race-blind alternatives to provide evidence that affirmative action policy was not needed. First, it considered grade point average and test scores in the context of factors such as the following:

[S]ocioeconomic status, whether the applicant is from a single-parent home, language spoken at home, family responsibilities, socioeconomic status of the school attended, and average SAT or ACT scores of the school attended in relation to the student's test scores. Second, Texas employed the top 10 percent plan, which allowed students in the top 10 percent of their high school classes to automatically enroll at the University of Texas at Austin. Third, Texas adopted new scholarship programs for low-income and first-generation college students (Kahlenberg, 2010, p. 5).

The third provision of the University of Texas differed from the previous two in that the latter focused on scholarship funding while the former two goals addressed admission policies. This particular case examined undergraduate admissions; however, this example provides insight about how affirmative action at the university level may influence graduate students of color as well.

In June 2016, the Supreme Court in *Fisher v. Texas* voted 4-3 to uphold the University of Texas at Austin's diversity in admissions policy. This was the second time the case had been brought before the Supreme Court, the first in 2008 on appeal. The decision provided a guide for universities and colleges throughout the country in fashioning affirmative action policies for students of color. The Supreme Court handed down the following decision, summarized below.

On June 24, 2013, the Supreme Court voided the lower appellate court's ruling in favor of UT and remanded the case for further consideration, through a 7–1 decision, with Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg dissenting (*Fisher I*). The Supreme Court found that the lower court had not appropriately applied the standard of strict scrutiny articulated in *Grutter*, and in *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (1978), to its assessment of the UT admissions program. *Fisher I* took *Grutter* and *Bakke* as given, and did not directly revisit

the constitutionality of using race as a factor in college admissions. Applying the Supreme Court's 2013 decision, the Fifth Circuit once again found for UT in 2014. Fisher again appealed the Fifth Circuit's decision, and the Supreme Court again agreed to hear her appeal (Fisher II). The Supreme Court heard oral argument in Fisher II on Dec. 9, 2015, and on June 23, 2016, voted 4-3 to uphold UT's admissions policy (U. Texas, 2013).

This decision constitutes a win for other universities and for affirmative action proponents.

According to Justin Driver, former University of Chicago law professor, “The decision signals that affirmative action is safe not only at the University of Texas but around the country”

(Barnes, 2016). Marisa Bono, a lawyer at the Mexican -American Legal Defense and Education

Fund, described the decision as a “green light for colleges to proceed with race-conscious

admissions policies” (Barnes, 2016). The decision will support any institution addressing the

issue of underrepresentation of minorities in higher education by leveraging the affirmative

action policies and recruitment initiatives. The ruling takes a significant step toward race equality

and equity as students of color strive for higher education attainment. From a university

standpoint, many institutions that seek to promote diversity can expand their recruiting efforts

based on race. That being said, challenges still exist for students of color who are in the minority

on college campuses. The lack of resources, isolationism, race relations, hostile environments

and underrepresentation for students of color are lingering issues in higher education.

From an institutional perspective, universities will continue to define the more abstract term of diversity by action-driven initiatives. Latest statistics illustrate a positive trend for graduate students of color in higher educational attainment; however, compared to Whites, a significant discrepancy still remains.

The proportion of minorities with doctoral degrees has increased far more than that of Whites, but a significant unbalance remains (Table 1.2) (Tower, 2009, p. 40-41).

Table 1.2: Proportion of Minorities with Doctoral Degrees

1995-2005	African Americans	American Indians	Asian Americans	Hispanics	Whites
Doctorate recipients by percentage (increase)	84	40	20	83	11
Minorities doctorate recipients by population	3,000	214	3000	1,740	29,144

Regardless of affirmative action policies existing in higher education institutions, the history and current literature are vital to define, inform, and understand the progression of affirmative action policy in higher education and among graduate students of color. Universities and colleges will need to look beyond affirmative action policies to understand the dynamics of population trends described above for ethnic minorities if the US seeks to recruit, retain, and graduate students of color.

Historical context: Higher education and diversity.

The concepts of diversity, affirmative action policy, and legislation vary from institution to institution; the government sets forth no overall standard, so each educational institution may interpret and implement diversity-based policies up to a point. Strategies for universities and college campuses may incorporate avenues of opportunity that meet standard basic legal requirements or reach further in terms of diversity.

The modern US Civil Rights Movement, precipitated mostly by African Americans' rejection of the societal inequities they faced, must be given credit for pushing our society to reconsider how higher education should incorporate students whose ancestral communities had

been historically excluded from institutions of higher learning. As early as 1965, largely in response to Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, some campuses began to redesign their recruitment and admissions activities, to organize special programs to ensure students' academic preparation, to reinforce academic achievement through tutorial programs, and to provide some campus-based socio-cultural outlets for the new students of color at their schools (Dodson, E. J., Montgomery, L. B., & Brown, J. L. 2009, p. 187).

In 1986, Title III of the Higher Education Act provided funds directly to institutions of higher education that serve low-income and minority students and was amended to include Part B—the amendment known as the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) Act—substantially increasing Title III funding to HBCUs (Matthews, 2009). In addition to the 1986 Act, in 1992 the Higher Education Act was amended to allow Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs) to be recognized as an approved program trader under Title V (Matthews, 2009). Title V's purpose is to expand educational opportunities for Hispanic students. The amendment allocates—to HSIs specifically—the first official federal appropriation dollars toward Hispanic students. Eligible schools are those with a full-time undergraduate enrollment of at least 25 percent Hispanic, of which half must be low-income and 25 percent first-generation collegians (Matthews, 2009). Currently, there are 222 member Hispanic Serving Institutions in the US (HACU, 2011). “Affirmative-action programs help achieve that larger goal. And the universities that create and carry them out do so not only because overcoming longstanding obstacles to people of color and women in higher education is the right thing to do, but also because policies that encourage a comprehensive diversity help universities achieve their mission” (Bollinger, 2007, p. 27-28).

University perspective.

Institutions that have made progress in diversity growth create diversity strategic plans, which in turn create a sense of inclusiveness. “In some cases, institutions of higher education justify their continued commitment to creating and maintaining a student body that is racially and ethnically diverse” (Rogers, et al., 2006, p. 143). Williams (2006) outlines his own institution’s commitment by incorporating a seven-tier system that promotes a diverse student body. The author details an ongoing diversity-planning model for institutions in higher education based on interviews with diversity officers, reviews of literature, and consulting work with several institutions. Williams’ (2006) seven-tier system is as follows:

Level One: Write diversity into the formal mission statement of the institution. Given the permanence of the institutional mission statements, referencing diversity constitutes a deep and broad commitment and an important building block for other campus efforts.

Level Two: Build diversity goals and initiatives in all academic and strategic plans. These documents communicate the campus-wide vision for current and future priorities. Incorporating diversity into these materials positions it in all discussions of institutional learning goals, curriculum, and the allocation of limited institutional resources.

Level Three: Connect diversity efforts to the financial systems of the institution. From an organizational perspective, this is the only way to achieve accountability. Consequently, campus diversity efforts must be tethered to merit review, promotion decisions, hiring and departmental budgets.

Level Four: Require senior leadership, faculty and staff to learn about diversity issues and their relationships to student learning and institutional excellence. Some strategies might include diversity briefings for executives and staff, campus-wide diversity symposia, professional development opportunities for faculty, and diversity leadership education for faculty, staff and students.

Level Five: Require each school, college and division to develop its own strategy for achieving institutional diversity. The most successful projects will have both centralized and decentralized diversity implementation efforts. Unless academic deans, vice presidents, department chairs and administrative entities own the implementation process, diversity implementation efforts run the risk of being marginalized and limited.

Level Six: Create diversity grants, incentive programs and diversity champion roles to encourage campus wide engagement in the process. People have a natural proclivity to

resist change projects they do not perceive to yield a benefit and in which they have no role. Stakeholder-led programs transform students, faculty and staff from passive observers into creative initiators.

Level Seven: Cultivate chief diversity officers who are competent in the areas of academic diversity and organizational change (p. 50).

A university's goal should be to increase the representation and retention of underrepresented graduate students of color by bringing awareness and improving the campus climate while at the same time leveraging diversity to provide support systems for graduate students of color. Levels two, four, six, and seven focus on this goal specifically. Reynolds and Pope (1994) also attest to William's tier system regarding policy, administration changes in hiring, and diversity woven into the mission and vision statements.

A higher education institution is responsible for the healthy development and achievement of its student body regardless of race or ethnicity. "When students are accepted into an institution of higher education, the responsibility lies with the university to develop and graduate students" (Lett & Wright, 2003, para. 3). PWIs recognize the importance of recruitment and retention of graduate students of color; however, "historically, higher education in the US has conveyed exclusionary and segregated practices relative to minority students' acceptance and attendance at white colleges and universities" (Lett & Wright, 2003, para. 5).

"Evidence has suggested that institutions of higher education committed to diversity translate that commitment into positive outcomes and benefits for all students" (Rogers & Molina, 2006, p. 143). As a result of these outcomes, institutions of higher education are embracing the education of culturally competent graduates. Therefore, PWIs need to recognize barriers and discover successful strategies for recruitment and retention of graduate students of color.

Diversity outreach programs at universities and colleges are crucial to the inclusivity of graduate students of color. By adding a mentoring component, administrators may consider this as an added and important variable for graduate students of color. “Universities need to step into the shoes and actually walk in the life of another individual, especially where there are significant differences related to race and culture. It is here that diversity can present problems related to the lack of communication and understanding” (Jones, 2007, p. 29). Most university administrators, professors, and facilitators handle a variety of roles, including the essential role of an advisor. “When a graduate student of color has a problem that is or could be race- or culture-sensitive, it is very difficult for that student to relate to a faculty member who not only does not look like him or her, but who comes from another culture” (Jones, 2007, p. 29). Universities and colleges must continue to define, develop, promote, establish, and integrate the philosophy of diversity. To summarize, the university perspective at the time of economic growth reflected vested interest in diversity growth, strategic planning and a racially diverse student body.

Economic Decline (2008 – 2014)

As discussed earlier in this chapter, higher education was not immune to the great recession, which resulted in rippling effects across several economic sectors. In terms of academia, the decline in the economy included a reduction of state budget dollars, which directly affected the funding for higher education. Hiring freezes and cutbacks reduced faculty and mentoring opportunities. From a personal perspective, the cohort of five doctoral students (including myself) had our assistantship funding eliminated after the second year of a three-year funding cycle. It was during this recession, I had to seek additional employment outside of academia to pay for tuition and other education related expenses.

In cases mentioned above, colleges and universities should develop a systematic approach to assist underrepresented students with navigating the institutional culture of higher education (Smith, 2009, p. 1). The lack of mentors or the resources of mentoring programs that would help graduate students of color earn their graduate degree contributes significantly to this result. Abraham (2009), director of the Atlanta-based Southern Regional Education Board State of Doctoral Scholars speaks to this challenge:

When minority doctoral candidates fail, the reason is seldom academic in nature. Minority doctoral candidates typically throw in the towel because they feel alone and unsupported. Alienation and isolation are two areas that minority students frequently identify as being huge barriers to their being successful at the graduate level. Mentoring underserved graduate students of color as well as taking a leadership role from a faculty member's perspective on university and college campuses for graduate students of color will benefit both the student of color and the university (p. 19).

William B. Russel, dean of Princeton University's Graduate School, said a disproportionate share of minority students who enter doctoral programs are academically and, in some cases, culturally unprepared for the demands that will be placed on them, causing them to fall behind early on. Students who drop out of PhD programs early on may do so because they chose the wrong programs or lacked access to strong mentors, he said, while those who abandon their quest for a doctorate late in the process often do so because of some conflict with a faculty advisor or a dissertation committee (Schmidt, 2008, p. 1). In the same article, Pamela J. Benoit, dean of the Graduate School at the University of Missouri, recognizes the need for student-retention efforts for graduate students of color.

Institutions can make mentoring a priority for students of color beyond the traditional cultural-based centers that exist on campuses (University of Washington, 2012). Riddick, et al. (2012) suggest these relationships meet two primary needs: “career support and socio-emotional support. This broad definition includes long- and short-term relationships, as well as mentors who are formally assigned to protégés and relationships that have developed organically and informally” (p. 37). To Riddick et al.’s point, an example was the significant need for career support for students of color, particularly during the great recession where jobs were at a premium and hiring was virtually non-existent in academia. Chapter IV and V exemplify how many graduate students of color highlighted the need for career advice, and professional development—all factors surrounding economic stability. The graduate school at the University of Washington (2012) further defines mentoring beyond the basic faculty-based relationship:

A mentor is more than an advisor. A mentor provides you with wisdom, technical knowledge, assistance, support, empathy and respect throughout, and often beyond, your graduate career. Mentoring helps students understand how their ambitions fit into graduate education, department life and career choices. An effective mentoring relationship develops over time. The student benefits from the mentor’s support, skills, wisdom and coaching. Later, both people deepen their working relationship, perhaps collaborating on projects in which the student develops into a junior colleague (para. 1).

Essentially, mentoring is the act of providing guidance and support delivered from a mentor to a protégé. Most often a mentor will provide support, feedback, information, and advocacy to a student. Peer mentoring and upward mentoring—when mentees inform their mentors about their needs and experiences—provide an ideal situation to share and apprise through narratives. DeAngelo (2016) discusses the need for mentoring but also highlights the importance of changes in systems and structures that hinder the ability for students of color to succeed.

Given the importance of mentoring to access to graduate study, especially for underrepresented racial minority students, it is imperative that institutional leaders support the extra-role behaviors associated with developing these positive relationships. Specifically, we need to address the bias, racialized and otherwise, engrained in

institutional cultures that have resulted in this crisis of mentoring of students of color at selective institutions. Shifting these cultures requires institutional leaders and other institutional actors to interrupt the oppressive structures that allow the bias inherent in these cultures to silently propagate limiting beliefs regarding the academic capacity students of color who attend these institutions (DeAngelo, 2016, p. 9).

This predisposition or bias that DeAngelo describes relates to critical race theory, on which I base the theoretical framework of this dissertation, described in Chapter III.

Deans of these graduate schools identify mentoring as a crucial element to graduate student retention and success. In *Education Week Teacher*, Long (2014) describes eight qualities of a great mentor that do not require extensive training but make impactful connections. These include respect, listening, challenging, collaboration, celebration, truth, safety, and empathy. These qualities speak to avenues for support with graduate students of color. Understanding and empathizing the challenges many graduate students of color face on campuses will bring awareness to the mentor/mentee relationship. By providing a safe space and listening to narratives from graduate students of color, the mentor will increase collaboration efforts and celebrate diverse perspectives. While Long presents the notion that a mentor does not require extensive training, institutions of higher education have seen challenges. For example, at a time of economic insecurity, institutions in higher education are challenged with constricted budgets, which results in other initiatives, such as robust mentoring program, to undergo budget cut. In this regard, cuts to mentoring programs affect many students of color by breaking the sense of safety, collaboration, and empathy. For many graduate students of color, social factors go far beyond the classroom during an economic recession. The inability to pay for tuition or college textbooks due to loss of employment not only impacts universities but students of color who rely on financial support from family members to pay tuition. For many graduate students of color, like myself, rely on their own employment to pay tuition. As such, when universities cut

mentoring programs, many students of color lose the additional support that is crucial to graduate student retention and success.

Perspectives of graduate students of color.

Mentoring's effectiveness, although strongly supported, may be difficult to assess. University faculty are primarily focused on research and teaching. Although advising requirements are given to faculty members who oversee doctoral students, no formal mentoring program is in place for many students, and the advisor-advisee interactions are on an "as-needed" basis. Though an influential factor on degree completion, it is difficult to assess because of differences in cultural background and field, or discipline (Ph.D. Completion Project, 2008). The lack of approachability between graduate students of color and non-minority faculty is a barrier described in Critical Race Theory as "colorblindness."

US minority students commonly indicated that they had chosen the department because they were attracted to working with particular faculty members who were persons of color with research interests on issues of race/ethnicity or because faculty members had specifically recruited them, in some cases bringing them to campus while the students were considering choices of institutions. This is evident in a selection of responses to a question that asked students to consider why they had chosen their specific graduate programs (Schlemper, 2011, p. 23).

A survey by Schlemper (2011) and his colleagues attempted to interpret the dialogue on diversity ever since they began documenting the number of ethnic minorities (African-American, Asian-American, Native-American, and Hispanic/Latinx) compared to white males in geography graduate schools for the past 40 years. Schlemper stated that challenges remain: "Isolation was expressed as a concern by some international and minority students, particularly if English was not their first language. For example, a Latino who had moved from a more diverse metropolitan area to the largely white community to pursue his master's degree expressed multiple aspects of

his situation” (p. 23). During the same study, other graduate students of color expressed the following:

Some [students] highlighted how different faculty's mentoring styles affected their sense of belonging. Contrasting two faculty members, one Asian woman reported that in a previous class "I feel I am a foreigner, I am not an American or an English speaker...I feel I am totally different as a woman." It affected her sense of confidence. With her current advisor, she feels she is treated the same as others and not isolated, "and now I am working, I feel that if I try hard, I can really...get the same rewards. With just the faculty around, it was just not a great environment for me. Fortunately, at the beginning, I was able to be adopted by another department," which created an important support for dealing with research on race, class, and gender. The reflections of these women of color highlight ways in which they connect comfort, [provide] confidence, and achievement with faculty relations (p. 23).

The role of mentoring and the retention of graduate students of color are related and dependent on each other in graduate work. Diverse faculty and white faculty who identify mentoring as a crucial role in graduate students of color success recognize the potential of a dynamic relationship reflecting a positive outcome for the advisor/mentor as well as the graduate students of color. Critical Race Theory (CRT) raises the point of race and racism in higher education. The interesting fact is that many students of color welcome the opportunity to share stories on race and racism. A study referenced by Schlemper (2011) regarding thoughts from students at San Jose State University found the following:

Students of color want to discuss issues of race and ethnicity with their mentors. African-American students were also more interested in being matched with a mentor of their own race than were all other students. Although few matches could be made that matched these students with mentors of the same ethnicity, and white mentors felt less comfortable in discussing issues related to diversity than did women of color, students of color in the program nonetheless still expressed overall high satisfaction with their one-on-one MentorNet relationship (p. 23).

In that study students' voices on diversity issues revealed not only voids and challenges, but ways departments could and do enhance and support diversity. The authors attested that a diversity of students and faculty enriches understanding of the world, thus reinforcing the

perspectives of literature reviewed on the value of being attentive to diversity within higher education. Some spoke to the need for wider representation in the faculty and of the importance of including courses of interest to a diverse student body. They suggested that geography as a discipline needs to do a better job of outreach so that potential graduate students will be more aware of the career possibilities related to earning an advanced degree (p. 23).

Diversity defined.

Diversity in higher education will continue to evolve with further scholarship and research. Each university establishes a process that defines the term diversity and sets the tone for university-wide policy and procedures.

The word *diversity* refers to difference resulting from social changes in society... Education is one of the most visible institutions in society, and its response to diversity has attracted considerable attention from the US public. Given the importance placed in society on earning credentials from institutions of higher education, the topic of diversity in higher education is unsurprisingly a raging firestorm that responds to the ebb and flow of public opinion (ASHE, 2015, p. 1).

Some universities and colleges nationwide derive their diversity framework from historic affirmative action policies (Appendix C) while others develop a more comprehensive, diversity-based strategic initiative. As an example, the Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity at Colorado State University (2011) is committed to enhancing diversity in all its forms to ensure an educational environment reflective of all demographic populations. This department oversees implementing and evaluating programs and procedures that support the mission of enhancing diversity. The University of Oregon (1999) defines diversity in the following passage:

The concept of diversity encompasses acceptance and respect. It means understanding that each individual is unique, and recognizing our individual differences. These can be along the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies. It is the exploration of these differences in a safe, positive, and nurturing environment. It is about understanding each other and moving beyond simple tolerance to embracing and celebrating the rich dimensions of diversity contained within each individual. (para. 1).

Defining diversity is important because it reflects an investment and promise of inclusion for the institution, their students, faculty and administration. Many universities further their commitment by establishing specific roles to enhance the mission of diversity such as a Chief Diversity Officer or Vice President of Diversity. The diversity statement defined in many institutions also assures the student body that needs are being met for increasingly diverse campuses to increase access, equality and inclusion.

Conclusion

According to the literature reviewed here, leveraging diversity outreach and mentoring with proper cultural inclusiveness for graduate students of color can help promote diversity on university campuses. Mentoring is one diversity-based strategy to promote the academic success of graduate students of color because it attempts to go beyond the affirmative action framework. As institutions of higher education comply with affirmative action policies, leadership must focus energy and policy on diversity. “A vital future for higher education won’t grow out of existing institutional systems, with their traditional leadership models and entrenched academic culture.... It will grow in inclusive spaces where diversity is fundamentally embraced and affirmed” (Barcelo, 2010, p. 20).

Graduate schools need to recognize the role of mentoring for graduate students of color as a potential source for a recruitment, retention, and ultimate graduation strategy. “Despite 30 years of affirmative action, the faculty profile at the majority of American colleges and universities remains largely white” (Nealy, 2008, p. 32). One part of building the mentoring bridge between graduate students of color and graduate degree success is the increase of minority faculty, which invites more opinions that are diverse, resources, and connectivity. The thought-provoking parallel between economic probability and higher education investment is a cause for

trepidation. Economic instability for students of color, faculty, and innovative programming, such as mentorship, provides a lens into several vulnerabilities for graduate students of color and their success. Providing a sustainable model around mentorship in higher education that is consistent is a focal point for graduate students of color and should be a priority to university administrators.

CHAPTER III: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Increasing underrepresentation of students of color in higher education compared to the overall U.S population concerns many PWIs. Many factors contribute to the challenges that students of color must overcome to attain post-secondary and graduate level goals. Systemic factors and repressive ideologies impacting race and racism among students of color limit their ability to succeed in higher education. While much academic literature has detailed historic and university-wide initiatives such as affirmative action policies and diversity development, critical research—albeit limited—has worked to highlight perspectives of graduate students of color and the use of mentoring as a tool to share experiences. The need for sharing perspectives among students of color may center around the use of a critical race theory framework that invites individuals to listen through a counter-storytelling platform to address the barriers many students face. Institutions of higher education recognize the need to produce culturally competent graduates. To support the research in a manner that foregrounds and privileges the perspectives of graduate students of color, I used Critical Race Theory as a guiding framework and foundation to this work to give students of color a voice in graduate school.

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a theoretical perspective that, in its attempt to explain and mitigate the social ill of racism, challenges, disrupts, and addresses historically oppressive fields—primarily law, and academia. Simply put, CRT is a theoretical framework intended to effect social change and alter the way society functions (Fassett and Warren, 2010). In the past three decades, CRT has pushed the often-controversial topic of race and racism to the forefront in fields such as law, and academia. In this study, I present CRT as a theoretical framework to

analyze and understand the implications and influences mentoring has for graduate students of color in PWIs.

The persistent problem of racialized and racist experiences of students of color in higher education (particularly at PWIs), and the urgency to address such racism through application of CRT, are illustrated by an incident that took place in March 2016, at the institution where I earned my undergraduate degree, the University of Northern Colorado. The *Greeley Tribune* (Silvy, 2016) reported the incident:

University of Northern Colorado President Kay Norton on Thursday responded to an act of racist vandalism at UNC, sending an email to the campus community condemning the act. "I am disappointed to hear that a poster promoting the use of inclusive language on our campus was defaced with derogatory and demeaning comments last week," Norton's email read, in part. "This behavior does not represent the voice of our campus community and is unacceptable." The UNC Bias Response Team, which is a function of the Dean of Students Office, displayed posters across campus March 18 as part of the "Language Matters" campaign. The following Monday, students returned to find one of the posters...had been defaced. That poster, which depicts UNC freshman Shyla Mars holding another poster, referenced the Black Lives Matter movement. The n-word and other derogatory language was used to deface the poster. Mars said she was shocked when she saw it. "I really had a rose-colored view of UNC," Mars said. "I didn't think this would happen." Reyna Anaya is Assistant Director of the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities, housed in the Dean of Students Office, and she oversees the Bias Response Team. She said it has taken a more active role since 2014, and part of that push was the poster campaign. The campaign seeks to educate the campus community about the potential pitfalls in word choice, pointing out issues with the use of the word "crazy," "illegal," and words that can induce a negative body image. All of the posters feature UNC students (para. 1).

This incident is not an isolated one. According to Griggs (2015), frequent racial incidents occur nationally in higher education: "In fiscal year 2015 the US Department of Education recorded 146 cases of racial harassment on college and university campuses, down from 177 the previous year but up from 96 in 2009" (para.10). Griggs indicates that only 13% of racial incidents are reported nationwide, suggesting the problem may be much worse: "Frat brothers chanting racial epithets. People in blackface at 'gangsta'-themed parties. A noose hung around a campus statue

of a former black student. US colleges and universities are more diverse than ever, and yet episodes like these happen with alarming regularity” (para. 1). Certainly, educators and administrators in higher education cannot expect students to succeed in racially-charged campus environments where such incidents are perpetrated. As we are still enduring these macro and microaggressions half a century after the Civil Rights Act was signed into law, CRT remains a pertinent and timely framework to unpack why these forms of racism endure.

Origins of CRT

CRT is an outworking of legal scholarship initiated during the 1960s, primarily focused on the civil rights movement. According to Yosso (2005), Critical Legal Studies (CLS) scholars began questioning whether the legal system at the time tended to legitimize minority oppression rather mitigate it (p. 74), and this research presented evidence supporting the former and argued against the existence of an impartial and bias-free legal system. Decades later, Brown and Jackson (2013) noted little change, identifying the lack of political forces that are “neutral, value-free, and unaffected by social and economic relations (p. 12).

Because CLS’s investigative scope was limited to the legal system with only limited reach into other disciplines, CRT emerged as the next iteration of race theory to address the effects of race and racism in the United States. As Akom (2011) reports, a new research paradigm was generated that required “a research orientation that empowers marginalized and vulnerable populations but is also sensitive to the needs of different communities. When this approach is implemented effectively, the concerns and needs of marginal communities are at the forefront while the dominant group is not ignored or privileged” (p.127).

New theories and frameworks—as well as their original authors and researchers—are almost always scrutinized, and CRT is no exception. After all, attempting to shift paradigms

takes courage and constant vigilance. Certainly, any theory relating to race and racism is bound to create dynamic, and at times controversial, discussions; therefore, it is no surprise that since its inception, CRT has had its proponents and detractors, and many original researchers and scholars influential in the early stages of the CRT movement come under criticism. Among the first targets were prominent authors such as Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Capper (2015) has noted that "key scholars in the CRT movement...in the early 1980s identified the inadequacies of Critical Legal Studies in addressing racism" (p. 794). As researchers in CRT refined and developed their work, other researchers such as Subotnik (1998) continued to criticize CRT. Subotnik provides a historical perspective through a lens different from CRT and CLS:

White males tempted to participate in the conversation were condemned in advance as interlopers, even imperialists...Whites did not—and probably could not—adequately represent minorities in these discussions, [yet] they helped crush the white civil rights cartel and encouraged a host of minority academics to enter the field (p. 684).

Furthermore, many white scholars felt their ethnic minority counterparts were using their race and ethnicity potentially as a wedge and pushing them out of the theory and its application. In sum, according to Decuir and Dixson (2004), "It is important to note that CRT has been critiqued because of the perception that the focus on race eclipses other aspects of difference that serve to marginalize and oppress people of color" (p. 30). Despite these challenges, CRT has expanded and grown into an intricate and functional theory, used in multiple disciplines.

First and Second Waves of CRT

As CRT continues to enlarge its scope from its origins in the CLS framework into other disciplines and derivatives such as LatCrit, AsianCrit, and TribalCrit among others, two overarching strands or generations of scholarship have undergirded new CRT thought, as summarized by Carbado:

First generation CRT scholars such as Bell (1979, 1980a, b, 1985, 1987), Delgado (1984, 1987, 1988a, b, 1989, 1990, 1992, 1995a, b), Crenshaw (1988), Crenshaw et al. (1995), Williams (1987, 1991), Harris (1993) and Angela Harris (1994) focused mainly on the material manifestations of racism as a way to argue for social justice, and focused much-needed attention on the inclusion of the subjugated voices of racially marginalized peoples into the debates on race, racism, the law and society. The second generation of scholars have taken Bell, Delgado, Williams and Crenshaw's ideas and extended them to address issues of gender, ethnicity, language, culture, sexuality and other key markers of difference. These works borrow heavily from post-modernism, post-structuralism and critical theory to focus more attention on teasing out the multi-varied meanings of race and its interaction with other forms of domination (as cited in Patton (2016), p. 315).

CRT in education is an emergent field of research and continues to build momentum. These first and second generational waves of CRT research are the foundational framework of my dissertation. Because I am a researcher of color, this literature review addresses CRT and its impact on education, more specifically higher education. I see it as a lens through which mentoring—as a tool of CRT—can support the experiences of students of color through encouraging counter-storytelling and narration.

CRT in Education Research

CRT was introduced in the field of education through a seminal article published by Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995). As noted previously, CRT is both a theory and a methodology to analyze the experiences of students of color in US schools, particularly in K-12 settings. For example, while research shows increasing ethnic and racial diversity in PK-12 schools, students of color in PK-12 are still underrepresented. Research also demonstrates that students of color in these schools have disproportionately fewer resources, limited access to advanced placement courses, and lower standardized test scores than their white counterparts (Welton & Martinez, 2013).

To summarize, CRT reveals not only an increasingly diverse population in PK-12 education but along with it the continuing challenge of imbalanced standardized test scores,

disproportionate graduation rates, and anemic post-secondary attainment for higher education. CRT is useful to explore the obstacles to students of color and has become a widely used analytical tool for addressing school inequities in PK-12.

Yet many of the challenges for students of color in PK-12 carry into higher education: “Well into the 21st century, racism remains a problem in higher education” (ASHE, 2015, p. 16). Such a pervasive presence of dysfunctional race relations in education, for which CRT may serve as a worthy remedy, includes, as mentioned above, the significant underrepresentation of ethnic minorities and students of color compared to white students from kindergarten through college, particularly in PWI. Underrepresentation may also contribute to the low proportion of students of color who actually matriculate from high school and obtain college degrees. However, as Solórzano and Villapando (1998) maintain, CRT may be a promising tool to investigate and document race-based issues:

How can we better understand the persistently low proportions of Students of Color graduating from US colleges and universities? One approach to answering this question is to examine the barriers Students of Color experience on the road to the baccalaureate. One theoretical framework that can be used to identify and explain the obstacles is ‘critical theory’.... [W]ithin the framework of critical theory, marginality can be a useful construct in understanding the problem of underrepresentation for Students of Color (p. 212).

These challenges—and related others—should concern educators as well as policy-makers at all levels, particularly given the increasing diversity in classrooms across the nation.

Because the barriers Solórzano and Villapando refer to are commonplace for students of color, one of my objectives with this research is to demonstrate the potential of CRT to address and mitigate problems such as underrepresentation in the classroom and graduation rates disproportionate to Whites, particularly in PWIs.

CRT has been the lens through which I have experienced graduate school, as have many students of color in higher education. CRT and CRM provide a framework to share challenges and opportunities with the aforementioned tenets, which focus on specific ethnic and cultural minorities. One of these is the challenge of dominant ideology; this element focuses on educational institutions and argues for non-biased equal opportunity and race-neutral educational research institutions:

Because CRT was initially geared toward critiquing the slow pace of racial reform promised by the civil rights legislation of the 1960s, the tendency was to focus on issues related to African-American citizens at the expense of other marginalized groups, including women, Latinx, Native Americans, and Asian Americans (Kumasi, 2011, p. 208).

CRT is relevant to my work and the work of other educators attempting to help students of color because this theory, with its accompanying methodology, is a mechanism to study, quantify, and influence policy in order to mitigate racism in PK-12 and higher education. Furthermore, an ambitious mentoring program among peers of students of color, coupled with a strong foundation in the CRT framework, are components that will provide a social support system as racism persists in PK-12 and higher education.

Latina/o Critical Theory (LatCrit) and CRT

The expansion of CRT to embrace and understand the varied and shared experiences of many different 'othered' groups provides specific sub-variants of the CRT lens. In terms of understanding racial structures among African-American, Latinx, Asian, and Native-American students (TribalCrit), CRT has expanded to include theories such as Latina/o critical theory, or LatCrit. "LatCrit is a branch of CRT that is guided by these same tenets [as those of CRT for African-American students], but also acknowledges issues specific to Latinx communities such as immigration status, language, ethnicity, and culture. LatCrit analyzes the experiences of

Latinx and the treatment this ethnic group receives (Perez, 2011, p. 381). As summarized by Basile & Lopez (2015):

Multiple scholars have utilized CRT to better understand racial structures among African-American, Latinx and Asian-American students and communities, and to expose the ways practices, policies, and procedures in education (such as color-blind approaches to teaching) have worked to maintain and expand racism and racialized power hierarchies (Jain, Herrera, Bernal, & Solórzano, 2011; Kohli & Solórzano, 2012; Leonard & Evans, 2008; Leonardo, 2011, 2013; Martin, Gholson, & Leonard, 2010; Solórzano & Ornelas, 2002; Yosso & Ravine, 2007; Yosso, 2005; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009) (p. 522).

To use CRT and LatCrit together as a lens for educational research, Bernal (2002) adapts and borrows from both groups of theorists. LatCrit is used as a lens for educational researchers to extrapolate Latinx' specific experiences in education and other disciplines. Therefore, as a Latino doctoral student in a PWI who is examining the lived experiences of Latinx students, it is quite relevant for me to use elements of LatCrit and CRT in my approach due to the narrative and storytelling components common to both. For example, Solórzano and Yosso (2001) have examined the role of CRT in graduate education among Latinx students. They state, "In order to integrate critical race theory with the experiences of Chicanas and Chicanos in graduate education, we use a technique that has a tradition in the social sciences, humanities, and the law—storytelling" (p. 475). Solórzano and Yosso (2001) also focus on the use of counter-storytelling by students sharing among themselves and mentors their experiences of marginalization as Latinx graduate students.

CRT Methodologies

Utilizing CRT theory, history, and issues that students of color encounter, my research examined the application of such knowledge to improve the racial climate in schools and colleges. Chapman (2008), Ladson-Billings (1998); Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995); Lynn (2004), and Solórzano & Yosso (2001) have applied CRT to the field of education research with

the express goal to examine issues of race, class, and gender in educational settings (p. 45).

DeCuir & Dixon (2004) concur with this strategy: "In order to fully utilize CRT in education, researchers must remain critical of race, and how it is deployed. CRT implies that race should be the center of focus and charges researchers to critique school practices and policies that are both overtly and covertly racist (p. 30).

Implementing proactive remedies is problematic without accompanying resources. During my time in a PWI as a graduate student of color, capital resource allocation for graduate students on campus was lacking. For graduate students of color, there are different areas of support compared to our undergraduate counterparts mainly because of the disparity of populations between undergraduates compared to graduate students.

In like manner, by applying CRT concepts to extract the narratives and counterstories of students of color and their experiences in education, specifically higher education, I developed the idea of mentoring to support students of color at PWIs. As described before, it is essential to understand and share the applicable nature of CRT with race and racism that begins in PK-12 education for students of color and continues throughout higher education. The application of CRT to promote change in racial climate and policy is known as Critical Race Methodology (CRM). Solórzano & Yosso (2002) characterize CRM as a

[T]heoretically grounded research approach that seeks to accomplish the following: (a) center race and racism in all aspects of the research process; (b) challenge traditional paradigms, texts, and theories that have been used to explain Students of Color's experiences; (c) provide a liberatory or transformative solution to oppression and subordination (racism, genderism, classism); (d) focus on Students of Color's racialized, gendered, and classed experiences; and (e) apply an interdisciplinary knowledge base, drawing from ethnic studies, women's studies, sociology, history, humanities, and law to develop an enhanced understanding of Students of Color's experiences in higher education (p. 10).

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is another thread in the critical race theory framework that provides an additional voice or means to analyze minorities in spaces where large power structures exist. The term “intersectionality” was introduced by scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in her 1989 essay “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color.” In her essay, Crenshaw used the idea of intersectionality “as a way to articulate the interaction of racism and patriarchy generally. I have also used intersectionality to describe the location of women of color both within overlapping systems of subordination and at the margins of feminism and anti-racism” (Crenshaw, 1989, p.12).

Crenshaw’s primary scholarly interests center around race and the law, and she is an intellectual leader in Critical Race Theory, having “worked extensively on a variety of issues pertaining to gender and race in the domestic arena including violence against women, structural racial inequality, and affirmative action” (AAPF, 2017). Crenshaw’s work has a broad range of reach on race matters including structural racial inequality and social inclusion. The aforementioned areas constitute work that has informed my research and continues to support solutions to address many of the barriers students of color are facing at PWIs. Crenshaw writes, “I want to suggest that intersectionality offers a way of mediating the tension between assertions of multiple identity and the ongoing necessity of group politics.” (1989, p.12). I incorporated Crenshaw’s work on intersectionality in my survey using specific questions tailored to address racial systems and marginalization of students of color on structural inequality.

Inequality, such as the discrimination that students of color experience face both covertly or overtly, is a major issue on college campuses. “As such, while intersectionality might not be a perfect tool, recognizing its uses and limitations does help us to ensure that we aren’t

overlooking the challenges people belonging to multiple minorities face as we move toward the goal of a fairer and more equal society” (Williams, 2014. “The Modern Civil Rights Movement,” para. 4).

Intersectionality provides insight into several social determiners for minorities and students of color. These include socioeconomic status, gender, linguistic development, race, and ethnicity. Many of these factors are variables that influence how graduate students of color may be perceived in school—and these experiences may be overlooked by an advisor or professor.

Crenshaw (2015) posted an article stating the importance of intersectionality in the *Washington Post* titled “Why Intersectionality Can’t Wait,” promoting inclusion. Crenshaw elegantly defines the use of intersectionality:

Intersectionality is an analytic sensibility, a way of thinking about identity and its relationship to power. Originally articulated on behalf of black women, the term brought to light the invisibility of many constituents within groups that claim them as members, but often fail to represent them. Intersectional erasures are not exclusive to black women. People of color within LGBTQ movements; girls of color in the fight against the school-to-prison pipeline; women within immigration movements; trans women within feminist movements; and people with disabilities fighting police abuse — all face vulnerabilities that reflect the intersections of racism, sexism, class oppression, transphobia, able-ism and more. Intersectionality has given many advocates a way to frame their circumstances and to fight for their visibility and inclusion (para. 7).

Crenshaw’s call to “fight for visibility and inclusion” for graduate students of color on PWIs only emphasizes the importance for graduate students of color to have a voice and for understanding the social factors make intersectionality an important tool for vulnerable and at-risk graduate students of color.

CRT: Counter-Storytelling and Narration Among Students of Color

CRT in part attempts to mitigate the climate of racism in higher education by affording students of color opportunities to share experiences with other students of color using counter-storytelling and narration. Indeed, narratives are a vital piece to CRT because they foreground

experiences from minority groups and students of color against a dominant culture. For example, narrating my own experiences as a researcher of color provides insight through counter-storytelling by uncovering a lack of culturally relevant resources for graduate students of color.

Another way of looking at counter-storytelling is as a method of "telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (i.e. those on the margins of society)" (Yosso, Villapando, Bernal, & Solórzano, 2001 p. 94). Relating experiences of students and researchers of color is valuable and even necessary as they face racism at PWIs. "As a normative experience, the narrative colors students' lives in their daily practices. It is in some senses, a state-of-being, or way of doing graduate school" (Gildersleeve, Croom, & Vasquez, 2011, p.107).

Narratives highlight and validate the micro- and macro-aggressions that occur for students of color; unfortunately, these may occur daily from different sources, such as the institution, the faculty, and non-minority students. "From a temporal analysis, we find that the narrative appears to stick out in students' everyday lives at particular moments when they simply cannot or will not tolerate the incongruence between their own experiences and what appear to be the dominant experiences of going to graduate school" (Gildersleeve, et al, 2011, p.106). By narrating stories with other students of color as well as mentors, students are better able to address race and racism. Romero and Margolis (2005) cite additional advantages to counter-storytelling:

Critical race counter-stories can serve several pedagogical functions: (1) they build community among those at the margins of society; (2) they can challenge the perceived wisdom of those at society's center; (3) they can open new windows into the reality of those at the margins by showing the possibilities beyond the ones they live and by showing that they are not alone in their position; (4) they can teach others that by combining elements from both the story and the current reality, one can construct another world that is richer than either the story or the reality alone; and (5) they can provide a context to understand and transform established belief systems (p.124).

As Romero and Margolis point out, when students of color share experiences of racism, isolationism, discrimination and bias in educational settings with other students of color, a common sense of community and resolve develops. These encounters may be particularly challenging for ethnic minorities in PWI as they attempt to flourish in a non-minority campus climate. Through counter-storytelling among students of color who feel marginalized, CRT can extract the experiences of students of color and examine more clearly the interactions and relationships generated or damaged by specific encounters and experiences students of color have among faculty, administration, and students.

Counter-storytelling is a form of expression for individuals that provides a needed outlet for their experiences and that, as such stories accumulate, contributes a broader view of any engrained racism on campus. In a critical race analysis of doctoral education, Gildersleeve et al, interviewed 22 graduate students of color (8 Latinx and 12 African Americans) on their everyday practices in higher education navigating through graduate school. The narrative and research was grounded in critical race theory. Based on their interviews with these students, they concluded that reducing “the long standing inequities of participation in higher education and to doctoral education as a more socially just cultural experience for all students must be a systemic effort, and it must recognize the everyday instantiations of race, racialization, and racism that our extended definition of the ‘Am I going crazy?!’ narrative documents (p. 110). Identifying, encouraging, and acknowledging this narrative voice is essential if students of color, administrators, faculty, and other higher education stakeholders seek opportunities to provide support.

In addition to being a valuable tool of CRT to create opportunities for students of color to share their experiences and provide others insight into their worlds, counter-storytelling can be

used as a metric to assess the degree to which their educational institution has effectively addressed racism. Hiraldo (2010) explains:

The use of counter-stories in analyzing higher education's climate provides faculty, staff, and students of color a voice to tell their narratives involving marginalized experiences. Counter-stories can assist in analyzing the climate of a college campus and provide opportunities for further research in the ways that an institution can become inclusive and not simply superficially diverse. This goal is important to keep in mind when institutions work toward creating a diverse college community. An institution can aim to increase the diversity of the campus by increasing the number of students of color. However, if the institution does not make the necessary changes to make the campus climate inclusive, the institution will have a difficult time maintaining diversity (p. 54).

CRT, its associated analytical paradigm of CRM, and the specific tools of narration and counter-storytelling, in conjunction with aggressive mentoring, provide the framework for my research and methodology.

The qualitative nature of counter-storytelling and narration has given rise to some resistance among some scholars. Because the idea of sharing personal narratives regarding racism and race as well as other controversial topics is qualitative, educational and non-educational institutions may not feel comfortable investigating and applying CRT. Abrams and Moio (2009), reflecting on this issue, state, "Based on their personal or professional backgrounds, educators may not be ready to deal with the type of intense personal or interpersonal reactions that can arise when engaging in discussion about racism or other oppressions" (p. 248). Ladson-Billings (2005) also sounds a cautionary note: "I sometimes worry that scholars who are attracted to CRT focus on storytelling to the exclusion of the central ideas such stories purport to illustrate. Thus, I clamor for richer, more detailed stories that place our stories in more robust and powerful contexts" (p.117).

I believe other scholars in addition to Abrams and Moio may undervalue CRT's method of counter-storytelling and narration among students of color, and words such as 'race' and

'racism' may prevent proactive discussion. However, the discussion of race and racism stems from one of the five tenets of CRT: the inter-centricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination, in which race and racism is the core component to experiences of people of color. As a result of their discomfort, some scholars may tend to limit discussion on race and racism—a topic they perceive as sensitive. But such limitations may have deleterious effects, according to Akom (2008):

By downplaying the importance of race and racism, reproduction theories offer little hope for challenging and changing the most repressive features of our public educational system. By ignoring or minimizing race and gender these theories unknowingly provide a rationale for not addressing the concrete needs of Black people/people of color in educational settings (p. 208).

Certainly, scholarly criticism of CRT's focus on race and racism is expected, as is any critique of new theories, frameworks and methodologies. However, extracting from and sharing personal experiences with people of color in a multitude of disciplines is a cornerstone of the CRT philosophy, and such counter-storytelling would lead to constructive dialogue among scholars and research subjects as well. Akom's observations above remind me, as an academic of color, that although sharing counterstories and narratives may receive criticism, it takes courage for students of color to share their lived and negative experiences. As he points out,

Exposing one's private experiences to public debate can be difficult, especially when those experiences reveal visible and invisible pain and suffering about the ways in which racial discrimination permeates our everyday existence as Black people/people of color in America and beyond (p. 218).

This literature review includes qualitative-based interviews and a quantitative survey to advocate a collaborative approach for CRT. For a person of color such as I, counter-storytelling is a tool in CRT that is also linked to my approach to and research in mentoring because it provides a qualitative view of my experiences in a PWI. This included open-ended questions with narratives to enhance the data and explore different perceptions. I also offered participants an opportunity

to conduct one on one interviews with me; unfortunately, none of the participants elected to pursue that option. That being said, I received rich data with my CRT infused open ended questions. In my quantitative research, I incorporated a survey highlighting the idea of mentoring by connecting counter-storytelling with a data-centric study. The summary of the data is presented in Chapter five. The survey analysis balanced qualitative and quantitative data rather than overemphasizing the use of narratives or storytelling (Ladson-Billings, 2005). I adopted his survey from a comparable study conducted at Texas A&M, Corpus Christi and tailored my questions to augment the CRT research. Each of these methodologies allowed me to foreground participants' own voices.

Campus Racial Climate, Narrative, and Counter-Storytelling in CRT

As discussed earlier, narration and counter-storytelling are two components of CRT which, as methodologies in higher education, work to make visible the race-based experiences of students of color. The concept of 'shared voices' is a powerful approach to begin to overcome racial barriers. 'Shared voices' is an umbrella term to describe support networks, resources, and mentorship opportunities for students of color. Such resources help portray a more complete picture of the transformative solutions described by Solórzano & Yosso (2002). Speaking of the value of experiential resources of students of color, Ledesma & Calderon (2015) note:

Narratives that center the voice of minoritized communities help honor and validate the experiences of those too often silenced or cast to the margins, while also interrogating presumed pedagogical canons. This amplification of usually silenced voices has made the tenet of honoring experiential knowledge one of the most popular CRT tenets for postsecondary Critical Race scholarship (p. 217).

Problems in higher education institutions, as Patton (2016, p. 325) argues, are varied and complex, but essentially they are bred on campus when PWIs minimize the voice of minority and marginalized students of color, creating a racially negative climate. Likely through the

colorblindness of administrators, cultural artifacts impact graduate students of color who feel singled out as only meeting affirmative action guidelines. As a result, many graduate students of color often work twice as hard to disprove and justify their accomplishments just to be on equal footing with their non-minority counterparts. Patton (2016) notes that ethnic misperceptions and stereotypes persist: “Asian-American students are treated as model minorities, a divisive tactic rooted in exceptionalism, whereas Latinx are ‘Mexicanized’ and presumed to be ‘illegal aliens.’ Native-American students are reduced to mascots and historic relics” (p. 326).

Such a racial climate is uncovered through voices, narratives, and counter-storytelling, cornerstones of Critical Race scholarship. Harper (2012) provides a strong perspective on higher education scholarship in his comparative analysis of researchers in CRT, who, he believes, are “authentically interested in narrowing racial gaps, diversifying college and university campuses, and doing research that informs the creation of environments that no longer marginalize persons of color” (p. 25). As a person of color in higher education, I have also highlighted narrative and counter-storytelling as they assist students of color in higher education navigating their way through the sometimes-hostile climate of college and university campuses.

The benefits of counter-storytelling for students of color in higher education are described by the research of Solórzano and Yosso (2001) in the example of a Latinx graduate student. Solórzano and Yosso wrote this piece to explore how to better understand the experiences of Chicano and Chicana students in graduate education. The CRT methodology of Solórzano and Yosso is concise, structured, and straightforward when they analyze undergraduate and graduate students of color finding themselves in this situation. Solórzano and Yosso’s process starts by “first defining critical race theory; second, documenting critical race theory’s genealogy; third, discussing the meaning and application of critical race method; and

finally, sharing a counterstory of the Chicana and Chicano graduate school experience” (p. 471). Their methodology provided a functional format to direct my dissertation. The goal is to combine research and history, i.e., the trans-disciplinary perspective of CRT, as well as the tenet of the centrality of experiential knowledge using counter-storytelling to align the interwoven themes of students of color in higher education using a CRT and LatCrit framework. Solórzano and Yosso (2001) want “to add to the tradition of counter-storytelling by illuminating the lives of Chicano and Chicana graduate students, who are often at the margins of graduate education” (p. 477).

The tenet of centrality of experiential knowledge is reflected throughout my research as a graduate student of color in a PWI. As such, I can use this tenet through my own experiences, using storytelling and narratives to understand and analyze racial perceptions on campus. As a student of color, I understand the narrative side of CRT and extended the opportunity to other graduate students of color by creating a qualitative/quantitative survey designed to capture perceptions and experiences at other PWIs. I examined all these stories to identify a trend or need for appropriate services in a system where graduate students of color are attempting to navigate. As a Latino graduate student of color, I explored the CRT framework further from a racial perspective developed by CRT scholars under LatCrit or Latinx critical race theory.

Mentorship and CRT

As a graduate student of color, I reflect on the underrepresentation documented in previous chapters of this dissertation, which seems to highlight the need to create more intentional strategies to connect students of color with like-experienced older mentors, such as teachers. Gay (2000), in a CRT-based study analyzing the impact of underrepresentation and marginalized students of color in a middle school music program, suggests:

Students feel a need to have a personal connection with teachers. This happens when teachers acknowledge their presence, honor their intellect, respect them as human beings, and make them feel like they are important. In other words, they empower students by legitimizing their ‘voice’ and visibility (p. 49).

As Gay suggests, there needs to be a personal connection with teachers who respect students’ cultural and ethnic backgrounds and life experiences. As a researcher, I want to connect the need for personal relationships in the form of a mentoring program, using CRT to uncover the challenges for students of color from higher education.

Such a mentoring program makes sense given that research in K-12 education has revealed significant attainment and achievement gaps for students of color because of the overall scarcity of resources for low-income schools. Given the growth of students of color, according to the National Center of Education Statistics in 2014 study by Howard and Navarro (2016), the direct correlation between the achievement gap and increased classroom diversity has important implications for education attainment and postsecondary transferability. Stovall’s (2006) research, in which he implemented CRT constructs in a high school program, led to the conclusion that creating a space where students of color can express themselves would be beneficial. Doing so, he states, “provided a space where the voices and the racialized experiences of students of color were validated” (p. 243). Stovall advocates providing a mentor or mentoring program where students of color feel safe to share their feelings and a space to have a true and honest dialogue. As a student of color who also had to navigate through multiple worlds in my journey in academia, I relied on a personal mentor to connect with our student communities, both undergraduate and graduate. Given enough capital support, a mentorship program is one element that can align with the use of CRT and bridge experiences of students of color in higher education.

Solórzano and Delgado-Bernal (2001), in their article on CRT, Latcrit, and

transformational resistance, pose two additional definitions for role models and mentors. The authors define transformational role models and mentors as “visible members of one’s own racial/ethnic and/or gender group who actively demonstrate a commitment to social justice, whereas transformational mentors use the aforementioned traits and their own experiences and expertise to help guide the development of others” (p. 322). Studies have shown that major stress among minorities on higher education campuses has resulted in recommendations that only cope with versus concentrate on alleviating racist institutional practices (Harper, 2012, p. 18).

Identifying a mentor or role model to address the stress or sense of isolationism characterizing students of color is a step to counteract the influence of engrained institutional practices. Bernal (2002) believes that although “students of color are holders and creators of knowledge, they often feel as if their histories, experiences, cultures, and languages are devalued, misinterpreted, or omitted within formal educational settings” (p. 106). In a study reported in the Association for the Study of Higher Education (2015, p. 21), Harper and McCoy provide an in-depth CRT analysis accompanied by a phenomenological approach at two PWIs, where one of the PWIs was described as an “extreme” predominantly white institution (EPWI). The term EPWI is defined as an institution where:

Students, faculty, and administration of color are grossly underrepresented, the institution possesses a history of racism and exclusionary policies and practices, the local community is overwhelmingly White and offers limited resources and/or services for People of Color, and there are no ‘visible’ Communities of Color (ASHE, 2015, p. 20).

Both Harper (2012) and McCoy (2014) found similar results in the experiences of students of color. Harper’s study found that “despite their academic, co-curricular, and athletic successes, the participants experienced racism and strategically navigated their respective intuitions by engaging with same-race peers and publicizing their educational achievements to White people who possessed deficit perspectives” (p. 390). In McCoy’s research, his participants were first-

generation students. McCoy's student sample "described family members' high educational expectations, a difficult admission process (due to the absence of mentoring and a lack of knowledge about the process), overcoming challenging transitions (socially and culturally), and culture shock" (p. 155). My dissertation finds McCoy's study valid based on my own similar experiences entering a doctoral program as a first-generation student in a PWI. I was the only ethnic minority in my cohort, and my lack of knowledge about the process of applying to graduate school, what classes to choose from, whom to reach out to and connect with, the lack of a robust mentoring program, and the difficult transition from a cultural perspective were challenging, confusing, and distressing.

I believe a mentorship program would provide a resource for students of color in PWIs. Mentorship is facilitated when the mentor grasps the student of color's cultural origin, language, background, and experiences from his or her time in K-12 to post-secondary work. As a concrete test of CRT, Park, Yoon, and Crosby (2016) examined a mentoring pilot project. They ascertained whether longer participation in a mentoring program resulted in better developmental outcomes. They found "significant benefit can be gained by mentees in cross-race/ethnicity matches if mentors are provided with sufficient training and support on issues of cultural awareness, uniqueness, and diversity" (p. 88). Along the same lines, Harper (2012) examined a comparative study among Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) and PWIs and found that "[W]ithout exception, these studies amplified the educational advantages conferred on Black students who attend HBCUs. In comparison to PWIs, satisfaction and sense of belonging were higher on HBCU campuses, which researchers used to explain outcomes differences" (p. 19). This example was useful because my study focuses on experiences, CRT, and the impact of mentoring on graduate students of color in PWIs. I see mentoring as a support mechanism for

students of color who do not have resources such as faculty of color in HBCUs or Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs).

In addition to leading to improved academic experiences, mentoring with a view toward extracting students of color's narratives and counterstories may sharpen their social perceptions. Solórzano and Delgado-Bernal (2001) report that mentoring is a useful component to enhance awareness and social justice. The authors used CRT and Latcrit with a construct of transformation resistance when they examined a particular event in US history for Latinx in education. The authors interviewed two women who participated in the East Los Angeles high school walkouts regarding a UCLA Chicana and Chicano studies protest in 1968. Solórzano and Delgado-Bernal found in the case of these two women that mentoring, using their narratives, was a strong motivation to protest. "In the case of Chicanas who participated in the 1968 school walkouts, the oral history data show that personal and family background and mentors and role models greatly contributed to their awareness and motivation toward social justice (Delgado-Bernal, 1997) taken from (Solórzano and Delgado-Bernal, 2001, p. 322).

Solórzano (2009), a leading CRT scholar in the field of education, suggests that the critical race researchers should always be looking for strategies that can inform CRT research, pedagogy, and practice. Another example illustrating the importance of mentoring, where CRT was used as a framework, comes from a study by Barger and Hummel (2015). In their study, a narrative mechanism derived from CRT chronicled the experiences of nursing students of color. One student, who was from Nigeria and who graduated in 2008, shared an insightful view of the negative feelings experienced in her program. As a student of color, she felt forced to proceed with caution during group assignments and discussions, and her suggestions were minimized or not taken seriously. She also felt like an outsider coming from another country (p. 42-43). In one

disturbing instance, an instructor told her, "This how we do it. You are in America now!" (p. 42).

Unfortunately, many individuals or institutions perhaps believe that assimilation is the answer if students of color are to be successful. "Methods by which this cultural assimilation may take place include learning English at the expense of losing Spanish and becoming an individual 'American' success story by loosening or cutting family and community ties" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 31). One theory argues for assimilation of students of color into the mainstream culture in order for them to succeed (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002. p. 31). However, assimilation is counterproductive because students of color may lose the only support network and identity they have to connect to real experiences. In the Barger and Hammel (2015) article, cultural assimilation was not the answer because they found success by identifying mentors in the program. One student of color was mentored by a faculty of color and shared her positive relationship in the program. Barger and Hammel (2015) state: "Most important was the Native-American professor who had been instrumental in helping Vanita overcome the challenges she experienced in her nursing program. Vanita explained that because this professor was also Native-American, she was supported by someone who understood her, and it made a difference in her success (p. 44).

The findings of Barger and Hummel (2015) confirm the value of interaction between graduate students of color through mentoring, narrative, and counter-storytelling. They clearly identify interpersonal interaction as "a critical element of a positive educational experience for students of color [that] merits further examination" (p. 45). By researching CRT and analyzing different frameworks such as counter-storytelling, or particularly the tenet of the centrality of experiential knowledge, I provide a bridge between the root cause of obstacles identified by narrative and counterstories of students of color—particularly graduate students of color—and

possible areas of support and solutions, such as mentoring.

Applying these strategies specifically to Latinx, Bernal (2002) interviewed and analyzed over 50 Chicana/Chicano counterstories describing their experiences in higher education. Her research indicated:

[T]he students develop tools and strategies for daily survival in an education system that often excludes and silences. In fact, the communication, practices, and learning that occur in the home and community can be viewed as a cultural knowledge base that helps students survive the daily experiences of racism, sexism, and classism. (p.113)
Another instrument of support related to mentoring is the idea of using faculty as a 'bridge' to the students of color. This approach is developed by Yoder (2001):
The theme of inclusion aligns with the 'bridging approach' to teaching students with varied ethnic backgrounds. A bridging faculty is committed to preserving the cultural or ethnic identity of students and providing a safe learning environment that honors differences. Bridging faculty also help students cope with barriers to their education, help them navigate conflict, and work collaboratively (p.45).

As mentioned before, I identified support systems such as mentoring for daily survival of students of color on campuses of higher education and to prevent minorities, specifically Latinx, from feeling isolated. "Latinx foster academic and social counter-spaces in which they build a culturally supportive community and develop skills to critically navigate between their worlds of school and home" (Yosso, T. J., Smith, W. A., Ceja, M., & Solórzano, D. G. (2009), p. 660).

Curiously, the concept of mentoring may be well-received by graduate students of color, particularly Latinx, who are perhaps culturally predisposed, as confirmed by Villapondo's (1996) national research work reported in Bernal (2002). Villapondo found that "in comparison to White students, Chicana/Chicano students enter college with higher levels of altruism, stronger interest in pursuing careers serving their communities, and stronger interests in 'helping their communities'" (p. 114).

Experiences of students of color in higher education have been and continue to be difficult for many underrepresented minority populations in PWIs. In order to support graduate

students of color and become successful mentors of their own students of color, higher education institutions can provide a sustainable and resourceful mentoring component. This idea is confirmed in a study by Santos and Reigadas (2002) on the role of student-faculty mentoring, where the researchers found a positive correlation for students of color and their mentoring counterparts:

The purpose of this study was to understand the student-faculty mentoring process and how mentoring facilitates Latinx students' adjustment to college. Thirty-two Latinx students participating in a university Faculty Mentoring Program (FMP) were surveyed. The findings showed that (a) students experienced an increase in college self-efficacy and academic goal definition as a result of participating in the FMP; (b) students with same-ethnic mentors perceived them to be significantly more supportive in furthering their personal and career development and reported significantly greater program satisfaction than non-matched students; and (c) frequency of student-mentor contact was positively correlated with students' adjustment to college, perceived mentor supportiveness, and program satisfaction (p. 40-50).

Conclusion

CRT can help open doors to uncover the educational struggles of students. From a K-12 perspective, the struggle for parents to register their children through waitlists at high performing schools is common in today's K-12 landscape. One can uncover the underrepresentation of students of color at high-performing schools by contrasting them with inner-city, lower-performing school districts with their high levels of free and reduced lunch student population—indications of high poverty levels. “As it relates to the issue of school achievement, educational scholars have found CRT to be a powerful explanatory tool to help tease apart the intersections of race, class, and other modes of domination” (Kumasi, 2011 p. 200). I believe the connection between low-performing schools due to lack of resources and the resulting achievement gaps at the K-12 level directly contributes to the underrepresentation of students of color in higher education due to relatively lower high school graduation rates. For those who make the leap into higher education, the struggle continues with a difficult transition into PWIs. School climate,

adequate representation, and institutional structures are difficult obstacles to overcome. Ledesma and Calderon (2015) confirm the potential of CRT:

Within the span of the last two decades, Critical Race Theory (CRT) has become an increasingly permanent fixture in the toolkit of education researchers seeking to critically examine educational opportunities, school climate, representation, and pedagogy, to name a few. Scholars have looked to CRT, as an epistemological and methodological tool, to help analyze the experiences of historically under-represented populations across the PK-20 educational pipeline (p. 206).

CRT helps discover how race and racism impacts PK-12 classrooms, higher education lecture halls, policies, and campus climates. CRT encourages educators and administrators to listen to the experiences of students of color. Race and racism in education are not casual conversational topics; they are often difficult to discuss. However, CRT and its application through narration, counter-storytelling, and mentoring can provide a platform for necessary dialogue on race and education by inviting and promoting minority voices. “The use of CRT in education is no longer in its infancy. To the contrary, CRT has evolved into a type of revolutionary project” (Ledesma and Calderon, 2015, p. 218). CRT has proven to be an essential framework for underrepresented minority voices. While CRT has its detractors and imperfections, it is evolving and addressing surrounding race, racism, and social justice. Again, Ledesma and Calderon (2015) assert:

CRT recognizes and embraces the experiential knowledge of historically marginalized people. In postsecondary scholarship, this means acknowledging the power of narratives that give testimony to the experiences of historically underrepresented students, faculty, staff, administrators, et cetera. Narratives that center the voice of minoritized communities help honor and validate the experiences of those too often silenced or cast to the margins, while also interrogating presumed pedagogical canons. This amplification of usually silenced voices has made the tenet of honoring experiential knowledge one of the most popular CRT tenets for postsecondary Critical Race scholarship (p. 217).

My dissertation and literature review speak to CRT as a tool for graduate students of color that promote opportunities for growth despite the underrepresentation of students of color,

and the goal of becoming successful at PWIs through mentoring. CRT continues to foster the voice of shared experiences for minority groups in several disciplines throughout education. It has been shown to be a useful framework which, when expanded into specific racial and ethnic populations, becomes a voice for minority and marginalized individuals in education. Race and racism, coupled with underrepresentation and inequality of students of color, is a sensitive matter but becomes a subject that needs to be discussed and addressed. This is why CRT is relevant for educators, faculty, and administrators of PWIs. I advocate CRT as an analytical tool to mirror stories and narratives of students of color in higher education. I believe extracting counterstories can provide the necessary guidance to support a robust and evidence-based mentoring component that will make a positive impact in PWIs where resources are scarce for students of color. I identify and connect the mentoring components from the shared experiences to support my dissertation study regarding the impact of mentoring for graduate students of color in PWIs. Higher education is not immune from, and in fact may be complicit, in creating racial inequities in K-12 schooling. Everyone has a story to share; it is my goal to share the importance of each story using the centrality of experiential knowledge in CRT through narratives and counter-storytelling.

Statement of Positionality

CRT is a component of the overall framework in my dissertation because it provides a tool—a voice—for students of color and their experiences in education with race and racism. CRT also uses counter-storytelling or narratives as perspective for experiences of students of color. Klein (2016) discusses challenges Latinx and black students face with isolation and poverty.

Since 2001, the share of schools serving a student population that is at least 75 percent

Black or Latinx as well as the overwhelmingly poor has increased from 9 to 16 percent. In these schools, students face challenges related to both racial isolation and poverty. Latinx students in these schools sometimes face “triple segregation,” facing barriers not only associated with racial isolation and poverty, but, also with learning a new language. And the number of schools facing the worst rates of racial isolation—where 90 to 100 percent of students are Black or Latinx and low-income—has grown by 143 percent since 2001. (para. 7)

For this reason, I leverage CRT to share my triple segregation story. My family emigrated from Mexico to the United States in 1979. As part of the traditional Latinx/Hispanic culture, children from an early age (5-8) worked alongside their parents to provide for the entire family. Both my father and mother had to leave school after second grade to help their families. My brothers and sisters progressed through school, but my parents expected them to quit so they could work full time to help support the family. My brothers and sisters had a different idea; they wanted to continue their education.

Being a first-generation Latino student learning a second language and working through my undergraduate as well as my MBA and now my PhD program, I have often felt underrepresented as an ethnic minority in my graduate work. I have relied on diversity offices as well as mentors for additional support. That being said, I recognize the crucial role diversity outreach programs such as advocacy offices and mentoring programs play in universities and colleges. I have first-hand experience identifying the obstacles and successes of transitioning from an undergraduate degree program into a graduate setting at PWIs.

As I continued working toward an MBA degree, I discovered I had a passion for education. Upon completion of my master’s degree in business administration, I researched the program requirements and outcomes of doctoral work. Initial research revealed a high demand for professors at the university level in particular areas. I spoke with several of my professors who had earned doctorate degrees and who had found their career personally rewarding. More

importantly, I saw an opportunity to become a mentor for other students during my PhD work, with the goal of sharing the importance of a mentoring program that would aid students of color who are interested in graduate work.

I was accepted to a Colorado State University graduate program, where I began to understand the importance of support systems for graduate students of color such as myself. I was fortunate to receive an assistantship, and seek additional opportunities to contribute to the scholarship of graduate students of color in higher education. As a PhD student, I recognize the potential strategies of student recruitment, retention, and gradation completion for underrepresented graduate students of color.

In my personal and professional life, my experience in diversity development has been obtained through volunteering at community centers and on volunteer boards representing the professional community. I have taught numerous diversity-based courses to employees as well as community members with the goal of addressing cultural aspects of our Hispanic/Latinx community. In addition, I used my professional training to conduct similar volunteer seminars for not-for-profits who needed basic financial training. I believe the key to reaching a diverse population is through education.

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter explains the research methodology employed to address the research questions outlined in Chapter I as well as to present and analyze the results of the survey. The purpose of my research was to assess, through a carefully designed survey instrument and restricted target respondent population of graduate students of color at three higher education institutions, the role of mentoring in those students' academic experience. I wanted to determine to a high degree of accuracy the extent to which graduate students of color are aware of and take advantage of opportunities to be mentored, as well as assess any academic impacts of mentoring, and I designed my research questions accordingly. Looking forward, I hope university officials can use my findings to implement programs and strategies to reduce barriers to learning and increase the academic success of graduate students of color.

Research Design

I used a Critical Race Theory (CRT) lens to examine the experiences of mentoring and/or associations between mentor(s) or mentorship programs and graduate students of color at PWIs. Experiential knowledge and intersectionality are two elements of CRT that recognize the voices of women and men of color. Historically, many students of color have been deprived of a platform to share their experiences, and they are often lost on large campuses where graduate students of color are a minority within a larger minority group of graduate students compared to the undergraduate population. For this graduate students of color (GSC) population, CRT recognizes experiential knowledge as one mechanism by which to authenticate experiences from graduate students of color in education. CRT does this when a student illustrates this knowledge through narratives and counter-storytelling. Such experiences help clarify CRT's relation to

racial subordination. “Drawing upon the field of critical race theory (CRT) and the established theories and practices of campus design and planning, this work seeks to realign the gaze of campus communities. It examines the contemporary and historical landscapes of institutions of higher education and, guided by the tenets of CRT, suggests ways to improve understandings of campus dynamics while contributing to the design of more inclusive educational environments” (Munoz, 2009, p. 54). For example, intersectionality with graduate students of color exposes the underlying issues between students or advisors during one-on-one sessions. “CRT scholars are keen to explore how racial inequities are shaped by processes that also reflect, and are influenced by, other dimensions of identity and social structure: This is where the notion of intersectionality is crucial” (Gillborn, 2015, p.278). Mentors should recognize race inequality for graduate students of color in large academic systems and provide the needed support. The majority of students in this study identified emotional support as a high need. Using this design, the study examined graduate students’ perceptions of mentoring. In this study, I used a survey to gather quantitative and qualitative data on the relationship between the experiences of graduate students of color and the influence of mentor(s) and/or mentorship program(s) at PWIs. I analyzed these data using both statistical methods and open coding methods. This survey has been used previously in a study by Texas A&M at Corpus Christi in officials’ attempts to recruit minorities into their nursing graduate program. I modified the survey to address specific needs for this research, and the instrument used a mentoring scale to evaluate mentors or mentorship programs. Both the qualitative and quantitative findings will provide additional academic research on the impact of mentoring for graduate students of color.

Research Questions

3. To what degree do graduate students of color utilize available mentoring, both personal (faculty, advisor) and programmatic (mentoring centers) at PWI?
4. How has such mentoring influenced their academic success, their accessibility to professional opportunities, and their overall graduate school experience?

Research Approach

The following describes my research strategy. I altered an existing CSU pilot study to make it more directly relevant to my research goals and used the revised survey as the tool for the main study.

In order for my research and survey methods to effectively study graduate students of color's experiences with mentoring, I needed to carefully plan how I would solicit information, determine the timing of survey administration, accurately assess resources at hand to conduct the research, and thoughtfully determine my role and responsibilities, not only to the survey respondents but to adhere to institutional research guidelines and requirements. I also needed to carefully identify the demographics of the survey respondents as well as the impact of my survey processes on respondents. I had to define what constituted an appropriate level of response participation, create a plan for participation, and design survey questions accordingly to help solicit the level and quality of response I needed. In order to do so, I needed to set clear objectives for the survey research and develop the survey instrument itself as well as post-survey evaluation tools.

Together with the particulars of survey design and processes, I needed to be aware of the needs of graduate students of color in higher education. Doing so would help me understand the best way to collect and share information, to create opportunities for productive group dialogue.

How I engaged survey respondents by listening to and monitoring their attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions was as important as how I messaged and framed questions and conversations. I wanted to include in my investigation respondents' interests, not merely their positions on mentoring. In doing so, I needed to be discerning when responses generated a higher level of emotionally charged situations.

Ultimately, since the results of my research will assist decision-makers at higher education institutions to develop policies to address the underrepresentation of graduate students of color, I needed to determine essential participants and skill sets for organizations; define risks, benefits, and costs; and describe decision-makers' unique roles in driving diversity initiatives.

Research Sites

I conducted this study at three PWIs in Colorado. The criteria for selection were based partly on convenience: the three universities I selected were universities where I taught as an affiliate faculty member, was a former undergraduate student, or am a current PhD candidate. Not only were these sites selected based on convenience of access, but also because they identified as PWIs based on the student population demographic makeup. In addition, all three universities were accessible and provided opportunities for me to visit multicultural and graduate school program offices necessary to gain access and approval to submit the survey. I had the advantage of personal knowledge and experience with these institutions, which afforded the opportunity to conduct a comprehensive analysis with the study participants.

Population

The study's population consisted of approximately 50-75 graduate students of color at three universities in Colorado. I identified students and their mentors through the survey, which

delineates a mentor, mentoring program, and mentorship. From those graduate students of color, I classified several factors including quantitative and qualitative data through interviews.

Data Collection and Sampling

To solicit participants for the study, I contacted the appropriate graduate school and multicultural administrative offices at each institution to identify potential participants. I also accessed each institution's graduate school website and obtained permission from an administrator to access student population data. Once permission was granted, I forwarded the written approval to the IRB offices at Colorado State University. As the final step in data collecting, I delivered the survey to GSC electronically.

Study Participants

I selected participants following the guidance of personnel within and from the database of each Department for Graduate Studies (DGS). I created an email listserv using these databases by which to send an invitation to participate in a survey (Appendix A). Each university selected for the study possessed demographic and ethnic information of enrolled graduate students of color, including professional degrees. This specific demographic information was located in the Institutional Research department. The study participants were students of color enrolled in a graduate program from master's to terminal degrees.

I collected primary data from each graduate school and multicultural center including mutual acquaintances from each university that would help distribute my survey. My colleagues then disseminated my survey to their mutual academic connections providing an introductory email. A more common term to this survey approach is snowball sampling or chain-referral sampling, a sampling technique where existing study participants recruit future participants among their acquaintances. Snowball sampling is often used as a method when participants are

difficult to attract. I selected this data collection strategy after my initial attempt failed to attract a significant number of participants for my survey. By leveraging existing partnerships and multicultural centers, I received the required number of respondents to produce an adequate sample size. Through these connection points, the graduate students of color indicated their willingness to participate in the study where I conducted the mentoring survey (Appendix B) through Survey Monkey via an email link.

Limitations

Although I expected 75-100 survey responses, a limitation of this survey was the electronic method of distribution to graduate students of color. Perhaps, graduate students of color had competing priorities and were focused on their specific research and work requirements may have resulted in limited participation. This survey was only one of many solicitations that graduate students of color receive daily or weekly from other graduate students and universities requesting information and feedback. In addition to a full load of semester work and duties, the length of the survey, which required several open-ended responses, may have contributed to a low response rate. There were 36 questions, which required additional time to complete in an era when information is instantaneous, and attention spans are relatively short. In general, electronic survey response rates are traditionally low compared to paper-based surveys (Nulty, 2008).

Significance of Study

The focus of the investigation was the diversity among graduate students of color as well as the barriers and/or successes they experience through their time in graduate school. Cross-cultural research of diversity in higher education will foster greater awareness by providing programs, activities, and culturally relevant information for all internal and external stakeholders.

In addition, the results of the research determined which resources and support services such as mentoring should be offered to graduate students of color to foster success at PWIs. Evidence suggests that institutions of higher education committed to diversity translate that commitment into positive outcomes and benefits for all students (Rogers & Molina, 2006). Increasingly, institutions of higher education are embracing the need to produce culturally competent graduates.

Ethical Issues

I was responsible for distributing the survey and collecting data. I assured survey participants that all data collected would be kept anonymous. I completed the required Institutional Review Board (IRB) training and obtained approval to implement and complete the survey. Due to the electronic format of the questionnaire, all electronic data was secured. Only the advisors and myself have access to the data. The data is scheduled to be stored for the length requirements outlined in the IRB policy at Colorado State University.

Instrument Description (Content & Level of Measurement)

The survey collected characteristics on perception, sensitivity, experiences, and observations of graduate students of color pertaining to mentoring. I incorporated these characteristics into the survey for analysis to address my research questions. I report survey findings in Chapter V. The instrument explored the degree to which graduate students of color benefited from mentoring during graduate school.

I constructed the instrument (Appendix B) from two separate questionnaires measuring the impact of mentors or of mentorship programs. The original survey was designed by Sutherland, Hamilton, and Goodman (2007) from Texas A&M Corpus Christi. Sutherland and her colleagues applied their survey for a publication titled *Affirming At-Risk Minorities for*

Success (ARMS): Retention, Graduation, and Success of the NCLEX-RN (2007) from funds provided by the US Department of Health and Human Services, using a mentor and tutoring survey to examine the role of mentoring for minority students in the ARMS program.

I adapted Section 2 of the survey in Appendix B to this dissertation. I used two survey instruments to create the mentoring survey. The instrument itself consists of Likert-scale questions that measure agreement with certain statements, from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). I asked participants from three PWIs to respond to the 25-item questionnaire.

Data Analysis

I conducted my research using an electronic survey emailed to participants. Surveys sent through email have several advantages, such as reaching numerous people instantaneously with relatively low cost.

A survey is a research method for collecting information from a selected group of people using standardized questionnaires or interviews. While many people think of a questionnaire as the “survey”, the questionnaire is just one part of the survey process. Surveys also require selecting populations for inclusion, pre-testing instruments, determining delivery methods, ensuring validity, and analyzing results (Innovation, 2006, p.1).

In the following sections, I explain the survey process beginning with researching the best form for the survey, creating my questionnaire, obtaining IRB approval, soliciting respondents, gathering the data, analyzing the data and sharing my results from the survey.

Survey Research and Adaptation

In order to establish a valid and reliable survey on the impact of mentoring on graduate students of color, and to monitor and inform survey development and implementation, I followed the *Practitioner's Guide to Perception Surveys* (2012) checklist. The guide has six steps: 1) define survey objectives and target group, 2) draft survey questions, 3) pilot and re-adjust the

questionnaire, 4) select respondents and the data collection method, 5) run the survey and 6) analyze the results (p. 33). I began by researching literature surveys, mentoring practices, mentors, higher education, graduate education, diversity, affirmative action and graduate students of color. Following the research, I reviewed mentoring-based surveys specifically on diversity and improving access to higher education for students of color. I narrowed my review to surveys that would be applicable to graduate students of color. After reading peer-reviewed surveys, I identified a survey that was replicable and ascertained the outcomes I desired in my own survey. As mentioned above, I located a survey conducted by a cadre of professors at Texas A&M Corpus Christi. The title of their publication and survey was *Affirming At-Risk Minorities for Success (ARMS): Retention, Graduation, and Success of the NCLEX-RN* (2007). These professors implemented a survey to examine the role of mentoring for minority students in the ARMS program. Their goal was to determine ways to reduce attrition rates and improve enrollment for students of color in the college's nursing program. They found that mentoring was a key indicator of program success, which is also a key survey objective to achieve my research goals, and ideal for replication. I contacted the authors of the ARMS survey to seek additional information and permission to use their survey for my own research.

After receiving written approval from these professors, I tailored certain aspects of the survey to align more precisely with my research goals. In addition, I asked for additional feedback from my advisors to broaden the scope of the survey and apply a CRT perspective to connect elements of my theoretical framework. My advisors helped me incorporate and expand my survey to address CRT social factors for graduate students of color. Having received approval of my survey from my advisors, I submitted the final version to IRB for review and approval. IRB was the last step before distributing my survey to my target demographic group.

As a standard practice and prior to my survey distribution, I conducted a pre-test survey using a small group of colleagues to seek improvements. I purposely chose my pilot group participants to reflect the demographic group of my future participants. They analyzed the questions, checked for ease of access, verified the link connection, and measured average completion time for the survey. In the pre-test process, I contacted each volunteer to discuss terms and definitions and to make final adjustments. Fortunately, the feedback was positive and only minor formatting was needed.

Survey Approval through the Institutional Review Board

Prior to implementing the survey, I needed to review all policies, practices and procedures applicable to and required by IRB, including collecting survey participant personal information as well as storing and accessing survey data. One of the key IRB requirements was to obtain written approval from each PWI at which I intended to conduct the survey. During the IRB review of my survey, I contacted officials at several graduate serving institutions through telephone and several follow-up emails. I also visited colleagues at each university with whom I had previously worked to garner more support for my study and to attract eligible respondents. I shared my study proposal with several individuals from each graduate-serving institution, sent them a final draft of my survey for review, and requested written approval from each representative with authority to authorize distribution of the survey.

Having received the written approvals, IRB approved my survey. I immediately began working with appropriate graduate school organizations to allow access to participants through electronic mail. Standard practices call for an IRB letter of invitation to participate in the survey. Colorado State University provides a template that I tailored to my specifications. The letter outlined my advisor's as well as my own contact information, the extent to which anonymous

surveys respect and protect privacy laws and personal information, the respondent's role, the overall objective of the study, and the purpose of the survey. "The survey's cover letter is extremely important, as a good letter helps maximize the response rate. Low response rates present the risk that no statistically valid conclusions can be drawn from the survey results" (OECD, 2012, p. 36). After including my introductory cover letter, I forwarded my survey link for distribution to the selected institution's graduate population. My first attempt to gather the necessary number of graduate students of color survey respondents was unsuccessful; the majority of survey respondents were White with only four percent of the total respondents being graduate students of color. Even though I was able to filter my initial survey by race, the numerical sample of graduate students of color was insufficient.

After reconvening with my advisors, I adjusted priorities to spend extra time and resources focusing on multicultural centers at these universities to target my survey more precisely to graduate students of color. I reached out to representatives and colleagues at these multicultural centers through telephone and email. I explained my research process and the need for graduate students of color to complete the survey. After receiving positive feedback from colleagues and different officials at the multicultural centers, I was able to increase my sample size. In addition to the multicultural support, I leveraged the resources from the survey platform itself (Survey Monkey) to filter and collect data on graduate students of color to reach a satisfactory representative and number of respondents.

Analyzing the Data

Survey Monkey was an appropriate, user friendly and well-known survey distribution platform for this particular study. As the survey administrator, I was able to create the survey with a graduate student of color's perspective and conducted several mock surveys through the

pilot testing phase to address potential errors prior to launching the survey. I populated the questions from a Microsoft Word document onto Survey Monkey's electronic platform. A key to my survey development was providing respondents opportunities for open-ended responses as well as opportunities to share experiences, define themselves, and be interviewed. The open-ended questions solicited their definitions of mentoring and critical social factors. Because CRT promotes using qualitative responses, I intentionally provided space in the survey to encourage meaningful responses. The survey also comprised closed-ended, scaled and Likert-response questions to identify important factors for my study such as demographic, racial/ethnic, gender, mentorship resources, accessibility, connectivity, and characteristics/qualities of mentors.

After designing and launching the survey, I collected the responses in real time through updates through Survey Monkey. I kept the survey open for further submissions in order to reach an equitable representation and sample size for data collection purposes. Following 10 days with no further responses, I closed the survey and began to analyze and interpret the results. Survey Monkey has an "analyze responses" function to produce percentage distributions while summarizing the data through this function. This tool captured all responses, and created graphic question summaries for interpretation. After reviewing the data from Survey Monkey, I interpreted the responses to each question and began writing results. First, I examined patterns within the data. "Response patterns for certain questions may stand out from the others and may indicate an area for improvement" (Innovation, 2006, p.6). For example, my response rate for question 12 showed that a majority (nearly 70%) of respondents indicated they would have liked more information about mentoring at the outset of their graduate studies, thus indicating an area of potential improvement of mentoring services at the graduate level. In analyzing the results, I was careful to "interpret the survey data not as facts, but as perceptions, interpret results together

with other data sources, and understand what is behind the results to draw policy conclusions” (OECD, 2012, p. 41). I had to ensure that my demographic group knew the meaning of each question. I grappled with perceptions of each open-ended response to interpret the ideas and knowledge behind each experience they shared. That was my general approach to writing to the survey and studying the data. I needed to understand and respect the fact that many respondents addressed difficult and sensitive issues on race and racism; negative and positive experiences; and social, economic, linguistic and mentor-based relationships. To finish writing the analysis of survey, I incorporated visual representations of each graph through Survey Monkey and summarized and identified specific data pieces and patterns that deserved the reader’s attention.

Summary

Through this study, I investigated the influence of mentors or mentorship programs on graduate students of color at PWIs through statistical analysis software and qualitative interviews. I analyzed variables such as faculty accessibility, quality of communication with faculty, trust between students and their faculty advisor, and the approachability of mentors. In addition, I examined the faculty advisor’s interest in the student’s personal welfare as well as the advisor's willingness to share opportunities for professional development and career opportunities. I also wanted to examine more subjective faculty-student responses, such as the degree to which faculty and respondents interacted informally and the degree to which faculty treated respondents as junior colleagues. My research assessed peer academic support, such as the availability of study groups, social support systems, peer advice concerning academic work as well as peer advice regarding departmental policies and practices.

The goal of this study was to provide higher education administrators with best practices to explore the importance of mentoring for graduate students of color, particularly evidence-

based strategies that attract graduate students of color by incorporating mentors or mentorship programs within every department to increase retention and graduation rates among graduate students of color.

To accomplish this over-arching goal, I defined two objectives: to identify the extent of a mentor's influence on graduate students of color in PWIs and to analyze expectations graduate students of color have of their mentor or mentorship program. To meet these two objectives, I designed the survey to assess the availability of a respondent's access to adequate mentoring opportunities and the degree to which they availed themselves of those opportunities. In addition, the survey assessed how their graduate school experience with mentors influenced their study habits, enhanced their learning (as represented in part by higher grade point average), affected any connection they had with specific academic departments and other sources of academic assistance, and improved (or not) their overall graduate school experience.

CHAPTER V: RESULTS

By surveying three GSCs at three PWIs, I addressed two objectives. The first objective identified the extent of a mentor's influence by offering an anonymous survey on the topic of graduate educational achievement and mentoring. I asked graduate students of color to define mentorship based on their own criteria, both formal and informal. The second objective solicited respondents' expectations regarding mentoring beyond basic advisor/advisee guidance to explore in more depth social factors such as cultural, racial, ethnic, gender, socioeconomic, or linguistic filtered through a CRT lens. Both objectives of this study provided an opportunity to research the main problem addressed by this dissertation: GSC are underrepresented in higher education institutions compared to the overall U.S. population. The percentage of GSC remains essentially stagnant across the United States. Among minority groups, total percentage of Latinx students in particular is much higher than in the past and is continuing to increase, which reflects a positive trend for Latinx graduate students.

Under the premise of underrepresentation of students of color in higher education, two questions framed my research:

1. To what degree do graduate students of color utilize available mentoring, both personal (faculty, advisor) and programatic (mentoring centers) at PWI?
2. How has such mentoring influenced their academic success, their accessibility to professional opportunities, and their overall graduate school experience?

Mentoring in graduate school increases the success of many graduate students of color. Based on preliminary survey results explained later in this chapter, faculty and/or advisors were found to be the primary mentor(s) for graduate students. Since faculty members are directly involved in

the success of students based on facilitation of course content, they are instrumental for the mentor-mentee relationships.

Additional findings address the impact and benefit of mentoring for graduate students of color—my overall research topic. Survey results indicated students were seeking emotional support, connections with other individuals, obtaining access to professional conferences, and guidance on academic articles and projects. These findings demonstrate the need for a well-rounded mentoring approach by faculty and advisors, both academic and emotional. For those students who did not seek mentoring, nearly two-thirds felt they would have benefited. The majority (nearly 70%) of respondents indicated they would have liked more information about mentoring at the outset of their graduate studies. Based on these findings, PWIs should create a proactive, inclusive mentoring program for newly accepted graduate students of color.

Survey Responses

Fifty-seven surveys were completed. Twelve open-ended questions addressed influential mentoring and social cultural factors, including language, cultural, ethnic, gender, and racial traits of respondents. Using Survey Monkey, I determined several “Target Audience” collectors. I sent the initial survey through email to graduate students of color at three graduate serving organizations and cultural centers, with an emphasis on Latinx graduate students. However, using only email to solicit survey responses often provides a lower response total. As Stern, Bilgen, & Dillman (2014) confirm, “Achieving a high response rate by e-mail contact only is ... problematic. Specialized populations notwithstanding (e.g., attendees at conferences or recent doctoral graduates), very few email-only surveys have been found effective at achieving high response rates” (p. 287). With this in mind, I worked directly with leaders and fellow graduate students of color from cultural centers at each university, including other departments and

classes, with permission from professors to implement the survey. As a result, the response total increased from 14 to 57 participants, and the survey responses themselves became more focused, tailored, and representative. This combination yielded a more thorough understanding of the perceptions of graduate students of color at these PWIs.

Survey Analysis

The survey's 57 respondents provided a number sufficient to help address in part both the study as well as survey objectives, from which useful conclusions can be derived. The questions were of two types: open-ended and Likert-scale. Open-ended questions were imported in "question summary data" format from Survey Monkey to reproduce written responses verbatim, and Likert-scale questions were imported in their graphic representations.

Section A: Demographic/Personal

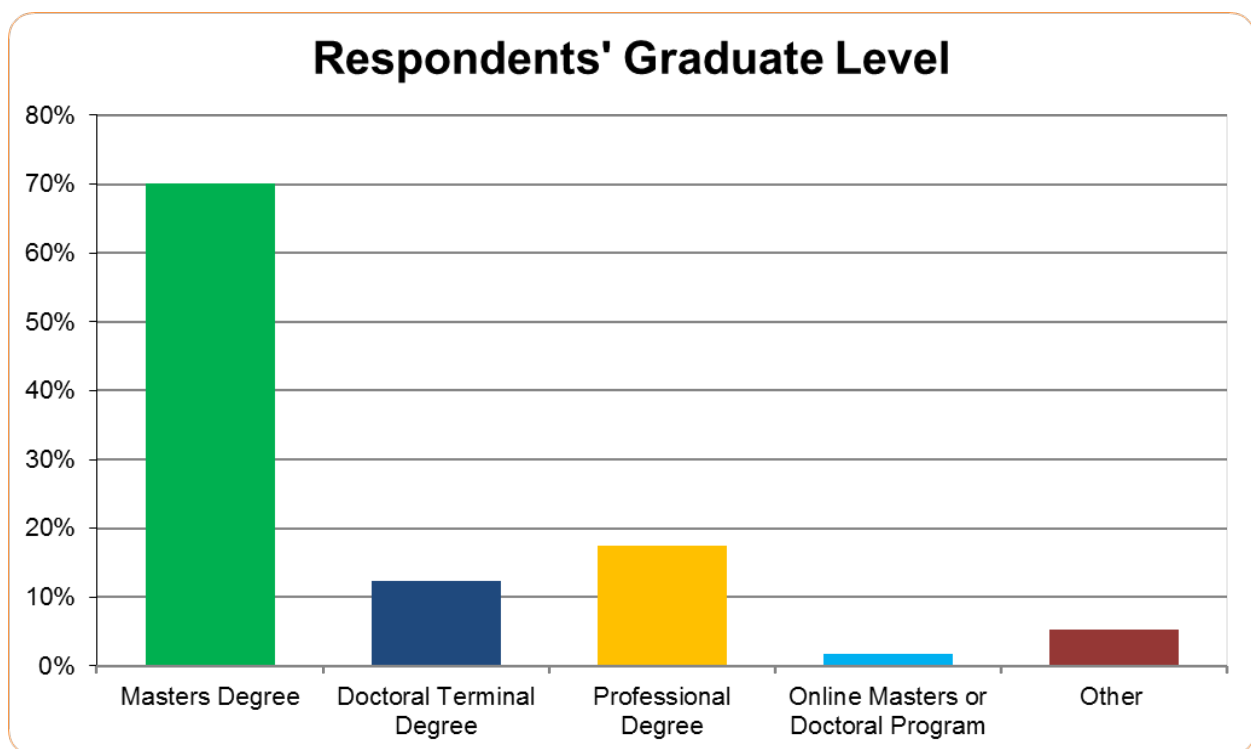


Figure 1. Respondents' graduate-level education

Data from three of the four questions soliciting personal base-line data (see Figures 1-3) show that the majority of respondents (60%) were female students pursuing Master's degrees (70%). Approximately 82% of respondents identified themselves as Latinx, Chicano/a, and/or Hispanic. The response from Latinx is favorable because the survey targeted Latinx-serving cultural centers. The survey was sent to those members on listservs who were identified by the institution as Latinx; however, the graduate students chose a variety of alternatives in Q2 for racial and ethnic identifiers. From a CRT perspective, this is a noteworthy finding. Institutional racism is a part of CRT's framework that can provide insight into the student's racial and ethnic identifiers. "Institutionalized racism is defined as the unconscious or conscious implementation of law, policies, and programs targeted at minoritized communities to limit their access and upward mobility" (Copridge, 2016, para. 7). It is possible that many of these students are afraid or hesitant to identify as a graduate students of color due to negative experiences, a toxic campus environment, or the lack of support and resources, thus blocking them from equitable opportunities. For example, "non-safe space" was a term used in a 2015 University of Colorado study conducted for improving campus climate and inclusivity. Students of color who participated in this research mentioned that such spaces were "not considered safe due to a lack of diversity and cultural responsiveness" (Pena, Gebremedhin, Kadima, Kaplan, Kirshner, & Raitz, 2015, p 12).

Extracurricular or service learning spaces that are described as non-safe lack cultural diversity, which can make it hard for a Student of Color to feel comfortable joining the space. Additionally, non-safe spaces fail to account for the fact that the campus is white-dominant and lacks cultural responsiveness or intention to support Students of Color (Pena et al., p. 3).

When institutional racism impedes academic progress through these non-safe spaces, many students may avoid being categorized or defined as marginalized. Students could feel singled out in a classroom of predominantly white students.

The fact that students who come from marginalized groups based on race, sexuality, social and economic factors have more negative experiences in the education system than White students. Critical Race Theory (CRT) provides many tools to help educators take to social justice activism, in order to create an environment that demonstrates that learning is valued for all students and ensures that all students are given an equal opportunity to obtain a quality education (Allen, 2016. "Abstract," para. 1).

Feelings of isolation, negative stereotypes and generalities around a person's race can lead to reluctance to share his or her true identity and may result in conforming to a mainstream cultural identity. All of these factors stem from institutional power structures that historically underrepresent students of color and their voices at PWIs. Education systems strive for opportunity for every student, but different ideologies too may tend to create artificial and therefore ineffective remedies for inequities. CRT argues that such superficial approaches to parity, such as color-blindness, affirmative action, and equal opportunity are inadequate as they often reflect the dominant belief system or culture. As Squire (2016) notes:

Power directly influences the ways that people are able to act and also places onto those people labels related to their ability to act in authentic ways. However, who is allowed to be authentic and by whom must be interrogated in alignment with a CRT framework of challenging dominant narratives (p.36).

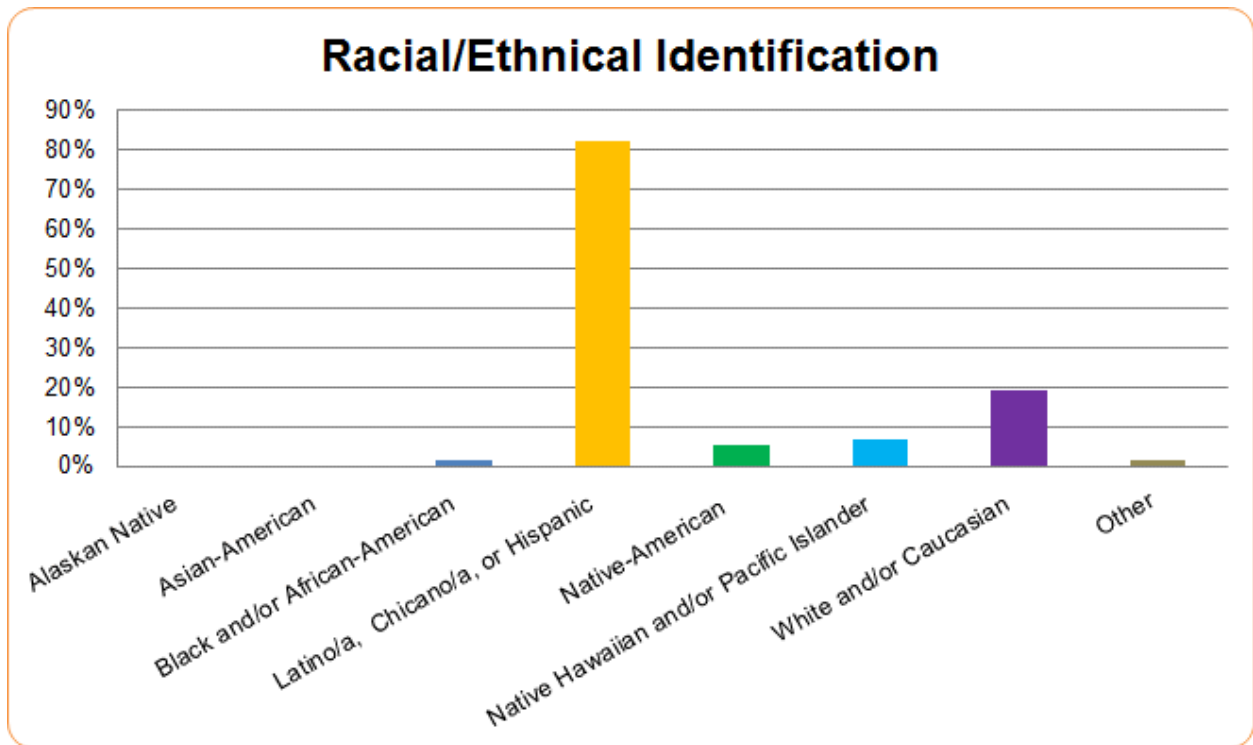


Figure 2. Respondents' ethnic identification

I attempted to structure and word the survey to afford a respondent the opportunity to identify himself or herself in his or her unique and specific way. Regardless of a respondent's decision to take advantage of this opportunity or not, CRT and the survey challenge the dominant narrative by giving a respondent this choice—to share his or her views against a prevailing system that has diminished voices for college students of color.

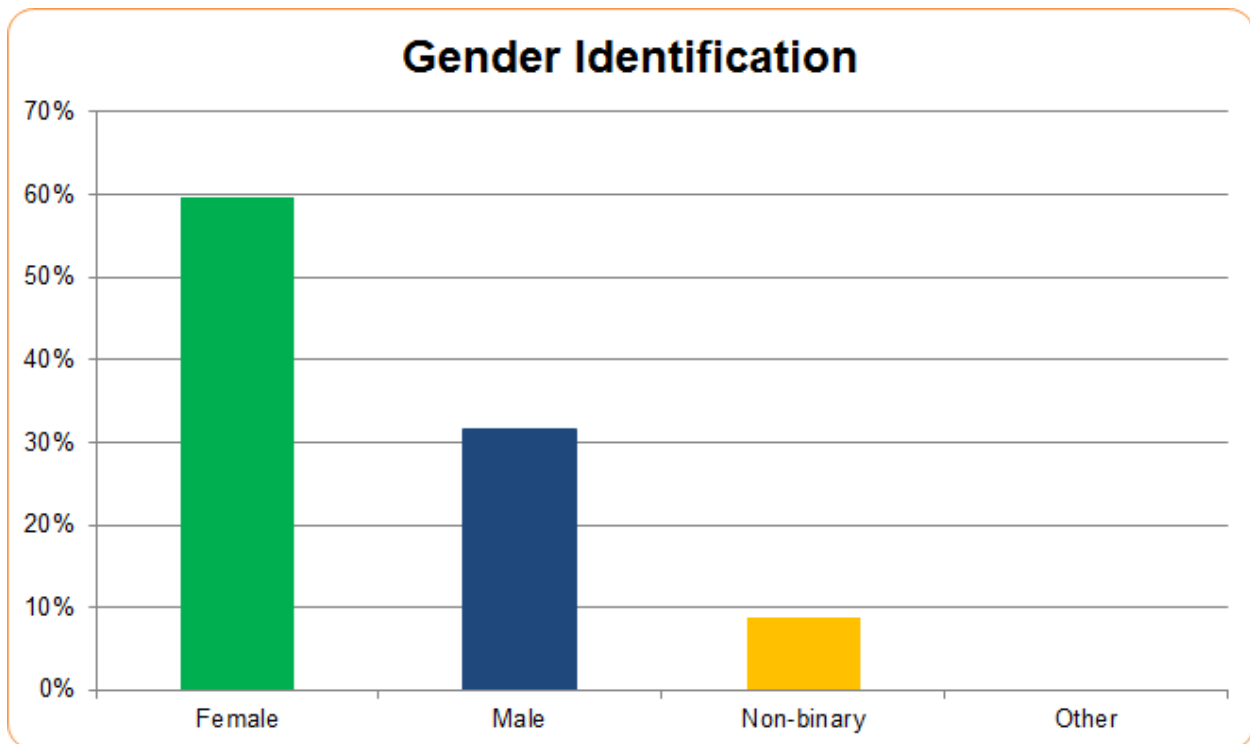


Figure 3. Respondents' gender identification

In my survey, one percent identified themselves as black/African American, 5% Native American, 7% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 19% White/Caucasian, and 1% as other. Many respondents felt free to identify themselves even though certain systems often predetermine or categorize their ethnic or racial background. This is very common among Latinx, who are often identified under a general category which does not accurately reflect their identity. In this particular survey, the results were expected, but the target audience (Latinx) elected to be identified as a different racial or ethnic group. The survey afforded respondents further opportunities to elaborate on their answers or to share more in-depth perceptions on the topic or on CRT in general.

Compared to white students' experiences in higher education, the more negative experiences of marginalized groups may find their genesis in dominant *in situ* structures or systems that dictate even the terms students of color must use when self-identifying. As an

example, multiracial Latinx may have difficulty selecting a single box because they feel most surveys use generic ‘umbrella terms such as ‘Hispanic,’ a descriptor that does not accurately reflect their multiracial and ethnic personas. Latinx students take pride with their identity and will use terms such as ‘Latinx’ to embrace multiple origins and racial backgrounds. “Examining multiple identities among Latinx students can provide insights into possible differences or inequities in educational experiences or outcomes” (Cuellar, 2018, “Identifying possible inequities among Latinx students,” para. 1). To avoid this common mistake on surveys, I provided an option for respondents to define themselves as they feel appropriate. Graduate students of color must define themselves regularly in classrooms or on college campuses when working on projects with non-minority students. When non-minority students try to fit students of color into certain categories based on race and ethnicity, students of color must go to extra lengths to explain and justify who they are. I have been approached several times during my PhD process regarding my ethnicity after others hear me speak. A frequent response is “I don’t hear an accent when you speak; I wouldn’t have known you’re from Mexico.” This remark is frustrating because it categorizes me based on my language. Many students of color, particularly Latinx, come from multiracial backgrounds and have their own view of who they are.

Latinos who identify themselves as one race (such as white or black) when asked to fit themselves into the country’s current standard racial categorization, but then say they consider being Latino as part of their racial background as well, have effectively indicated a multiracial background. That makes this group of Latinos potentially part of the mixed-race population (Pew Research Center, 2015, para. 6).

Many Latinx like to represent their multicultural heritage by acknowledging their parents’ Latin American native and cultural roots from as well as personifying their upbringing in the U.S.

Section B: Mentoring (General)

Question 4 (open-ended) asked students to provide their interpretation of, and ideal criteria, describing mentoring. Responses were brief but pointed and precise, using specific descriptors centered around the concept of *guidance* and its synonyms. Students were careful to avoid using the term itself within the definition; derivations of “to mentor,” such as “mentor” and “mentoring” are minimal. Student responses mirrored the CRT’s framework, which is, inviting both graduate students of color and faculty from unique circumstances to connect experiences through mentorship opportunities. These graduate students of color in general believed that mentoring requires a personal, on-going, consistent relationship with a junior student; that a good mentor combines his or her experience and subject-area expertise to guide (advise, counsel), challenge, and encourage the mentee through “investment” of the mentor in the mentee’s life. Included in the definitions were ideas of “supervising,” “teaching,” and “problem-solving.” One graduate student of color shared his/her definition of mentoring as “similar to big brother-big sister, an example of someone who has experienced what one is about to embark on.”

In this section, I share their narratives by linking several CRT elements to these stories. For example, one respondent offered a perspective about the relation of mentoring to a student’s mental health, a topic I have addressed as it pertains to a student’s feeling of isolation. They stated:

Mentoring is engaging in a supportive relationship with one or a few persons offering constructive criticism, [or] a listening ear as a good friend might do. However, a distance needs to be maintained as to keep a proper focus plus ensuring good ‘mental health’ for all involved. One should empower as opposed to creating a dependency.

Students of color with a diverse set of social, language, economic, and sexuality factors historically have a greater number of negative experiences within large systematic structures, such as, higher education institutions. As a result, these racially charged campus climates impact

the overall mental health wellness and success for graduate students of color in higher education. CRT promotes the use of social justice activism to provide a more equitable space for graduate students of color to receive a high quality, valued, and respected learning atmosphere. An advisor or professor rarely observes the mental health of a graduate student of color in the classroom. Thus, highlighting the need for personal counterstories and opportunities created by mentors for open and unfettered communication with mentees. Similar responses regarded the role of mentors as a support system; one respondent shared their definition of mentoring in Spanish, stating, “[s]ervir de guía en área académica o de trabajo a una persona,” that is, a mentor serves as a guide for a person in the areas of academics and career. Overall, the responses about mentoring provided a penumbra of meanings that captured the essence of mentoring for these students. Terms like “caring,” “coaching,” “teacher,” and “guidance” were terms emphasizing mentors as a vital part of a support system for success. Respondents demonstrated a common theme in this section, effective guidance via mentorship through large system structures in predominately-white institutions surveyed in the dissertation.

Question 6 (open-ended) narrowed the responses to address specifically the benefits of mentoring for graduate students of color. The comments that pointed more directly to racial concerns were in the minority, instead affirming the need for the mentor to be impartial and supportive, to “feel comfortable in the climate he is around,” or to “provide a realistic framework of the struggles they may find.” Indeed, most comments did not identify specific connections to issues of color; several respondents even maintained that the issues would be no different for students of color than for any other student. One student stated, “I do not think my race had much to do with the offers of my mentor. Mentoring to me was offered regardless of my ethnic background. I was selected due to my character and willingness to learn.” One even found the

assumption “flawed” that such students’ needs would be different. In this particular set of responses, CRT is able to speak towards internalized colonization. When students select an in-depth research study, graduate students of color need to prove themselves as validated members, thus providing a sense of colonization. “By colonization, I mean that European American thought, knowledge, and power structures dominate present-day society in the United States.” (Mckinley and Brayboy, 2005, p.430). In this sense, a student of color needs to conform to the ideologies of mainstream historic European academic structures and systems that align with White students and frequently underrepresent students of color. Eurocentric thinkers implicitly and sometimes explicitly dismiss academic contributions due to preconceived conceptions of people of color from low socioeconomic background and school systems as it relates to academic contributions, performance and achievement. This is where students of color have to work twice as hard and prove their worthiness. This idea of conformity or being like those who hold the power often require graduate students of color to refuse additional support to combat the perception of necessitating special treatment based on their race or ethnicity. In other instances, respondents provided thought-provoking explanations related to CRT tenants. For example, one respondent made the following statement regarding effective mentors:

Mentoring allows for students of color to catch up/gain experience that may previously not been afforded to them. Coming from a family of limited education, I was unaware and/or uninformed of professional settings, networks, and processes because of inexperience or having people without guidance and knowledge.

The term “catch up” is compelling, as it represents the idea of inequity from the outset. Billings and Gillborn present the ideology that “[b]eyond equal treatment [is] the need to redress past inequities. Thus, there was a move toward affirmative action and the creation of African Americans and other marginalized groups as “protected classes” to insure that they were not systematically screened out of opportunities” (Billings and Gillborn, 2004, p.59). The literature

review provides the importance of affirmative action policy and CRT as a tool to address this inequity in education for students of color. I purposely pulled responses that had backgrounds similar to my own family's dynamics, education, and overall experiences in higher education. Finding mentors is important to provide insight about professional settings. I felt lost the first year of my doctoral program until I connected with a mentor who was referred to me by a professor at another PWI.

Another student mentioned his/her perspective that reflects many first-generation graduate students of color like myself:

As a student of color, you may be the first in your family to have the ability to pursue higher education. The educational system can be difficult to navigate, and having the support and expertise of a mentor is beneficial and the extended support is extremely helpful in achieving your educational goals.

Other respondents echoed the sentiment of this ideology and further associated it to the effectiveness for graduate students of color. One respondent described the importance of a "deep understanding of what it means to be a student of color, knowledge of privilege, and knowledge of how higher education often contradicts family values." A similar response posited, "a sense of belonging, some comfort (i.e. being a safe person/space), and assistance with acclimating to the culture, which is not something most of us were familiar with beforehand." In this set of responses, CRT informs and addresses the dominant culture and authority due to a common colorblind perspective that mainstream America generally accepts. Consequently, when individuals claim to be colorblind, they normalize people of color as "other" or "outsiders in a structure not meant for them. Such ideology disregards the unique values students of color hold sacred, such as their history, their culture, and their diversity. As a result, graduate students of color will continue to feel isolated and misplaced.

Systematic structures around CRT influence the themes mentioned above, such as privilege, a sense of belonging, and meaning of race. These are important factors that effective mentors need to consider. Graduate students of color and their personal belief systems present opportunities for academic institutions to leverage their approaches to fostering diversity. To summarize, one respondent provided a unique statement identifying a common misperception about tailoring needs to one's race and ethnicity:

A person of color may not have any different needs as another. Cultural background may require a different kind of dialogue. Any mentor should be sensitive to someone's needs. A mentor should have an understanding of issues a person of color might encounter in their academic environment.

This statement was a refreshing reminder of the value of dialogue between a mentor and a graduate student of color. This statement reiterates the importance of mentors utilizing their own counternarratives via experiential knowledge as a CRT tool for graduate students of color. In this regard, mentors can produce inroads in a mentorship relationship by sharing personal experiences and understanding the unique set of conditions that graduate students of color are exposed to.

Section C: Mentoring (Personal Experience)

Questions 5, 8-12 gave respondents the opportunity to express their personal involvement in either individual mentoring or a mentoring program in graduate school. It was important for me to give respondents an opportunity to assess their overall impression of how mentoring has influenced their experience in graduate school, and I designed Q5 (open-ended) to elicit such responses. I deliberately chose the verb "influenced" over a more positive verb such as "benefited" to allow for the complete range of responses. Several of the 57 respondents were quite specific about how their mentoring experience influenced them. Aside from emotional support mentioned by several students, mentors were seen to provide specific help in areas such

as accessing and critiquing academic articles, providing connections with other individuals and events in the student's field, obtaining access to professional conferences and other events, and feedback (both positive and negative) on projects. One student appreciated the knowledge gained from someone who already had an advanced degree and who had presumably navigated the vicissitudes of end-degree pursuit. Another felt that the mentor's example—and whether such example was positive or negative was not articulated—gave the student insight in mentoring others. Two respondents were just embarking on their graduate education at the time they completed their survey, and both reported favorable experiences in their initial meeting with their mentors. Two other respondents reported little or no influence from mentoring so far in their graduate career, one citing his or her “own busy schedule and the limited availability of” potential mentors.

Surprisingly, only slightly more than a quarter of respondents to Q9 had sought mentoring services during his or her graduate school experience; however, 64.9% reported that they had eventually obtained mentors (Q8) (see Figures 4, 5, and 6).

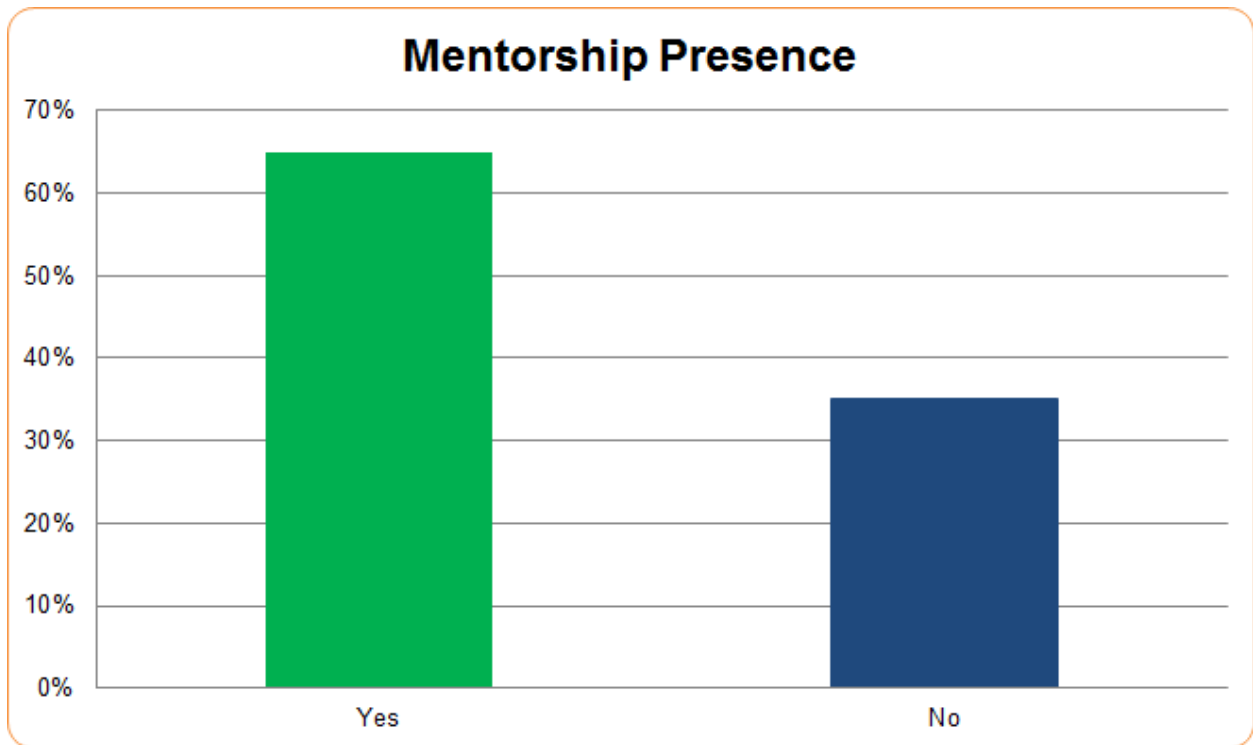


Figure 4. Mentorship Presence in Graduate School

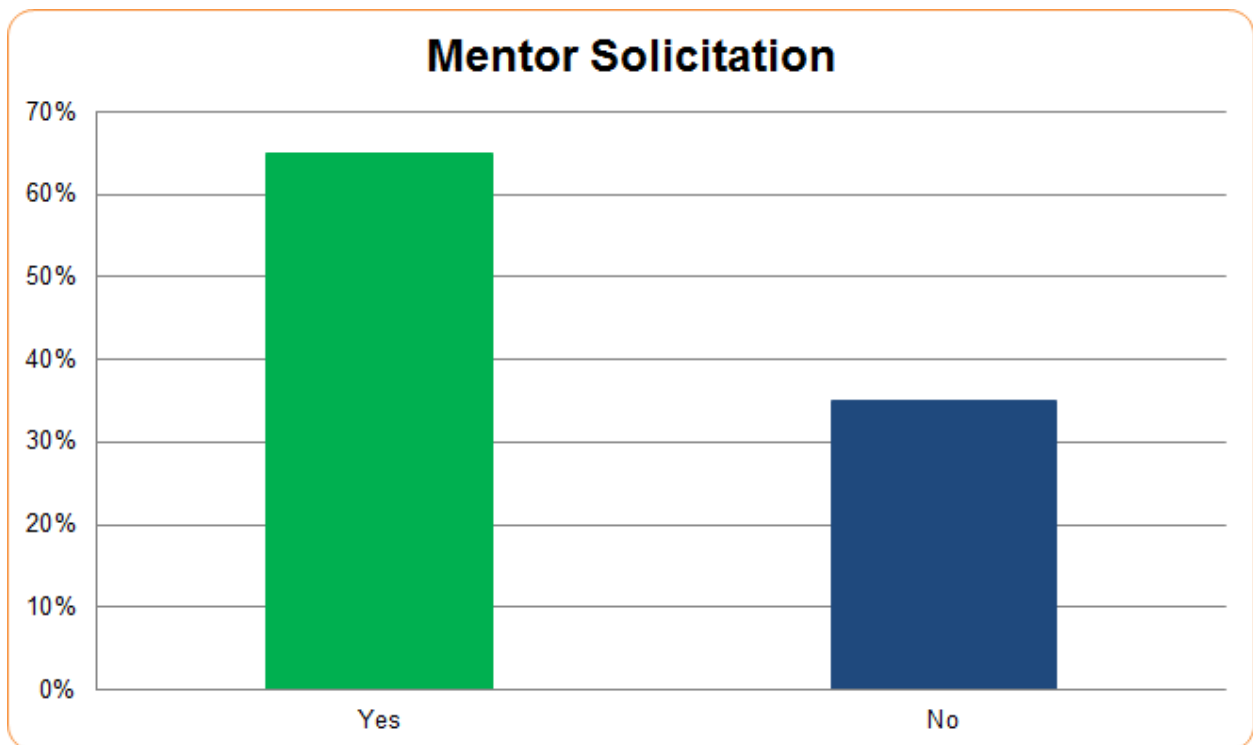


Figure 5. Respondents seeking mentoring services

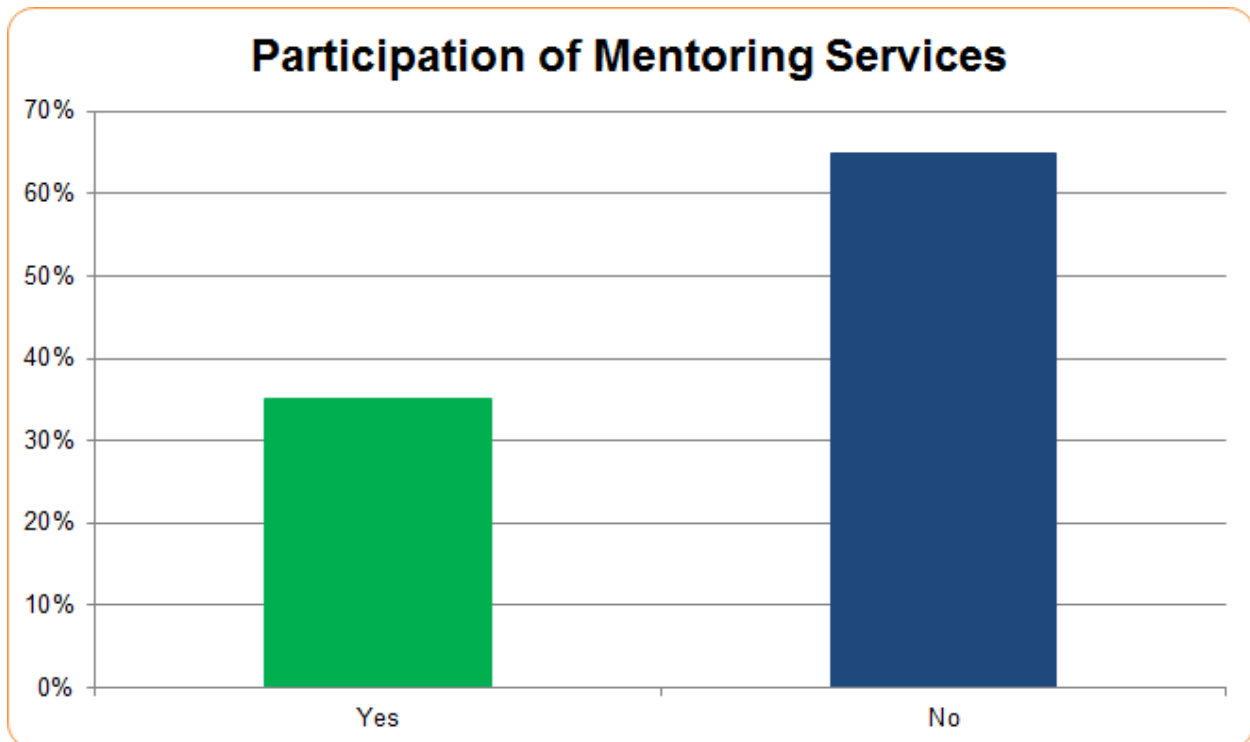


Figure 6. Respondents participating in mentoring services

However, of students who at some time in their higher education experience obtained a mentor, only one third found those mentors through a campus mentoring service. Also telling is that of those who did not seek mentoring, nearly two-thirds felt they would have benefited (Q11) (see Figure 7).

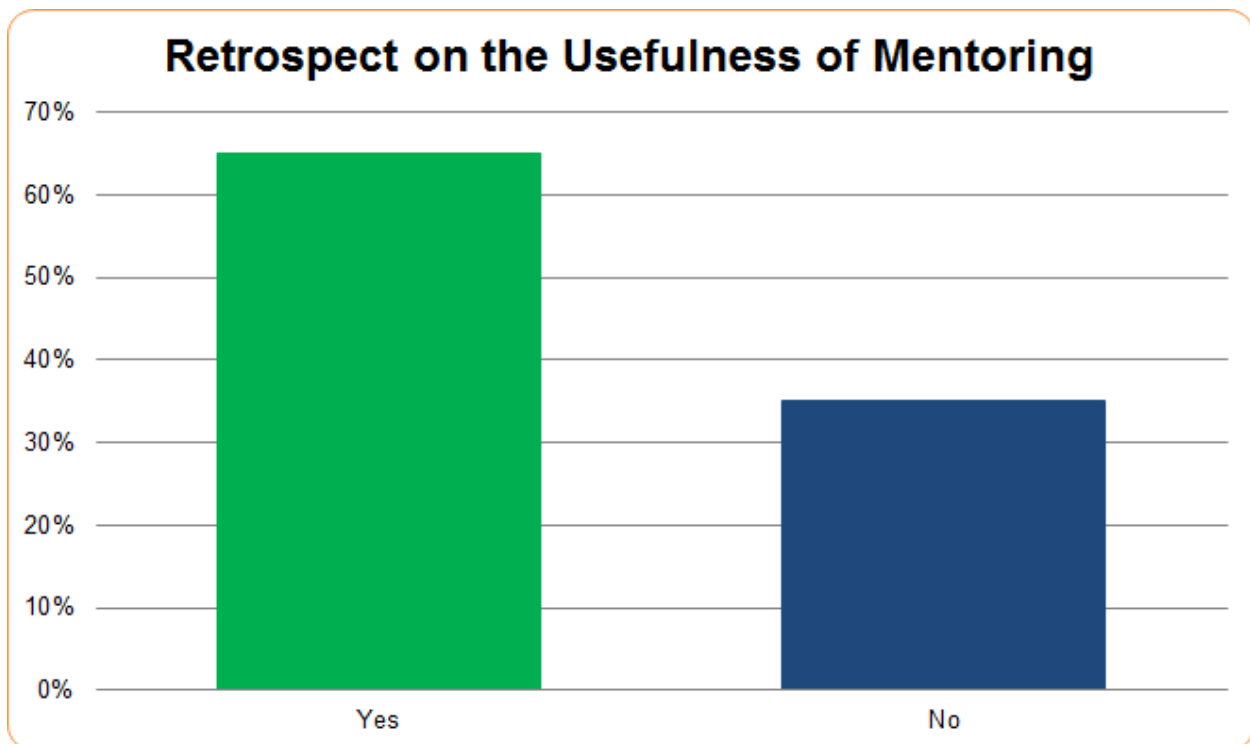


Figure 7. Level of benefit predicted by respondents who did not seeking mentoring

These results lend themselves to deriving possible correlations between how those students surveyed perceived and responded to the entire range of survey questions. The disparate results between Q8 and Q9 indicate that further research should be conducted on the existence and effectiveness of mentoring *programs*, per se, for graduate students of color, especially given that a majority (nearly 70%) of respondents to Q12 (see Figure 8) indicated they would have liked more information about mentoring at the outset of their graduate studies. It is, indeed, curious that although few had sought mentoring, nearly all would have wanted more information regarding mentoring services available at their institution.

Questions 13-16 (see Figures 9-12), 17-18 (open-ended), and 21 (open ended) asked students for information specific to their individual mentors, such as the mentor's position in the university hierarchy, ethnicity, location, and method used to create the mentor-student connection. Several questions solicited open-ended responses regarding how the student's

mentor helped him or her, the degree to which the mentor recognized particular needs of students of color, and the degree to which the mentor shared other topics of potential interest considering the student's ethnic background and needs pertinent thereto.

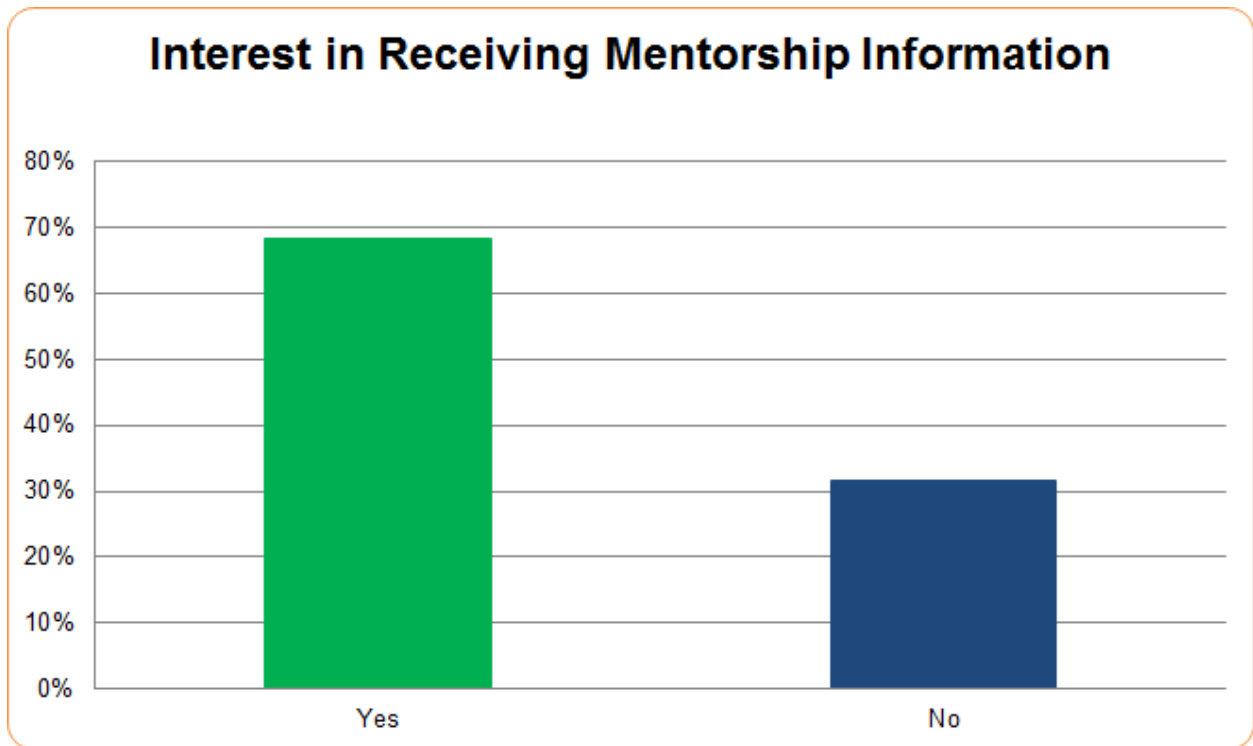


Figure 8. Respondents' preference to have received more information about mentoring

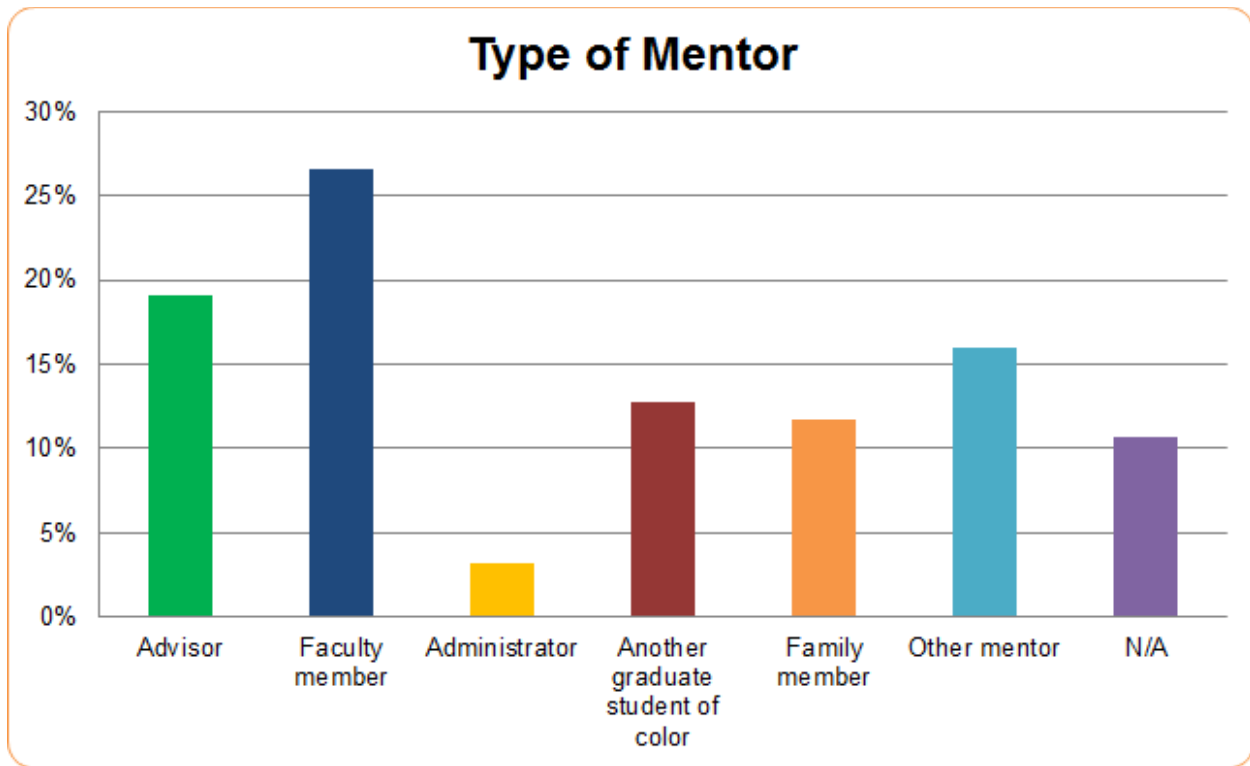


Figure 9. Identification of mentors' position

Most respondents' faculty program advisor or other faculty member doubled as mentor, suggesting that perhaps the boundaries between “mentor” and “advisor” are often blurred. Over 90% of respondents' mentors were either “White or Caucasian” or “Latino/a” (Q14), suggesting a disparity in either the availability of mentors of color for non-Latinx/a graduate students of color, a student’s misunderstanding of his or her options in choosing a mentor, neutrality regarding the ethnicity of the mentor, or some other factor—an objective for future study.

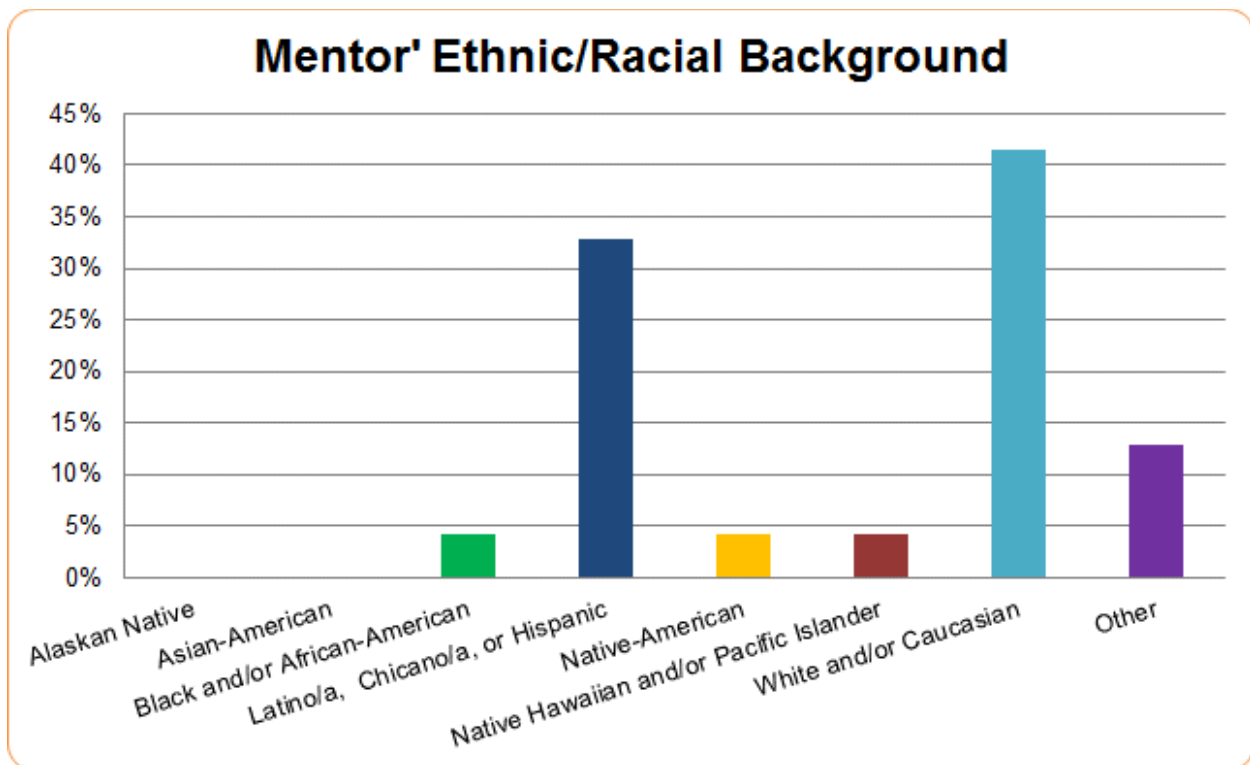


Figure 10. Mentors' ethnic/racial characteristics

Q15 and Q16 solicited thoughts about the availability of mentors. Most mentors were on campus, from which fact it could be inferred that convenience was important in selecting a mentor.

Regarding the question of how the respondent “connected” with his or her mentor, the responses were ambiguous: 44% of respondents were referred to a mentor by someone on campus (student, teacher, other college/department), but more than half—56%—connected with their mentor in a way other than any stipulated.

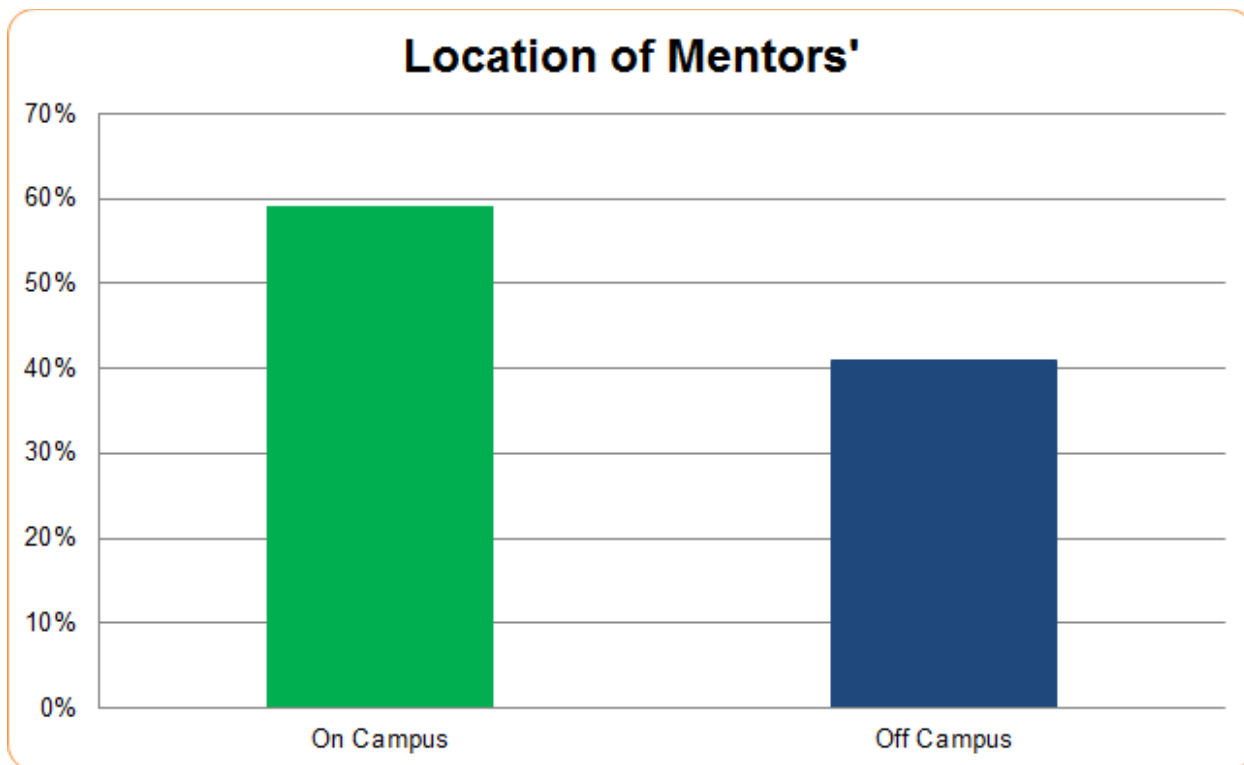


Figure 11. Site location of mentors

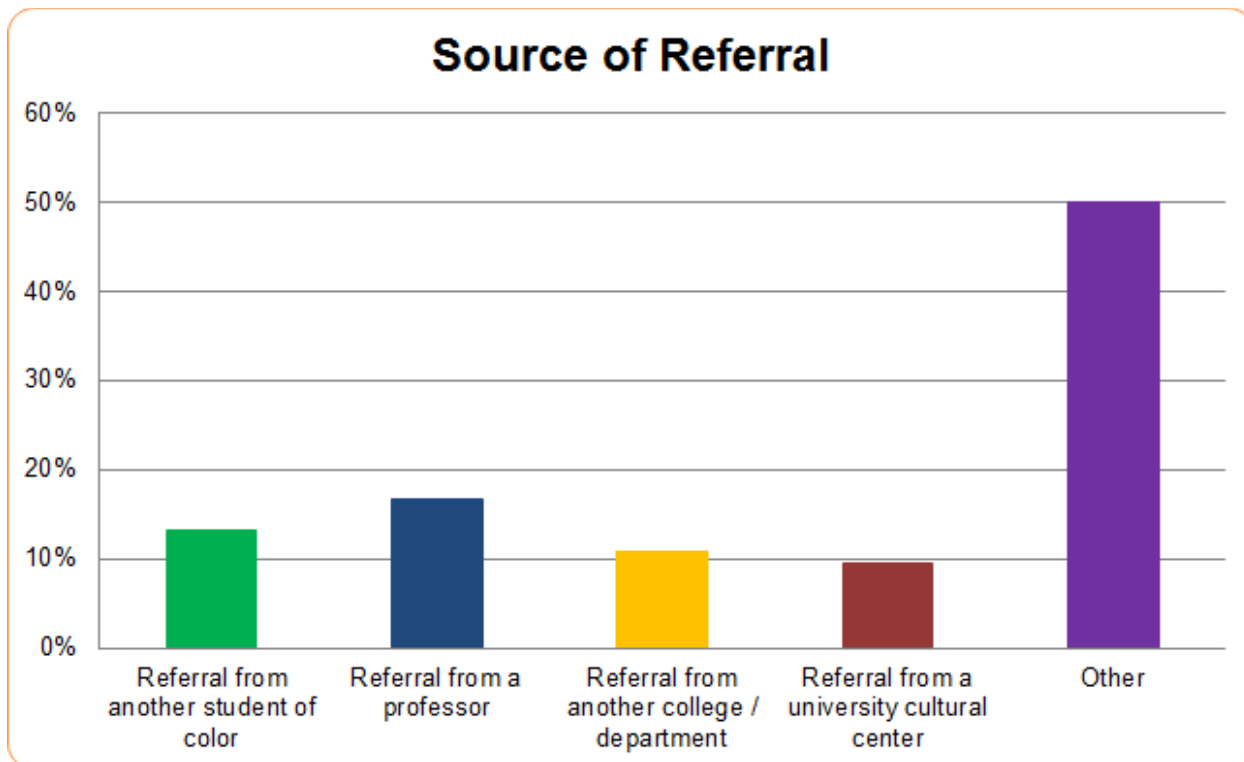


Figure 12. How respondents connected with their mentors

Further research is necessary to investigate—and perhaps leverage—other ways students are connected to their mentors. Only slightly more than 14% of students were connected to his or her mentor through the recommendation of a university cultural center. This data may suggest—at least for the three colleges represented by the respondents—that campus cultural centers may need to examine their practices regarding mentoring recommendations for graduate students of color.

Q17 and Q18 (both open-ended) gave respondents the opportunity to narrate the content of and degree to which the mentor specifically helped the student while acknowledging the student's ethnic background and tailoring assistance accordingly if necessary. Key word groupings in responses to Q17 included professional development, motivation to finish, emotional support, professional opportunities, critical perspectives, dialogue space, listening, field experience recommendations, providing advice, providing tools, providing information, guidance, and advice to perform good research, becoming a stronger academic, encouragement, clarifying purpose of task, providing alternative view, “challenging me,” the doctorate process, acclimating to the graduate experience, research team make-up across geographies, new aspects in the field of study, courses to take, projects to embark on, writing skills, presenting skills, compassion, career guidance, navigating the complicated educational system, language and life's trials, and development of self-confidence. These responses and word groupings illuminate mentoring factors that helped graduate students of color to meet academic challenges.

Question 18 asked students to describe how their mentor acknowledged their “cultural, ethnic, gender, socioeconomic, or linguistic background” during their association. The results were mixed, but a numerical majority responding positively—that their mentor had addressed those needs. In particular, mentors helped these students in ways specific to these demographic

characteristics, noting the importance of taking pride in one's culture and in bilingualism, holding conversations about socioeconomic backgrounds, the need for a mentor to take "a genuine interest in me and acknowledge my ethnicity [Hispanic]," and the importance of continued education. One student reported that "my mentor was able to see how I could help others through both my cultural and linguistic background." He or she valued the mentor's understanding of the student's cultural and linguistic attributes: "My mentors and I are Latinos and first generation college students." CRT associates these responses with the idea of linguistic capital for graduate students of color. That is, mentees achieve intellectual and social skills through multiple languages or styles. Linguistic capital for multilingual graduate students of color are acknowledged and encouraged by mentors and faculty understanding the value of the identity, language, and backgrounds of students of color.

On the other hand, an above average percentage of survey respondents reported either neutral or negative experiences with their mentor, noting that the mentor "did not treat me any differently from other students" or that issues of ethnicity were "not specifically acknowledged, but it was not necessary." The overarching themes and coding key word groupings for Q17 and Q18 seemed to adhere to the role and goals of a mentor or mentoring program for graduate students of color at PWIs. As previously mentioned in the literature review, Long (2014) prescribes eight qualities of mentors that result in the effectiveness students have experienced when interacting with their mentors. These eight qualities are respect, listening, challenging, collaboration, celebration, truth, safety, and empathy. These eight traits emphasize the importance of recognizing that graduate students of color have different barriers, and a mentor may need to be that very life coach who provides a safe environment for a particular student of color.

Whereas Q18 addressed how a mentor acknowledged the student's ethnicity and culture in their relationships, conversations, and so forth, Q21 (open-ended) asked the respondent to discuss the degree to which his or her mentor provided opportunities for the student to explore academic topics within his or her degree emphasis that included the same demographic characteristics as in Q18. Nearly all 57 participants responded favorably, some describing specific opportunities (e.g. "A mentor guided me to join a Latino professional group"). Another student eloquently stated:

This is where I was able to blossom as a graduate student. My mentors, some faculty members, allowed for my epistemological perspective to rise to the forefront of discussions without fear of misunderstanding or reprisals. This question is key, to not only higher education, but public education.

This response illustrates the premise of my research underlying the importance of CRT for higher education. Faculty or mentors can stimulate the minds of graduate students of color by teaching and learning through a CRT lens. In many of the responses to this question, the student depicts the mentor as an advocate and support network for the student.

The final subset of questions pertaining to a respondent's personal experience with mentoring were Likert-style or binary-response questions that included self-evaluation. Q23 (see Figure 13) was an important question that asked students to rank the importance of a set of nine attributes of a mentor on a scale of 0 (not important) to 2 (very important). The nine attributes were accessibility, open and honest, established trust between you and your mentor, approachability, willingness to share opportunities for professional development, career advice, discuss race, ethnicity, gender, understanding of socioeconomic background, and linguistic experiences. Fifty-six of the fifty-seven students who completed the survey responded to this question. All students responded to the accessibility attribute question, and only two of the fifty-seven students did not respond to the linguistics attribute question. With the exception of one

attribute, students rated all attributes in the top 50th percentile. The mentor characteristics whose weighted average was highest were “Discusses race, ethnic, and gender topics” (1.91) and “Discusses your linguistic experiences” (1.82). For unweighted responses, students gave high importance to “open and honest” (84%), “established trust between you and your mentor” (80%), and “accessible” (75% of respondents).

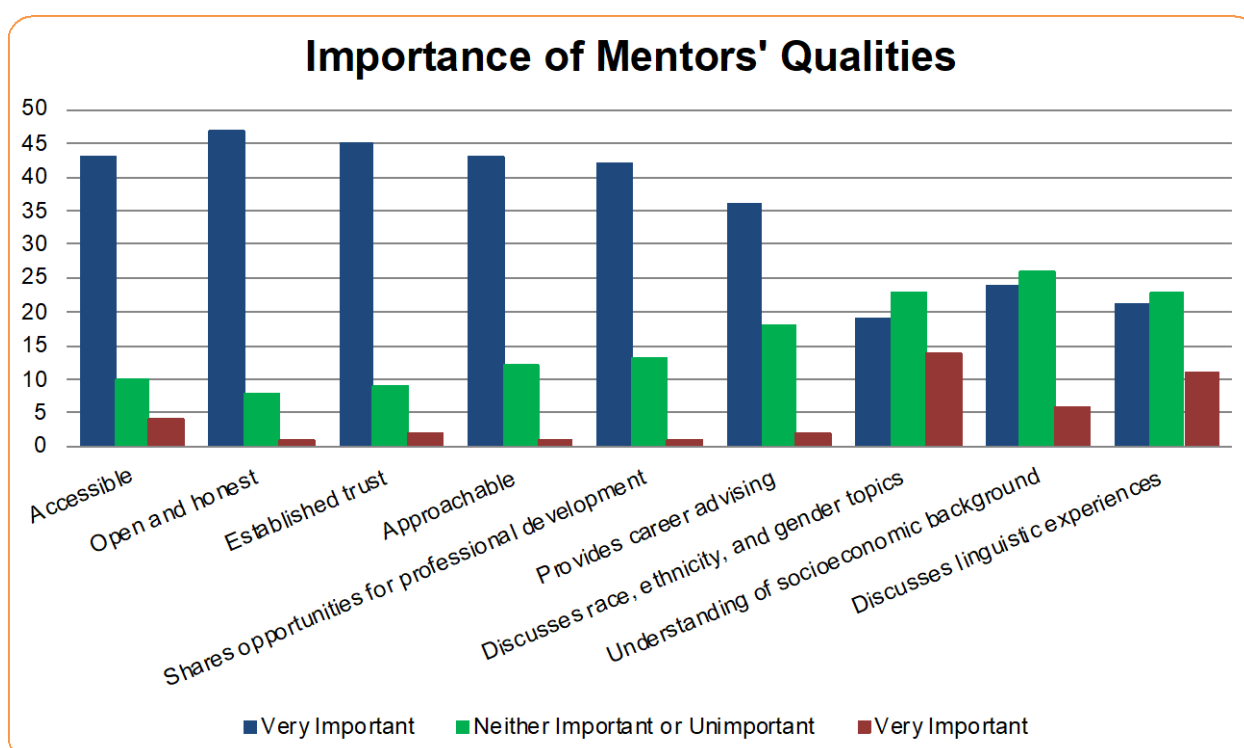


Figure 13. Importance of mentor qualities

I designed Q26 and Q27 as self-reporting or self-evaluating questions to assess the respondent’s own active participation in available mentoring. When asked whether their institutions provided ample opportunities to seek mentoring (Q26) (see Figure 14), over half (54%) responded either “strongly agree” (17.5%) or “agree” (36.8%). Sixty-three percent reported that they had put into practice recommendations of their mentor(s) during their association with mentors.

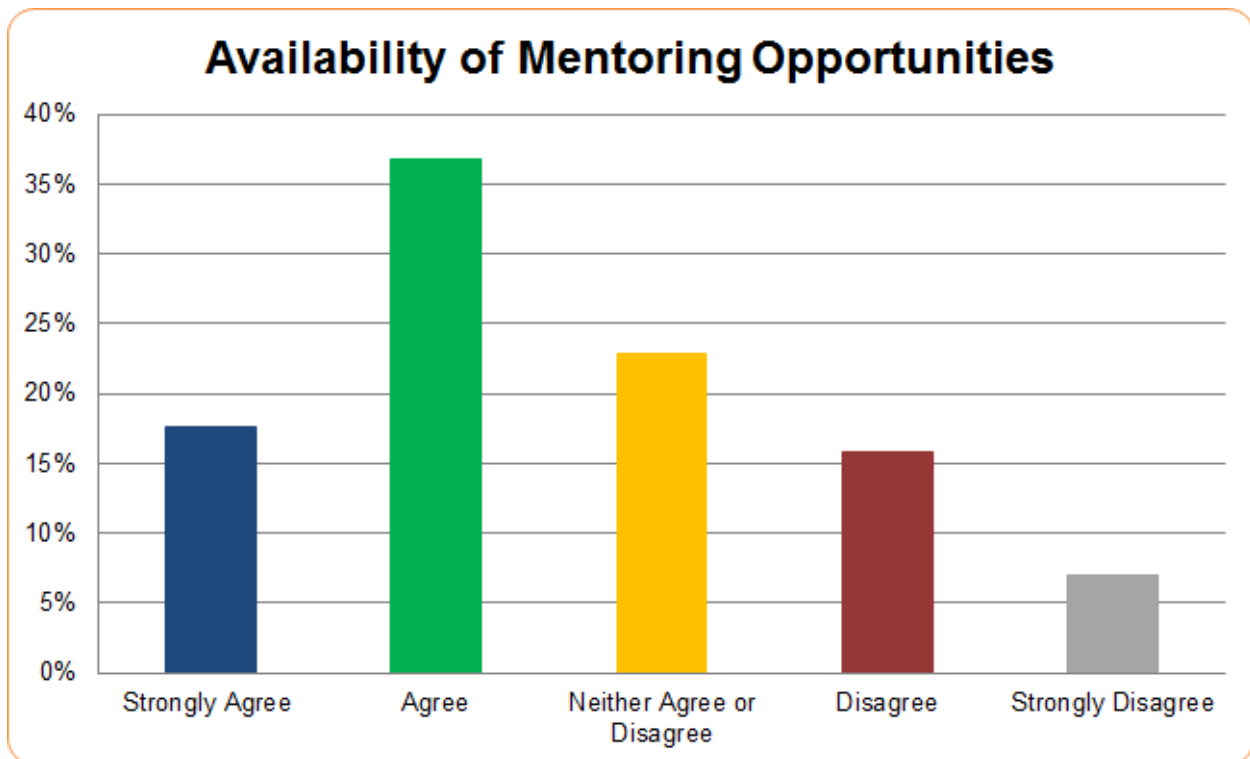


Figure 14. Respondents’ assessment of availability of mentoring opportunities

Section D: Mentoring (Personal Evaluation)

These questions asked respondents to evaluate more thoughtfully and precisely their mentoring experience, with approximately half the questions open-ended and the other half Likert-scale queries. I designed the questions to elicit the most precise responses from students to address the second purpose question: “What is the impact of mentoring graduate students of color at PWIs?”

Question 7 (open-ended) asked respondents to report the chief advantages mentoring afforded them. Replies varied from the very brief to explicit and included qualities such as “access and guidance for internship opportunities” and “support, understanding, and most importantly, lifelong relationships.” Students noted that mentoring help included guidance on degree plans, networking and events, career-related questions, challenging the student’s own perceptions derived from cultural privilege, insight to overcoming obstacles, access to

professional conferences, and directions in research. In addition, students cited improved independence and autonomy over their academic and career choices, valuable encouragement, increased critical thinking skills applied to decision-making—while at the same time noting a degree of “comfort and assimilation and experiences [he or she] had not gone through or expected.” One student lauded the mentor’s honesty and insights regarding “how the educational system works; its pitfalls as well as its positive aspects.” Another specifically cited a mentor’s help with writing, research, and documentation skills. Among the several shorter responses reflected those who experienced limited or no connection with mentors, clearly reflecting a need for additional mentors for graduate students of color. One student expressed her need for mentors by saying, “Since I have never had a mentor, I feel I could have made better career choices with a mentor. Without a mentor, I feel like I had to ‘wing it’ in many of my choices.” With little direction, this graduate student of color felt frustration, or possibly self-doubt. This example emphasizes the need for advisors and university systems to welcome and illuminate the counternarratives of faculty members using CRT in their research; when the research of faculty members projecting their own counternarratives through a CRT lens are presented, honored, and welcomed, there is the capacity to create a welcoming environment where students of color may see themselves in mentors who may have had similar experiences. For graduate students of color, this can provide an opportunity to seek out mentors who may provide clarity through shared lives, thus providing the potential for stronger direction and support.

The tenor of responses to Q7, while somewhat brief, seemed more personal, including comments about how the mentor provided a worthy example on which the respondent could model his or her own future mentoring. Other mentors were valued for simply “listen[ing],” affording “freedom” in choices, and helping the student discern “educational objectives.” One

student cited the mentor's demonstration of career work-path goals such as networking and access to professional development opportunities. In sum, respondents felt that mentors provided a common link to graduate students of color: the combination of educational attainment and professional career advice. Many mentors provided "future advice," as one student stated. Another graduate student of color captured this idea: "Being able to gain valuable information processes and procedures to improve on my craft and experiences making me a better educator and professional is the most important benefit I see in mentoring." Large institutions of higher education can support this graduate student of color by changing initiatives, policies, and pedagogy to eliminate the inequalities and social injustices that exist. The responses to the Likert-scale questions relating to benefits of mentoring were largely positive, confirming the narrative responses to Q7. For example, Q24 (see Figure 15) asked for a current assessment of the student's mentoring relationship(s), with approximately two-thirds of respondents either "strongly agreeing" or "agreeing" with the statement, "I am benefiting from the mentoring I am receiving."

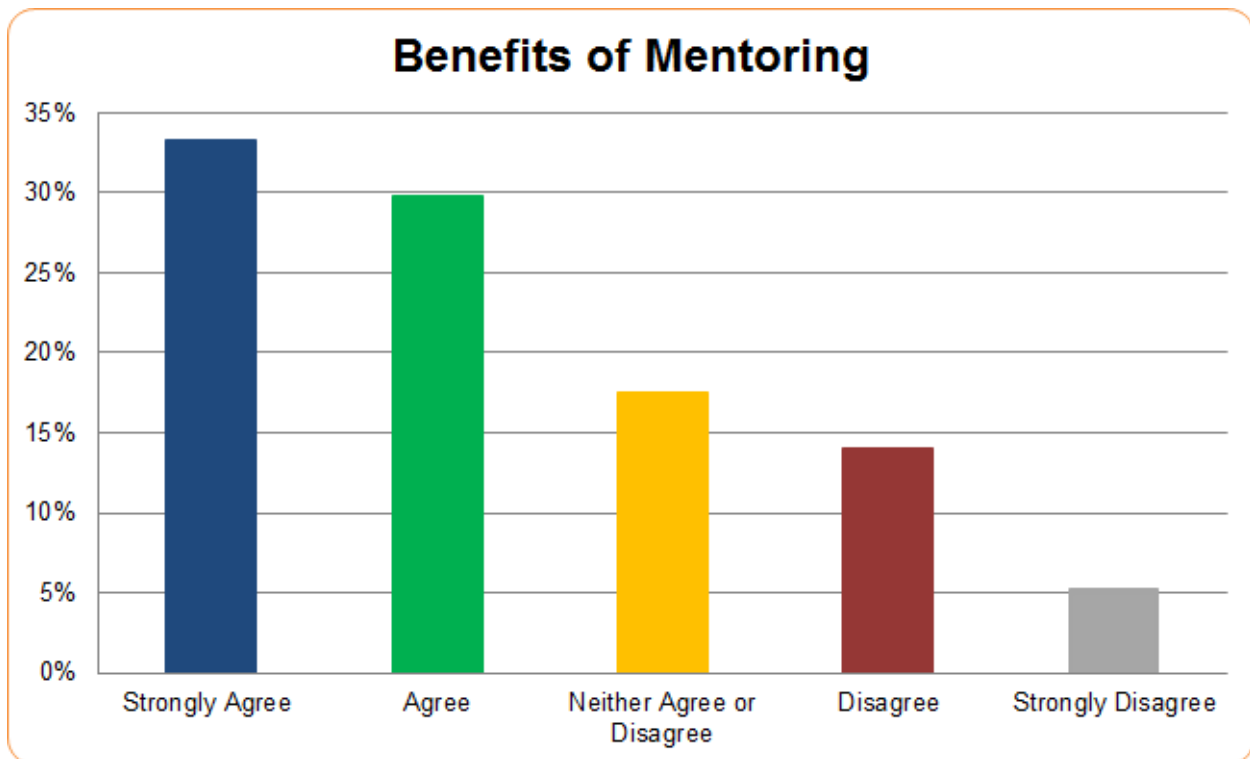


Figure 15. Level of benefits from mentoring

Questions 19-21 (open-ended) addressed partially the second objective of the larger study: “Analyze, through a critical race theory framework lens, survey respondents’ expectations of being...provided more in-depth cultural, racial, ethnic, gender, socioeconomic, or linguistic support.” To Q19, which asked how important to the student a mentor’s recognition and understanding of “culture, ethnic, gender, racial, socioeconomic, linguistic” background was, the overall response indicated that such considerations played an important role in navigating the graduate studies environment. Although one respondent opined, “In my case it was not important,” another poignantly affirmed that the provision of mentorship was “very important [because] if you don’t know who I am or where I came from, you can’t understand me.” Another similar response underscores the significance of these social factors.

“It is extremely important for your mentors to understand your background from all aspects—culturally, ethnically, and socioeconomic. If a mentor cannot relate to the

experiences that you are encountering, it is difficult to engage and build a meaningful relationship.”

One student stated they did not have a mentor, yet recognized the crucial role a mentor plays.

They explained, “Did not have a mentor. If I had a mentor, I believe it is important to have someone that understands the challenges that a student faces culturally.” The root of these responses validated the perceptions of these graduate students of color that authentic understanding created a sense of meaningful mentorship. Q20 asked the student to respond to essentially the same question, posed negatively (and speculatively); that is, what influence *not* having mentoring would have had on the student’s academic life. Students had mixed responses, but those who felt the lack of such understanding worded their responses quite strongly:

If you have a mentor that does not understand the experiences of a student of color, it makes it hard to engage in a meaningful relationship and build trust. This can result in an experience of feeling isolated during graduate school. If you are a non-traditional student of color, it can be difficult to find connections that make you feel excepted [*sic*] as a student, and often having a strong mentor is what keeps students engaged and connected during their higher-education experience.

Students posited the consequences of having a mentor who lacked understanding of the student’s rationale for selecting a particular major: “I don’t think you could effectively mentor someone if you don’t understand their background. I would think your help would be somewhat askew.

Communication is vital.” Other concerns noted difficulty in establishing common ground between the mentor and mentee, as well as the absence of empathy. To Q22 (open-ended), which asked students whether they would have benefitted from mentors’ additional guidance on topics “that matter more,” or that address the student’s “culture, ethnic, gender, socioeconomic, or linguistic background,” the majority felt satisfied with the guidance their mentor provided. On the other hand, one student expressed strongly the certainty that he or she would have benefitted from such guidance:

A mentor could have steered me towards areas in my field that better respond to my gender and ethnicity. For example, I have superb bilingual skills that I often take for granted because society in general takes them for granted. A mentor could have also guided me in applying my professional skills in Latino communities. It is what I would prefer to do, but did not know how to steer in that direction.

This respondent mentioned the importance of gender and ethnicity which further emphasized the important use of LatCrit in my research. A theoretical branch from CRT, LatCrit is able to examine, racial, gender, language, experiences, and discrimination among Latinx graduate students. LatCrit could provide insight for this respondent and their mentor(s). This LatCrit counterstory expresses this student's journey through the university systematic structure. This graduate student of color emphasizes gender, ethnicity and linguistic ability as a form to advocate for personal experience where people of color are marginalized when competing for career opportunities against White privilege. "LatCrit scholars also argue that providing space for and utilizing the knowledge of marginalized people is vital for theory, practice, and social transformation" (Murillo, 2010, p.65). Perhaps this experience led to miscommunication or confusion between the student and mentor regarding the student's values—all the more reason for mentors to offer the space for clear goal setting with the incorporation of all social factors including the special qualities that come with diverse linguistic and socioeconomic backgrounds. But for the most part, respondents were pleased with their mentors, citing "great support system," "provided his expertise," "I was lucky," and "I felt the relationship was healthy, and she provided the guidance I wanted."

The other Likert-scale-formatted questions (Q25-36) assessed the survey respondents' overall perceptions about the value of their mentor or mentoring program. Not all questions are detailed below. The questions were framed in positive language, such as "I have had positive

interaction...,” “I feel better about...,” “I have seen improvement...,” “I have utilized resources/suggestions...,” “Mentoring has made a positive difference,” and so forth.

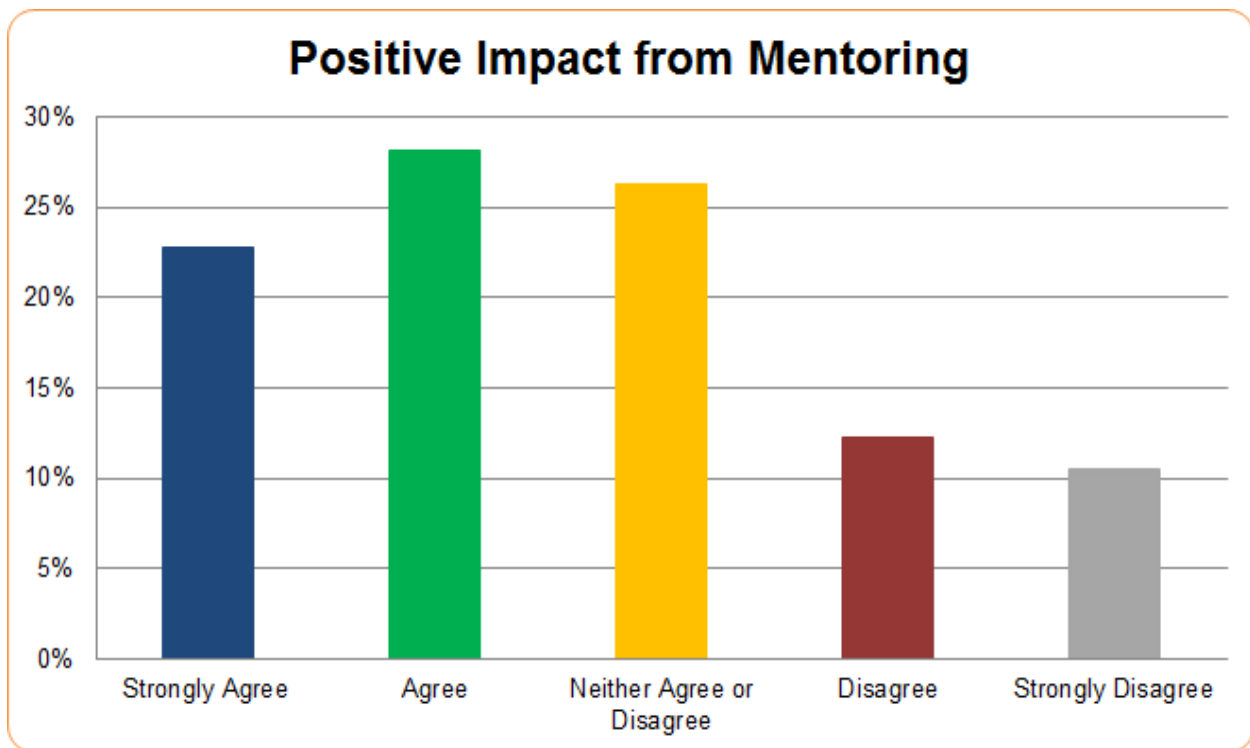


Figure 16. Respondents’ assessment of mentoring’s positive difference in school or department

To these positively-framed queries, over 50% reported having experienced a “positive difference in my connection with the school or department” due to mentoring (Q32) (see Figure 16), 58% “feeling better” about their graduate school experience because of mentoring (Q28) (see Figure 17), 54% availing themselves of resources and suggestions offered by their mentors (Q30) (see Figure 18), and 65% agree[ing] or “strongly agree[ing]” to Q31 (see Figure 19): “I made satisfactory use of mentoring.”

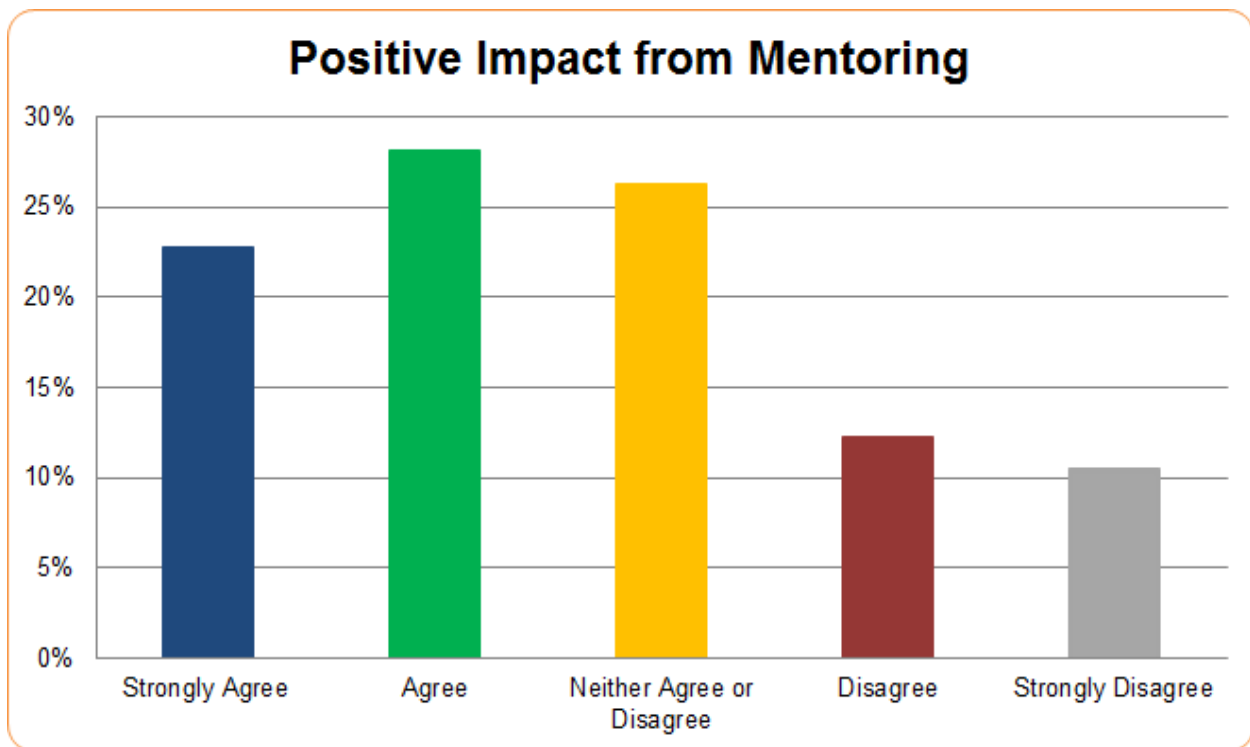


Figure 17. Respondents' overall assessment of graduate school experience as a result of mentoring

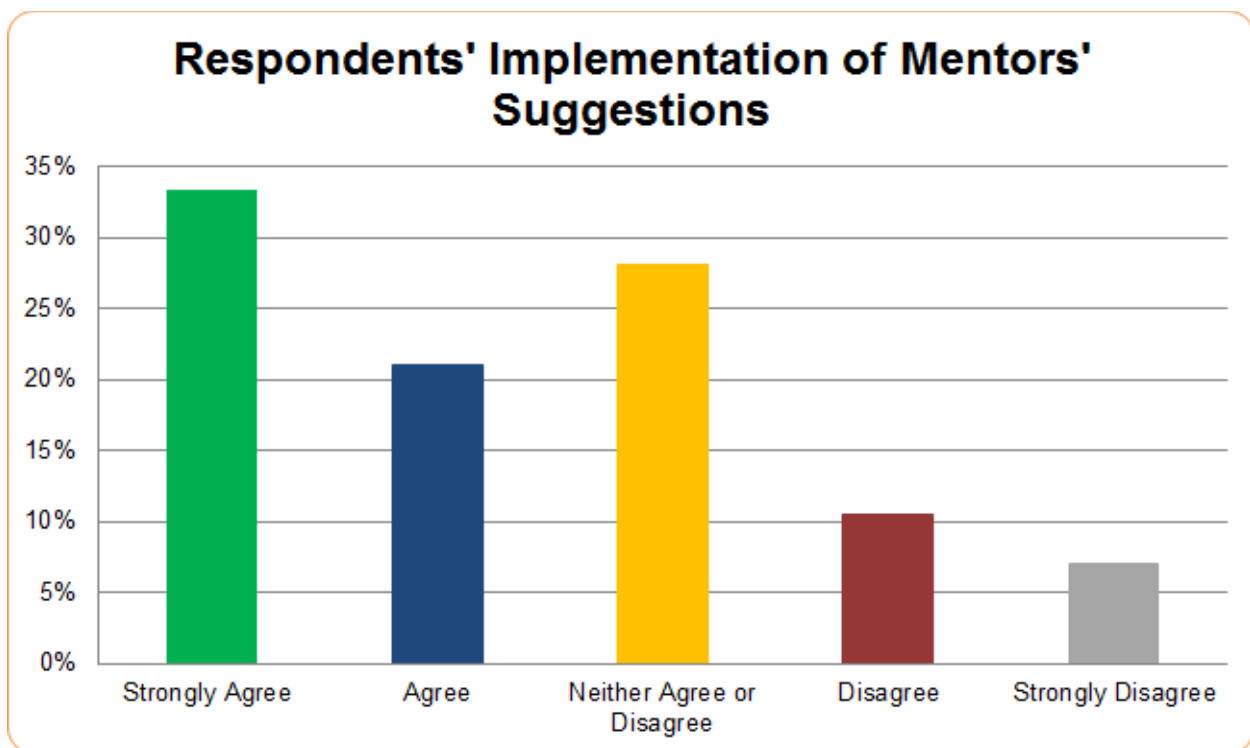


Figure 18. Respondents' overall assessment of mentor's suggestions for enhanced learning

Fifty-eight percent of students responding to Q33 (see Figure 20), which asked for their overall assessment of mentoring's importance to their academic achievement, felt that mentoring had had a positive influence on such achievement.

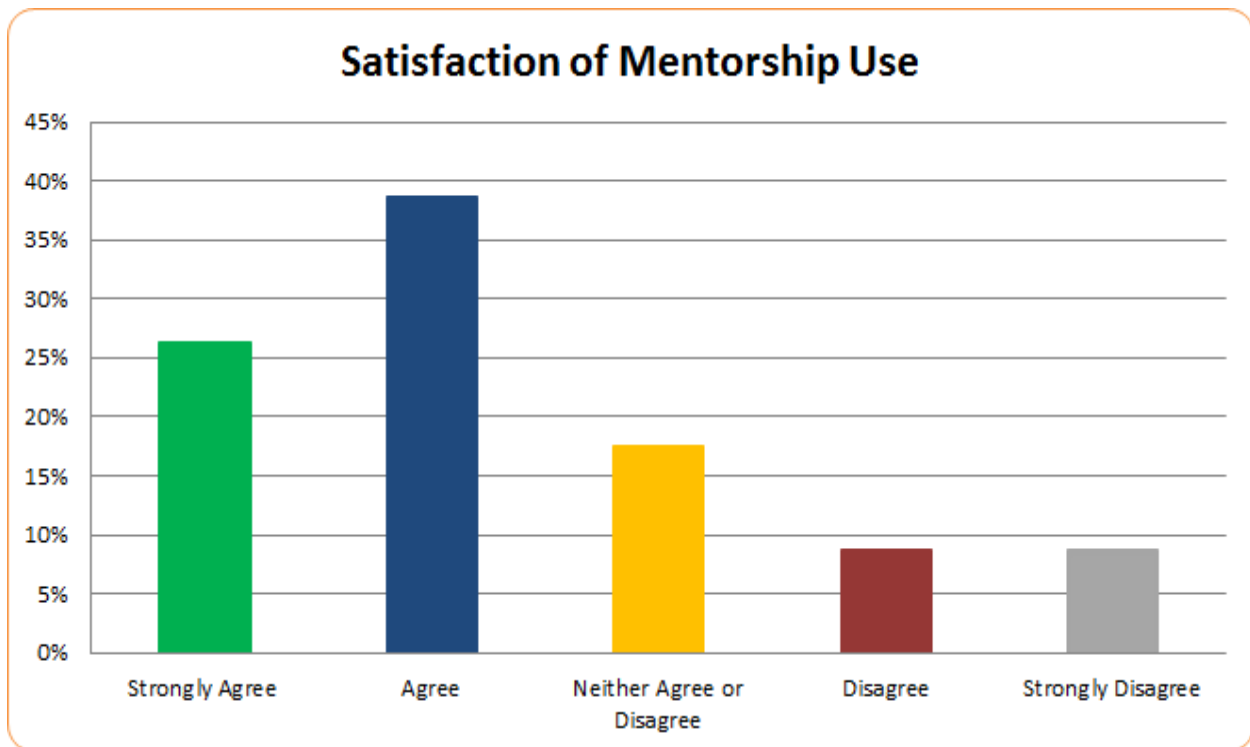


Figure 19. Respondents' assessment of satisfactory use of mentoring

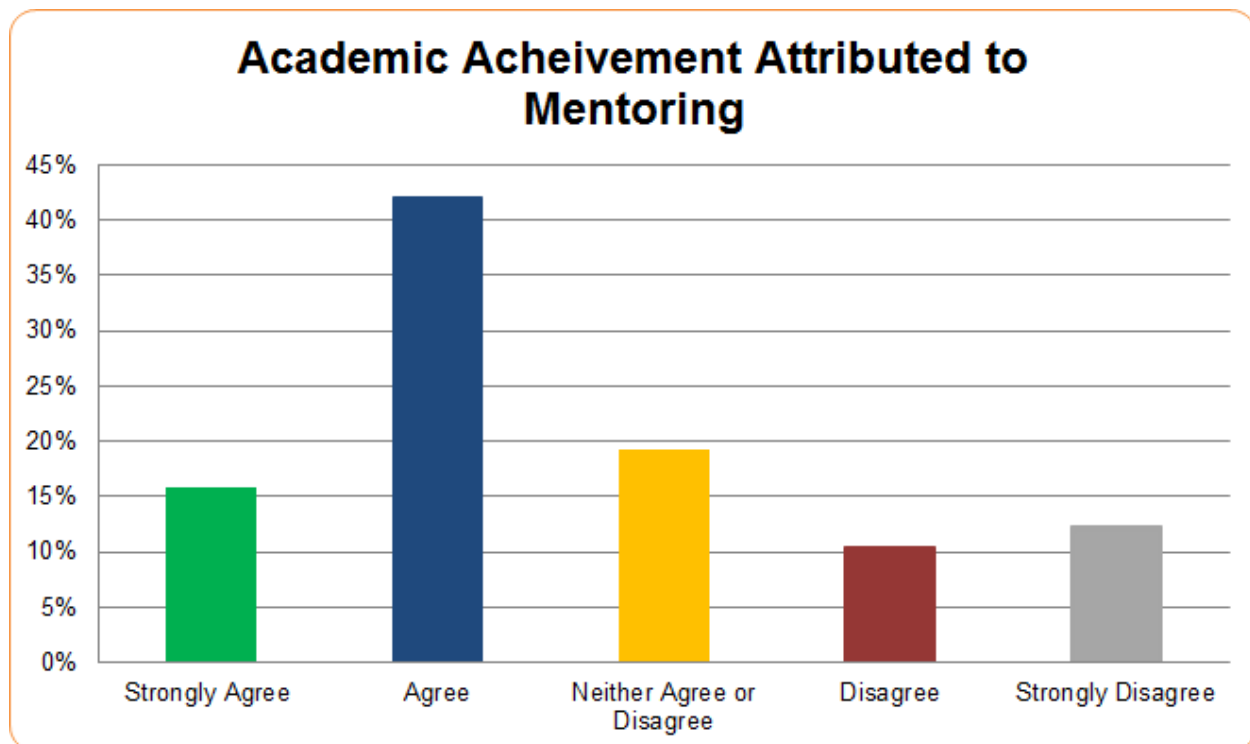


Figure 20. Importance of mentoring to academic achievement

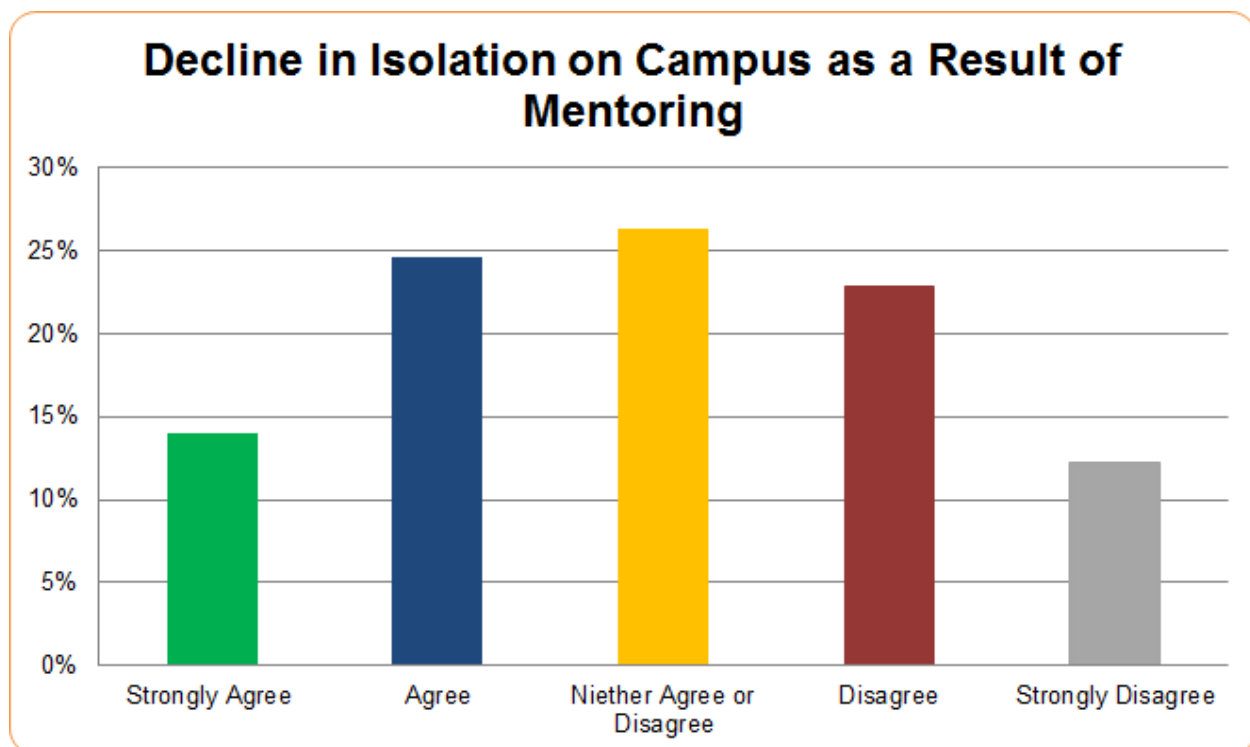


Figure 21. Level of isolation on campus for respondents with mentors

Even though 38% felt “less isolated on campus because of mentoring” (Q34) (see Figure 21), a high proportion—34%—of respondents either disagreed or “strongly disagree[d]”; that is, they did not feel mentoring made them feel less isolated because of cultural, ethnic, racial, and gender differences. Similar results were reported regarding the degree to which students felt their mentoring experiences enabled them to feel “more responsible for [their] academic success” (Q36) (see Figure 22), with 58% agreeing or “strongly agreeing.

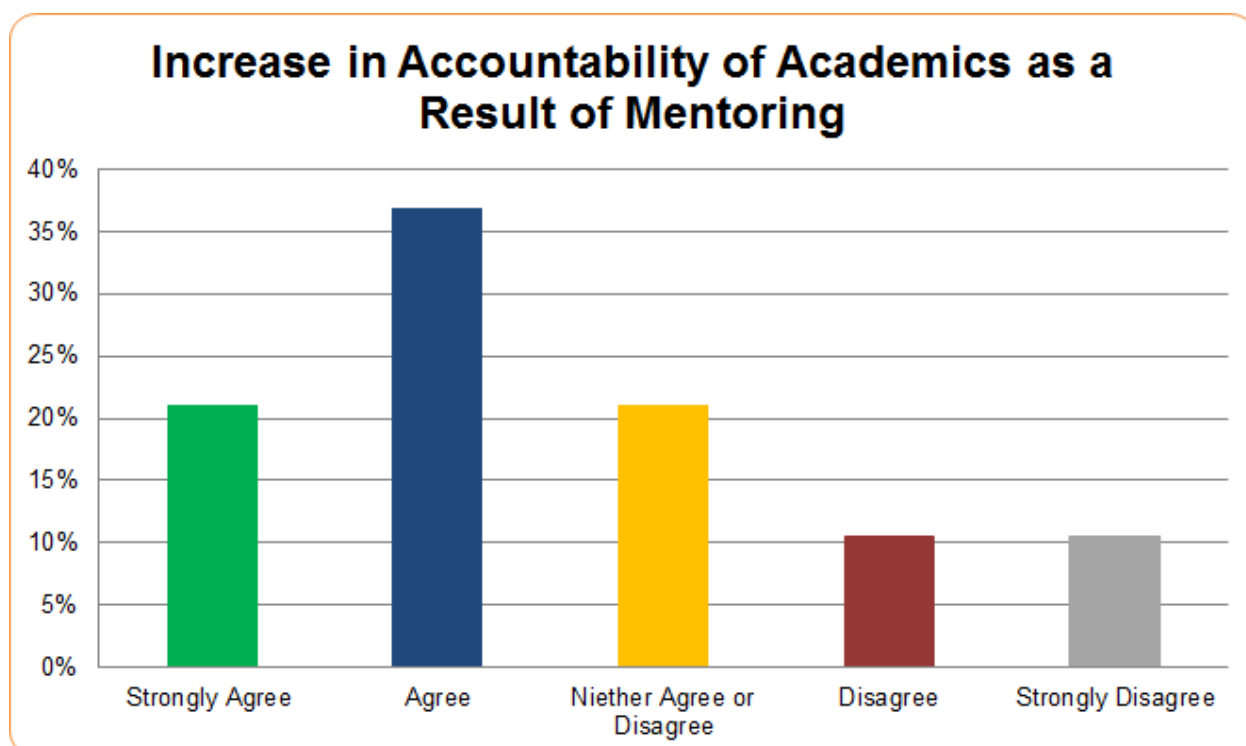


Figure 22. Mentoring’s effect on responsibility for academic success

Of these Likert-scale questions, Q29 (see Figure 23) drew neutral or somewhat negative reactions. Forty-two percent of students reported improved study habits as a result of mentoring, while nearly 26% “disagree[d]” or “strongly disagree[d]” that their student habits had improved. Regarding mentoring’s influence on whether students are “able to find academic help when needed because of mentoring” (Q35) (see Figure 24), students’ responses were rather tepid across the range of responses.

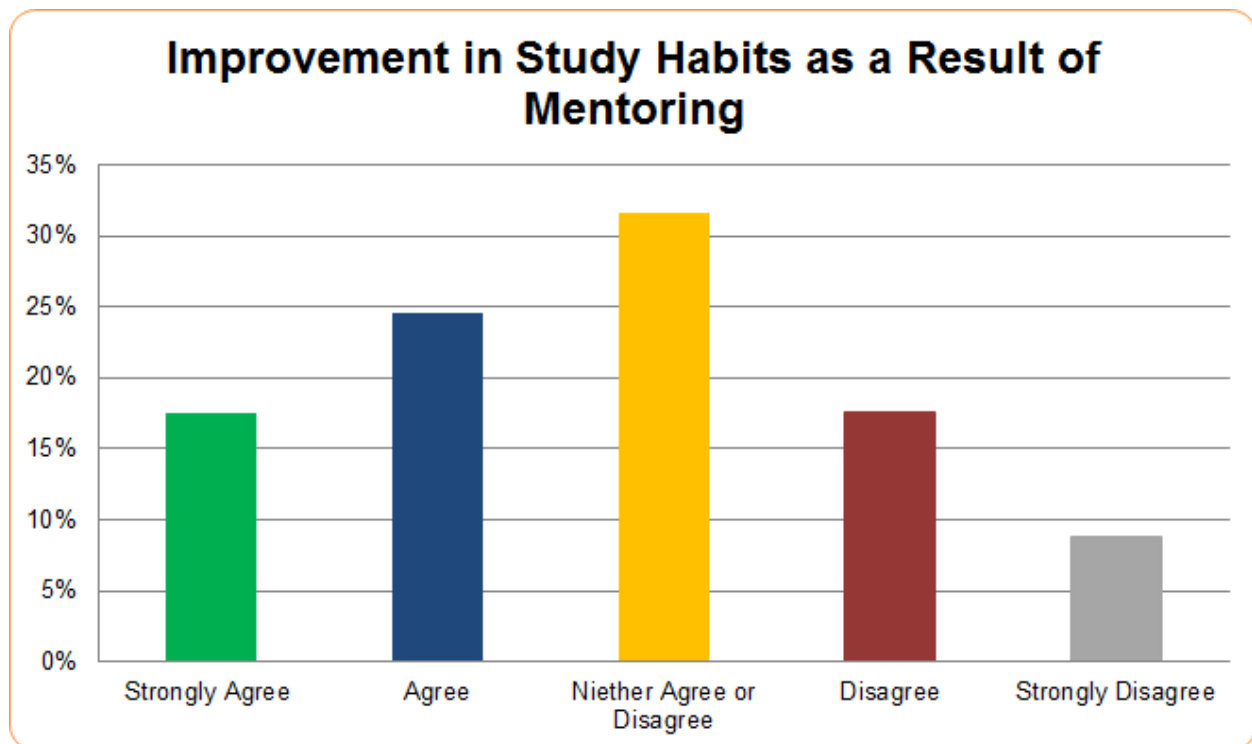


Figure 23. Respondents' assessment of mentoring on study habits

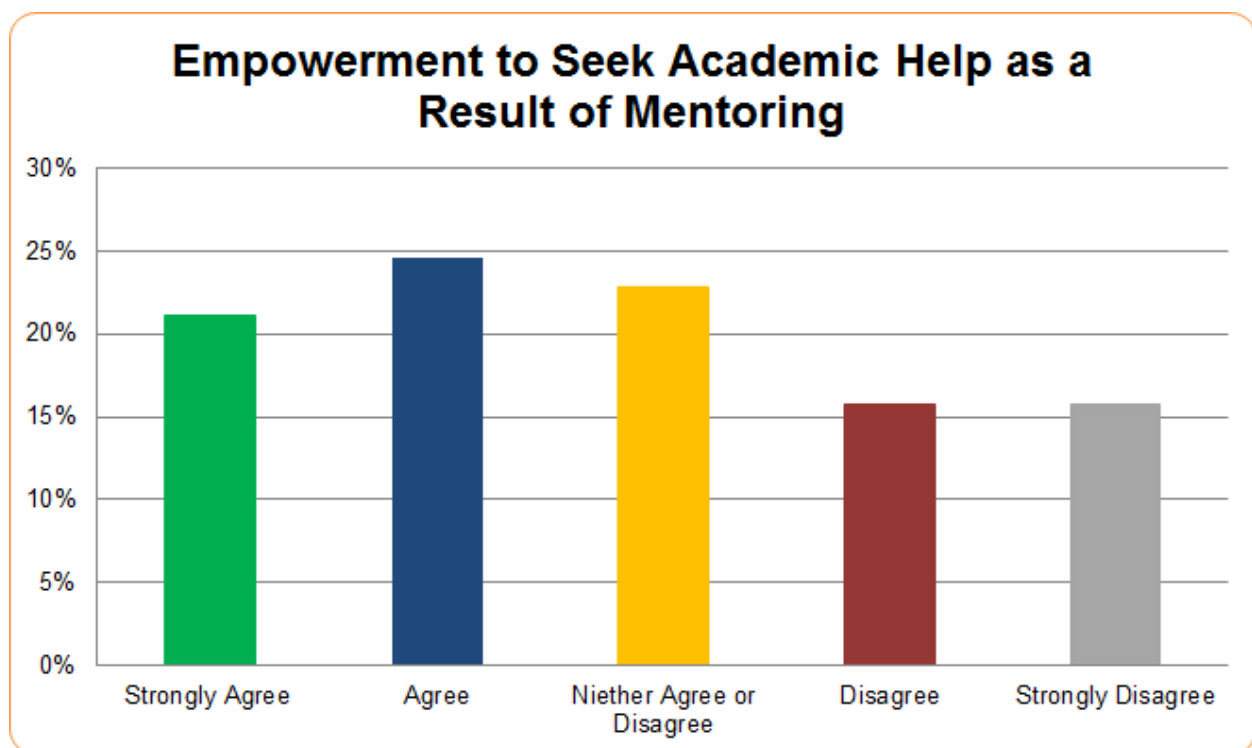


Figure 24. Mentoring's relation to locating academic assistance

Summary of Results

The survey results gave clarity on the specific topics it was designed to address as well as the study's over-arching research questions, and here I briefly summarize the responses in the three different areas of questioning: demographic/personal; overall attitudes and perceptions of mentoring; and personal experiences with mentoring.

Respondents' overall attitudes and perceptions of mentoring show that mentees expect mentors to exhibit high levels of accessibility, approachability, trust, interest in a mentee's personal and academic welfare. Also, respondents expected at least some level of engagement with the mentee as a junior colleague, not merely as a student. Finally, respondents expected mentors to help their charges navigate departmental academic support structures and policies as well as professional opportunities.

Respondents' personal experiences with mentoring at their institutions revealed that although mentoring was a valuable resource that institutions should offer, an overwhelming percentage of respondents were either not aware of such opportunities or did not always choose to take advantage of them. Those who did utilize such resources reported positive academic, social, and professional outcomes as a result of their association with mentors. These findings show that graduate students of color, especially the increasing Latinx populations at PWI's, may benefit from institutionalized mentoring programs publicized more robustly to students of those demographics, particularly through on-campus cultural centers. Responses to the demographic/personal questions revealed that most participants identified as female Latinx pursuing Master's degrees.

CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION

I distributed a qualitative-quantitative anonymous survey on the impact of mentoring for graduate students of color through email as an electronic survey to three PWIs in northern Colorado. These institutions provided a listserv targeting graduate students both on-campus and off-campus students. I also worked with cultural centers and other graduate students of color colleagues to increase survey responses. In addition to quantitative survey questions, the survey also included open-ended questions focusing on mentoring development, social factors, and the opportunity for respondents to share their personal narratives and counterstories in a one-on-one interview format. Unfortunately, no GSC accepted my invitation for one-on-one interviews. That being said, the data and open-ended responses provided useful information about respondents' perceptions of mentoring and critical race-social factors. The results of this study reflect that mentoring would support graduate students in their educational goals.

From the fifty-seven completed surveys, approximately 83% of respondents identified themselves as Latinx, Chicano/a, or Hispanic. Additionally, eight of the fifty-seven identified as another minority ethnic or racial group, providing a well-rounded perspective of graduate students of color with a predominance of Latinx. Question 38 solicited the willingness of survey respondents to participate in further research through personal interview; however, those who said they were willing declined to send contact information, and because this was an anonymous survey, the author was unable to reach out to those who expressed interest. That being said, it is encouraging to note that some were willing to share their narratives because ultimately these can be useful for universities and graduate students of color.

Several of the fifty-seven respondents were quite specific about the aspects of their mentoring experience that influenced them. This is a positive result and addresses the first research question on the success of graduate students of color through mentoring. Numerous respondents cited the benefit of emotional support, especially for students of color facing exclusion. For example, Q5 queries the degree to which mentoring has influenced the student's graduate school education. One student affirmed, "It positively helped me, motivating me when I was stressed and exhausted by reaching out to an individual that I saw as a mentor." This statement reflects the potential reach of mentors and addresses another challenge—academic achievement—for many graduate students of color. Fifty-seven percent of survey respondents felt "mentoring has been important to my academic achievement." In terms of analyzing their experiences through a CRT framework—including social factors such as cultural, ethnic, gender, socioeconomic, and linguistic background—the majority responded positively and felt that their mentor had addressed these factors. One student replied, "I was able to overcome the disadvantages by the differences between myself and my mentor. I think the struggle made me stronger." Of the respondents to Q10, only 35% had participated in a mentoring program during his or her graduate school experience; however, 65% reported that they had had mentors (Q8). These responses seem to indicate that formal mentoring systems may not exist on many campus; advisors and faculty may constitute the only mentoring platform for many graduate schools. The data also foregrounds an opportunity for graduate schools to establish mentoring programs that work in combination with faculty and advisors to provide a multi-pronged mentoring experience. A formal mentoring program can help mitigate the issue mentioned in Milkman's study, where professors were less likely to provide mentoring services for students of color compared to their white counterparts.

Q11 lends itself to deriving possible correlations for both research questions. Q11 asks whether survey respondents would have benefited from a mentor or mentoring program during their graduate studies, and 65% replied affirmatively. Yet only 28% of respondents sought mentoring services at a university center or cultural center. This result could indicate that campus cultural centers would be well-advised to be more intentional about establishing mentoring services. Responses to Q7, Q23 and Q25, related to the benefits of mentoring, were largely positive, with 64% of respondents selecting either “strongly agreeing” or “agreeing” with the statement, “I am benefiting from the mentoring I am receiving.” Question 11 targeted survey respondents who had not sought mentoring services; nearly 65% say they would have benefited from a mentor or mentoring program, and 68% of respondents to Q12 would have wanted more information regarding mentoring services available at their institution.

These survey results, combined with the literature, have made a meaningful connection to this dissertation’s hypothesis, based on the two research questions: 1. To what degree do graduate students of color utilize available mentoring, both personal (faculty, advisor) and programmatic (mentoring centers) at PWI? 2. How has such mentoring influenced their academic success, their accessibility to professional opportunities, and their overall graduate school experience? Based on the qualitative and quantitative data, it is clear that mentoring does make a positive impact on graduate students of color at PWIs.

Underrepresentation of students of color compared to the overall U.S. population and the difficulties such students encounter while pursuing higher education are roadblocks many institutions are struggling to remove. Many systemic and race-critical barriers limit access for students of color, and that number increases as they enter graduate schools at PWIs. Through narratives, counterstories, lived experiences and mentoring programs, one is able to uncover

these social factors that hinder accessibility and success for many students of color, but systemic barriers still exist.

Not only do social factors impact students of color, but many face additional challenges from unresponsive faculty advisors. Milkman's study is relevant to this dissertation because of those graduate students surveyed, nearly 44 % elected their faculty as their mentors. The need for universities to promote and create a positive and inclusive environment is a goal that affects both students and university stakeholders. Isolationism, cultural disconnect, linguistic, and socioeconomic status contribute to the underrepresentation at PWIs.

The majority of graduate students of color at PWIs are currently not receiving sufficient support or guidance, which affects personal, social, and academic success. In order to serve as true supporters, students, faculty, and administrators must educate themselves about race and the role played in maintaining the system of oppression (Sulaiman, 2006, para. 7).

Implications for Future Practice

Results from my research have the potential to assist graduate programs, specifically for graduate students of color. More importantly, as new researchers, I encourage students of color to leverage this study to inform their personal graduate journey by leveraging this study. These recommendations include developing and training robust mentor/mentee relationships and offering formal mentoring programs to address social factors that graduate students of color face daily. Based on my findings, graduate students of color can utilize my survey as a tool to invite counterstories and one-on-one interviews. Similarly, graduate students of color and institutions can tailor this survey to their own research, departments, or goals in order to measure and improve the experiences. Colleges and universities at the department level need to implement training and derive outcome expectations to accurately measure the effectiveness of any new mentoring program. When considering the needs of graduate students of color, such surveys

should take place at the beginning of each program and periodically during the student's program.

When mentoring becomes part of the academic establishment, it should provide additional support beyond mere academic or career conversations. An effective mentor or mentoring program considers all social factors that influence the graduate students of color's experience and expectations. It may be difficult for these students to share all their experiences at the beginning of a mentoring relationship. Training and time are also part of the mentoring experience. Many survey respondents were at the beginning of their graduate work and had yet to establish a mentor. Structures that include a group setting with other graduate students of color or a mentoring group are also practices to consider. Only one survey respondent was aware of or utilized a mentoring program rather than a mentor-mentee relationship. Effective mentoring programs will allow for group settings rather than only a faculty or advisor connection. Regardless, studies support investing in a multi-programmatic approach to mentoring provides academic support for graduate students of color.

Implications for Future Research

Given the current and volatile national sentiment on race relations stemming from historical inequality and underrepresentation, now more than ever including all voices is vital at all levels of academia. A university-wide mentoring program, fortunately, can be implemented at the faculty, student and mentor level without substantial organizational red tape. A strong assessment of mentoring, through student interviews and through assessing general relationships with faculty, can provide the impetus to incorporate remedies that will make graduate students of color feel connected to their program. Graduate students of color must invest in these ideals by advocating for these initiatives and/or co-sponsoring programs for university administrators. In

certain cases, graduate students of color need to become the proponent by supporting or recommending a new policy or cause to address the needs or a gap in services in academia. For example, a group of graduate students from one of the universities I researched on my survey formed a graduate led organization within the department to create a voice. This group invites faculty and administrators to share their research, policy, ideas, and goals for the school. Cultural centers are additional support systems for students of color who seek refuge from large institutions. Cultural centers can supplement needed resources and guidance around similar barriers for students of color and provide a safe zone to share diverse ideas and initiatives. This is a reasonable goal considering the number of graduate students of color, which is knowingly lower than the general student population.

Future studies should explore best practices to implement a mentoring program and faculty-student conversations that involve critical race- or social factors-based questions as mentioned previously and in my survey. Faculty need to proactively assess these social considerations in their students of color and support them as they begin their program, not delaying until the middle or late stages, when it becomes more difficult to keep students on track. A mentoring program should also include information on social factors influencing our graduate students of color. In this regard, faculty will also need training; institutions cannot assume that they have the tools necessary to support graduate students of color or to speak to critical race factors.

Another avenue for future investigation is to identify mechanisms to evaluate perspectives of faculty and graduate students of color, such as an annual pre/post survey that captures the qualitative and quantitative perceptions of faculty and students to measure the success of the mentoring program. Colleges in higher education should implement pre/post

surveys to uncover best practices rather, than a university-wide assessment, which may dilute results. Additional research should focus on the classification of faculty and mentor by ethnicity. Even though not the primary focus of my research, I encountered articles and studies on mentoring between ethnic and cultural relationships for students and faculty of color.

In this dissertation, I focused on race without attending in detail to other implications. In application, in a university setting, one must consider intersectional identity and make considerations for other components of identity such as gender, sexuality, linguistics and social economic status.

Foregrounding race as guided by CRT is vital in understanding experiences; however, complexing this issue further, is applying additional factors of intersectional identities to this methodology. The intersection of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality with an oppressive nature from a faculty member and mentee can create a complicated and confusing situation. In practice, one must be cautionary with the addition of intersectional identities. For example, the clash over ideology around sexuality can cause friction among a homophobic faculty and their LGBTQ mentee.

Finding a way to pair the significance of race and ethnicity, and the desire to eliminate biases should be a goal for mentorship around graduate students of color. However, one cannot proceed forward to attend mentorship by addressing race alone, but through intersectional factors. For example, a Latinx identity goes beyond race and the misalignment around race when additional factors are involved between the mentor and mentee, such as classism. Classism may impede or limit the benefits of the mentoring experience because of a prejudice against the mentee belonging to a particular social class within the same ethnicity.

I acknowledge the complexity of addressing intersectionality of identities in mentorship; however, organic mentoring should be at the core of the process, and subsequently mentors should acknowledge and incorporate intersectional identity. Interspersed through my survey, were identifiers mentioned in this space around social factors, including open-ended opportunities to share intersectional identity; however, there is additional research needed in this space.

Personal Reflections

Identity and language.

Being multicultural has its advantages and disadvantages depending on the person's point of view. Linguistics, for example, is a CRT social factor tied to my survey. Many graduate students of color speak a second language, which helps but also may hinder their ability to fully grasp the dominant language in the US. Many immigrant students who enter the school system are met with mandatory English language acquisition programs due to lack of bilingual/bicultural literacy immersion programs. This approach not only diminishes their dominant language but often leaves students staggering with their English language development. I myself struggled to learn English. Spanish was my first language, and I was not allowed to pass second grade because of my poor English language skills. At the time, no bilingual immersion programs existed at my elementary school.

The manner in which the multilingual learner population is constructed in terms of English proficiency and therefore either situated as academic failures or invisible in policy and practice, is highly problematic. Therefore, closer examination of the positioning of multilingual learners in policy and practice is necessary to substantially challenge these deficit perspectives and reposition secondary multilingual learners in terms of their assets rather than English language deficit (Mitchell, 2013, p. 3).

Linguistic social factors are just one example of a larger dominant educational structure that CRT works to expose and address in academia. Ironically, its language provides a voice through

counter-storytelling with CRT. Counter-storytelling is an established method to combat larger barriers for graduate students of color. CRT has discovered fundamental flaws and inequitable social structures around race and repression. “CRT in educational research unapologetically centers the ways race, class, gender, sexuality and other forms of oppression manifest in the educational experiences of People of Color” (Huber, 2010, p.78).

Finding and defining personal identity through a CRT framework can support many graduate students of color on college campuses that consciously or unconsciously through micro-aggressions disregard the importance of race. Graduate students of color are consistently prodded to define themselves on university-wide surveys, class interactions, and admission paperwork. Fortunately, graduate students of color can leverage CRT to freely express race and multiculturalism. CRT lives and breathes on narratives from shared experiences. My survey shares the same philosophy by encouraging students to express and define themselves authentically—without pretense, hesitancy or disguise

I appreciated the variety of responses throughout my survey and the rich data that resulted from this work. The demographic questions were very complex to unpack because they spoke to several levels of personal identity, a struggle many graduate students of color face when explaining to others. I genuinely hope the graduate students of color who took my survey were comfortable sharing their true identities with me.

Prospects

Writing to critical race theory and social factors at a time in our nation when sentiment around race relations is highly charged, particularly for marginalized members of society, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to provide a platform for graduate students of color to express themselves. My research also provided an opportunity to analyze specific attitudes and

experiences of the respondents and to recommend solutions to these challenges, such as utilizing mentors or a mentoring program to support graduate students of color.

Tenured faculty members who are long-term, if not permanent, employees can directly influence (for better or for worse) the potential success of underrepresented students, particularly graduate students and junior faculty members (Whittaker & Montgomery, 2014. p. 269).

Many survey responses support my contention that mentors or mentoring services can increase their success in higher education. Over 75% reported having had “positive interaction in my connection with individuals at the college/university due to mentoring.”

Providing a voice for historically underserved students of color in PWI has been a privilege. Doing so has allowed me to listen to and read several counterstories and life experiences from graduate students of color as they progress through their graduate careers. I also met administrators, representatives from student organizations, and faculty who share the same passion to support graduate students of color. “The graduate student experience, for many, can be a time of great stress, insecurity, and uncertainty. Overwhelmingly, studies verify that good mentoring is one of the best indicators of graduate student success” (Brunsma, Embrick, & Shin, 2017, para. 1). This research study of graduate students of color is another positive step that addresses critical race issues and promotes a continuing dialogue that can move institutions of higher education toward the ideal goal of proper representation of students of color in higher education. More conversations involving more students of color are needed to influence and incorporate policy that ultimately will address race matters in higher education. Although the survey reached many students of color, a limited number of students responded. Still, I hope others utilize my survey and expand my work through further research.

Any remedies to the underrepresentation, inequity, and race-related barriers on campuses around the nation must continue to look beyond basic cultural awareness to systemic institutional

transformation, including a philosophical change that introduces and considers social factors influencing graduate students of color.

As an example, my current institution continues to battle bias or hate that leaves students of color with a sense of isolation or intimidation. Such an example occurred during Fall 2017 at Colorado State University. Two Jewish and Middle Eastern students were harassed, forcing CSU President Tony Frank to address these issues. In the first instance, anti-Semitic slurs were promulgated on campus; in the second, a Middle Eastern student was accosted on a transit bus by a non-campus member “exhibit[ing] disturbing and intimidating behavior toward her.” Frank, writing to the entire university (Appendix E), reiterated the institution’s commitment to better communicating incidents of hate speech. He also acknowledged the difficult “balancing act” between protecting free-speech rights of all students, no matter how distasteful one might perceive such speech, while simultaneously pursuing and punishing expression of speech that tangibly harms members of the university community. “But to manage that balancing act with vigilance and care,” he affirmed, “is precisely our responsibility as members of an academic community.” Unfortunately, these are the racial and anti-Semitic experiences some students are experiencing on one of the campuses to which I submitted my survey and that I currently attend. Frank specifically calls out the impact of isolationism, reinforcing the research found for many students of color who are underrepresented at many PWIs. Many students experience these social injustices every day on and off campus.

When there is a disproportionately small number of students of color on PWIs, speeches, marches and similar events infused with racial overtones or subject matter create an underlying sense of uneasiness and anxiety for graduate students of color. It can be devastating and demoralizing for graduate students of color and students of color not only to live with issues

regarding hate speech, but to read about them from the president of their educational institution. Individuals with racist predispositions are often present in the same classrooms as graduate students of color, an unsettling, unwelcome environment at best that students of color must tolerate.

Mentoring and CRT provide frameworks to acknowledge and address race and racism in the field of education, so I based my research on these two strategies. Mentoring creates a sense of solitude or safe zones for graduate students of color against this negative climate (Lopez & Justice, 2014). Likewise, the goal of CRT is not only to establish a theoretical framework for this dissertation but also to create the narratives and lived experiences of race and racism in large structures like PWIs.

CRT brings activist, scholar, and practitioner together to study and transform relationships among race, racism, and power. It moves beyond race as a variable or grouping mechanism, and focuses instead on how race operates in our lives” (Williams, 2016, “Developing a critical perspective,” para. 1).

I interwove these two principles throughout my research and my mentoring survey in order to uncover experiences and examine first-hand the role CRT and mentoring play in the lives and experiences of graduate students of color. These lived experiences matter to me as a graduate student of color, and they must matter to other PWIs because together we face these obstacles every day. The small number of graduate students of color have an equally small voice compared to the whole university population.

Graduate students of color are themselves a minority *within* a minority (the graduate student population) and thus may be particularly susceptible to bias and academic/ethnic discrimination. The findings of my research, in particular the need for mentors to guide graduate students of color through the social and academic pathways to success, indicate that part of the responsibility Frank refers to “as members of an academic community” includes institutional

commitment to graduate students of color—shown by implementing specific programs and investing in specific resources to reduce isolationism and to enhance a graduate students of color’s academic experience—through robust mentoring initiatives.

Conclusion

The diversity of graduate student populations on college campuses is increasing. With many graduate-serving organizations in place, mentoring and proper, whole guidance that reflects social-based factors are vital. Data described in Chapter I show that the population of graduate students of color is small enough that impactful mentoring programs can produce positive relationships and outcomes. Implementation of and training required in a mentoring program are relatively inexpensive. Training can originate from faculty and other experts who have researched and gained expertise in mentoring, race matters and CRT.

It is paramount to address race and racism on college campuses through several avenues, but solutions must be adopted and endorsed by university presidents, administrators, college deans, faculty and graduate students of color. There is a plethora of work needed to support graduate students beyond the realm of discussion in this dissertation. For instance, policies around affordability, tuition hike freezes or cap tuition rates that impact many graduate students of color who struggle for financial resources to pay for college. Included in this idea are policies for undocumented and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrives (DACA) students, identifying avenues for these student who are unable to access financial aid from the government due to their status. Several colleges have created funds, endowments, and grants to help support funding for undocumented and low-income students. Yet, based on the racism revealed in the counterstories of participants in this study, graduate schools must include zero-tolerance campus-based policies for sexual, racial and anti-Semitic verbal and physical assaults and social justice initiatives

around race equity, inclusion and diversity. Graduate schools are an institution within large university systems that can support graduate students of color. Within graduate schools, are graduate councils, led by graduate students who function as a connection point to administrators and a voice for graduate students. Cultural centers and graduate student councils provide the advocacy power to address prominent issues such as racism on college campuses. Often times, graduate students are overlooked due to the relatively small numbers compared to undergraduates within college departments. With this in mind, leveraging these support systems is vital for graduate students of color like myself. I applied the aforementioned resources they provided to guide through a difficult process by including their voice and endorsing initiatives to address positive race-based structures. Counterstories provide ample reasons why universities should also develop mentorship that is inclusive through systematic pedagogy, practice, and policy that acknowledges the graduate student of color experience and voice.. Most importantly, these policies and approaches must become student-centered, with the students' narratives and experiences in mind. Graduate students of color need a place at the table to offer new ideas and solutions for university-wide practices and policies that increase the value and outcome of their college experiences. Listening well and instituting systemic mentoring can positively influence students of color success at PWIs.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Instrument Script

Dear [Name]:

My name is René Gonzalez, and I am a PhD candidate at Colorado State University. As a graduate student of color, it is important for me to understand the role and impact of mentoring in our graduate careers. I am asking fellow graduate students of color to complete a survey on the role of mentors and mentorship programs. As an incentive, five of those who return this survey, chosen at random, will receive a gift card. I hope you will participate in this important assessment of graduate students of color in higher education at predominantly white institutions to assess the level of effectiveness of mentoring. Your participation in this research is voluntary. I anticipate the survey will take approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. I assure you that all responses will remain confidential, and any published results will identify only your university location, not its name. This instrument meets all the requirements for the protection of respondent privacy and confidentiality and is approved by the Colorado State University Institutional Review Board. It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but I have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks. I appreciate your assistance in gathering this information about graduate students of color. If you have questions at any time, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you,

Rene Gonzalez

Colorado State University

School of Education: 209 Education Building

Fort Collins, CO 80523

Email: Rene.Gonzalez@colostate.edu

Appendix B: Instrument

MENTORING SURVEY

As a graduate student of color, it is important for me to understand the role and effectiveness of mentoring in your graduate career. Mentoring is a very broad term; please feel free to interpret the role unique to your situation, meaning that a mentor can be more than one person, advisor, faculty member, university administrator, or an academic formal or informal mentorship program.

I am asking fellow graduate students of color to fill out this 10- to 15-minute survey on the role of mentors or mentorship programs. As an incentive, five of those who return this survey, chosen at random, will receive a gift card. Thank you in advance for completing and submitting the survey.

Section I: Impact of Mentoring

1. In your own words, what is mentoring?
2. What aspects of mentoring have influenced you during your graduate school education?
3. What do you think an effective mentor provides for a graduate student of color?
4. Do you presently have or at any time during your graduate school experience did you have a mentor? (Y/N)
5. Do you presently have or at any time during your graduate school experience did you have more than one mentor? (Y/N)
 - a. If you selected Y, how many mentors do/did you have? (1,2,3 or more)
6. Have you been a part of a mentoring program during your graduate school experience? (Y/N)
7. Have you searched for mentorship services such as a university cultural center? (Y/N)

If you selected “N” to the previous four questions, please answer the following two questions. If you selected “Y” to the previous four questions, please skip to section II.

8. Do you feel you would have benefited from a mentor and/or mentoring program during your graduate studies? (Y/N)
9. Would you have liked to receive more information about a mentor and/or mentoring program at the start of your graduate program? (Y/N)

Section II: Mentoring Descriptive Section

1. Which option best describes your mentors during graduate school (mark all that apply)?
 - a. Advisor
 - b. Faculty member
 - c. Administrator
 - d. Another student of color
 - e. Family member
 - f. Other mentor (please state) _____
2. Please select the best descriptors of your mentors in terms of ethnicity and/or racial background (mark all that apply):
 - a. Black and/or African-American
 - b. Asian
 - c. Native Hawaiian and/or Pacific Islander
 - d. Latinx/Hispanic/Chican@
 - e. Native-American/Native-American
 - f. Alaska Native
 - g. Other (please state) _____

3. Please select your mentors' gender (mark all that apply):
 - a. Female
 - b. Male
 - c. Transgender
 - d. Other (please state) _____
4. Were your mentor(s) on campus or off campus?
 - a. On campus
 - b. Off campus
5. How did you connect with your mentor(s)?
 - a. Referral from another student of color
 - b. Referral from a professor
 - c. Referral from a college department
 - d. Referral from a family member
 - e. Referral from a university cultural center
 - f. Other (please state) _____
6. Describe what your mentor(s) helped you with.
7. What were the most important benefits you received from your mentor(s) or mentoring program?

Section III: Graduate Student Information:

1. Please select the categories that best describe your gender:
 - a. Female
 - b. Male
 - c. Transgender

- d. Other (please state) _____
- 2. Please select the best descriptor(s) in terms of your ethnicity and/or racial background
(mark all that apply):
 - a. Black and/or African-American
 - b. Asian
 - c. Native Hawaiian and/or Pacific Islander
 - d. Latinx/Hispanic/Chican@
 - e. Native-American/Native-American
 - f. Alaska Native
 - g. Other (please state) _____
- 3. What program are you currently enrolled in?
 - a. Master's Degree Program
 - b. Doctoral/Terminal Degree Program
 - c. Professional Degree Program
 - a. Online Masters or PhD Program
- 4. Are you willing to be a mentor for another student of color? (Y/N)

Section IV: Data Survey

	SA.....SD
1. I am benefiting from the mentoring I receive.	1 2 3 4 5
2. I have had positive interactions in my connection with individuals at the college and/or university due to mentoring.	1 2 3 4 5
3. There have been adequate opportunities available to me to receive mentoring.	1 2 3 4 5
4. I have implemented suggestions provided by my mentors.	1 2 3 4 5
5. I feel better about my graduate school experience because of mentoring.	1 2 3 4 5
6. I have seen improvement in my study habits as a result of mentoring.	1 2 3 4 5
7. I have utilized resources/suggestions to enhance my learning because of mentoring.	1 2 3 4 5
8. I am satisfied that I made use of mentoring.	1 2 3 4 5
9. Mentoring has made a positive difference in my connection with the school or department (dept. varies on specific major).	1 2 3 4 5
10. Mentoring has been important to my academic achievement.	1 2 3 4 5
11. I feel less isolated on campus because of mentoring.	1 2 3 4 5
12. I am able to find academic help when needed because of mentoring.	1 2 3 4 5
13. I am more responsible for my academic success because of mentoring.	1 2 3 4 5

Section V: Characteristics of a Mentor

How important are the following mentor characteristics to your graduate success?

An impactful mentor is...	Very unimportant	Neither important nor unimportant	Very important	Level of Expectation 1: High 2: Medium 3: Low
Accessible				
Open and honest				
Establishes trust between you and mentor				
Approachable				
Interested in my personal welfare				
Willing to share opportunities for professional networking & development				
Provides career advising				
Willing to have informal (social) interactions				

Treats me as junior colleague				
Includes peer-specific support (e.g., study groups)				
Includes peer social support, Peer academic advice (e.g., coursework, critique of work)				

Appendix C: Historical Timeline of Affirmative Action Legislation and Policy (Matthews, 2009)

- 1986: Title III in the Higher Education Act is amended to include Part B—the amendment to be known as the Historically Black Colleges and Universities Act—substantially increasing Title III funding to HBCUs.
- 1989: A federal appeals court revives the Adams desegregation case, requiring the US Department of Education to monitor the desegregation of public colleges in all states that have a legally mandated segregation system of higher education. In 1987, a federal judge dismissed the case, which for nearly 15 years prior had forced the Southern and border states to submit plans to desegregate their colleges.
- 1990: Michael Williams, head of the US Department of Education Department's Office of Civil Rights in the administration of President George H.W. Bush, announces that it is illegal for colleges to restrict scholarships based on race or ethnicity. Following protests from colleges, the Administration re-examines the issue, yet later adopts a policy to again restrict such scholarships.
- 1992: The US Supreme Court rules in *Ayers v. Mississippi* that Mississippi has done enough to eliminate segregation in its public universities. The lawsuit was filed in 1975 by the late Jake Ayers, the father of a black college student who accused the state of neglecting its three historically black colleges and universities. The court orders a new trial in the case to produce another desegregation plan. The lawsuit continues as *Ayers v. Fordice*.
- 1992: The Higher Education Act is amended to allow Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs) to be recognized as an approved program under Title V. The amendment marked

the first official federal appropriation specifically for HSIs, defined as schools with a full-time undergraduate enrollment that is at least 25 percent Hispanic, of which half must be low-income and 25 percent first-generation collegians.

- 1994: The 4th US Circuit Court of Appeals rules in *Podberesky v. Kirwan* that publicly-funded scholarships designated only for black students are no longer permissible in the state of Maryland and other 4th Circuit Court states.
- 1995: The US Supreme Court's 5-4 decision in *Adarand Contractors Inc v. Peña* holds that federal affirmative action programs involving the use of race as a basis for preferential treatment are lawful only if they can withstand federal courts' "strict scrutiny." The case, which limits the use of preferences based on race or ethnicity in federal programs, prompts colleges and universities to examine their participation in "set-aside" and minority-grant programs.
- 1995: Federal District Court Judge Harold Murphy's decision in *Knight v. Alabama* mandates the creation of Whites-only scholarships at Alabama State University to desegregate the school. The decision is later challenged by the Washington, D.C.-based Center for Individual Rights on behalf of a black student. The parties involved agreed to end the case in 2006 with an assortment of enhancements for historically black colleges and universities. The state approved a six-fold increase in need-based aid for students, regardless of race.
- 1995: President Bill Clinton delivers the "Mend It, Don't End It" speech defending affirmative action. His speech provides critical moral and political support for affirmative action during a period of heightened attacks by critics. Months prior to the speech, Clinton had ordered a review of all federal programs involving affirmative action.

- 1995: The University of California Board of Regents passes SP-1, a ban on race- and gender-conscious affirmative action policies in admissions and hiring in the university system.
- 1996: California's Proposition 209—the anti-affirmative action referendum—passes, imposing a ban on race- and gender-conscious affirmative action on all state institutions (universities and colleges).
- 1996: The 5th Circuit Court of Appeals decides in *Hopwood v. Texas* that race cannot be used in admissions decisions, causing underrepresented minority enrollment to plummet at Texas colleges.
- 1997: Two lawsuits are filed against the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, challenging both the undergraduate and law schools' admissions policies (*Grutter v. Bollinger* and *Gratz v. Bollinger*). In *Gratz v. Bollinger*, which was filed by the Washington, D.C.-based Center for Individual Rights, two white students, Jennifer Gratz and Patrick Hamacher, sue the University of Michigan after being denied admission to the university's undergraduate college. The lawsuits charge the university and law school with reverse discrimination (not applicable to graduate school but important as a timeline reference).
- 1998: Washington state's 1-200 bill passes, imposing a ban on race- and gender-conscious affirmative action policies.
- 2000: The Georgia Appeals Court rules in favor of white plaintiffs who claim the University of Georgia used race as a factor in admissions.
- 2001: University of California regents repeal their ban on affirmative action, hoping to send a welcoming message to minority students. The move is largely symbolic since

California voters passed Proposition 209 in 1996, which continues to prohibit race-conscious policies in the state.

- 2002: The 6th US Circuit Court of Appeals rules in favor of the University of Michigan's affirmative action policy in admissions to the law school (*Grutter v. Bollinger*), reversing a lower court ruling and upholding the university's position that it has a compelling interest in achieving a diverse student body.
- 2002: A federal judge approves a desegregation plan for Mississippi's universities, signaling an end to the 27-year-old legal battle. Mississippi lawmakers pledge to fulfill the requirements of the settlement, expected to cost more than \$500 million.
- 2003: The US Supreme Court strikes down the University of Michigan's undergraduate admissions policy, which uses a point-based system for applicants, while still allowing the consideration of race. In addition, the court upholds the law school's admissions policy, which used a less mechanical admissions formula.
- 2006: The state of California prevails in a lawsuit challenging Assembly Bill 540, a provision that allows undocumented immigrant students who attended and graduated from a California high school and have resided in the state for at least three years to receive in-state tuition at state colleges and universities.
- 2006: The *Geier v. Alexander* desegregation case, filed in 1968, comes to an end with the determination that Tennessee had successfully dismantled its dual—one for Blacks, one for Whites—system of higher education.
- 2006: Michigan becomes the third state to ban race- and gender-conscious affirmative action policies.

- 2007: The U.S Supreme Court, ruling 5-4, limits the use of race in school assignments in the consolidated case of Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District and Meredith v. Jefferson County Board of Education. The decision prohibits public school districts from assigning students to schools solely for the purpose of achieving racial integration, and the court declined to recognize racial balancing as a state interest.
- 2008: A referendum to ban racial and gender preferences is approved by Nebraska voters, but fails in Colorado. Ward Connerly, the former University of California regent behind the bans in California and Michigan, set out to put the issue to voters in five states, but affirmative action proponents in Arizona, Missouri and Oklahoma fought to keep it off the ballot and failed.
- 2009: The Texas Legislature approves limits on the Top 10 percent rule guaranteeing state college admission to any Texan who finished in the top 10 percent of their high school class. Passed in 1997, the law was intended to boost diversity on college campuses after a federal court banned affirmative action in admissions. However, with the vast majority of spots at the University of Texas at Austin going to these students, officials had little discretion to admit other talented students. Lawmakers agree to cap automatic admissions to 75 percent of the freshman class at UT-Austin, starting in 2011.

Appendix D: Definitions of Terms (in Alphabetical Order)

African-American/Black: An American of African ancestry having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa (except those of Hispanic origin) (Mellion, 2010).

Attrition rate: The percentage of entering students who have not graduated and who are no longer enrolled at any institutions (Matthews, 2010).

Discrimination: The less-than-favorable treatment of a person or group of people due to their color, race, creed, nationality, or ethnicity compared to another person or group. (Wright, 2010)

Latinx/Hispanic-American: An American of Hispanic or Latin-American ancestry having origins in Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Central or South America, or in other Spanish speaking cultures regardless of race (Mellion, 2010).

Equality: Prescription of the equal opportunity and treatment of all people, regardless of their circumstances (Wright, 2010).

Graduation rate: The percentage of students completing a degree at either the institution in which they entered or any other institution (Matthews, 2010).

Majority: The racial group which has historically had access to power in the United States institutions, typically European (white) Americans (Mellion, 2010).

Mentor: Faison (1996) defines "mentor" as a long-term relationship that is both structural and intentional in nature. A mentor has the following roles in the life of the student at an educational institution:

- supporter, advisor, sponsor, tutor, and role model. Therefore, faculty members, higher education administrators, and academic advisors at predominantly white institutions often serve as these mentors (Wright, 2010).

Mentoring: Supporting another in reaching his or her goals. (Wright, 2010).

Mentoring programs: Institutional efforts to retain college students so they successfully attain a degree (Wright, 2010).

Minority: The racial or ethnic groups who have been historically underrepresented in the United States, typically Asian Americans, African Americans, Hispanic/Latinx, and Native Americans (Mellion, 2010).

Native Americans: An American having origins in any of the original peoples of North American or Hawaii and who maintains cultural identification through tribal affiliation or community recognition (Mellion, 2010).

Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs): University designation that serve a majority student population and institutions of higher learning that do not carry a Historically black College (HBC) or Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) designation (Mellion, 2010).

Race: A term that classifies a person based on their ancestral physical and cultural characteristics (Wright, 2010).

Retention rate: The percentage of a student cohort who completes their degrees or are still enrolled at an institution (Matthews, 2010).

White: Refers to Americans of European ancestry. The terms "white" and "Caucasian" are used interchangeably (Matthews, 2010).

Appendix E: Letter from CSU President Tony Frank, October 6, 2017

Dear Colleagues,

We have been hearing from students and faculty since the beginning of this semester that we, as a university, need to do a better job of communicating around bias or hate incidents that occur on our campus that negatively target an individual or a community. Such incidents, even when legally protected by the First Amendment, can fly in the face of our campus *Principles of Community* and leave members of our CSU family feeling isolated and intimidated. While we always intervene with those immediately impacted, it can be a difficult decision as to when to share information with the entire campus community, and I'll admit it's a decision we haven't always gotten right. We have had several reported incidents of hate already this semester. It began with the paper noose that was hung in one of our residence halls just before classes started. And yesterday, our Jewish students, along with faculty, staff, and allies, marched in solidarity to draw attention to two anti-Semitic messages that appeared recently in the halls—one left anonymously on a student's whiteboard and another involving an anti-Semitic nickname given to someone's personal server that was visible to many on our campus network.

We have heard these concerns about communication and take them seriously. I discussed this earlier this week with members of the President's Cabinet and how we can do better. As a start, let's reset some foundational elements: Colorado State University deplores any acts of hate and terror and takes seriously our responsibility to investigate them and address them appropriately through our judicial and conduct systems. And while allowing hateful speech to occur as required by law, we can still publicly and strenuously disdain it when there is evident harm to our institution and its people. How much to communicate

and when—and through which vehicles—can be a difficult balancing act, weighing the potential of magnifying the voice of those who would seek to intimidate against failing to state how strongly we condemn such actions and risking the appearance of inaction or apathy. It's a balancing act that can leave many of us feeling frustrated, hurt, and angry. But to manage that balancing act with vigilance and care is precisely our responsibility as members of an academic community.

To that end, one of our Middle Eastern students had a concerning experience yesterday while riding on a local bus, and there are several points about this incident that are worth addressing. The woman was riding the bus when a local resident (one known to law enforcement and not a member of the CSU community) began to exhibit disturbing and intimidating behavior toward her. Such behavior is indefensible and utterly offensive to our community, which cherishes internationalism and diversity and is committed to inclusion and the safety of all people.

The incident also provided an outstanding demonstration of the power of effective bystander intervention. Other women and men on the bus interceded on our student's behalf and condemned the man's behavior, inserting themselves between our student and the perpetrator. A group of fellow passengers disembarked with her and walked her safely to her destination. The student did the right thing, as well, in reaching out to a trusted faculty member, who encouraged the student to report the incident to law enforcement. As a result, CSUPD was able to identify and cite the offender, who has been issued an exclusionary order from campus, which means he cannot be on CSU property.

This doesn't erase the fear this woman felt or the feelings she will continue to struggle with over this incident. It doesn't prevent such an incident from happening again, but it provides a model for all of us in upholding and defending our community standards. If you see something wrong, say something. If you are concerned about someone else or need personal guidance and support, tell someone. Take care of one another, because Rams take care of Rams—and because it's our job as human beings.

In that spirit, I want to wish you all a renewing weekend filled with peace and community—get some rest, get out in the sun when you can, and know that our university is fully committed to your success and well-being. Be well.

-tony

Dr. Tony Frank

President