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Higher Education Policy and Student Affairs
THESIS



Learning While Black: Creating Access to Graduate
School for Black Students

Hassan Gomes

May 2021

Learning While Black: Creating Access to Graduate School for Black Students

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the

Department of Educational Foundations and Policy Studies

West Chester University

West Chester, Pennsylvania

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of

Master of Science

By

Hassan A. Gomes

May 2021

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my mother and sister. The pikin finally knows book, I love and cherish you both.

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Abstract

I am a Black educator.

I understand that from its inception higher education in Western culture was not designed with anyone but white men in mind. I am convinced that racism remains prominent in higher education and prevents space for the marginalized. This lack of space carries over into graduate studies and prevents Black student matriculation. Black students face barriers in graduate matriculation due to a lack of funding for graduate tuition, a lack of Black faculty and staff, and an abundance of negative experiences rooted in racism at institutions of higher education. Resources in graduate programs for Black students should present as, Black staffing in graduate admissions departments, mentorship from current Black graduate students and faculty, and focused funding opportunities for Black graduate students. My proposed intervention does all of this, by utilizing “Shoulder Tap” racism will not be cured, but Black graduate student matriculation will increase.

Keywords: Black graduate student, Mentorship, Black student experiences, Barriers, Matriculation, Educative, Empowerment

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Chapter One: The Lost Ones

To the reader:

Just telling you how race affects the interactions and experiences of non-white people in the United States won't suffice. I want you to understand just how deeply influential my race has been throughout my life, and how big of a role race has played in my identity development and perspective. Regardless of who you are or for what reason you're reading this, I want you to briefly reflect on how and who you are. To understand your race is to consider your own upbringing, and for me, the systems of oppression present throughout my life. By utilizing psychology experts Dr. Derald Wing Sue and Dr. David Sue's 2003 revised identity model as a tool for understanding this phenomenon, I have gained more clarity on where I currently am in my journey. Known as the racial and cultural identity development (RCID) model, (Patton et al, 2016, p. 95) I have unpacked and identified when my own five stages of RCID have taken place. I strongly urge the reader to reflect back on their growth and understanding of race over time, and critically analyze the differences before continuing chapter one. Below is an examination and explanation of my journey of identity development. I have provided this in the hope that you will better recognize the need for change, any change surrounding issues of race in higher education.

In *Student Development in College: Theory, Research, and Practice* Dr. Lori D. Patton of Ohio State University summarizes all five stages of the RCID model, the first stage being conformity. "In conformity, individuals identify with White culture, internalize negative stereotypes about themselves or their racial/ethnic group, and have no desire to learn about their cultural heritage" (Patton et al, 2016, p. 95). During the first year of my undergraduate experience, I was well aware of my race and just how it affected me in social situations. I

recognized that I was once again amongst the minority in a predominantly white institution (PWI) and that I would have to play the same “games” I engaged in at my predominantly white high school. These games included not over expressing my blackness or pointing out the differences between me and the majority of the faculty and student body. They also included not taking offense to the blatantly racist or micro-aggressive jokes and comments being directed at me by superiors and peers alike, all while continuing to see and exceed white expectations of what appropriate and professional attire, behavior, and communication looked like. I did my best to conform to what I was expected to be in my newfound environment and wasn’t looking to rock the boat in any sense of the word. I was aware of the stereotypes that were being placed on me, but I decided to not comment on them nor their effects. Luckily, I did however have the desire to learn about my black cultural heritage and discover what it meant to be a vocal black man.

The second stage of the RCID model is dissonance. “In dissonance, individuals' experiences contradict their White worldview. They begin a journey of questioning the dominant culture and gaining an increased interest in learning more about their own racial/ethnic group” (Patton et al, 2016, p. 95). During the second semester of my first year in college, I joined the university’s African Student Association (ASA) or AFRISA. I joined the organization as the Freshman Representative based on the recommendation of the current president at the time. Previously, I expressed my desire to understand more about my culture and my people. Considering the fact that I was a first generation African, I wanted to initially gather more information about what my people were all about. Finding the organization and joining seemed like a great way to gain experience and a brief understanding. Around this time, I also realized I no longer wanted to remain quiet when someone attempted to oppress or discourage me.

Regardless of your skin color or social capital, I wasn't taking it. For the Black students I wasn't "Black" enough, so they would make comments about how different I was based on the same disparaging stereotypes cultivated by our white counterparts. For the African community I wasn't "African" enough, so they would make comments based on the close minded and segregated perceptions of the Black American students. This encouraged dissonance within my identity as an African American male. Yet at my core I knew I didn't agree with the colonizers approach to either part of my intersecting identity.

The third stage of the RCID model is resistance and immersion. "Resistance and immersion involve conscious exploration of one's racial/ethnic identity. Individuals reject White culture and learn about themselves and their cultural group, leading to the formation of a new identity" (Patton et al, 2016, p. 95). During the spring semester of my second year of undergrad, I joined the greatest fraternity in the world. I became a proud member of Omega Psi Phi fraternity incorporated. The historically black fraternity opened my eyes to the widespread advantages of black people and students coming together with a common goal in mind. During this time, I begin to not only view the positions and opinions of the majority as privileged and negative, but as less than and not equal to that of the minority. I became extremely cognizant of the presence that Black people have and how threatened some white people are of that presence. The Black Lives Matter movement, a movement focused on the dismantling of police brutality on Black people was in full swing and gaining more and more traction. In response to it, the "all lives matter" and "blue lives matter" movements also started to pop up across the country. Regardless of the purpose, I viewed these counter organizations as blockades to what the Black community was looking to establish.

The fourth stage of the RCID model is introspection. “In the introspection stage, individuals grapple with finding a balance between the dominant culture and their own cultural heritage and the role of both in shaping their identity” (Patton et al, 2016, p.98). During the fall semester of my current graduate program, I was asked to reflect on my experiences as a fourth-year undergraduate student. Multiple assignments given to me during that semester required me to compare and contrast how my thinking and position had changed. At this point in my college career I was aware of what social forces were working against my identity, and what spaces I felt comfortable expressing my displeasure. Additionally, I was also aware of the circumstances within society and the fact that I still need to function with people I may not agree with. I the slight balance that is needed in order to maintain your cultural influence and still understand and participate in the master culture. With this newfound appreciation and awareness of this skill, I worked to add onto my understanding and find more common ground.

The final stage of the RCID model is synergistic articulation and awareness. “Those who continue this intensive exploration move to synergistic articulation and awareness, in which they integrate their knowledge and experiences into a new identity whereby they accept themselves, appreciate the contributions of other groups, and balance their racial/ethnic identity with other aspects of their identity” (Patton et al, 2016, p. 95). As I sit here during my last semester of graduate school, my identity is balanced. I understand who I am and why I feel so passionate. I am a Black man, the son of a Black woman, the brother of a Black woman, and a product of my experiences. I ask you the reader to once again pause to consider your own identity development. Consider where you are in the RCID model, and how that shapes your perspective before continuing.

Chapter Two: The Miseducation of Hassan Gomes

To save man from the morass of propaganda, in my opinion, is one of the chief aims of education. Education must enable one to sift and weigh evidence, to discern the true from the false, the real from the unreal, and the facts from the fiction....The function of education, therefore, is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. But education which stops with efficiency may prove the greatest menace to society.

-Martin Luther King, Jr., *The Purpose of Education*

Nothing Even Matters

As a Black graduate student, I recognize that I am different from the usual. I recognize the stares of admiration and glares of apprehension. I recognize the lack of academic opportunities housed in graduate level education for me. I recognize the social and societal expectations of failure, and surprise when I succeed. But most of all, I *don't* recognize a lot of faces. I lack the sense of familiarity and similarity when engaging with peers and colleagues, and often find myself asking, where are the graduate students that look like me? The graduate students that have kinky curls, wider noses, larger lips, and darker skin, have they chosen a different program of study or concentration? Did I miss the wave? The fact of the matter is that Black students are substantially underrepresented in graduate programs, and historically have never been represented. A 2019 report from the Council on Graduate Schools (CGS) and Graduate Record Examinations (GRE) shows that in 2018, there were 533,974 students enrolled in graduate schools for the first time. Only 9.4 percent of all first-time enrollees in graduate programs were Black. That same year, 16.6 million undergraduate students enrolled in the Fall.

Black students made up about 7 percent of the undergraduate population (Okahana & Zhou, 2019). With the goal of understanding the creation and perpetuation of this phenomenon, along with the aim of providing a truly equitable higher educational experience to Black students, I eagerly attempt to corner and solve this issue throughout this thesis.

Journey to My Concern

March 21, 1996 is the day I was born, the day my mother was temporarily paralyzed due to medical negligence, and the day my sister became the sole provider for our family. When the circumstances around her were nothing short of disastrous, 17-year-old Nawatu (NUH-Wa-Tu) persevered. Even though her divergent identities as an African, masculine-of-center lesbian created obstacles for her to overcome, she retained her faith, nursed our mother back to health, and raised me to the best of her ability. Nawatu ingrained in me the values that guided and directed my development and maturation as a man. She showed me how people would attempt to deny her access and abolish her happiness based on their perception of who she was and how she looked. Nawatu was my first friend, my dad, and my teacher. My mother, Josephine, is determined to negate any person or thing blocking her blessings or threatening her access—she overcame health concerns, job loss, eviction notices, and many other obstacles to raise two children. The amassing of teachings and examples in my two-parent household boil down to one request, that I take advantage of all their sacrifices and provide the same for others, so that we may never be gainsaid. I owe everything to two Black women, in a country that does not recognize or honor their existence.

On April 22, 2014, I joined the military. I served in the United States Army National Guard for six years in order to gain access to higher education. I suffered through rigorous physical, emotional, and psychological conditioning, all to relieve my family of the financial

burden of Western education. I was prepared to potentially wage war for this country; however, I was not prepared for the discrimination I experienced in the military. I assumed that growing up in a predominantly white area would have sufficed as enough prior knowledge, but life is different when you have a chain of command. Life is different when you are powerless to the demands and decisions of those above you, and when you are a prisoner protecting the land of the free. The very opportunity that provided my access to education simultaneously stripped me of my access to autonomy. Still, I intend to serve once again. This time, rather than fighting wars for power and dominance, I want to win battles for equity, equality, and access in higher education. Much like a leopard in the rain, I keep my spots when met with adversity.

In August of 2019, I received my Bachelor of Arts degree in communication studies with a minor in Psychology. During my undergraduate career, I quickly learned how transformative and impactful higher education could be for students. Just as quickly, I learned that racism, classism, and other forms of structural oppression have augmented the framework of higher educational institutions. Although the packaging of the racist ideology at my institution was not always overt, the microaggressions, prejudicial slights, and culturally insensitive programming that I witnessed continued to reveal the hidden institutional racism at my university. As a first-year student, I understood portions of my privilege and my moral obligation to engage in conscious social change. I wanted to be part of the solution and advance positive change for the common good.

I found my role as an ethical change agent in student leadership and programming for the racially and ethnically marginalized students at my university. My role as a student leader allowed me to engage with a multitude of students and enhance my cultural competence. Specifically, while serving as president of the African Student Association, Black Men United, and the National Pan-Hellenic Council over a three-year period, I was keenly aware of the social

injustices shaping the experiences of multiple student identities within our university. My diverse experiences as an undergraduate student provided me with the platform, opportunity, and resources to educate and empower my peers to seek justice and combat white supremacy on our campus.

To continue my personal transformation, increase my knowledge of equity, and improve my leadership abilities, I worked as a gender and equity facilitator, multicultural center peer mentor, and leadership consultant. These professional work environments served as a conduit for an increase of expert power and a vehicle to provide access to disenfranchised students. I was consistently the first or only Black student, male student, African student, or first-generation student in my university workplaces. To me, this came with the obligation to provide insight to my colleagues and open doors for students coming after me. I wanted to make the transition easier, serve as a point of contact, and surround myself with people that cared about underserved and overlooked students just as much as I did. As graduation approached, I realized that I wanted to continue that work post-undergrad, so that other Black students would have an example, and I applied to graduate programs in higher education.

Why higher education? To answer, I wish I could provide a personal experience with a graduate recruiter or graduate admissions officer, or a story about how going to graduate school has always been part of my academic plan. Sadly, neither are the case. I had no interest in pursuing a graduate degree, and I never considered higher education as a potential career path.

Based on my experiences during undergrad, college was the last place I wanted to work. I enjoyed providing resources for others and assisting students in the Black and African communities, but the horror stories about graduate school kept me away. The tales of the trials and tribulations Black graduate students faced on the daily kept me wary and far from a graduate

program application. Hearing close friends express their struggles with microaggressions, racism, and intolerance reminded me to much of my undergraduate experiences. I wasn't prepared to submit myself to additional punishment. However, I was convinced to apply by Black graduate students currently enrolled at the time. Two friends, mentors, and colleagues of mine, Ashley and Travon. The pair insisted that I could leverage my student experiences and leadership to incite change on a much larger scale. That with a graduate degree in higher education I would be primed to identify, critically examine, and counteract the issues I grappled with as an undergraduate. They introduced me to faculty members that could answer my questions and provided me with resources to pay for tuition via graduate assistantships. But what sold me, and the reason I applied to graduate school? I wanted more Black students to have the same opportunities and options they provided me.

Everything Is Everything

In May 2021, I will complete my graduate degree and thesis for the Master of Science in Higher Education Policy and Student Affairs. Due to the historical, student-centered, and critical action research foci of my graduate program, I am now cognizant of the falsity of several grand narratives I once believed about higher education. I understand now that racism, classism, and other forms of intolerance have not infiltrated the framework of higher educational institutions, but that these ideologies are woven into the very fabric of the post-secondary sphere. I understand that from its inception, education in Western culture was not designed with anyone but white men in mind, and I am convinced that the issue of racism remains prominent in higher education due to the comfort of faculty, staff, and stakeholders who choose to remain ignorant on issues regarding race relations and campus climate. That reality, coupled with a quintessential

combination of white fragility, white privilege, and a lack of interest for students of color, ultimately means that there is no space for the marginalized.

Even with no space for us, Black students still fight on. This legacy of fighting back and pushing forward is particularly necessary in graduate higher education where Black students face barriers in their enrollment, support, and resources. I don't recognize a lot of faces because the Black students aren't matriculating to graduate studies. A lack of funding to pay for rising graduate tuition and fear of additional academic debt can potentially add strain to Black students interested in graduate programs. Black and African American college graduates owe an average of \$25,000 more in student loan debt than White college graduates (Hess, 2021). This gap in student debt for Black students can be a barrier, especially for those who lack knowledge of financial resources available for graduate students.

Another barrier preventing Black student graduate matriculation can be traced to a lack of Black faculty in higher education. In order to enlarge the pool of Black mathematics Ph.D.'s, Dr. Duane A. Cooper (assistant professor of mathematics at Morehouse College) offers recommendations to various stakeholders in his study titled *Recommendations for Increasing the Participation and Success of Blacks in Graduate Mathematics Study*. Utilizing Black graduate student experiences at the University of Maryland, Dr. Cooper explains the influence faculty have on Black student graduate matriculation. He explains how non-Black faculty can and often do serve Black students well, but that it (good service and mentorship) happens infrequently and valuable guidance and support often comes from other Blacks or not at all. Dr. Cooper also identifies the importance of Black faculty presence to the matriculation of Black students to graduate school. "Again, more than half of the Black graduate students reported that undergraduate professors were the influence or an influence on their decision to pursue a

mathematics Ph.D. Particularly striking is that in all but one instance, the influential faculty or staff member was either Black or from a Black college” (Cooper, 2004). But due to the repercussions of desegregation, Black educators historically have not been welcomed in institutions of higher education (Haney, 1978). Thus, there is a lack of Black faculty and staff to perform the much-needed mentorship and professional guidance for Black students. Especially in the case of predominately white institutions, Black educators aren’t in place to assist Black undergraduate student matriculation to graduate programs.

Lastly, I believe negative experiences rooted in racism at institutions of higher education also serves as a barrier preventing Black student graduate matriculation. From my own personal experiences and shared experiences of fellow Black students detailed in chapter three, it is clear that Black student experiences as undergraduates can affect willingness to continue in the academy. With so many graduate programs—even at state funded universities—lacking diversity, the systemic issues related to racism against Black students have no choice but to continue. I believe that by increasing Black graduate enrollment we not only diversify student enrollment, but the workforce and educators of tomorrow.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Frameworks

In order to preserve my usefulness, interest, and passion for higher education, student affairs, and Black students, I think a plan of how I am going to educate students should be in place. This plan of how I will serve Black students presents in the form of a personal and professional educational philosophy, in this case a philosophy of higher education. This will allow me, as the practitioner, to guide my motivations and provide direction. It sounds good, but does it really matter what I want to do when a system is already in place? When the expectation of my role as an educator has already been prescribed? Educational philosophy and purpose differ depending on the institution of higher education, the program, and the faculty or staff member disseminating the information. In my experiences, the majority of western institutions of higher education utilize a business-like model and incorporate it into the classroom. I don't know why or how learning and business can coexist in education. Via my masters program in higher education and student affairs I've learned that the university is supposed to be a sort of "break" from society and business, more of a community of learners eager to uncover life's mysteries and solve age old dilemmas. Still, I've heard certain fields of study being considered more "valuable" compared to others. I've seen the higher cost in tuition and fees in order to add additional value to degrees and certifications. And, I've seen quantitative data as the major signal of student success and understanding. Throughout my time as a Black graduate student I have been exposed to the history of institutions of higher education. History that vividly details how the very ivy league colleges and universities I revere, were built on the backs of African slaves and housed some of the most heinous and inhumane crimes in U.S. history. I have read, endured, and personally experienced the current educational debt crisis facing disadvantaged students. I fear that I will have to choose between providing Black students an education that will prepare them

to survive a system of oppression or empower Black students to question and critically think about if standardized test scores are equitable and if education is only as important as the financial return on investment it can provide. Keeping all this in mind, it has become exceedingly clear that in order to serve as an agent of change, I must clearly identify my educational philosophy. Yes, it does matter what I want to do regardless of the system that is in place. A man that stands for nothing will fall for anything (Malcom X). I will stand for what I believe can assist Black student matriculation into graduate programs, because that is how I can create change.

According to Audrey Rentz's *Student Affairs Practice in Higher Education*, there are multiple distinct questions you need to consider in order to construct a personal philosophy of student affairs:

How can cultural standards be best defined? Should children be given instruction on the tried and true best ways to think and live, or should they be given the tools of critical thought and left to create their own worlds? Is it better to educate for mastery or understanding or even something else? Do appropriate educational practices differ depending on the subject matter and the age of the student?

(Rentz, & MacKinnon, 2004 p. 24)

Utilizing these questions and others provided by the article, I have curated my own educational philosophy. My philosophy presents a comparative model, where I compare a current phenomenon with what I hope to replace it with. Throughout this chapter I will explain my experiences in higher education, reveal my findings, and provide a realistic, sustainable, and equitable direction for the practice of higher education. All in the hopes that Black students may matriculate to graduate programs.

My Experiences Part I: I Am A Black Educator

I am a Black educator, and I want to orientate Black students attending institutions of higher education in a direction that primes them for their definition of success and allows them to accomplish their goals. With this aspiration comes the responsibility to ensure I provide an unparalleled educational experience for the students I reach. With the incremental change and replacement of higher educational staff and educators, the procedures and benefits of educational practices are being called under question. While some higher education faculty and staff don't see a need for change, others are desperately searching for solutions to the current shortcomings of a lacking system. When thinking about what should comprise education John Dewey, an American philosopher, psychologist, and educational reformer proposes the following, "I assume that amid all uncertainties there is one permanent frame of reference: namely, the organic connection between education and personal experience" (Dewey, 1986 p. 61). Dewey believes education is created by experiences, however, not all experiences are the same. He continues, "the belief that a genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative. Experience and education cannot be directly equated to each other, for some experiences are "miseducative" (Dewey, 1986, p.61). My understanding and interpretation of educative versus miseducative experiences has been crucial to forming an educational philosophy. To make sure that I don't perpetuate the same miseducative teachings I have endured as a Black student, I first had to identify how these experiences occur currently. As a Black student, I have at times witnessed and experienced the lack of enthusiasm surrounding traditional and institutionalized education. When this occurs, I have often blamed myself or the Black students struggling. I thought the deficit was with the student, and never thought to question the interpellation (Backer, 2019) taking place. Now, as a

Black educator I understand that the lack of self-controlled feelings toward education, and potentially negative feelings can sometimes be traced back to miseducative experiences. How many Black students have become callous to ideas and lost the joy in learning not because of their own actions but, because of the way in which learning was experienced? I presume that by actively avoiding the production of miseducative experiences for black students, their outlook on learning may improve. And that philosophy is how I plan to assist Black students in higher education and empower more Black students to pursue graduate studies.

I invite the reader to foster a stronger perspective of their educational experiences, while providing some brief insight into my own. In this section I will explain the educative and miseducative experiences of my time in higher education. This is an essential component in understanding my philosophy of education because it is based in Black student experiences and has been created to increase educational outcomes for Black students. To determine my college experiences as educative or miseducative, I use Dewey's explanation of education for analysis. Additionally, I use my academic and co-curricular experiences to determine and evaluate my findings. Lastly, all names will either not be stated or changed in order to maintain confidentiality and professionalism.

My Experiences Part II: Miseducation Reflection

During the fall 2015 semester of my undergraduate journey, I declared nursing as my major. With that declaration came the onslaught of chemistry, biology, statistics, and anatomy courses I would later learn to resent. At the time I blamed my ominous test scores on the difficult concepts on the exams. However, looking back now I can distinctly remember the pure dread and uninterest I felt while attending a lecture for those classes. The anxiety and deep-rooted boredom I experienced the morning of each frightening fifty-minute block, knowing I was going

to sit through the entire period just being talked at. One class specifically was the most painful and difficult to stomach, Biology 100. The class consisted of four one hundred question exams which each represented fifteen percent of your final grade. The course teaching style consisted of the professor standing at the front of the room reading PowerPoint slides with a monotone voice. To some readers that teaching style may sound fine, but I see this as a critical issue in education. This teaching style is known as Banking method, and it occurs whenever education becomes a process of depositing knowledge into passive students.

The following are considered oppressive traits of banking method by Paulo Freire:

(a) the teacher teaches and the students are taught; (b) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing; (c) the teacher thinks and the students are thought about; (d) the teacher talks and the students listen—meekly; (e) the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined; (f) the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply; (g) the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher; (h) the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it; (i) the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students; (j) the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects. (Freire, 2014, p.73)

I consider the banking method to be the most common and dangerous method of teaching. When we create systems that only grade understanding by how well the student is able to regurgitate information, is that really learning? The course provided no sense of community and rarely allowed students to participate. Oppressive experiences don't provide students with the ability to grow or expand with the knowledge gained, and by restating information back to the source from

which you received it, this model does exactly that. Due to my diminishing interest in STEM, I slowly began turning my attention elsewhere. I didn't enjoy how I was learning and quickly stopped retaining information. The miseducative nature of the class and others like it stifled my experience and ultimately led to the changing of my major. I blamed myself for my lack of fortitude and had no interest in pursuing further education. And why would I? Why would I want to continue in STEM? As a Black student enrolled in a science, technology, engineering, or mathematics (STEM) program there is already a disconnect. The disconnection lies in the lack of Black students. According to Ebony O. McGee's (2020) article *Interrogating Structural Racism in STEM Higher Education*, "In the past 40 years, more than 135,000 academic articles have discussed the STEM pipeline in some form or another, including almost 14,000 about the leaking pipeline that causes "minorities and women" (this widely used metaphor largely ignores minoritized women of color) to "leak out", of STEM somewhere along their educational or employment trajectory" (McGee, 2020 p. 633).

I wasn't the first Black student nor the last to leak out of the STEM pipeline. I think that dehumanizing teaching styles such as banking method don't provide space to critically evaluate and fix structural problems. Considering Dewey's description of miseducation as "an experience may be such as to engender callousness; it may produce lack of sensitivity and of responsiveness" (Dewey, 1986, p.61). I would not consider that class, or many others that utilize banking method, educational. I think an educational philosophy that promotes callousness towards learning serves as an injustice. It makes sense, banking method was created by oppressors to teach people how to better "fit" into the world (Freire, 2014, p.76). Banking method was never designed for marginalized students, it was designed to keep the oppressor in power and the oppressed controlled. In order to increase Black student graduate matriculation;

negative experiences rooted in intolerance at institutions of higher education shouldn't be present. To increase Black student willingness to continue in the academy, banking method needs to be avoided. As explained by Freire (2014),

Those truly committed to liberation must reject the banking concept in its entirety,

adopting instead a concept of women and men as conscious beings, and consciousness as consciousness intent upon the world. They must abandon the educational goal of deposit-making and replace it with the posing of the problems of human beings in their relations with the world. (p.79)

Soon after the beginning of my second year I made the wise decision to change my major to communication studies. With the adjustment to communication studies came the adjustment to education as well. Yes, the major still prescribed exams and lectures we're still part of the curriculum. However new and experimental assignments and projects were now introduced. These new forms of instruction challenged me as a student and aided me in my education. Group discussion became the primary mode of information passing and was a more superior alternative. As an example I can recall my Small Group Communication course. Not only did the professor encourage students to think outside the box, she encouraged us to question everything we were being taught and to teach her as well. Through this questioning and conversation she believed we would a) gain a better understanding of the presented material, b) Would house the information and contextualize it outside of the classroom, and c) Give the experiences purpose outside of what was expected to be on an exam. By engaging her students, she was able to make things jovial and create a desire for more in that moment and in the future. Just as Dewey (1986) states, It is his business to arrange for the kind of experiences which, while they do not repel the student, but rather engage his activities are, nevertheless, more than immediately

enjoyable since they promote having desirable future experiences Just as no man lives or dies to himself, so no experience lives and dies to itself. (p.61)

These experiences were enjoyable to me as a Black student because I felt liberated. I felt free to question and express my curiosity, I was challenged to explore why things are how they are. This role as a “critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher” (Freire, 2014, p. 79) empowered me, and reignited my passion for learning. Freire calls this liberating method of education problem-posing. “Problem-posing education, responding to the essence of consciousness—intentionality—rejects communiques and embodies communication. It epitomizes the special characteristic of consciousness: being conscious of, not only as intent on objects but as turned in upon itself in a Jasperian "split"—consciousness as consciousness of consciousness” (Freire, 2014, p. 79). Problem-posing education breaks down the roles of teacher and student and replaces it with what they truly are, people. Through dialogue both people teach one another, and both become responsible for the process of growth. Authority is no longer valid, it’s just people teaching each other. With the world on standby as the mediator. If an experience is truly educative and problem-posing is being utilized, the lessons won’t stop when the professor stops talking. Instead, both educators are empowered students with a voice and means to share what they have learned. Black students deserve problem-posing education, they deserve education that excites them and gives them agency. When increasing Black student matriculation into graduate programs, liberating problem-posing education should be present.

Tools of Success v. Tools of Reform

“Essentially, student affairs professionals accept that college is a critical period of life during which students discover a meaningful identity and develop core values for how they will perceive and experience their adult lives. This holistic view of education focuses on the growth

of the intellectual and emotional capacities of students, as well as their development of a stable sense of identity, interpersonal skills, moral and spiritual values, ethics, career goals and vocational skills, and physical wellness. Subsequently, student affairs professionals deliberately create programs, services, and experiences that will advance the students' growth in one or more dimensions of their lives." (Long, 2012, p. 7)

Long (2012) has explained, "student affairs professionals respect students as individuals who matter and who have dignity. They recognize that each student is unique in his or her own personal experiences, circumstances, and needs. Accordingly, each student deserves attention, respect, and fair treatment. Every interaction with a student should serve the student's best interests" (Long, 2012, p. 7). Maintaining the ideal of educating students with their own personal goals and objectives in mind, it is important to provide more than just "tools for success". These types of tools and forms of academic preparations are considered to be very fruitful, especially in terms of providing tangible prescribed academic outcomes. These prescribed academic outcomes however are the desired outcomes of a traditionally oppressive institution of education. Success in higher education more often than not is defined by the standards of white people. Providing students the answers deletes the need to create something new, as explained earlier this can be miseducative. Statements like "don't reinvent the wheel" or "if it isn't broke don't fix it" are common affirmations that some faculty, staff, and practitioners apparently believe have grounds to be practiced in education. The humane part of education, the natural interest in discovery, is banished when the process is already present for you to exploit. Why venture away from the prescribed trail when the road less taken hasn't been revealed? This potentially leads to those who are oppressed, staying oppressed. Western society approves of what currently is, what currently is the norm, what currently is right, and what currently holds power. What currently is,

is whiteness. Educational norms and processes created by white men for white men continue to serve as the pinnacle of righteousness in the educational realm. The “success” generally desired at my predominately white institution is defined by the expectations of whiteness, thus the tools for said success were never intended for me or other students like me. Black students experiences are shaped by these white expectations, and when Black students fall short they are blamed. Instead of blaming the system.

Instead of setting students up to succeed by my personal or societal definitions of what success looks like, I plan to provide students with the information to create or change current processes and define what success means to them. I don't want other Black students to succumb to imposter syndrome attempting to identify with a goal that was not designed for them. When students are given the ability to reform their surroundings, the possibilities are truly endless. Less persuading students to follow footsteps and academic programs that lead to societal goals, but instead aid them in creating new fields of sustainable work environments that adapt to their ever-changing interest. Black students what to succeed and I want to help them achieve their goals.

While these objectives of academic reform may be feasible, it is important still for Black students to survive in what is. When choosing between offering Black students an educational experience that will prepare them to survive our present system of oppression and white supremacy or empowering them to question and critically think about the reconstruction of education, I have decided to do both. Part of my educational philosophy is to provide Black students with tools for academic and personal success, along with the necessary tools to question and promote academic and societal reform. The tools for their success and academic preparation will provide Black students with the answers that have been provided based on the lived experiences of people who came before them and identify as the same, all in order to achieve

their goals. The humane portion of the education being provided to the Black student will nurture their natural interest in discovery, better equipping them to orientate their respective fields of study to recognize Blacks. The information to create or change current processes is found within the critical evaluation of what is currently in place, and I plan to challenge students to reflect why they are in higher educational institutions and what they hope to gain. Lastly, to promote the sharing of knowledge I believe that traditional and experimental forms of mentorship and advising or needed. These processes will provide Black students with additional lived experiences to guide their own personal, ethical, and scholarly identity. I presume that this scholarly identity will assist Black students and promote their academic advancement. Creating better experiences for Black students in education will encourage them to stay in academia longer. This increase in Black presence and increase of good educational experiences will promote better Black graduate student matriculation.

Three Steps to Success

Note to the reader: Success for this purpose is defined by the student.

During my first year as a higher education practitioner I worked in multiple graduate assistant roles and internships, each focusing on specific aspects of student development. Yet across the board advising and supporting of undergraduate students has played a major role in all. Although the form of the advising and supporting wasn't always the same (large groups advisement, small group advisement, individual support and meetings, etc.) I quickly came to the conclusion that advising and supporting will be an essential portion of my career regardless of the role or position I serve in. With this understanding came additional questions about how exactly I wanted to go about doing this, and what tactics I would incorporate in my arsenal of

skills. I first inquired about what advising and supporting even looked like, or rather what does effective advising and supporting look like?

Offering a student advice or supporting their claims and proclamations doesn't necessarily require much skill. Quick reassuring gestures and brief non intimate conversation can get the job done. However, in order to practice effective advising and support the educator must legitimately commit to the student and the situation at hand. Step one of Hassan's effective advising and supporting process consists of listening and understanding. Making yourself physically and emotionally available to the student, thus allowing them to know they are being heard not only verbally but also nonverbally. Depending on the severity of the positive or negative events and feelings leading to your meeting with the student, this can be exceedingly difficult. Making sure that the student is feeling heard will at a minimum create an open and comfortable environment which will encourage the student to disclose more information, and with more information you can better serve that student. Next, as the educator you must recognize that you may not have a suitable answer or response for the student. That is completely ok. The roles in higher education don't come with the expectation of solving everyone's problems, but instead that you'll educate and offer options. So in case you don't know what to say you should be prepared to recommend resources and other outlets for said student, additionally you also have the obligation to be honest and let the student know that you're not sure what the answer is but will continue to help. Lastly, continued support of the student. Just cause the student leaves your office doesn't mean the issues that brought them to you have been relieved. By following up and checking in students feel that you are concerned with their progress and have stock in them. I think this is essential when working with Black students because they need to know that someone is aware of the challenges they are facing. Long (2012)

says that when effectively working with diverse populations of students, advocacy is important. “They (practitioner) must be able to perceive the organizational barriers that exist at the campus, demonstrate their genuine concern for minority students’ success, and work with college and university administrators to develop strategies for creating a welcoming, inclusive environment” (Long, 2012, p. 10). Advising and supporting is essential to the work of higher education and student affairs educators because we are in the business of guiding future generations, and these interactions are forming what students will take with them much after we’re gone. When I consider my own undergraduate advisors, I can recall just how influential their assistance was to my professional growth. The care and lack thereof between my two advisors created both examples of how student interaction should go, and a step by step of what shouldn’t happen. As a Black student, a “hands off” advising approach that expected me to have knowledge of the university wasn’t very effective. My advisor didn’t recognize the disadvantages of both my Black identity and my first-generation student identity when relating to the university. In contrast my second advisor was invested in my growth and took time to understand my ignorance of college. She recognized my struggle, utilized her privilege, and advocated for me. These past interactions have now influenced how I conduct sessions with my own students. In my experiences Black students that have proper support in education not only appreciate it, but they are equipped with the necessary steps for success.

Prepared Curriculum v. Community Grown Curriculum

When the class starts the educator has a prescribed curriculum and academic expectations for the students to follow and observe. Without even meeting the students yet, the staff or faculty member already knows what the student needs to learn from their course or program. Imagine if instead the students and educators alike created what the goals of the program and learning

outcomes would consist of? How would this change the interest of the students? How would the students consider the information? When we force people to learn how we learn we don't take into account the individual abilities of the students in front of us. With less creation of standards that all students must follow and more specialization in what they want to learn. As experts in the field it should be our prerogative to guide learning in the direction that the students want to pursue, instead of what society deems more important. Especially in regard to Black students. As explained earlier, many of the higher educational academic process were not designed with Black students in mind. So how can we hold these students to the same standard? Through my lived experiences I have seen first-hand how easily an academic assignment like creating a "family tree" can cause distress for Black students. An educator's philosophy of education must consider all of this, because history has provided obstacles for students to overcome. I have identified how crucial Black student experiences in education are to Black student graduate matriculation. I believe by utilizing community grown curriculum that substantiates Black student desired learning outcomes, providing Black students agency with tools of reform, and educating Black students with problem-posing methodologies, will improve their academic experiences. Thus, increasing Black student graduate matriculation and reconstructing education with black students in mind.

Statement on Critical Action Research

As explained by Brydon-Miller, Greenwood, and Maguire (2003)

Action research, as defined by Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury, is:

a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview which we believe is emerging at this historical moment. It seeks to bring together action and

reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities. (p.10)

With elements from Dewey, Action Research (AR) is the processes and product of an in-depth investigation which brings about change. Traditional research is a structured process of gathering information for a purpose, but AR does not use the same method “scientific” as traditional research. In action research the researcher has an active role in the development of the gathered information. The research subjects are those who directly benefit from the AR. The AR works hand in hand in collaboration in order to engage the subjects. The basic model of action research consists of three steps, Look, Think, Act. During the “Look” step of AR the researcher gathers data, defines the data, and describes the data. Next the researcher thinks about what the data means, analyzes the data for issues, and theorizes potential solutions. Last, the researcher must act, create a plan, implement the plan, and evaluate the results. The methodology of action research is based on your beliefs about data. While the method is the actual steps you take. Action research is about morally committed action, and when you add critical theories concerned with power and justice you now have Critical Action Research (CAR). CAR has a judgment and an agenda, it’s based in the improvement of human life. While maintaining elements of international standards for human subjects, CAR attempts to gather data for the betterment of the stakeholders, researchers, participants, and humanity. Critical action research is all about the community (the researchers are in the community as well), and the change towards increased social justice. Researchers utilizing critical action research maintain this standard by gaining informed consent from participants, analyzing assessment of risks & benefits, and by selecting appropriate subjects. As a Black educator CAR means so much to me because of the emphasis

on community. The Black student community that I want to create change in, is my community. My investment, philosophy, and experiences all work in conjunction with CAR to create positive change for Black students. By utilizing CAR I can change Black student graduate matriculation for the better.

Chapter Four: This Isn't Anything New

Historically, American education has never been a place for Black students to succeed. In particular, American higher education wasn't designed for Black people at all. Craig Steven Wilder is a professor of American history at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and author of *Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities*. In his book, Dr. Wilder explains the direct connections between the creation of North American colonial institutions of higher education and the enslavement of Black people. To the readers who are heavily connected to higher education this shouldn't be a surprise. The cycle would begin with young white men from wealthy families, whose wealth derived from the enslavement of Black people. The white men would enroll into institutions of higher education in order to contribute to the family business of slave trade. The fathers of these white male students would then donate funds towards these colleges and universities knowing that the desired return on investment (ROI) would potentially grow. The white students, upon graduating from said university or college, would then be employed by their families or other major donors involved in slave trade. Some graduates would go south to tutor the children of wealthy plantation owners. After amassing wealth of their own, these alumni became donors as well. Thus, creating the first alumni associations of every college and university in the colonies and completing the cycle.

Dr. Wilder provides strong evidence that the intolerance of the university has limited the academic freedom and access to opportunity for Black students. Specifically, his research paints a clear picture that traces the racist and racial roots of U.S. higher education and the outcomes of those ideological and economic histories. The ramifications of racism in higher education currently rain down on Black students attempting to enroll and enrolled in graduate programs. To

increase Black graduate enrollment the results of racism in higher education should be identified, acknowledged, and thwarted.

Learning While Black

When learning as a Black student, the fear of receiving a “No” in the educational realm is neither scary nor imaginative. It is simply a reality. Receiving a no happens all the time for Black students in educational institutions. When Black families in Los Angeles County Public Schools argued that the California school finance system (which relied heavily on local property tax) substantially disadvantaged the students in districts with lower income (Serrano v. Priest), or when the "separate but equal doctrine" allowed public schools to deny admission to students based on race, the no's were standard practice. The no's come swiftly, but as Black students we understand how to overcome it. Black students conquered the 1971 case, Serrano v. Priest, which ended with the California Supreme Court finding the system in violation of the Equal Protection Clause because there was too great a disparity in the funding provided for various districts. Black students conquered the 1954 case, Brown v. Board of Education, when the Supreme Court unanimously found that segregation of public schools violated the Equal Protection Clause on the basis that segregation was psychologically harmful to Black students. The case outlawed state-sanctioned segregation not only of public schools, but all public spaces. Black students can't afford to be afraid of 'no's,' they must keep the fight and push forward. This legacy of fighting back and pushing forward is particularly necessary in graduate higher education where Black students face barriers in their enrollment, persistence, retention, and graduation. It is exceedingly important to identify how power moves and stays in control within higher education. Understanding power and the history of education are key to providing Black students their deserved educational reparations.

Historical Example: Black College Students Fighting for Education

Another strong example of Black graduate students fighting back and pushing forward in history can be seen in the case of Autherine Lucy Foster, when during the Jim Crow era of the 1950s she paved the way for future generations of Black graduate students. Autherine Lucy Foster or “Lucy” was a young black woman who graduated from a small liberal arts college for Black people and was motivated to enroll for a second bachelor’s degree at the University of Alabama in 1952. Her application was first accepted but later revoked once the university learned that Lucy was Black. Lucy took this matter to court in 1955 and was represented by Thurgood Marshall. According to the United States Courts (2021), U.S. District Judge Harlan H. Grooms ruled that Lucy should be admitted into the University of Alabama. “Plaintiffs were denied admission to the University of Alabama solely on account of their race and color,” Grooms wrote (United States Courts, 2021, p. 1). Once Lucy was admitted, a mob attacked her, forcing her to seek protection in a classroom for hours. She was then suspended from the University of Alabama on the claim that “the action was taken for her own protection.” Marshall attempted to file a complaint against the university which led to Lucy’s expulsion claiming that she slandered the university. Years later, in 1988, Lucy was invited to speak to a history class at the University of Alabama where she later began her master’s program in elementary education. In 1992 Lucy and her daughter both graduated from the University of Alabama. Lucy faced incredibly challenging and difficult circumstances in order to receive graduate level education, and even in the face of racism Lucy prevailed. The history of higher education and the history of educational oppression of Blacks is the same history. Although to some the 1950’s may seem so irrelevant to the issues students are facing now, but the issues haven’t disappeared. Racism and

negative experiences for Black students interested in pursuing graduate level education is still live and well.

My Review: Intolerance & The University

My mother said I must always be intolerant of ignorance but understanding of illiteracy. That some people, unable to go to school, were more educated and more intelligent than college professors.

- Maya Angelou

I often reflect on what I have learned about higher education, and how I plan to assist in the reorientation of the field in the coming years. Amongst the conversations of how transformative and impactful higher education is, the recurring testimonials of its failures tend to catch my attention even further. Currently, none more than the repulsive face of intolerance that is woven into the framework of higher education. Although the packaging of the intolerance isn't always upfront or easily visible, the microaggressions, detrimental prejudicial slights, culturally insensitive programming, and racist ideology hint at the hidden institutional racism in our institutions of higher education. I think intolerance remains prominent in higher education due to the comfort and ignorance of faculty and staff. Higher education practitioners perpetuate discrimination by remaining ignorant on issues regarding race relations and campus climate, accepting the presence of privilege within educational spaces, and a failure to even crave understanding and relation to underrepresented students. In order to further delineate my findings, I will attempt to unfasten the veil harboring these actions in the hopes of identifying solutions specifically for Black students pursuing graduate credentials. Provided below are my recollections of negative events, experiences, and communications endured by Black students in higher education. I am sharing them in order to paint an important picture. A picture that

explains why some Black students don't want to continue in higher education, why Black students don't feel valued in higher education, and why some Black students don't matriculate to graduate programs. I think in order to move forward we must first look back and consider history like Lucy's story. However, this picture demonstrates how the racist past of higher education is still present today. I want the reader to witness how small and large instances of intolerance, discrimination, and racism have and continue to effect Black students and Black educators in higher education. The history of higher education and the history of educational oppression of Blacks is the same history. Except one is a shameful memory while the other creates memories to be ashamed of.

Black Women & The University

During a Division of Student Affairs (DOSA) meeting consisting of university student affairs professionals and paraprofessionals, attendees were asked questions relating to the lack of Black female student representation in paraprofessional roles on campus. The presenters used an online software that enabled the audience to respond anonymously via their mobile phones. When asked directly why this disparity amongst student employees is present in our "inclusive" university, the responses were expressive of the issue. "Their culture is unprofessional, no childcare is provided, conduct issues, they don't have the grade point average, no transportation, and not connected to the right networks" were just a handful of the answers proposed. Which is more disheartening? That the audience consists of student facing employees whose entire professional purpose is to educate and cultivate change in the youth? Or that the responders not only feel this way, but didn't consider it inappropriate to post these problematic deficit perspectives for their present Black women coworkers to view? This comfort of saying whatever comes to mind with no fear of consequences is extremely dangerous, especially the uneducated

and baseless stereotypes that burden Black women. Not only are Black women expected to meet performance standards created for and by White men, they are also demeaned and disrespected in the process.

Shortly after this demoralizing event, a young Black graduate student in my program's Students of Color Caucus sent an email to Black faculty, staff, and graduate paraprofessionals. In this correspondence, she invited these audience members to a safe space for discussion, support, and to offer possible solutions to those who were negatively impacted by the remarks at the DOSA meeting. She offered a collaborative community to work towards creating an inclusive environment at this institution. This young Black student took the initiative to address the problem, even though she too was among those who were traumatized by this distasteful event. Staying consistent with the history of Black women in higher education, she utilized her trauma as a tool for reform.

Dr. Lori Walkington, Co-Chair of the Women's Caucus for the California Faculty Association (CFA) and Assistant Professor at California State University San Marcos, has written about the struggle for Black women in higher education in her article *How Far Have We Really Come? Black Women Faculty and Graduate Students' Experiences in Higher Education*. Dr. Walkington has argued, "negative racial stereotypes affect women of color, particularly black women, disproportionately, and in ways gender discrimination alone cannot explain" (Walkington, 2017 p.52). She continues to explain how these forms of discrimination not only affect Black women in faculty positions, but also as graduate students. As argued by Walkington (2017):

Black women faculty and graduate students face a double-bind of racial and gender discrimination at every level of academic life. This double minority status leads faculty

and students to view black women scholars as less capable, leading to fewer full-time, tenured positions for black women faculty, and assumptions of black women graduate students as affirmative action recipient's incapable of graduate level work.

(Walkington, 2017, p.52)

These negative assumptions without a doubt impact the accessibility and experiences of Black women graduate students, thus perpetuating feelings of discomfort and a lack of interest in graduate programming. The history of higher education and the history of educational oppression of Blacks is the same history. Black women's feelings and experiences haven't mattered before, and not much has changed now.

Black Graduate Students & The University

Less than one month into my role as a Graduate Assistant (GA), I received an email from a white faculty member spewing disdainful remarks at me regarding my work as a GA. In an attempt to schedule a meeting with her, my supervisor, and myself to discuss her concerns, she used offensive language and a demeaning tone. In this email she expressed her thoughts on my professionalism and proceeded to mention that she would appreciate continuing the semester on a positive note as she had expectations that I would cause problems in my role.

Microaggressions like these not only target Black higher educational faculty and staff but also Black graduate students in and out of the field. While attempting to adjust and find my place amongst the paraprofessional staff of the university, I was given a vague list of responsibilities and expectations. My role as a GA that was tasked with supporting student success, called for an empirical interpretation of what the position called for. Student success to me consisted of ensuring the welfare of our entire personnel in and outside the walls of the center, following up with questions and concerns relating to our daily practices, and empowering the undergraduate

student employees with the knowledge and skills to lead a large student run facility. These goals, however, didn't align with the methods of a professional staff member, who took my eagerness and passion for change as a menace and something in need of reproach. Not only wouldn't the staff member speak to me, actively ignoring me in the workplace, but additionally, in the passive aggressive email that she sent to my supervisor and I, she comfortably used offensive language and character defamations without ever speaking to me face-to-face. What was I supposed to do? More importantly, what is a Black male graduate student disliked by a white female staff member to do?

With unrest of losing my position my voice was stifled. When I presented the email to my direct supervisor (who was cc'd on the correspondence) and pointed at the micro aggressive messaging and accusatory language that made my skin crawl, he (a white man) instructed me to "not take the words seriously" and to meet with the offender. My feelings being dismissed provoked me to disengage and warranted my fears of being "overly sensitive" when receiving criticism. Not until meeting with Black colleagues and non-white constituents of the university were my feelings validated and understood.

Black Students & Microaggressions.

While navigating institutions of higher education, Black students must combat micro aggressive behaviors of faculty, staff, and students. As cited by Erica Morales (2014) of California Polytechnic State University, Black students have historically dealt with racial discrimination and microaggressions on college campuses. In her research Morales (2014) identifies multiple forms of culturally incentive behaviors and actions Black students have to endure at colleges.

“Black students frequently encounter rude stares and avoidance, exclusion from study groups and other campus spaces as well as doubts about their academic ability from non-Black students. At times, this marginalization can take the form of overt derogatory comments” (Morales, 2014, p. 50). Morales continues to explain the term racial microaggressions, and how the racial stereotypes and alienation Black students experience from non- Black peers, staff and faculty at universities falls in this category (Morales, 2014).

Morales’ work details a study that was conducted to better understand the negative experiences Black students were facing and what types of microaggressions were happening at Pacific Sun University (PSU). The study consisted of sixty-two in-depth interviews with Black undergraduate students at PSU. While the interviews were taking place only two percent of the student population consisted of Black students at this predominately white institution (PWI). The Black students interviewed consisted of 30 Black women, and 32 Black men. As detailed by Morales (2014):

All students had spent a minimum of one year at PSU to be able to comment on their experiences. Given the small population of Black students on campus, I mostly recruited participants for the study through snowball sampling. I also recruited participants through attending events and networking with Black student organizations on campus. (p. 53)

Morales found that “Black students encounter racialized notions of exoticism, hypersexuality and aggressiveness that are connected to ideas about low-income and working-class Black women and men” (p. 62). Likewise, Black men on campus were “exoticized” and “seen as athletes and sports-experts” whereas Black women were “viewed as the teachers of such cultural aspects as hair, music and dance, particularly hip-hop” (p. 62). As explained by Morales (2014), “Hypersexuality takes on distinct gendered forms when Black men are viewed as sexual

predators while Black women are stereotyped as promiscuous. Finally, aggressiveness translates into being perceived as threatening for Black men and intimidating for Black women” (p. 62). Once again, Black students in higher education are looked at as any and everything other than as students. While attempting to navigate a higher educational system that wasn’t designed for their success, Black students must also combat baseless and often harmful stereotypes. Black student graduate matriculation suffers directly from poor educational experiences, and microaggressions play a role in the perpetuation of bad experiences for Black students. As Morales says in their conclusion, “Moreover, these racial microaggressions can have negative implications for Black student academic performance, retention and health” (Morales, 2014, p. 62). To increase Black graduate student matriculation, microaggressions against Black students should be mitigated.

As detailed above, I experienced microaggressions firsthand. Yet why weren’t any professional staff members in the space able to recognize my point of view? Why didn’t they strive to ease my discomfort with the language used to describe me? I believe the problem is based in the privilege associated with being the majority in a space that lacks representation for the diversity housed in the university. When the majority of people look like you, when the majority of opinions sound like yours, what's to be expected other than groupthink, especially when it comes to white fragility and mindset theories of racial bias.

With less Black educators being provided positions of power in higher education, there aren't enough advocates to stir up counter thinking. According to *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*:

Not only is there a significant shortfall in the number of black faculty nationwide but those blacks who do hold positions are concentrated in lower-level faculty posts. In 2003 only 3.2 percent of all full professors were black, up from 2.9 percent a quarter of a

century ago in 1981. Of all black full-time faculty in 2003, 16.1 percent were full professors. In contrast, 28.6 percent of all white full-time faculty members were full professors in 2003. (Slater, 2007, p. 12)

The lack of diversity in higher education leads to privilege and racism in this field. The history of higher education and the history of educational oppression of Blacks is the same history. Black student identity isn't considered.

Black Educators & The University

Dr. X is the director of a Multicultural Center at a state funded university in Pennsylvania, and he has served as a higher education professional in numerous roles. Dr. X considers his role in supporting students as a “life calling” rather than a job. Dr. X is a Black educator. I recall conversations with Dr. X where I asked about his experiences as a Black educator. During our energized conversations Dr. X would give me additional insight as to what events in his life persuaded him to consider higher education as a career path. He briefly explained to me how he started his undergraduate education at a community college because of financial issues, then later transferred to a 4-year college. He told me a story of difficulty and triumph based around an Africana class, an impossible eight-page paper and how different the transition was. He told me about an experience he had in this class and how it has transformed him.

In the beginning of the school year, his professor discussed the syllabus with the class and went into further detail about the eight-page paper everyone was expected to write. Dr. X attempted to drop this class because of the mindset he had towards writing—he did not enjoy it. He further explained that his professor did not let him drop the class. This class transformed Dr. X's viewpoint on writing and contributed to his passion for research. He expressed how research

gives him the ability to tell stories that are either untold or unheard. The transformation Dr. X went through during his life is truly inspirational. He went from a multicultural student with a diminished academic identity, to an educator looking to instill and encourage a sense of belonging for all students.

From my conversations with Dr. X I have been able to identify three powerful gems of advice. First that a position or title without the work to back it up isn't enough, how people see you outside of your role is what's important. Next, that preparation before promotion is important, without certain experiences success is exceedingly more difficult. Finally, there is not one specific path to success. I should be open to what the journey may bring. Each bit of advice was substantial and just the fact that Dr. X was willing to take time out of his schedule to speak with me was a gift. But the advice and newfound mentorship he offered extended beyond our brief conversations. I learned that due to the lack of Black educators, people like Dr. X have to wear many hats in order to provide a holistic learning environment for their Black students. Even though Dr. X wasn't a faculty member, I was still able to learn as his student. Dr. X provided a similar experience as Ashley and Travon did, they were all able to provide their experiences and assist a Black student who otherwise would've missed out. I call this process of Black students and educators filling the gaps of resources and knowledge for other Black in education "shoulder tapping," and I think it is vital to Black student graduate matriculation. By lifting as we climb and utilizing our own Black positive and negative experiences in education to empower other Blacks, we can cover each other's bases.

Benefits of Mentorship

The benefits of mentorship have been documented many times over in the history of higher education. When mentorship is applied to Black students the results continuously yield positive outcomes in terms of student retention and matriculation. Along with this, Black student experiential and academic outlooks steadily improve. As explained by Dr. Yolanda Gibson (2014), “Mentoring programs provide support systems which enable African American male students to succeed. For example, African American males in mentoring programs tend to show higher self-esteem, higher levels of academic motivation, and performance” (p.75). The increase in positive academic experiences for Black students will lead to better academic outlooks. Having Black educators involved serves as icing on the cake. These Black educators provide much needed guidance and advocacy for Black students. The students get a better idea of how to accomplish their goals and someone to aspire to be. “African American males also require successful role models that they can identify with to promote academic competence and self-esteem” (Gibson, 2014, p.76) These Black student role models are critical to Black graduate student matriculation.

Benefits of Black Educators

As cited by Dr. Stephanie G. Adams (2011) of the University of Texas at Dallas, Black faculty and staff are important to Black graduate student success. “Several studies have focused on the lack of faculty mentors for African American graduate students. African-American students require successful persons with which they can identify in order to succeed academically” (Adams, 2011, p. 33). As explained by Dr. Adams (2011):

Graduate students develop professional identities from a composite of professional models and individuals, both positive and negative. Mentoring programs exist to provide graduate students structured interactions with faculty and administrators geared toward increasing the probability of degree program completion and career success. Dr. Adams continues to explain that research shows that additional increases in personal ambition, supportive family, and supportive faculty can be achieved via Black faculty mentorship (p.33).

Conclusion

As stated previously, I understand that from its inception higher education in Western culture was not designed with anyone but white men in mind. I am convinced that racism remains prominent in higher education and prevents space for the marginalized. This lack of space for the marginalized carries over into graduate studies and prevents Black student matriculation. I believe that in graduate higher education Black students face barriers in their matriculation due to a) a lack of funding to pay for rising graduate tuition, b) a lack of Black faculty and staff in higher education, and c) an abundance of negative experiences rooted in racism at institutions of higher education. From my own personal experiences and shared experiences of fellow Black students, I believe that these barriers powered by prolonged effects of racism are preventing Black student graduate matriculation. I believe that by increasing Black graduate enrollment we not only diversify student enrollment, but the workforce and educators of tomorrow.

Proposed intervention

Graduate higher education is in critical need of representation and resources for Black college students. I think the resources in graduate higher education for Black students should present as Black staffing in graduate admissions departments, mentorship from current Black

graduate students and faculty for prospective Black graduate students, and focused funding opportunities for Black graduate students. I believe by utilizing the negative and positive experiences of Black graduate students, staff, and faculty, graduate schools can be more accessible to Black students. Providing Black undergraduate students with these experiences earlier can better prepare them to navigate undergraduate programs more effectively, thus hopefully preventing some miseducative and traumatizing higher educational experiences. I believe having a Black educator in graduate admissions can create change for Black students through advocacy and education. Having an advocate that has similar experiences as the Black students and can relate to their concerns is crucial. Providing Black students with ways to pay for tuition that does not burden them or their families is also necessary. These funds should aim to recognize and mitigate the egregious disservice done to Black students historically. My proposed intervention does all of this and is named after an important component of my experience in graduate school. By utilizing “shoulder tapping” racism will not be cured, but Black student graduate matriculation will increase.

Chapter Five: *Shoulder Tap*

With Black and African American college graduates owing an average of \$25,000 more in student loan debt than White college graduates (Hess, 2021), the gap in student debt for Black students is a barrier to Black graduate student matriculation. The lack of Black faculty and staff to perform the much-needed mentorship and professional guidance for Black students because of Black educators historically not being welcomed in institutions of higher education (Haney, 1978), is a barrier to Black graduate student matriculation. And as cited by Erica Morales (2014) of California Polytechnic State University, Black students have historically dealt with racial discrimination and microaggressions on college campuses. Racial discrimination and microaggressions on college campuses is a barrier to Black graduate student matriculation.

This is why graduate higher education is in critical need of representation and resources for Black college students. I think the resources in graduate higher education for Black students should present as Black staffing in graduate admissions departments, mentorship from current Black graduate students and faculty for prospective Black graduate students, and focused funding opportunities for Black graduate students. I believe by utilizing the negative and positive experiences of Black graduate students, staff, and faculty, graduate schools can be more accessible to Black students. Providing Black undergraduate students during their third year and onward with these experiences can better prepare them to navigate graduate programs more effectively, thus hopefully preventing some miseducative and traumatizing higher educational experiences. I believe having a Black educator in graduate admissions can create change for Black students through advocacy and education. Having an advocate that has similar experiences as the Black students and can relate to their concerns is crucial. Providing Black students with ways to pay for tuition that does not burden them, or their families is also necessary. These funds

should aim to recognize and mitigate the egregious disservice done to Black students historically. My proposed intervention does all of this. By utilizing “Shoulder Tap” racism will not be cured, but Black student graduate matriculation will increase.

Shoulder Tap

Although I wish I could provide a holistic solution to racism in higher education, sadly I know of no such thing. However, I believe my intervention can increase Black graduate student matriculation. *Shoulder Tap* is a program split into two coordinated and connecting interventions. Part 1 (*Shoulder Tap: Black Graduate Student Recruitment or BGSR*) is about creating a sustainable system in the form of university funds that directly impacts Black educators, current Black graduate students, potential Black graduate students, and graduate admission offices. Part 2 (*Shoulder Tap: Black Graduate Student Support or BGSS*) directly impacts Black educators and current Black graduate students at institutions of higher education. *Shoulder Tap* not only address the barriers Black graduate students are facing, it provides space to identify further concerns while simultaneously creating jobs specifically designed for Black educators.

Overall Intervention Goals

- Goal 1: To increase Black graduate student matriculation.
 - Objective 1: Black graduate student matriculation will increase via the Black Graduate Student Recruitment (BGSR) Graduate Recruiter. The BGSR Graduate Recruiter is co-funded by the Graduate Admissions department and the Career Development Center of (insert institution name) and maintains two reporting lines. The BGSR Graduate Recruiter will contact 3rd year and above Black

undergraduate students at (insert institution name) and provide guidance, mentorship, and resources needed to matriculate to graduate studies.

- Outcome 1: Via the BGSR Graduate Recruiter's support, Black undergraduates at (insert institution name) will surpass graduate application requirements and matriculate into graduate school at either (insert institution name) or another institution of their choosing.
- Goal 2: To create a sustainable system of university funds at (insert institution name) that directly assist Black educators, current Black graduate students, and potential Black graduate students.
 - Objective 2: *Shoulder Tap* request funding from (insert institution name) to support the Black Graduate Student Recruitment (BGSR) program, the Black Graduate Student Support (BGSS) program, all hired Black educators, and all resources as outlined in the intervention budget.
 - Outcome 2: Via funding of all portions of *Shoulder Tap* Black educators, current Black graduate students, and potential Black graduate students at (insert institution name) will benefit. This beneficence will present as job creation for Black educators at (insert institution name), scholarships for current Black graduate students at (insert institution name), and graduate application/preparation material waivers for prospective Black graduate students.
- Goal 3: To foster an educative support system for Black graduate students at (insert institution name).

- Objective 3: The Black Graduate Student Support (BGSS) program will foster an educative support system for Black graduate students via the BGSS Program Manager.
- Outcome 3: Black graduate students that participate in the BGSS support group and programming opportunities will have opportunities to share experiences, goals, and mentorship in educative ways.

Overall Intervention Learning Outcomes

- Learning Outcome #1: Upon completion of the Black Graduate Student Recruitment program Black undergraduate and recently graduated Black students will be able to formulate clear, creative, and concise personal statements for admission to graduate level programs at (insert institution name).
- Learning Outcome #2: As a result of participating in the annual Black Graduate Student Support training, graduate admissions staff at (insert institution name) will be able to think critically about how race, ethnicity, and culture should not only influence but reflect awareness in admissions material required by the graduate school.
- Learning Outcome #3: Upon completion of the Black Graduate Student Recruitment program Black undergraduate and recent graduate students at (insert institution name) will be equipped with the necessary interview skills and best practices needed for admission to graduate level programs at the institution of choice.

Theory to Practice

As mentioned previously, when choosing between offering my students an educational experience that will prepare them to survive our present system of oppression and white supremacy or empowering them to question and critically think about their liberation, I have decided to do both. My educational philosophy has been heavily influenced by Paulo Freire and the reformatting of education and its overall purpose. As cited by Dr. Renée Smith-Maddox and Dr. Daniel G. Solórzano (2002), “Freire’s work provides teachers with the foundation for a theory of democratic schooling that is linked to methodologies that aim to liberate those who are forced to exist on the margins of society” (p. 69).

My educational philosophy is enacted via *Shoulder Tap* by the interventions ability to provide Black students with tools for academic and personal success, along with the necessary tools to question and promote academic and societal reform. In *Shoulder Tap* Black graduate students are able to combat the traditional banking method that is learned in the K-12 school system and are encouraged to critically think about higher education, their own experiences, and share their findings via support group conversations with their peers and Black educators. The tools for reform and academic preparation in the Black Graduate Student Recruitment program will provide Black students with the answers that have already been tested, vetted, and will help them achieve their goals. While simultaneously exposing the students to the hidden curriculum around personal statement creation that isn’t readily available. The humane portion of the education being provided to the Black graduate students will nurture their natural interest in discovery via graduate education. With these advanced degrees these same Black students will be better equipped to orientate their respective fields of study to recognize Blacks. The

information to create or change current processes is found within the critical evaluation of what is currently in place.

Literature Informing Intervention

Benefits of Mentorship

When describing the benefits of mentorship for Black men Dr. Yolanda Gibson, vice president for student affairs at Shenandoah University, has this to say, “Mentoring programs provide support systems which enable African American male students to succeed. For example, African American males in mentoring programs tend to show higher self-esteem, higher levels of academic motivation, and performance” (Gibson, 2014, p. 75) The increase in positive academic experiences for Black students is what *Shoulder Tap* is designed to do. The mentorship Black undergraduate students receive via the Black Graduate Student Recruitment program and Black graduate students receive during the Black Graduate Student Support programs, are crucial to Black graduate student matriculation.

Benefits of Black Educators

As cited by Dr. Stephanie G. Adams of the University of Texas, Black faculty and staff are important to Black graduate student success. “Several studies have focused on the lack of faculty mentors for African American graduate students. African-American students require successful persons with which they can identify in order to succeed academically” (Adams, 2011, p. 33). The *Shoulder Tap* program requires Black educators in order to increase Black graduate student matriculation. Dr. Adams continues to explain that research shows that additional increases in personal ambition, supportive family, and supportive faculty can be achieved via Black faculty mentorship (Adams, 2011, p.33).

Benefits of Equity Scholarships

Scholarships designed for historically disadvantaged and academically oppressed students are utilized and needed in the *Shoulder Tap* program. Research conducted by Richard J. Reeda and Brian Hurd at Macquarie University Sydney, describe the positive outcomes associated with equity scholarships. During the study, a total of 525 students at Macquarie were provided an equity scholarship for a period of at least a year between 2009 and 2012. The results concluded with clear increases in student retention directly attributed to the scholarships. “In common with elsewhere (Gale and Parker 2013), the initial statistical data suggest that the scholarship program has had a strong impact on the retention rates of scholarship recipients; the aggregate retention rate for recipients during this period was 90.6%” (Reed & Hurd, 2016, p. 1239). This 90.6% retention rate was well above the rate of non-scholarship holders at Macquarie University of 84.1% (Reed & Hurd, 2016, p. 1239). In addition to the qualitative data collected, the pair also interviewed 12 of the scholarship holders. The results stayed consistent. Equity scholarships increase retention of disadvantaged students. Findings like these are exactly why the Black Graduate Student Recruitment program utilize scholarships.

Program Proposal

Shoulder Tap: Black Graduate Student Recruitment (BGSR)

Shoulder Tap includes a request for funds to support the Black Graduate Student Recruitment (BGSR) program in hiring a fulltime Black educator as a Graduate Recruiter or equivalent to work co-funded by the Graduate Admissions department and the Career Development Center of (insert institution name). The Black educator’s role among other things will include the specific devotion to recruiting Black graduate students, ensuring Black graduate student successful recruitment/matriculation, assisting 3rd year and above Black undergraduate

students with application material/program selection, sharing of Black graduate student experiences, and graduate school funding opportunities. The BGSR program is designed to contact, educate, and assist 3rd year and above Black undergraduate students at (insert institution name). The program provides resources such as free or discounted graduate application waivers, counseling, and detailed information about graduate programs at (insert institution name). The ultimate goal is that the Black undergraduate students are admitted into a graduate program at (insert institution name) or the graduate program of their choosing at another institution. The BGSR program also consists of funding to empower and educate 1 recruited Black graduate student per college of study at (insert institution name) each year via full academic scholarships for graduate programs at (insert institution name).

BGSR Graduate Recruiter Job Description. The BGSR Graduate Recruiter will contribute to the *Shoulder Tap* program by recruiting, marketing, admitting and mentoring third year and above Black undergraduate students. The position will be co-funded by the Graduate Admissions department and the Career Development Center of (insert institution name) and maintains two reporting lines. The BGSR Graduate Recruiter will also assist with logistics related to program planning, summer events, and student support.

Core responsibilities of the BGSR Graduate Recruiter role include:

- Recruit prospective Black undergraduate students through marketing and communications. Maintain up-to-date marketing materials and practices.
- Responsible for the administration and configuration of the admission system (Slate) including but not be limited to having a thorough understanding of: data fields, prompts, forms, rule editors, queries, workflows, database management and reporting.

- Read, review, evaluate, and determine qualifications for admission of prospective Black graduate students.
- Advise and counsel Black undergraduate students and parents who contact Graduate Admissions with concerns or questions about the BGSR program.
- Manage the BGSR brand for recruitment communications including website.
- Counsel prospective Black graduate students and parents regarding the graduate admissions process.
- Liaise with Career Development Center programs as needed.
- Educate prospective Black graduate students on financial aid process for graduate programs.
- Coordinate feedback mechanisms and assessment of the BGSR experience.
- Manage and enhance Black graduate alumni engagement.
- Assist with summer operations including program planning, summer events, and student support as necessary.
- Other duties as assigned.

The BGSR Graduate Recruiter role is fast-paced and. The ideal candidate for this role will be a self-starter who demonstrates positive relationship-building skills with Black students, an outgoing and educative approach to education, excellent communication, and strong attention to detail. Strong analytical ability and experience in recruitment process modeling is strongly preferred. Flexibility and adaptability will be key traits for candidates applying to this position.

Qualifications. To perform this job successfully, an individual must be able to perform each essential duty satisfactorily. The requirements listed below are representative of the

knowledge, skill, and/or ability required. Reasonable accommodations may be made to enable individuals with disabilities to perform the essential functions.

- Identify as a Black educator
- Bachelor's degree is required, Master's degree preferred
- Minimum of 2-4 years of related experience required
- Experience with social media, multimedia and web-based communication preferred
- Excellent interpersonal, problem solving, and organizational skills

Requirements.

- Background check
- Valid Driver's License
- Child Protection Clearances

Shoulder Tap: Black Graduate Student Support (BGSS)

The Black Graduate Student Support (BGSS) program will request funds for hiring a full-time Black educator as a Program Manager or equivalent to work in the Student Success office of (insert institution name). The Black Program Manager will work closely with the BGSR Graduate Recruiter and will be tasked with supporting, mentoring, and advising current Black graduate students. In order to provide potential and newly admitted Black graduate students examples of Black graduate student success, the BGSS program will host support groups consisting of current Black graduate students. The support groups will provide Black graduate students the space to connect with other Black graduate students, share their experiences, and

express their challenges and victories surrounding graduate education. These seasoned Black graduate students will share their experiences and mentor incoming Black graduate students.

BGSS Program Manager Job Description. The BGSS Program Manager will serve as a general advisor for new and current Black graduate students at (insert institution name). This individual will be knowledgeable about initial course placement, registration policies and procedures, basic financial aid and campus resources and will serve as an advising contact for Black graduate students. This position will also support current students through general advising and referral to campus support systems.

Core responsibilities of the BGSR Graduate Recruiter role include:

- Provide new and current Black graduate student advising drop in services, scheduled appointments and events as assigned.
- Advising sessions may be conducted in person, via phone or computer, however the Program Manager will be expected to work on site to provide maximum availability to students.
- Assist Black graduate students in understanding and adjusting to the demands and culture of higher education.
- Assist with events and other learning opportunities that support Black graduate students in reaching their academic and career goals.
- Assist students in maintaining good academic standing, informing them of relevant policies, procedures and campus resources.
- Maintain appropriate documentation of all student contacts.
- Assist Black graduate students in identifying the most effective and efficient path to program completion.

- Provide Black graduate student support via support groups and informal mentorship.
- Maintain positive and productive working relationships with all Program Administrators and faculty to ensure that Black Graduate students receive accurate and reliable information.
- Refer students to appropriate campus resources for assistance with disability services, academic and personal issues and other college-related concerns.
- Refer students to appropriate community resources.
- Perform other related duties as assigned.

Qualifications. To perform this job successfully, an individual must be able to perform each essential duty satisfactorily. The requirements listed below are representative of the knowledge, skill, and/or ability required. Reasonable accommodations may be made to enable individuals with disabilities to perform the essential functions.

- Identify as a Black educator
- Bachelor's Degree required.
- One year (full time equivalency) of experience working in a counseling/advising capacity in an educational setting required.
- Experience working with individuals with diverse academic needs
- Demonstrated strong communication skills.
- Proficiency with Microsoft Office (especially Word, Excel, and PowerPoint) and Internet skills.

Requirements.

- Background check
- Valid Driver's License
- Child Protection Clearances

BGSS Support Group & Mentorship

1. Keeping with its educative positionality, the BGSS Support Group meeting schedule, frequency, and meeting topics will be established via recommendations of current Black graduate students at (insert institution name).
2. To maintain multi-directional learning the BGSS Support Group program manager will create a space that is free of hierarchy.
3. University funds may be used to purchase incentives for Black graduate students that want to informally mentor and be informal mentees in the BGSS program.

The qualities of multi-directional learning and educating challenges perceptions of how a program like the BGSS Support Group and informal mentorship operate. Normally I would provide prescribed and very rigged guidelines for the program in order to create hypothesis of outcomes. However, considering how often banking method intersects with the firm walls of programming, I have decided to do the opposite. Provide the Black graduate students with the Black educators, mentorship/advice, financial resources, and space, and watch what they create. The experiences of Black graduate students vary widely, this also effects their academic and social needs. Those needs don't require a one stop shop of solutions or prescribed measures in my option. Instead the Black graduate students who participate in the BGSS Support Group and informal mentorship will advocate for themselves and utilize their agency however they see fit.

Professional Competencies

The ACPA/NASPA Professional Competencies are key to maintain best practice for interventions. *Shoulder Tap* utilizes Student Learning and Development, Social Justice/Inclusion, and Advising and Supporting (ACPA/NASPA, 2015) most frequently. These competency areas as described below are integral to guiding my intervention (ACPA/NASPA, 2015)

Competency Area	Description
Personal and Ethical Foundations (PEF)	Involves the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to develop and maintain integrity in one's life and work; this includes thoughtful development, critique, and adherence to a holistic and comprehensive standard of ethics and commitment to one's own wellness and growth. Personal and ethical foundations are aligned because integrity has an internal locus informed by a combination of external ethical guidelines, an internal voice of care, and our own lived experiences. Our personal and ethical foundations grow through a process of curiosity, reflection, and self-authorship.
Values, Philosophy, and History (VPH)	Involves knowledge, skills, and dispositions that connect the history, philosophy, and values of the student affairs profession to one's current professional practice. This competency area embodies the foundations of the profession from which current and future research, scholarship, and practice will change and grow. The commitment to demonstrating this competency area ensures that our present and future practices are informed by an understanding of the profession's history, philosophy, and values.
Assessment, Evaluation, and Research (AER)	Focuses on the ability to design, conduct, critique, and use various AER methodologies and the results obtained from them, to utilize AER processes and their results to inform practice, and to shape the political and ethical climate surrounding AER processes and uses in higher education.
Law, Policy, and Governance (LPG)	Includes the knowledge, skills, and dispositions relating to policy development processes used in various contexts, the application of legal constructs, compliance/policy issues, and the understanding of governance structures and their impact on one's professional practice
Organizational and Human Resources (OHR)	Includes knowledge, skills, and dispositions used in the management of institutional human capital, financial, and physical resources. This competency area recognizes that student affairs professionals bring personal strengths and grow as managers through challenging themselves to build new skills in the selection, supervision, motivation, and formal evaluation of staff; resolution of conflict; management of the politics of organizational discourse; and the effective application of strategies and techniques associated with financial resources, facilities management, fundraising, technology, crisis management, risk management and sustainable resources.

Leadership (LEAD)	Addresses the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required of a leader, with or without positional authority. Leadership involves both the individual role of a leader and the leadership process of individuals working together to envision, plan, and affect change in organizations and respond to broad-based constituencies and issues. This can include working with students, student affairs colleagues, faculty, and community members.
Social Justice and Inclusion (SJI)	While there are many conceptions of social justice and inclusion in various contexts, for the purposes of this competency area, it is defined here as both a process and a goal which includes the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to create learning environments that foster equitable participation of all groups while seeking to address and acknowledge issues of oppression, privilege, and power. This competency involves student affairs educators who have a sense of their own agency and social responsibility that includes others, their community, and the larger global context. Student affairs educators may incorporate social justice and inclusion competencies into their practice through seeking to meet the needs of all groups, equitably distributing resources, raising social consciousness, and repairing past and current harms on campus communities
Student Learning and Development (SLD)	Addresses the concepts and principles of student development and learning theory. This includes the ability to apply theory to improve and inform student affairs and teaching practice.
Technology (TECH)	Focuses on the use of digital tools, resources, and technologies for the advancement of student learning, development, and success as well as the improved performance of student affairs professionals. Included within this area are knowledge, skills, and dispositions that lead to the generation of digital literacy and digital citizenship within communities of students, student affairs professionals, faculty members, and colleges and universities as a whole.
Advising and Supporting (A/S)	Addresses the knowledge, skills, and dispositions related to providing advising and support to individuals and groups through direction, feedback, critique, referral, and guidance. Through developing advising and supporting strategies that take into account self-knowledge and the needs of others, we play critical roles in advancing the holistic wellness of ourselves, our students, and our colleagues.

This intervention utilizes Student Learning and Development, Social Justice/Inclusion, and Advising and Supporting (ACPA/NASPA, 2015) most frequently. As previously mentioned in Chapter 3, *Shoulder Tap* works to bring equity to college campuses by offering resources to Black undergraduate and graduate students, this act is grounded within all three competencies

listed above. The hiring of the BGSS Program Manager and encouraging institutions to hire more Black faculty members position works directly under the competency area of Social Justice and Inclusion, as the description states, both a process and a goal which includes the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to create learning environments that foster equitable participation of all groups while seeking to address and acknowledge issues of oppression, privilege, and power(ACPA/NASPA, 2015). Within this intervention and any shift in an approach to assist students, it is crucial to stay in tune with best practices as outlined in the NASPA/ACPA Competencies. By staying in tune with these competencies and other best practices, we can work to assist students and go above and beyond for our Black students, staff and faculty through *Shoulder Tap's* effort.

As stated previously, I understand that from its inception higher education in Western culture was not designed with anyone but white men in mind. I am convinced that racism remains prominent in higher education and prevents space for the marginalized. This lack of space for the marginalized carries over into graduate studies and prevents Black student matriculation. I believe that in graduate higher education Black students face barriers in their matriculation partially due to a lack of funding to pay for rising graduate tuition, a lack of Black faculty and staff in higher education, and an abundance of negative experiences rooted in racism at institutions of higher education. From my own personal experiences and shared experiences of fellow Black students, I believe that these barriers powered by prolonged effects of racism are preventing Black student graduate matriculation. I believe that by increasing Black graduate enrollment we not only diversify student enrollment, but the workforce and educators of tomorrow.

Chapter Six: Implementation

In the previous chapter, the importance of providing support and space for Black students in order to increase Black graduate student matriculation was emphasized. *Shoulder Tap* is an initiative to help provide access to graduate school for Black undergraduate students and support for current Black graduate students. As stated previously, I think the resources in graduate higher education for Black students should present as Black staffing in graduate admissions departments, mentorship from current Black graduate students and faculty for prospective Black graduate students, and focused funding opportunities for Black graduate students. *Shoulder Tap* is how I bring all these desired outcomes together. *Shoulder Tap* is a program split into two coordinated and connecting interventions. Part 1 (*Shoulder Tap: Black Graduate Student Recruitment or BGSR*) is about creating a sustainable system in the form of university funds that directly impacts Black educators, current Black graduate students, potential Black graduate students, and graduate admission offices. Part 2 (*Shoulder Tap: Black Graduate Student Support or BGSS*) directly impacts Black educators and current Black graduate students at institutions of higher education. *Shoulder Tap* not only address the barriers Black graduate students are facing, it provides space to identify further concerns while simultaneously creating jobs specifically designed for Black educators.

Timeline

Implementing any new initiative onto a college campus can prove to be challenging. I would estimate a full roll out being accomplished in 2-3 years. Within the first year, the Student Success Office, Graduate Admissions Office, and Career Development Center of (insert institution name) would begin the process of hiring a Graduate Recruiter, a Program Manager, and identifying Black graduate students interested in becoming peer mentors for the BGSS

program. Within the same first year the Black graduate students interested in informal peer mentoring would make recommendations to the BGSS Program Manager and design criteria for the support group. Within year two, the Graduate Admissions Office via the BGSR Graduate Recruiter would work on recruiting at (insert institution name) and local colleges with diverse populations and a high percentage of Black students. Potentially any Historically Black Colleges or Minority Serving Institutions in the area would serve well in developing a recruitment population. Another opportunity this Graduate Recruiter would take to increase participation in the *Shoulder Tap* program would be by creating relationships with the (insert institution name) Multicultural Affairs Office. The hope of these steps in the second year is to increase relationships both on and off campus. This effort would increase the amount of Black graduate applicants which turns to more Black students matriculating not only to the graduate school but within *Shoulder Tap*. The hope is that by the third year all components of *Shoulder Tap* would be successfully implemented and begin working in tandem as students continue to be supported from their 3rd year, to their final day of graduate school. Reference Appendix A to see the timeline in a linear fashion.

Budget/Funding

The expected budget for this program and implementation of both components of BGSS and BGSR can be seen below. Materials needed for printing and branding can be used from budget lines from both the Graduate Admissions Office as well as Career Development. The largest budget item would be the hiring of the Graduate Recruiter and Program Manager. Taking into account the actual salary of the positions as well as benefits and other expenses that come with the job. Estimating roughly \$50,000 per position, for a total of \$100,000. Another large expense that would come from this intervention is the full tuition scholarship that would be

granted to one Black student per academic college, for the following example institution, I estimate five academic colleges being offered. A final cost of the intervention would be an initial cost of providing GRE, GMAT and other professional study guides and materials students could utilize as needed. Ensuring there are enough study materials for students to take as needed is important, estimating a total of \$3,000 which would be able to cover almost 100 study guides priced at roughly \$30. Below is a budget to help clarify the expected costs of implementing both components within *Shoulder Tap*.

The funding for *Shoulder Tap* would be provided by the Graduate Admissions department, the Career Development Center, the Student Success Center, and the university colleges of (insert institution name). The Graduate Admissions department and Career Development Center will co-sponsor and provide funding to pay for the BGSR Graduate Recruiter position. The BGSR Graduate Recruiter reports to both areas and handles the recruitment and matriculation of Black graduate students. The Student Success Center will provide funds for the BGSS Program Manager position. The BGSS Program Manager will report to the Student Success Center on how Black graduate students are adjusting to graduate programs, and how the center can support these students. The university colleges will fund all the scholarships and additional materials needed for *Shoulder Tap* as mentioned below. The university colleges will either wave GRE requirements for their graduate programs or the Graduate Admissions department will provide the BGSR Graduate Recruiter with funds to pay for one time GRE waivers for Black students applying to (insert institution name) graduate programs. Non (insert institution name) graduate program GRE waivers will be provided via alumni sponsorship on a case by case basis. All aspects of the funding process will be initiated via request sent to the appropriate Director, Dean, or President. Please see Appendix B.

Item	Cost	Total
Two Black educators: Graduate Recruiter Program Manager	\$50,000 per position/yearly	\$100,000
Printing/Branding	\$3,000 per year	\$3,000
T-shirts/Swag	\$5,000 per year	\$5,000
Full Tuition Scholarships	\$12,000 (1) per college/year	\$60,000
Preparation Materials, GRE, GMAT study guides etc.	\$3,000 per year	\$5,000
All items	All cost per year	\$173,000

Marketing and Recruitment

Along with the previously mentioned recruitment of the BGSR Graduate Recruiter, the *Shoulder Tap* program will utilize virtual and in person means to gain Black student participants. Virtual marketing will be created and sent by the BGSR Graduate Recruiter to Black undergraduate students via email. The email list will be acquired via partnerships with the Multicultural Center at (insert institution name). Additionally, the BGSR Graduate Recruiter will partner with the Graduate Admissions department to produce monthly email correspondence to send to faculty, staff, and students of (insert institution name) and participate in Graduate Admissions events to garnish interest in *Shoulder Tap*. The BGSS Program Manager will consolidate a list of all Black graduate students at (insert institution name) with the help of the graduate coordinators and send out email correspondence monthly to all students that identify as Black graduate students. The email will include necessary information on what programs, resources, or events the BGSS Support Group are providing at that time. The

Shoulder Tap program will participate in all other marketing and recruitment plans prescribed by the Graduate Admissions department, Career Development Center, Student Success Center, and or the university colleges of (insert institution name).

Leadership

Black (2015) states, “the challenges experienced in Higher Education (HE) over recent decades have led to the emergence of various leadership approaches within the sector and can be observed in many HE institutions across all regions, whether research-led, teaching-led, large or small, specialized or multi-faculty” (Black, 2015, p.56). Effective leadership within higher education has been traditionally more results oriented compared to any other form of leadership. Faculty and staff push the narrative that the right type of academic leadership involves a strategic plan for success, effective communication and explanation of goals, and a convincing statement about their personal dedication to diversity. The “effectiveness” of the leadership style is perceived via how well the current rules, guidelines, and goals are being upheld and met. Higher education practitioners and institutions have continued to fail Black students by utilizing a system not designed for their success. By promoting teaching and educational standards that do not reflect the current campus climates, nor acknowledge the educational and societal barriers Black students are facing due to a severe history of systematic racism and oppression, Black students will continue suffer. By simply repeating what has already been done, how do we expect to see change? Universities are more committed now than ever before to leveling the proverbial academic “playing field”, when in fact Black students deserve more.

Black students deserve educational reparations, ethnic and racial accommodations, and not fair but exceptional opportunities to excel. It is not just the job of higher education practitioners to make this a reality, but the ethos of dedication to all students. The type of

leadership needed to facilitate this change is not one that repeats and re-administers the same non-effective methods, but one that promotes change. Transformative leadership supported by individualized considerations for Black students, influential Black educators, and respectful inquiry into the limitations facing Black students are steps in the right direction. As explained by Sheilds (2010),

Transformative leadership begins with questions of justice and democracy; it critiques inequitable practices and offers the promise not only of greater individual achievement but of a better life lived in common with others. Transformative leadership, therefore, inextricably links education and educational leadership with the wider social context within which it is embedded. Thus, it is my contention that transformative leadership and leadership for inclusive and socially just learning environments are inextricably related. (p.559)

The questions should be less about how to transform Black students, and more about how to change higher education and graduate enrollment. Reparations are due and my intervention provides sustainable, easily implemented, and immediate change for the betterment of Black academics.

In order to manifest the most appropriate and meaningful intervention, I utilized the ACPA/NASPA Competencies and incorporated their guidelines into my thinking about leadership. The competencies recommend graduate students structure programs, services, and interventions for both graduate student organizations and university policy around the competencies and rubrics. Some examples included, creating intentional programming around the ten competency areas, establishing officer positions that are directly connected with

advancing a particular competency area, guiding reflection and dialogue at networking events, and conducting needs assessment (and subsequent interventions/actions) to address any gaps in programming or organizational structure. With this in mind, I developed the silhouette for the *Shoulder Tap* program. My understanding of why the deficit exists in graduate programs originates during the undergraduate years, thus the solution must emerge there as well. Black students enrolled in a baccalaureate programs would have the opportunity to participate during the beginning of their third year through the completion of their degree requirements. *Shoulder Tap* includes free Graduate Record Examinations (GRE) preparatory exams and courses and GRE financial waivers that would cover the cost of official examinations. Black students have expressed to me personally how financial hardships can create an almost impossible reality when applying for graduate school. *Shoulder Tap* introduces Black students to resources such as graduate assistantships and research positions that can help to cover tuition cost. As previously mentioned, with student debt at an all-time high and many Black students being included in those numbers, many cannot deliberately agree to adding more debt to what they have already accumulated. By educating and connecting students into a network with other Black students, we are able to provide solutions.

Shoulder Tap also includes informal Black graduate student mentors already enrolled in a graduate programs. The purpose of the mentor is not only to guide and advise the young students, but also to serve as a living example. The goal they are attempting to achieve is not fictitious, but a resilient reality being demonstrated by the Black student in front of them. Higher education practitioners may not completely grasp just how crucial it is to recognize someone that looks like you in a position you wish to matriculate to. Who better to understand your struggle and truly discern where you are coming from than someone who was in your shoes? The

mentorship position will also serve the Black graduate students. Allowing the student to document the time spent as internship or graduate assistantship hours, gaining a stronger understanding of their program by implementing tips and tricks to help others, and the feelings of appreciation from the undergraduate students they are helping. The mentors will be given the opportunity to demonstrate transformational leadership by attempting to change graduate program expectations and realities. By educating the undergraduate Black students they are empowering them to create and identify their own future. Rather than hearing opinions about how arduous the voyage to graduate school is from people that may not have their best interest, these Black graduate students will be able to form their own opinions from the insight their mentor brings to the table. As Black educators, it is our moral and ethical obligation to assist each other, especially when the perception, expectation, and actuality still exists that no one else will.

This intervention utilizes my knowledge of both effective and transformational leadership. Drawbacks would include how much the program would cost and if universities would be willing to pay to fund it. Considering the amount of positions, programs, and funds universities allocate every year to sustainable diversity, I think anything less than full funding of this intervention would be deemed unacceptable. A more transformative intervention would tackle the systemic racism in higher education and offer reparations more directly to Black students. Considering the hundreds of years Black people have been forced to lay down under the unjust and political education system, my program is not nearly enough. Guaranteed acceptance, free tuition for themselves and their children, and room and board included is slightly closer to what needs to be offered. Until universities and colleges are truly ready to take

responsibility for their part in the injustices Black students have faced in this country, *Shoulder Tap* will be an appropriate first step.

Evaluation and Assessment

The importance of initial data and post-data would be crucial in deciding if the goals of this intervention are being met. In order to gather progress of our students as they prepare for graduate school, *Shoulder Tap* would offer a survey to third year, Black undergraduate students to gauge where they currently stand in their opinions and comfortability when it comes to applying for graduate school (see Appendix C). After working through BGSR Black students would take the post program survey, collecting data on if they have been admitted or have committed to any graduate schools (see Appendix D). By utilizing this blended method of both qualitative and quantitative data from this survey we will be able to adjust our efforts based on student's anecdotal feedback as well as quantitative and measurable gauging from how they felt in the beginning of their 3rd year and how they feel about applying and attending graduate school in their final semester. The benefit of the having the mentorship component of the BGSS is being able to informally check in with our current graduate students who are mentoring as well as those being mentored. Evaluation and assessment are key to every intervention and we would continually informally check in with our students to ensure that their needs are being met, and if they are not, the informal check-in's will be adjusted.

After sometime of implementing *Shoulder Tap*, we would also have historical data to compare results. After two-three years we would begin to see if there is an increase in Black undergraduate students applying and attending graduate school as well as how our Black graduate students are being retained and persisting through their programs. For assessment (insert institution name), would send out "Update Us" forms to our alumni of *Shoulder Tap* who

have continued into graduate school, asking them to give a short summary of what they are up to now (see Appendix E).

- Assessment #1: When Black students from the program matriculate into their graduate program of choice. I will be able to access this through quantitative data collection.
- Assessment #2: The graduate admissions staff will be required to complete a pre and post training assessment, along with semesterly “continued learning” programs and required individual professional development based around discussed topics. All materials will be provided by Chief Diversity Equity and Inclusion Officer at (insert institution name).
- Assessment #3: Similar yet different to the first learning outcome I will utilize both quantitative (number of students accepted to their desired program) and qualitative (open ended response questions about the student's preparedness during the interview) data collection methods.

Limitations & Looking Ahead

A challenge within the Black Graduate Student Support program is the attempt to decolonize traditional mentoring and educative spaces. To ask students and professionals to abandon previously instilled ideologies of the Banking Method that Paulo Freire (Freire, 2014) discusses can be potentially difficult. The greatest struggle is to abandon what we are all taught from our formal learning K-12 in order to help Black students embrace a more beneficial way of learning and support. Within the Black Graduate Student Recruitment program, a challenge would be to prove the value of these professional positions. Within the first few years, quantitative data would be accessible but potentially limited in terms of validating if the Graduate Recruiter and Program Manager positions are creating an impact. Unfortunately, many retention and persistence efforts take anywhere from 2-3 years to show comparison data

to determine if the efforts are working. This is a challenge, often because positions have 30, 60, 90 day and one-year evaluations to determine if a professional is fit to stay within the position. (insert institution name) cannot simply expect outcomes immediately, and this is a short coming as universities are results driven. These challenges cannot deter us from changing route or shying away from implementing these necessary steps to help more Black graduate students succeed and persist through graduate school.

Thesis Conclusion

I am a Black educator. As an undergraduate and graduate student at a PWI, I have experienced and lived the realities of systemic racist ideologies. Yet, even with my increasing awareness of these challenges, I am incredibly grateful for the purpose that my military and academic experiences have awoken in me. While in the National Guard, I provided seminars and classes to other Black soldiers on how to use educational benefits. As an undergraduate, I found my role as an advocate in student leadership and programming for racially and ethnically marginalized students, and I have furthered my understanding and research acumen through advanced graduate studies. Yet, more work is to be done. I hope that in the near future I no longer will be one of the few, but one of the many. One of the many Black graduate degree holders, one of the many Black educators, and one of the many curly haired and wide nosed Black students of the academy. *Shoulder Tap* isn't the end, it's the beginning.

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Appendix A

Shoulder Tap Timeline

Year 1

- Send co-funding letter request to the Student Success Office, Graduate Admissions Office, Career Development Center and university colleges of (insert institution name)
- Hire (1) Graduate Recruiter
- Hire (1) Program Manager
- Identify Black graduate students interested in becoming informal peer mentors
- Identify and contact co-funding resources (alumni)
- Send co-funding letter request to identified donors

Year 2

- Begin recruiting at local institutions to attract more Black undergraduate students to apply/attend graduate programs at (insert institution name)
- Create relationships with the Office of Multicultural Affairs and all other student center offices and departments at (insert institution name)
- Participate in fundraising opportunities for donors as prescribed by the Alumni Association at (insert institution name)

Year 3

- Analyze present data of Black graduate students and compare it with historical data of Black graduate students applying and enrolling to determine program success
- Continue all efforts and adjust as needed to ensure the success of the *Shoulder Tap* initiative

Appendix B

Funds Request: sent to the Offices of Graduate Admissions, Student Success Office, Career Development Center, and the university colleges at (insert institution name).

To whom it may concern,

On behalf of the Black graduate students and Black educators at (insert institution name), we are pleased to announce the launch of the *Shoulder Tap* initiative. *Shoulder Tap* is a program split into two coordinated and connecting interventions. Part 1 (*Shoulder Tap*: Black Graduate Student Recruitment or BGSR) is about creating a sustainable system in the form of university funds that directly impacts Black educators, current Black graduate students, potential Black graduate students, and graduate admission offices. Part 2 (*Shoulder Tap*: Black Graduate Student Support or BGSS) directly impacts Black educators and current Black graduate students at institutions of higher education. *Shoulder Tap* not only address the barriers Black graduate students are facing, it provides space to identify further concerns while simultaneously creating jobs specifically designed for Black educators.

To accomplish the year one goals of *Shoulder Tap* and successfully meet the needs of Black graduate students, we are extending a request for funds to support this ground breaking program. Your contribution will benefit Black students who struggle to persist through graduate school, and help fund this new and valuable mentoring program/ support group. This program is need based on the low matriculation and retention of Black students at (insert institution name), investing in the lives of Black students in our communities will additionally serve you well. *Shoulder Tap* will increase Black graduate student enrollment for Graduate Admissions and the university colleges, while also Black student interaction with the Student Success Office and Career Development Center.

Our current goal is to raise our total sum as described in the intervention proposal by the end of the academic year.

Please help us continue our efforts to guide and produce tomorrow's great leaders.

Sincerely,

Appendix C

Pre-Survey:

to be given to third year Black undergraduate students

Do you identify as a Black undergraduate student?

Yes No

If you attended graduate school, would you identify as a Black graduate student?

Yes No

Have you considered attending graduate school? (1-not at all, 5- sometimes, 10-I will attend)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Please explain why you have or have not considered graduate school?

Do you feel prepared to apply for graduate school at this moment?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How can we help you feel better prepared to attend graduate school?

Appendix D

Post-Survey:

to be given to Black undergraduate students participating in *Shoulder Tap*

Do you identify as a Black undergraduate student?

Yes No

If you attended graduate school, would you identify as a Black graduate student

Yes No

Have you considered attending graduate school? (1-not at all, 5- sometimes, 10-I will attend)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Please explain why you have or have not considered graduate school?

Do you feel prepared to apply for graduate school at this moment?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Has *Shoulder Tap* been useful in your preparation to apply/attend graduate school?

Yes Somewhat No

If 'yes' or 'somewhat' please tell us how *Shoulder Tap* has been useful in you feeling better prepared to apply/attend graduate school.

Have you been admitted to any graduate school programs? If so, please list them.

Do you feel prepared to attend graduate school?

Yes No

If yes, what aspects of *Shoulder Tap* were most helpful?

If no, how can we better assist students to feel more prepared?

Appendix E

“Update Us” Form

What year did you graduate with your bachelor's degree?

When did you begin your graduate school journey?

When are you planning to graduate/ have graduated?

Tell us about your graduate experience. Where did you attend and what was your program of study?

Did *Shoulder Tap* prepare you for what you have experienced on your graduate school journey?

What did you learn in ST that you were able to apply in your graduate school experience?

How could *Shoulder Tap* have better prepared you?

Where are you currently employed and located?

Please provide an email address if you are willing to have us contact you for more information about the *Shoulder Tap* program.