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Student–Faculty Engagement Solutions for Retention of Racially Minoritized Students

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Abstract

This qualitative study examined the importance of student–faculty interactions for racially minoritized students. Persistent challenges in low retention rates for racially minoritized students have been a focal point of scholarly investigation for decades (Carey, 2004; Kinzie et al., 2008). Despite research indicating that engagement between students and faculty is crucial for improving student retention, these interactions are constrained (Cox et al., 2010). The presence of effective student–faculty engagement can foster students' persistence, while the absence of engagement can create a negative academic experience, especially for racially minoritized students.

Tinto's theory of student departure (1975, 1987, 1993) is one of the most relevant college impact theories to understand student retention. Tinto's work considers retention by accounting for multiple dynamic factors, as opposed to just academic performance or exclusively student-focused concerns (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Therefore, this study used this theory to develop research questions and interpret the data.

The purpose of this study was to identify strategies to increase student–faculty interactions by addressing the disparity between the limited interactions and the established benefits associated with such interactions. Understanding the causes of student attrition is crucial for universities to develop and implement successful retention strategies. In this study, a qualitative semistructured interview design was employed at a medium-sized public university in the Midwest. The researchers conducted a comprehensive exploration of student–faculty engagement with racially minoritized students who identified as first-time first-year college students. Through the participants' personal stories and examples, the researchers identified factors that deter student–faculty

engagement and identified effective strategies to enhance such interactions. The findings revealed students desire a welcoming and comfortable learning environment and professors who exhibit characteristics and behaviors that promote relationship building. The findings also indicated students navigate through barriers that hinder academic progress. In addition, students value holistic support and personal development to enhance their educational experience.

Awareness of students' needs, coupled with intentional techniques on the professor's behalf, has the potential to be transformative for students' academic experiences. The recommendations of this study can serve as a framework for institutions seeking to enhance interactions between racially minoritized students and faculty, thereby contributing to improved retention.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In higher education, the issue of retention among racially minoritized students has long been a concern, with persistent challenges in low retention rates prompting scholarly investigation for decades. Despite efforts to address these challenges, research indicates that engagement between students and faculty remains constrained, with significant implications for student persistence and academic success.

This qualitative study sought to explore the importance of student–faculty interactions for racially minoritized students and identified strategies to increase such interactions. By addressing the disparity between limited interactions and the established benefits associated with them, this research aimed to contribute to the development of effective retention strategies in higher education institutions. Through in-depth interviews conducted at a medium-sized public university in the Midwest, this study delved into the experiences of racially minoritized first-time first-year college students, explored factors that hinder student–faculty engagement and identified effective strategies to enhance it. Recognizing the importance of developing intentional strategies to increase student–faculty engagement, this study provided valuable insights for institutions seeking to improve retention rates among racially minoritized students.

Background

This study proposed how to increase student–faculty engagement for the retention of racially minoritized students. First, this research introduced the phenomenon of retention for higher education institutions, some of the causes of this challenge and its effects on institutional standing. Second, it examined the causes of low participation in student–faculty interactions and its relationship to attrition numbers for racially

minoritized students. Understanding that academic engagement and meaningful interactions have a significant impact on enrollment in postsecondary institutions (Chipchase et al., 2017; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), this study proposed student–faculty engagement solutions for racially minoritized students. The benefits of academic experiences and learning approaches that align with the social-cultural background of racially minoritized students are impactful for student retention (Harper & Quaye, 2015; Owolabi, 2018). The participants of this study were racially minoritized students who identify as a first-time first-year student at a medium sized 4-year metropolitan university located in the Midwest.

Theoretical Framework

The experiences on a college campus influence a student's ability to persist at the university (Coleman et al., 2021; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Patterson Silver Wolf et al., 2021). Faculty are important as an environmental variable for student persistence under the theories of college impact (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Theories of college impact are models that explain student change within the lens of the institutional dynamics and experiences students have while attending college. Some of the student-related variables influencing change are demographics, academic achievement, race, and ethnicity. Other variables related to the structure of the academic institution are the environment and the climate created by student–faculty interactions.

Tinto's theory of student departure (1975, 1987, 1993) is one of the most relevant college impact theories to understand student retention. This theory embraces variables such as: student's preentry attributes, goals/commitments, institutional experiences, integration, and student's departure decision (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Tinto's

work looked at retention by accounting for multiple dynamic factors, as opposed to just academic performance or only student-focused concerns. Instead of colleges shifting all responsibility to students, this framework allows for colleges to see how their own policies, institutional memory, and ways of functioning actually hurt student retention. Prior research has noted that there are not enough studies that analyzed retention of racially minoritized students through Tinto's theory (Braxton et al., 2004). Our research paid close attention to student–faculty interactions as a factor for integration, persistence, and retention with a special focus on racially minoritized students.

Social, Cultural, and Historical Perspectives

During the first year of college, students are determining how to engage in out-of-class activities. Students want to feel welcomed and included in their academic environment (Hawkins & Larabee, 2009). Kinzie et al. (2008) described racially minoritized students as having added difficulties related to students' family socioeconomic and educational backgrounds. Racially minoritized students commonly experience their first year of college differently than their White peers due to the social and cultural challenges they face. Hawkins and Larabee (2009) listed these challenges as: campus climate, culturally exclusive environmental norms, overwhelming Whiteness, academic preparation, and utilization of campus support services. The campus climate at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) impacts racially minoritized students' out-of-class engagement in terms of frequency and quality because they experience one way culture assimilation, marginalization, and isolation. Insufficient support networks put students at risk of dropping out, since they do not know what resources are available or how to navigate them correctly (Gupton et al., 2009).

The content and focus of western literature does not adequately represent or address the history, experiences, and concerns of racially minoritized students (Quaye et al., 2009; Quaye et al., 2015). There is a disparity in the representation of professors who share the same race as racially minoritized students in higher education (Bartlebaugh & Abraham, 2021). Student–faculty engagement for racially minoritized students must be tailored to the needs of these students. A common challenge for professors at PWIs is not understanding students' racial dynamics (Quaye et al., 2009). Many racially minoritized first-year students do not utilize available resources because they are unaware of them or disengaged from out-of-class activities, which means students are missing the opportunity to learn about them (Hawkins & Larabee, 2009).

With the increase of higher education access for racially minoritized students, the role of faculty and administrators has shifted to envisioning and enacting new and more progressive ways of creating diversity, equity, and inclusion. These positive changes bring new challenges to retain and engage culturally diverse students (Crosling, 2017; Owolabi, 2018; Quaye et al, 2015; Yamauchi et al., 2016). Kuh and Love (2004) proposed that knowledge of a student's culture of origin and the cultures of immersion are needed to understand student persistence. As a result, student persistence is related to the student's sociocultural connections, which lead to more meaningful integration to the academic institution. Practices that promote inclusion for racially minoritized students are highly recommended in research related to this topic. For example, Kinzie et al. (2008) suggested that through socialization, validation activities, encouragement, and support, faculty can help racially minoritized students to engage and succeed by increasing their confidence. Knowledge of the student's background will increase interactions among

students and faculty (Owolabi, 2018). Prioritizing the inclusion of professors with similar backgrounds as students could minimize underrepresentation and create more inclusive curricular content (Quaye et al., 2009).

Researchers have suggested that engagement leads to persistence, retention, and better academic performance, especially for culturally-diverse students (Yamauchi et al., 2016). Once again, retention and engagement must be in unison in order to understand causes of attrition, and hence create solutions. Research has shown that stronger student–faculty interactions will lead to integration and consequently persistence. The conditions that enable diverse populations to engage exist when faculty and institutions shift from negligence to intelligence to promote retention (Harper & Quaye, 2015).

Local Contextual Perspectives

The university targeted for this study is a 4-year public institution located within 25 miles of a major metropolitan city. The main campus has a student body of over 13,000. The primary programs are arts, sciences, nursing, education, business, and engineering. The city located adjacent to campus has an estimated population of 25,218 (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). The surrounding community racial breakdowns are listed in Table 1.

Table 1

Racial Breakdown of Surrounding Community

Race	Percentage
American Indian and Alaska Native	0.40
Asian alone	2.10
Black or African American alone	8.70
Hispanic or Latino	2.30
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone	0.00
Two or more races	2.60
White alone	85.80
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino	84.70

Note. Adapted from U.S. Census Bureau (n.d.), QuickFacts, (https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/).

The student population at the study university is more diverse than the surrounding community as shown in Table 2. For example, at the time of the study, the surrounding community had 8.7% Black or African American and the university community had 14.2%. Some of the reasons that the university has a more diverse student body than the immediate area includes: proximity to a large city, established programs in diverse areas of the city, recruiters in other metropolitan cities, and international agents/recruiters.

Table 2

Student Racial Breakdown for the University in Fall 2021

Race	Percentage
American Indian and Alaska Native	0.20
Asian	2.40
Black/non-Hispanic	14.20
Hispanic	5.60
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0.10
Non-resident alien	2.10
Two or More Races	3.70
Unknown	1.70
White/non-Hispanic	70.00

The university is located 20 miles from a city that has a large minoritized population. Although most minority representation in this area is typical of the surrounding areas, at the time of the study, the Black or African American population represented 96.6% of the overall city population. The university has an established program and extended campus located in the heavily diverse areas of the city. The center, funded by federal, state, and local grants, supports the surrounding community through head start programs, TRIO upward bound, a charter school, and a learning resource center. Students and families who use these services are connected and familiar with the university, which directs more diverse students to campus.

Table 3 depicts the racial/ethnic breakdown of the full-time faculty. Understanding this composition is crucial for assessing the dynamics of student–faculty interactions from the perspective of minoritized students. The data illustrated that a significant portion of the faculty, 77.73%, identified as White/non-Hispanic. The next largest group, Asian faculty members, comprised 9.19% of the faculty body. Black/non-

Hispanic faculty were represented at 6.7%, and Hispanic faculty at 2.92%. These tables highlight the diversity among the faculty, though with a predominant representation of White/non-Hispanic members.

Table 3

Faculty Race by Gender and Percentage in 2022

Race	Gender		Total	Percentage
	Male	Female		
American Indian and Alaska Native	1	0	1	0.11
Asian	48	37	85	9.19
Black/non-Hispanic	28	34	85	6.7
Hispanic	11	16	27	2.92
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	1	1	2	0.22
Non-resident alien	10	8	18	1.95
Two or more races	4	7	11	1.19
Unknown	0	0	0	0.00
White/non-Hispanic	329	390	719	77.73

To establish the baseline services that are a prerequisite to promoting retention, it is important to note the current organizational structure and the most prominent programming that is focused on student–faculty engagement initiatives. The student body is represented by a division for equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). The head of the EDI division reports directly to the Chancellor. This position has a seat on the senior leadership committee and is on equal footing with all Vice Chancellor positions. This organizational structure not only reflects the institution's prioritization of EDI but also ensures these values are embedded at the highest levels of decision making.

At the time of this study, the EDI offices consisted of the Accessible Campus Community and Equitable Student Support (ACCESS), Equal Opportunity, Access and

Title IX Coordination (EOA), Inclusive Excellence, Education and Development Hub (The Hub), and Student Opportunities for Academic Results. In addition to these offices, EDI is supported by a University Diversity Council and Campus Diversity Liaisons.

The EOA ensures that the university is complying with legal requirements for equal opportunity, affirmative action, and gender equity. Students, staff, or faculty who would like to file a complaint are directed to this office for all issues regarding discrimination and sexual harassment. EOA is responsible for staying current with new legislation and training for all equal opportunity and affirmative action requirements.

One of the campus' main locations for inclusivity and diversity is The Hub. This center is a designated space to ensure that all students, regardless of demographics, have a place on campus where they can feel a sense of connectedness and belonging to the university. This space provides a lounge area and computers that are accessible to any student who would like to partake in this designated safe space. The Hub staff develops programming to promote conversations, diversity and inclusive awareness. They design and implement structured conversations, workshops, panels, heritage month celebrations, and graduation and orientation ceremonies for diverse groups on campus.

Besides the EDI offices, the university utilizes the Education Advisor Board program, Starfish. Starfish is a program that promotes communication between faculty, students, and on campus offices (EAB, 2024). Students primarily use this tool to communicate with advisors and resource offices. Faculty can alert offices through Starfish when students need assistance or additional resources. For example, a student's academic advisor can be alerted by a faculty member when a student is chronically absent for class or if the student ceases submitting assignments. This program helps create a

safety net for students. It assists with timely intervention and support. Using this program, potential issues can be addressed before they escalate into major concerns.

Although the university established the EDI and its supporting offices and provides additional programs like Starfish to enhance communication between faculty and students, the retention rates for the underrepresented students were substantially lower than the White students. Table 4 displays the full-time and combined full-time student retention for first-year for Fall 2020 to Fall 2021.

A review of the Fall 2020 to Fall 2021 retention data (see Table 4) revealed that the two groups with a higher retention rate than White (77.1%) students were the American Indian and Alaska Native (100%) students, and Asian (90%) students. All other students' retention rates were lower than White students. The most significant difference were the Black or African American (62.3%) students that were 14.8% behind the White students.

Table 4

First-Year Fall 2020 to Fall 2021 Retention - as of Census

Ethnicity	Original cohort start F20	Returning F21 census	Difference	Retention rate
American Indian and Alaska Native	2	2	0	100
Asian	40	36	-4	90
Black/non-Hispanic	207	129	-78	62.3
Hispanic	90	62	-28	68.9
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	3	2	-1	66.7
Non-resident alien	8	6	-2	75
Two or more races	86	56	-30	65.1
Unknown	26	18	-8	69.2
White/non-Hispanic	1047	807	-240	77.1

Although the university had programming and EDI, the difference in retention is significant. This raises concerns regarding the utilization and effectiveness of these programs. Although the campus had these initiatives in place, it was not enough to facilitate change. Faculty and students must seek opportunities to engage with one another. This study intended to examine student–faculty interactions and identify how to increase racially minoritized first-year student participation.

Problem of Practice

Although research supports that student–faculty engagement is a critical solution to increasing student retention, these interactions are limited (Cox et al., 2010). Students, for varying reasons, do not engage with faculty as often as they should. The lack of student–faculty engagement creates a negative academic experience for all students, but especially for racially minoritized students. In contrast to their White peers, when students of color perceive the college environment to be less supportive, they are less likely to persist to graduation (Carey, 2004; Kinzie et al., 2008; Pascarella et al., 1996). The racial climate and culture can shape on-campus student engagement (Quaye et al., 2015). Racially minoritized students have fewer student–faculty interactions when they feel the college environment is racially insensitive (Cole, 2007).

Student retention is a big concern and a current issue for higher education institutions. In higher education institutions, the student and staff interactions can define satisfaction and student retention. For many years, retention was viewed as a student's sole responsibility. With the burden solely on their shoulders, students were expected to stay enrolled and to have academic success during college years; however, this has shifted to a shared responsibility with the institution (Crosling, 2017; Owolabi, 2018;

Quaye et al, 2015; Yamauchi et al., 2016). Educational attainment is analyzed in terms of the efforts of the institution to retain students. Retention is not an achievable goal when it is disconnected from student engagement (Coleman et al., 2021). Nelson and Creagh (2013) addressed that targeted interventions can be implemented when student disengagement is being identified as early as the first year in higher education.

Racially minoritized students have the highest departure numbers in higher education (Patterson Silver Wolf et al., 2021). Knowledge of the student's background and the purposeful creation of activities that encourage students to participate in them is highly suggested (Owolabi, 2018). A pedagogical shift that fulfills the needs of students of color will lead to higher retention and graduation rates (Owolabi, 2018). Quaye et. al (2015), claimed that engaging strategies for racially minoritized students and conceptualizing their racial and ethnic identities and cultures will positively impact retention.

Harper and Quaye (2015) claimed that it is professors' responsibility for placing students at risk of dropping when engagement is not customized for students, they also made recommendations on assessing resources and services resulting in environmental conditions that includes every student. The research team's intention was to show how increased and meaningful student–faculty interactions result in higher retention rates, and make recommendations to enhance engagement with special considerations for racially minoritized students.

Significance of the Study

Hurtado and Carter (1997) found that a sense of belonging was an important mediating variable that contributed to student success, particularly for historically marginalized student groups whose culture and values are not dominant on campus.

Students who felt a sense of belonging because they attended a supportive institution initiated more social interactions and formed better relationships on campus (Hussain & Jones, 2021). Student–faculty engagement is one way that students' sense of belonging was enhanced (Hurtado et al., 2015; Hussain & Jones, 2021).

A qualitative study conducted at a large southwestern PWI found that student–faculty relationships and psychosociocultural influences were useful predictors of Black students' academic and social engagement at PWIs (Beasley, 2020). When student–faculty relationships exist, students are motivated to work harder and demonstrate higher levels of engagement and academic performance. Ryan and Deci's self-determination theory (2000) posited that relationships between students and teachers increase students' motivation to achieve their goals. Students feel motivated to set goals for themselves, invest effort to meet those goals, and notice progress toward goal attainment (Kim & Lundberg, 2016; Schunk, 1996; Zimmerman, 1995).

Student–faculty relationships impact students' cognitive abilities as well. College students' cognitive skills and abilities are among the most essential outcomes of a college education (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The cognitive skills domain include skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and logic. Engaging with faculty provided students with a unique opportunity to utilize those skills. Students seek guidance about academic course selection, request clarity about course assignments, or engage in undergraduate research (Trolian et al., 2021). Students also seek guidance regarding their career path. Researchers suggested that student–faculty interactions relate to students' career plans were beneficial for overall career development (Komarraju et al., 2010). These career-related interactions lead to positive outcomes such as networking conversations, job referrals, and graduate school support.

Recognizing that student–faculty engagement is a critical way to promote a sense of belonging for racially minoritized students, institutions need to create opportunities for students to interact with their faculty as soon as they arrived on campus (Hausmann et al., 2007; Hussain & Jones, 2021; Tatum, 1999; Walton & Cohen, 2011). The first year of college is critical to educational persistence and retention (Turner & Thompson, 2014). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2022b) affirmed, "Retention rates measure the percentage of first-time undergraduate students who return to the same institution the following fall" (para. 1). In 2015, nearly 28% of all first-year students at private 4-year undergraduate and graduate universities in the United States did not return for their sophomore year (ACT, 2015). In Fall 2020, there was a reported increase of 82% in undergraduate retention of full-time students at 4-year degree institutions (NCES, 2022b, para. 2). Although there has been improvement in overall retention over the past 2 decades in 4-year colleges, in recent years, the first-year to second-year student retention rate dropped. Retention rates for racially minoritized students lag behind those of White students substantially (Heiman, 2010; Sweat et al., 2013).

Owolabi (2018) explained that with the appearance of more financial aid services, the access to higher education has increased for racially minoritized students, and these opportunities have brought new issues for college institutions. Educational attainment, graduation rates, student engagement, and student loan debt, are some of the biggest concerns (Owolabi, 2018; Coleman et al., 2021). Student retention differs based on different student populations. Racially minoritized students have added difficulties, such as "precollege educational preparation, students' family socioeconomic and educational backgrounds, racial discrimination" (Kinzie et al., 2008, p. 23–24). The increase in

students of diverse cultural backgrounds leads to a new generation of students—diverse student cohorts—and with them appears new challenges for retention (Crosling, 2017). Special attention needs to be provided to racially minoritized students to determine the programming and relationships that were needed to ensure those students felt connected to campus.

Practices to Increase Student Engagement and Student Retention

There is a push to create more inclusive and diverse university environments that not only attract students of color, but retain and graduate them as well (Duranczyk et al., 2004). Understanding the causes of student attrition is crucial for universities to develop and implement successful retention strategies (Williams & Roberts, 2023; Zepke & Leach, 2005). Although there are multiple causes that contribute to a student's decision to leave, institutional factors are often taken into consideration. Common factors include academic performance, lack of connection to their college campus, financial hardship or a fear of getting into debt, paid employment commitments, family problems, physical or emotional challenges, relationship or caring responsibilities, poor health, or crucial life events such as bereavement and pregnancy (Osman et al., 2017). Although some of these factors, such as poor health or bereavement are not directly influenced by the academic institution, factors such as disappointing academic performance, dislike of the chosen major or poor preparation for college are potentially more amenable to institutional intervention (Williams & Roberts, 2023).

Developing a sense of belonging is one strategy that has been identified as a factor that can increase retention. Racially minoritized students, however, may find it more difficult to develop a sense of belonging, especially at a PWI. Reduced sense of

belonging often results in isolation and alienation, which further reduced participation in campus activities and interactions across racial-ethnic boundaries (Hausmann, et al., 2007; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hussain & Jones, 2021; Tatum, 1999; Walton & Cohen, 2011). Discrimination also impacts the connection racially minoritized students have to their college campuses. Qualitative studies revealed that various forms of discrimination, including tokenization, perceived double standards, a lack of respect from others in the academic community, and a lack of mentorship and collegial support negatively impacted minority students' sense of belonging (González, 2006). In those instances, students grappled with how to cope, either conforming to White norms or they distanced themselves, which increased feelings of isolation (González, 2006). In contrast, students noted that academic environments that were supportive of their cultural identity increased their sense of belonging.

Research also showed that increasing social capital provides students with relevant information, strong networks, and realistic goal-setting necessary for college access and a sense of belonging (Crawley et al., 2019). In McCallen and Johnson's (2020) qualitative analysis, the role of faculty emerged as being the most significant source of social capital in relation to first-generation student participants' perceptions of their college success. The core of social capital is the idea that a person is impacted by the knowledge, norms, and resources held by their community, family and social contacts. Students' level of integration into the academic and social life of college is measured by the strength of the connections they have with other members of the campus community (Liou et al., 2016).

Additionally, self-motivation increases the probability that a first-year student will return during the sophomore year. Self-motivation can be fostered by the connection that students have to their communities, family, church, or tribe to persist successfully at their institution and maintain a responsible attitude (Stinespring et al., 2020). Establishing a sense of community is especially important for racially minoritized students. Sweat et al. (2013) found in their research study on the prediction of high impact practices and student engagement that having a close faculty mentor was the strong and significant predictor for both indicators of student engagement for White and minority students alike. Connection with others through meaningful interactions are key factors that motivate students to engage in proactive learning behaviors. Similarly, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) found in their meta-analysis of higher education research that undergraduate research has a positive effect on minoritized students, specifically in terms of increased rates of persistence to graduation. The strongest effects were witnessed among African American and sophomore students. Active and engaged learning strategies that are employed in the college classroom are pathways toward obtaining the desired immersion outcomes among college students.

Refining the Problem of Practice

If one solution for retention improvement among racially minoritized students is to increase the number of quality student–faculty interactions, a broader question may be: How can these interactions increase if students rarely seek out or take advantage of these interactions? Low retention rates among racially minoritized college students are a major problem in the United States (Carey, 2004; Kinzie et al., 2008). There is no quick and easy fix to this issue. Institutions have spent decades trying to determine strategies by

which to increase retention. With the recognition that numerous factors contribute to low retention rates among minority students, institutions must take into account that there will also be numerous solutions. One of the solutions to increase retention is to create student–faculty interactions, but this is a problem in and of itself. Even when these interactions exist, most students are not taking advantage of them (Cox et al., 2010). Student retention must be the goal and responsibility of the entire institution, and they must consider strategic implementation of programming to support students' needs. However, before institutions can increase retention among racially minoritized students, they must determine how to not only create more student–faculty engagement opportunities, but also learn ways to increase student participation. From a student's perspective, faculty need to know why students do not attend office hours. This can help faculty influence students to visit their professors more during office hours and ultimately make the experience more effective (Griffin et al., 2014).

The larger problem of low retention rates for racially minoritized students has been studied for decades. This study focused on the more narrowed problem of low student–faculty interactions which is one factor that leads to low retention rates. The institution site of this study was not exempt from the problem of low retention rates for racially minoritized students. For example, first-year Black students had 14.8% lower retention rates than their White peers according to data retrieved from the site's institutional research data based on the 2021 student population (see Table 4). This retention rate discrepancy is significant. By conducting interviews with racially minoritized students, the researchers of this study uncovered factors that contribute to decreased student–faculty engagement.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify strategies to increase student–faculty engagement with racially minoritized students who identify as first-time first-year at a midsize midwestern public university. The problem of low student–faculty engagement is a nationwide dilemma for higher education institutions (Briody et al., 2019; Cox et al., 2010; Griffin et al., 2014; Johnson et al., 2020). This study aimed to reconcile the disconnect between racially minoritized first-time students and faculty as it relates to low levels of engagement. Prior research was clear, student–faculty interactions have positive impacts on student success (Carr et al., 2021; Griffin et al., 2014; Hausmann et al., 2007; Hussain & Jones, 2021; Kim & Sax, 2014; Komarraju et al., 2010; Tatum, 1999; Trent et al., 2021; Trolian et al., 2021; Walton & Cohen, 2011). The disconnect was that prior research also made it clear that these interactions are minimal (Briody et al., 2019; Cox et al., 2010; Griffin et al., 2014; Johnson et al., 2020). Office hours, in-class discussion, and faculty mentorship are just a few opportunities faculty provide students to support and engage with them (Deil-Amen, 2011; Fowler, 2021; Griffin et al., 2014; Lund et al., 2019; Nagda et al., 1998; Pfund et al., 2013; Raposa et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2017; White, 2011). Thus, the opportunities exist, but students do not take full advantage of them (Briody et al., 2019; Cox et al., 2010; Griffin et al., 2014, Johnson et al., 2020). A few reasons why students do not take full advantage of these opportunities include intimidation, uncertainty of purpose, inconvenience, and racial tensions (Briody et al., 2019; Cole, 2007; Johnson et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2017; White, 2011). There is undoubtedly a breakdown between the opportunities faculty provide and the reasons why students are reluctant to engage.

Research Questions

As student–faculty engagement is a critical solution to increase retention for racially minoritized students, this study sought to answer this primary research question: How can institutions increase student–faculty interactions for racially minoritized students who identify as first-time first-year students? The following subquestions assisted with identifying areas of opportunity for increasing retention through student–faculty interactions:

1. What are the reasons that students do not use office hours, which are one of the sole support options faculty offer their students?
2. Do first-generation students perceive student–faculty engagement differently?
3. Do in-class interactions influence the approachability of faculty outside of the classroom?
4. Does the racial identity of faculty play a role in how minoritized students interact with some faculty and not others?

Review of Knowledge for Action

Student engagement is a factor that influences student retention (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Campus environments and pedagogical approaches that appeal to racially minoritized students are necessary for positive college experiences (Quaye et al., 2015). Therefore, along with motivation and a sense of belonging, this research aimed to explore how to encourage more student–faculty engagement. Student–faculty interactions and inclusive approaches can define the students' academic experiences in higher education and can determine students'' academic success (Crosling, 2017). Healthy and meaningful experiences in the academic environment have a positive effect on student retention. Inclusive and supportive communities are essential to increase student engagement and retention for racially minoritized students (Quaye et al., 2015; Rendon et al., 2004). Considering that student retention data and student engagement are phenomena that influence each other, this study presented ways to increase student–faculty engagement regarding the retention of racially minoritized students. This review of literature recollected the existing linkages between student–faculty interaction and student retention.

Research Databases and Search Terms

The research team explored the bibliographic resources in the catalog from the libraries at the University of Missouri–St. Louis (UMSL). When research was not available through UMSL databases, these sources were accessed through other means. These included Google Scholar, ResearchGate, EBSCO, Education Full Text, and ERIC. Resources not physically or digitally available to access were obtained via interlibrary loans or purchased. The researchers implemented boolean searches to find sources. The

search terms observed were student–faculty, minority students, student retention, classroom engagement, approachability, classroom interactions, out-of-class interactions, office hours, racial diversity, racial identity, office hours utilization, first-generation students, informal interactions, communication preferences, students perceptions of faculty, and teaching methods.

Conceptual Framework

This study recognized that there are numerous retention factors for racially minoritized students (see Figure 1). Figure 1 illustrates many of the factors that influence retention such as: socialization, validation activities, support, culture, campus involvement, and financial security (Kinzie et al., 2008). Highlighted in this table are "student–faculty interactions." That highlighted factor is expanded upon by displaying the results of student–faculty interactions. This expansion displays several results of these interactions. These results include: persistence, higher grades, a greater sense of belonging, retention, and others.

This study specifically targeted student–faculty interactions. It is clear that student–faculty interactions have positive impacts on student success. Academic performance will not be enhanced if the students do not do their part to engage with the opportunities available. Likewise, if higher education institutions, specifically the faculty, do not provide these opportunities then academic performance can be expected to decrease. In order to increase academic performance through student–faculty interaction, both parties must provide and pursue those interactions (see Figure 2). If it is understood that these interactions are necessary for academic success and retention, some of the

questions that arose were: What are the strategies to increase those interactions and what type of interactions are the most beneficial?

Figure 1

Student–Faculty Interaction Within Retention

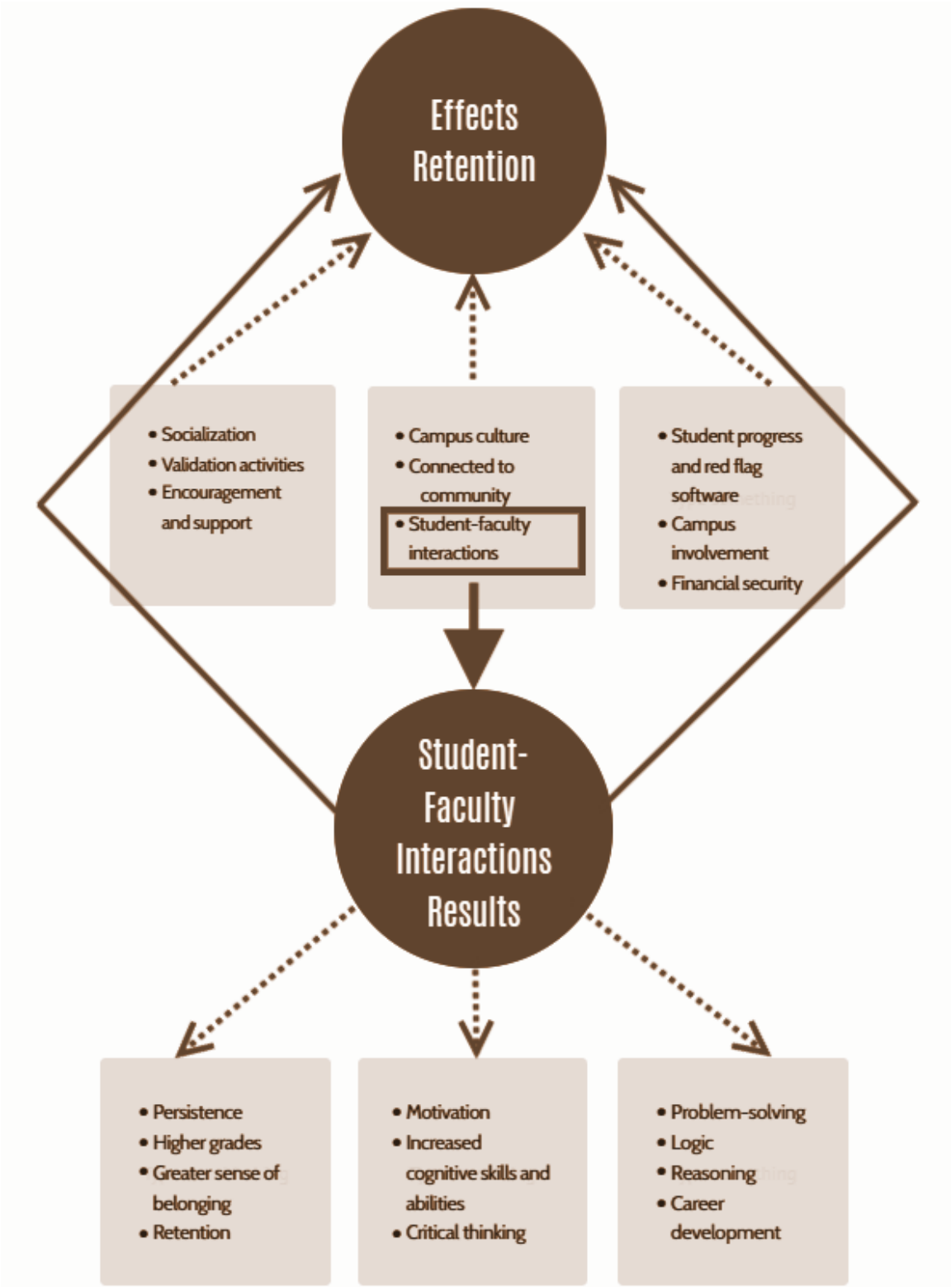
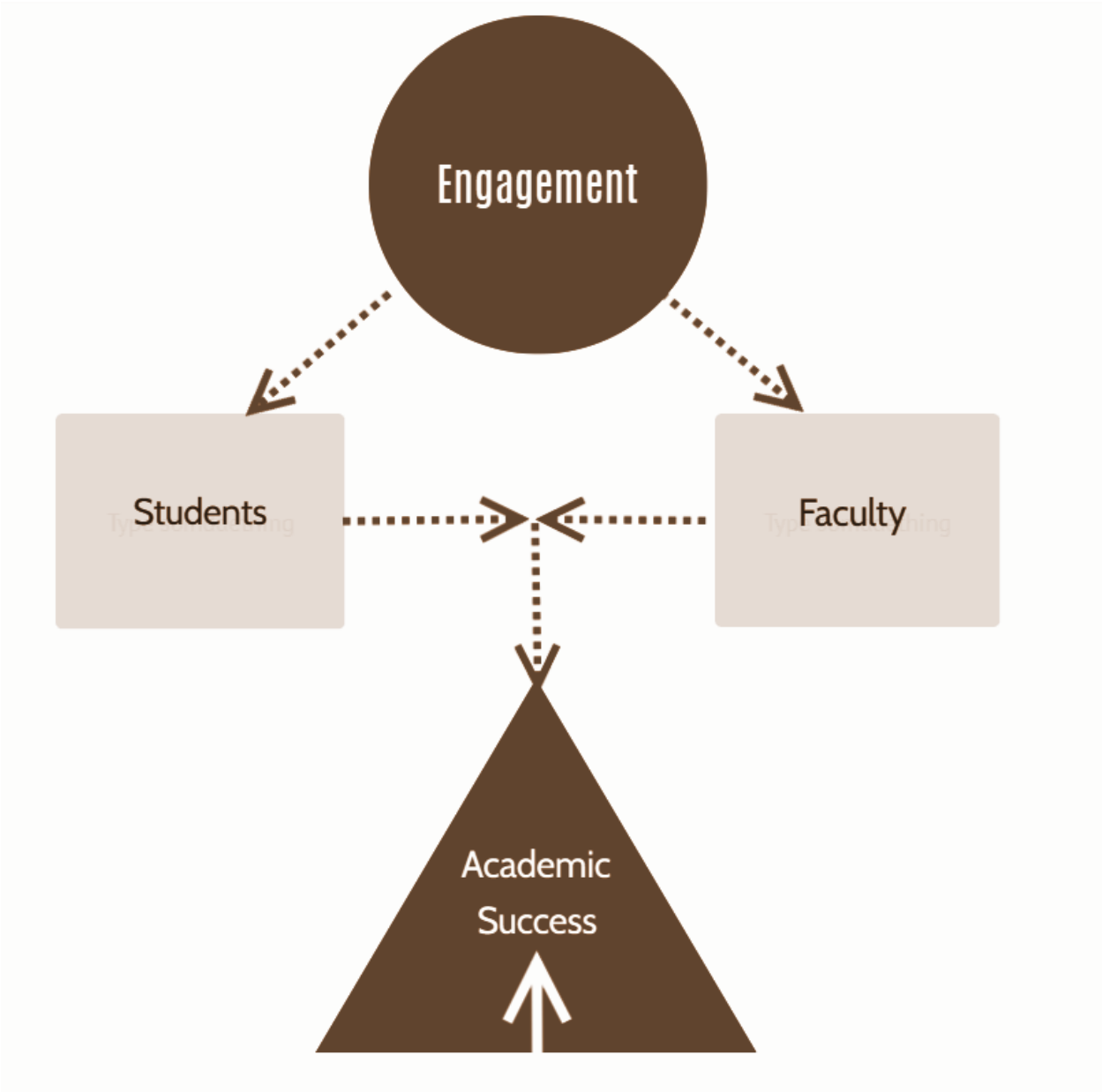


Figure 2

Engagement for Academic Success



Literature Review

The foundation of this study was based on prior scholarly research. There was an extensive body of published research on the retention of racially minoritized students and student–faculty interactions which reinforced the conceptual framework of this study (Carey, 2004; Carr et al., 2021; Griffin et al., 2014; Hausmann et al., 2007; Hussain & Jones, 2021; Kinsie et al., 2008; Owolabi, 2018). However, during the course of this study, the researchers found limited scholarly studies on ways to increase these interactions specifically for racially minoritized first-year college students (Braxton et al., 2004). In the next section, a review of literature related to the retention of racially minoritized students, the benefits of student–faculty interactions, and the factors contributing to limited student–faculty interactions were explored.

Retention

Student retention has been a major concern for academic institutions over the past few decades (Othman, 2016). Despite the increase in diversity, colleges and universities across the nation continue to struggle to retain and graduate students of color to the same degree as their White counterparts (Banks & Dohy, 2019; Duranczyk et al., 2004). In comparison with other developed countries, the United States has the most college dropouts (Owolabi, 2018). Educational access has little impact if students are not able to gain the value of obtaining a postsecondary degree. There are more than 3,000 4-year colleges and universities in the United States (Strikwerda, 2019). According to the 2018 Report on the Progress of the American Talent Initiative, fewer than 300 of these institutions graduate at least 70% of their students within 6 years (Pisacreta et al., 2018). Only 59% of students graduate within 6 years nationwide. Only 14% of community

college students who intend to earn a 4-year degree actually obtain one within 6 years of beginning community college (Pisacreta et al., 2018; Strikwerda, 2019).

As the United States is becoming more diverse, it is imperative that college campuses address the barriers to retention, such as stigma, cultural mistrust, and lacking a supportive network, especially for students of color (Primm, 2018). Approximately 40% of college and university students identify as Black, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, and mixed race. Gen Z, which is the newest generation that now characterizes the student profile on college campuses, is reported to be more racially and ethnically diverse than previous generations (Parker & Igielnik, 2020). One-in-four Gen Zers are Hispanic, 14% are Black, 6% are Asian, and 5% are some other race or two or more races. Recognizing that Gen Z students are becoming a dominant force on campus, it is important that institutions focus on addressing their unique needs and experiences.

First-generation students are becoming a significant force on college campuses as well. Many of today's students identify as first-generation. Fifty-six percent of all college students identify as first-generation (Fischer, 2007). First-generation students are defined as college students whose parents did not receive a postsecondary education (Checkoway, 2018; Ishitani, 2006). Parents of these students may have attended or may be concurrently attending, but have not yet completed either an associate or bachelor's degree (Checkoway, 2018; Fischer, 2007; Hopkins et al., 2021). Demographically, first-generation students are primarily minority students, more likely to be female, older, Black, or Hispanic, have dependent children, and come from low-income families (Checkoway, 2018; Goldman et al., 2021; Hopkins et al., 2021; Yen, 2010). First-generation students face many psychological and physical barriers that other students do

not. Some of these barriers include having difficulty adjusting academically and socially to campus (Fischer, 2007).

These barriers put first-generation students at a higher risk of not completing their degree. Although the reasons they unenroll vary, the common denominator is that many of these students do not make it to their sophomore year of college (Fischer, 2007). A longitudinal study from the NCES found that among the 12th graders who enrolled in postsecondary education, 46% had obtained a bachelor's degree or higher within 8 years, but only 24% of first-generation college students completed a bachelor's degree or higher within 8 years (Cataldi et al., 2018). Even among those students who had bachelor's degree goals and initially attended a 4-year institution, 47% of first-generation students obtained a bachelor's degree compared to 78% of students who had at least one parent with a bachelor's degree (Cataldi et al., 2018). First-generation students are almost twice as likely to drop out of 4-year institutions compared with students whose parents have a bachelor's degree (Yeh, 2010).

The national data regarding graduation rates by race make it clear that disparities between students of color and their counterparts exist (Banks & Dohy, 2019). Although Black students represent a larger share of the undergraduate and graduate student population in comparison to 20 years ago, the retention rate of these students is low (Brown, 2019). Black students had the lowest 6-year completion rate (45.9%) among students who enrolled in 4-year public institutions. Hispanic students followed at 55% (Shapiro et al., 2017).

Student–Faculty Engagement

Student–faculty relationships are the core of the academic and learning college experiences and have multilayers to be unveiled (Fusani, 1994). Recognizing that students spend the majority of their academic experience in the classroom, faculty play a critical role in creating a sense of belonging for minority students. Close positive relationships with faculty and staff defined by principles of care and concern are especially important (Trent et al., 2021).

Faculty affect student–faculty interaction opportunities in either a negative or positive manner. Griffin et al. (2014) posited that faculty influence on these interactions stems from two sources. The first was due to the social and physical identities of the faculty members. This was typically out of the control of the faculty; however, it was still a large influential factor. The second factor, and one in which is controlled by faculty, was out-of-class approachability. The traits that contribute to someone being approachable and a good teacher include being good-natured, professional but not distant, good sense of humor, demanding but not unkind (Jenkins, 2016). Even if a faculty member encompasses all of these traits, it is important to invite students to office hours. Faculty members actively encouraging students to utilize office hours can have a more significant influence on student engagement than simply being approachable (Griffin et al., 2014).

Benefits of student–faculty interactions include promoting student persistence, educational aspirations, and degree completion (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Retention and improved college experiences are outcomes of out-of-class communication (Jaasma & Koper, 1999). Students gain academic and cognitive development skills from the

contact with their professors outside of class (Terenzini et al., 1999). Fusani (1994) indicated that out-of-class communication improved students' motivation. In addition, personal interactions help students feel important and valued by their professors when interacting outside of the classroom (Cox & Orehovec, 2007). Indeed, persistence, motivation, degree completion, and valued feelings are some of the most important outcomes of research evidence.

Professors have essential roles for inviting students to extra-class interactions. There is a connection between strong instructional skills and out-of-class accessibility (Terenzini et al., 1999). Communication in class is one determinant factor for students to engage in extra-class communications. Out of the classroom communication was enhanced for students when communication integration was implemented by professors as a component of the in-class experience (Sidelinger et al., 2015). Faculty must incorporate communication in class to result in students engaging in extra-class communications.

Research has identified nonverbal behaviors as trust, openness, connectedness, motivation, rapport, receptiveness, and others (Cox et al., 2010; Jaasma & Koper, 1999). Physical cues of approachability could be tone of voice, facial expressions and moods such as unhurried and relaxedness (Brooks & Young, 2016; Cox et al., 2010). Fusani (1994) implied that there are some implications between professors' behaviors and attitudes in class and the students' decision to have out-of-class communication. Jaasma and Koper (1999) indicated that students' perception of faculty behaviors is also linked to the frequency and length of out-of-class communications. A peculiar fact is that Cox et al. (2010) found that the students' perception of professors' openness can be determined

by the way office hours are presented in the syllabus. Out-of-classroom dynamics happen before or after class and can come in the form of emails or meeting a professor during their office hours (Fusani, 1994). There has been a distinction between casual interactions and substantive interactions. Casual interactions are brief greetings, small talks, or talking about nonacademic topics; and substantive interactions are described as academic or intellectual conversations, they are also a space for discussions of a student's career goals (Cox et al., 2010).

Perceptiveness of professors' behaviors and physical cues are crucial signals for students to initiate out-of-class interactions. Professors' behaviors, like trust and immediacy, and student motivation are related to out of class relationships (Jaasma & Koper, 1999). With these factors, the students are more likely to stay in contact with professors out of class. Language that creates rapport is an important factor for students seeking interactions out of the classroom (Jaasma & Koper, 1999), and consequently, is one component to aid student social integration (Sidelinger et al., 2016; Sidelinger et al., 2015). Professor-to-student connectedness is also an indicator for students' integration (Catt et al., 2007; Milem & Berger, 1997), contributing to students' willingness to pursue out-of-class contact (Sidelinger et al., 2015). Student–faculty interactions with potential are those described as ones where students perceive faculty members as receptive, unhurried, and relaxed during encounters out-of class (Jacob, 1957, as cited in Cox et al., 2010). The social integration highly depends on professors' rapport, with the beginning point of in-class experiences (Sidelinger et al., 2016). This implies that depending on how effective those in-class interactions are, the student will be more embedded and decide to have out-of-class interactions. By building those relationships, students become more

integrated socially; therefore, the classroom climate becomes more comfortable and the barriers existing between the student and professor vanish.

The presentation of the option and value for out-of-class interaction is fundamental to informing and promoting students to seek these opportunities. Cox et al. (2010) addressed that during a student's first year, students may be unfamiliar with the purpose and processes of communicating with faculty beyond the classroom, and students may experience discomfort when talking to professors. Understanding the purpose of those interactions is important for students and it is an imperative task for faculty to accomplish starting in the classroom. Compared to their first year, student–faculty interactions outside of the classroom begin to become more common and frequent over time as students adjust to college during their 4 years (Kuh & Hu, 2001). Coincidental contact with faculty helps to humanize the faculty and break the hierarchy associated from student–faculty relationships (Cox, 2011). One consequential effect of student–faculty incidental interactions is that it fosters future interactions and is the path to substantive interactions (Cox, 2011; Cox et al., 2010). In class, teaching behaviors are cues for students seeking informal interactions (Jaasma & Koper, 1999), because those are signals for students for physiological approachability (Cox et al., 2010).

Student interactions are more than just behaviors students take part in. Emotional and psychological support are additional considerations faculty must understand and apply to engagement opportunities (Culver et al., 2022). Some authors have suggested that student success is enhanced when faculty show emotional concern for their students (Carr et al., 2021; Trent et al., 2021). When students feel a sense of care from a professor, they tend to exert greater effort in their academic pursuits, display increased confidence,

and show elevated levels of engagement and overall growth (Carr et al., 2021). Previous research has also demonstrated that formal and informal interactions between faculty and students play a role in students' academic achievements (Kim & Sax, 2014; Romsa et al., 2017). Carr et al. (2021) found that faculty who take extra time to develop relationships with students equip those students to create more substantial learning experiences.

Although research showed a direct link between the impact of student–faculty interaction and student success, there is also evidence that students rarely sought out these interactions (Briody et al., 2019; Cox et al., 2010; Griffin et al., 2014; Johnson et al., 2020). Historically, this was not an uncommon problem among colleges and universities across the country (Cox et al., 2010). If students are not taking advantage of the engagement opportunities faculty provide, then it makes it difficult to foster relationships with students. This is a disconcerting situation because the proven benefits of student–faculty interactions outside of the classroom included increased student retention, satisfaction, and performance (Griffin et al., 2014).

Students rarely seek out interactions with faculty through office hours provided by faculty. The concept of office hours has been a staple of universities and faculty for decades (Fowler, 2021). Historically and traditionally, office hours are typically a one-on-one setting in which students seek assistance from their professors to cultivate their success as students. During office hours, students have the opportunity to seek additional assistance, engage in discussions about course-related material, explore related interests, receive career guidance, or engage in casual conversations (Pfund et al., 2013). Most higher education institutions require their faculty to hold a set amount of office hours per week specifically to support students' needs (Fowler, 2021; Griffin et al., 2014; Smith et

al., 2017). In a study of 625 undergraduate students, Griffin et al., (2014) found that 66% of undergraduates never visited office hours and only 8% attended more than once per month. The underutilization of office hours diminishes a genuine and significant opportunity for student–faculty interaction (Griffin et al., 2014). Even though office hours are one of the sole support options faculty offer their students, students do not take advantage of them.

There are several reasons why students rarely attend office hours. One reason is that students are uncertain of the purpose of office hours (Johnson et al., 2020). This can lead to the perception that office hours are not important. Not only do students perceive office hours to be unimportant, many do not recognize the advantages and benefits of utilizing office hours (Smith et al., 2017).

Students also reported feeling uncomfortable or intimidated to meet with their professors in their office which leads to avoidance. Some students reported feeling like a burden to their professors, thus avoiding the interaction of office hours (Smith et al., 2017). First-year students, students with low self-confidence, and students who were not familiar with college norms tended to be more uncomfortable talking with faculty (Cox et al., 2010). In a qualitative study on overcoming professor avoidance, Briody et al. (2019) found students expressed apprehension about being judged or poorly evaluated by their professors thus avoiding interactions. This exploratory study collected 37 individual interviews of faculty, staff, and students as well as 23 student group interviews spanning over 2 years. A common theme revealed in this research was that professor avoidance can be partially attributed to students feeling intimidated or even scared to ask dumb or silly questions (Briody et al., 2019). Students who were experiencing these feelings often do

not ask for help in person, even in a one-on-one setting. These students avoided in person interactions even when they needed assistance. Therefore, the students who may need the help the most will not seek it out (Ames & Lau, 1982).

For students who do perceive office hours as potentially valuable, they find that they can get their questions answered in other ways. For example, students reported in-person office hours as a waste of time or inconvenient when they can just email their professors with questions and concerns (Smith et al., 2017). Students may also prefer to use this method due to self-esteem, self-worth, and social anxiety in the classroom. Individuals with these issues found in-person communication to be more threatening than other means of communication such as email (Kitsantas & Chow, 2007). Other students reported being too busy to meet with their professors and emailing was easier and quicker than finding the time to meet (Briody et al., 2019). Students have responsibilities outside of the classroom that limit their time for additional faculty interactions. With advances in technology, faculty and students can communicate with each other virtually, thus limiting the need for in-person office hours. This generational expectation makes face-to-face office hours seem unnecessary or inopportune. Therefore, students can depend on email as a reliable means of communication (Smith et al., 2017). Other students who saw office hours as beneficial only used them when there was a crisis. For example, some students utilized office hours the last week or two before the semester ended when they believed they were failing and wanted help. They saw office hours as a lifeline rather than a regular resource. Whatever the reasons, it was clear that the traditional use of office hours was not achieving their initial intentions (Fowler, 2021).

On-ground and online programs are benefiting from universities that are integrating technology. Allowing students to connect more with faculty, regardless of traditional or online, provided an avenue for increased communication between faculty and students (Li & Pitts, 2009). Although online formats allow for increased student–faculty, there are barriers and challenges for many students by adding a technological component. Racially minoritized students experienced these barriers more often than their nonminoritized peers (Kienbaum, 2020). In an online survey of 2,913 undergraduate students from 30 U.S. universities in 19 states, conducted by Katz et al. (2021), access to computer hardware, stable internet connection, developed digital and online skills, and remote learning proficiency are barriers many students face. Two of the key findings in the Katz et al.'s study (2021) were that internet and digital device availability led to lower remote learning proficiency. When considering engagement with professors, they found that these barriers led to more difficulty with engagement and also led to lower remote learning proficiency.

Whether office hours are presented online or in person, it is imperative that faculty are present during their posted office hours. Pfund et al. (2013) conducted two studies at a single university. The first study attempted to measure the students' perception of whether faculty would be present during their posted office hours. The second study was an observation of attendance by faculty members at the same university. Students perceived that the attendance rate of faculty was 77%. Faculty who took the same survey estimated that faculty attended 83% of the time.

The second study was an observational study of 221 faculty members. The researchers recorded if faculty were present during the posted office hours and "in all,

76% of the faculty were physically present in their offices, 4% posted absences, and 20% were physically absent" (Pfund et al., 2013, p. 526). In addition, the researchers found that 78% of faculty did not adhere to the university requirements of posting office hours, holding 3 office hours a week on at least two separate days. Unfortunately, these circumstances impacted students. According to Pfund et al. (2013) students who encountered one of these instances believed the same was to be expected in future encounters, therefore reduced their willingness to engage in future office hours.

Regardless of access to faculty by email, virtually, or in person, students want to have more options for student–faculty interactions available to them. The desire for diverse interaction modalities is highlighted by a study by Li and Pitts (2009), which found that students were not generally satisfied with traditional office hours. When these students were presented with the alternative of virtual office hours, virtual hours were still underutilized. However, students who had access to this additional alternative were overall more satisfied with the course simply due to additional options being available.

Brooks and Young (2016) found that the mode of instruction affects students' views of professors' receptiveness to out-of-class interactions. Students who attended in-person courses sought more out-of-class interactions with faculty than those who were attending class via online formats. In addition, online course students' felt that professors were less willing to have out-of-classroom interactions, but when interactions occurred students perceived faculty to be less impatient, rushed, and distant. This was explained because when the encounters happened via online modes, faculty lacked nonverbal cues like being impatient.

Classroom Experiences

The classroom is an educational setting where instruction takes place. Traditionally, this is an environment where students go to learn and professors go to teach. Attainment of knowledge, learning gains, and academic skills have a greater association with in-class than out-of-class activities (Lancaster & Lundberg, 2019). In-class experiences play a pivotal role in student success, particularly for the commuting students' integration process (Deil-Amen, 2011). The classroom is the primary site of student engagement, both socially and academically (Deil-Amen, 2011). In this setting, it is a common pedagogical tool for professors to ask questions to their students and/or start class discussions to stimulate the learning process (White, 2011). Class discussions have a myriad of benefits including student engagement in their own learning, having a voice to empower themselves, and preparing them for collaborative experiences (White, 2011). However, some students are reluctant to participate. Research showed there are benefits to in-class participation, yet students hesitate to engage. In their 2003 study, Crombie et al. explored students' classroom experiences by investigating perceptions of theirs, others, and professors' classroom behavior. They surveyed 510 undergraduate students from a midsized university. Their findings revealed that 64% of students reported rarely or never responding to in-class questions from their professors (Crombie et al., 2003).

The reluctance of racially minoritized students to participate in class can be influenced by various factors. One factor that contributes to this reluctance is unfamiliarity with classroom conduct. Racially minoritized students may come from diverse cultural backgrounds where classroom norms and expectations differ. This unfamiliarity can lead to hesitancy in participating, as they feel unsure about what is

considered appropriate behavior in the academic setting (White, 2011). Another factor is believing their feedback is not valuable. Some minority students may hold the perception that their opinions are not as valued as those of their peers. This feeling of being undervalued can discourage active participation in class discussions. Academic inferiority also plays a role in minority students' low levels of class participation (Briody et al., 2019). Some students feel their schooling does not adequately prepare them for college, thus undermining their confidence in participating (White, 2011). Additional considerations to racially minoritized students opting not to participate include preserving their sense of personal and cultural identity, having a limited understanding of the academic discourse utilized in classroom discussion, or having low confidence in speaking the primary language (White, 2011).

Professor Mentorship

The last type of student–faculty interaction explored here is faculty mentorship. Professors provide students support beyond the classroom with things such as networking, career advice, and research opportunities (Briody et al., 2019). Research suggested that supportive relationships with mentors have been identified as a critical key to student academic success (Dahlvig, 2010; Lund et al., 2019; Raposa et al., 2021). Faculty mentorship can help students adjust to college life, provide guidance (Raposa et al., 2021), and gain intellectual self-concept (Cole, 2007). A study by Nagda et al. (1998) found that the benefits of mentoring were particularly strong for racially minoritized students because these students may experience additional obstacles or challenges to navigate college life. They followed 613 first-year and sophomore undergraduate students at a large-sized university enrolled in their Undergraduate Research Opportunity

Program (UROP) to assess the impact of participation on retention. They also followed a control group of 667 undergraduate first-year and sophomore students who applied for the program but were not admitted. Their findings indicated that participation in the program increased retention rates and noted that the strongest increase was for African Americans. They hypothesized that being part of the program helped to develop academic interaction and promoted positive peer and mentoring relationships. Their results also posited that the higher retention rates observed among students in the program could be attributed to the establishment of a dynamic, one-on-one relationship and regular interaction with faculty (Nagda et al., 1998). Faculty mentorship plays a crucial role in enhancing the overall academic and personal development of students, providing them with the tools and support needed for success.

Given the benefits of faculty mentorship, there remains a reluctance to engage with faculty (Briody et al., 2019; Cox et al., 2010; Griffin et al., 2014; Johnson et al., 2020). For some students, the financial burden of college keeps them from being more involved with faculty because of off-campus work and/or home obligations and commitments (Parnes et al., 2020; Raposa et al., 2021). In a study by Raposa et al. (2021), researchers used data from the Gallup-Purdue index (web based survey data) that surveyed more than 5,000 college graduates between 2000 and 2015. They explored factors that form positive mentor relationships for college students. It was determined that students from larger institutions were less likely to identify a supportive mentoring relationship. Both first-generation and racially minoritized students had lower perceptions of faculty support (Raposa et al., 2021).

Quality Student–Faculty Interactions

Specifically for racially minoritized students, there are several factors that influence the quality and frequency of student–faculty interactions in the classroom and outside of the classroom. For example, experiences of discrimination and stereotyping in and outside of the classroom can cause students to withdraw in this environment as well as negatively impact students' sense of belonging (Culver et al., 2022; Trent et al., 2021). An additional barrier to racially minoritized student interactions with faculty is racism and racial tension (Cole, 2007). Less frequent student–faculty contact can result from racially minoritized students who perceive their college as racially insensitive (Cole, 2007). Research has shown that racially minoritized students are more likely to encounter active and passive racism (Jain & Crisp, 2021). Given the challenges to meaningful interactions that racially minoritized students face, some of these students may need additional attention and support (Culver et al., 2022).

Minoritized groups such as racially minoritized students, LGBTQ+ students, and students with disabilities may also experience higher levels of discomfort with faculty (Johnson et al., 2020). A study by Kraft (1991) found that Black students at PWIs were especially susceptible to feeling neglected by their faculty. This ethnography research study was conducted by interviewing 43 Black undergraduate students at a PWI. The results of this study indicated the vast majority of female participants placed a strong emphasis on faculty support as being a key factor to their academic success. However, a common complaint amongst both male and female participants was that faculty appeared less willing to help Black students than White students. The findings concluded a poor

quality of academic experiences leads to negative effects on student performance (Kraft, 1991).

Professor Diversity

Creating a sense of belonging for students in college is essential to academic persistence (Gopalan & Brady, 2020; Trent et al., 2021). Racially minoritized students may not feel a sense of belonging because they do not feel they are represented in the institution (Culver et al., 2022). Historically, increasing diversity within an institution meant increasing the diversity specifically within the student body, and not taking into account the need to diversify faculty and staff as well. Student academic achievements have been linked to institutions having not only a diverse student body but also a diverse body of faculty and staff that students see themselves reflected in (Culver et al., 2022). According to U.S. Census Bureau data, nearly 36% of undergraduate students are Black or Hispanic (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). However, approximately 8% of faculty in U.S. colleges and universities are Black or Hispanic (NCES, 2022a). These statistics show there is an imbalance between the diversity of students and the faculty that teaches them. In addition, the rate at which diversity in college has grown is not consistent with the rate of faculty diversification (Bartlebaugh & Abraham, 2021).

As a result of the imbalance between student and faculty diversity, students do not see themselves represented in the faculty that teaches them, in the place where they spend the majority of their academic learning experiences, the classroom. This is important as researchers have found positive effects diverse campuses have on all students, not just students of color (Bartlebaugh & Abraham, 2021; Trent et al., 2021). A diverse campus enhances education experiences, encourages social development, and strengthens cultural

awareness (Bartlebaugh & Abraham, 2021; Reason et al., 2010; Trent et al., 2021). A diverse learning environment can also create openness to diversity and more respectful attitudes for those from different cultural backgrounds (Smith et al., 2017; Reason et al., 2010). Given the benefits that a diverse campus culture brings, there is a continuing need for increased faculty diversity in higher education. Racially diverse faculty can provide mentorship for racially minoritized students. Research supports that mentoring has been connected to increased college retention for racially minoritized students (Dahlvig, 2010; Nagda et al., 1998). However, this is a challenge at some PWIs because they do not have enough faculty of color to fill this role (Dahlvig, 2010). Racially diverse faculty also bring new perspectives to their fields of study, different approaches to teaching, and challenge common stereotypes (Bartlebaugh & Abraham, 2021). Faculty from different cultural and racial backgrounds can influence the curriculum by incorporating discussions about race as well as including literature from minority authors (Guiffrida, 2005; Milem, 2011). This allows students to have more well-rounded viewpoints of the diverse world they live in.

Racially minoritized students may experience difficulty connecting with White faculty for various reasons and may connect better with a diverse faculty (Dahlvig, 2010; Guiffrida, 2005). Recognition must be given to the concept that racially minoritized students often view faculty at PWIs as culturally callous (Guiffrida, 2005). Therefore, racially minoritized students may view White faculty as less approachable and likely to interact with them less. The barriers to connecting with White faculty cause difficulty for racially minoritized students to build relationships with them and may find it easier to connect with other minoritized faculty (Dahlvig, 2010; Guiffrida, 2005). Minority faculty

provide extra time, encouragement, support, and advocacy for other minority students. True quality and meaningful relationships often stem from matched-race student–faculty relationships (Guiffrida, 2005; Dahlvig, 2010). Collectively, racially minoritized students typically better identify and connect with racially minoritized faculty rather than White faculty (Dahlvig, 2010).

Chapter Summary

Decades of research have addressed the widespread problem of low retention rates among racially minoritized students (Carey, 2004; Kinzie et al., 2008). This study explored the more specific challenge of limited interactions between students and faculty, which was identified as a key factor contributing to low retention rates. Because racially minoritized students are particularly vulnerable to lower retention rates (Heiman, 2010; Sweat et al., 2013), the purpose of this study was to identify strategies to increase student–faculty engagement with racially minoritized students who identify as first-time students at a medium size midwestern university. Prior research provided a framework for understanding the institution site that was studied. The institution under investigation is not exempt from the problem of low retention rates for racially minoritized students, evidenced by a 14.8% lower retention rate for first-year Black students compared to their White counterparts (see Table 4). This disparity is noteworthy. A symbiotic relationship exists between student's and faculty's ability to successfully engage in ways that support retention on college campuses. Increased student–faculty interaction leads to numerous benefits for all stakeholders: students, faculty, and the institution as a whole.

In this chapter, the researchers described the background of the problem, research questions, and prior research on student–faculty interactions. In Chapter 2, the research

design and instrumentation for this study is explored. Chapter 3 details the results of this study and discusses the themes that emerged. Chapter 4 presents a discussion of limitations, recommendations, and future research initiatives.

Chapter 2: Methods and Design for Action

Low retention rates continue to plague minority students in the United States (Carey, 2004; Kinsie et al., 2008; Owolabi, 2018). Student–faculty engagement is one small piece of the complexities that surround what some scholars consider an epidemic of dropout rates. Although there is an abundance of research that supports the benefits of student–faculty relationships (Carr et al., 2021; Griffin et al., 2014; Hausmann et al., 2007; Hussain & Jones, 2021), postsecondary participation remains low (Briody et al., 2019; Cox et al., 2010; Griffin et al., 2014; Hurtado et al., 2015; Hussain & Jones, 2021; Johnson et al., 2020; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Underutilization of opportunities such as faculty office hours and classroom interactions are problematic for higher education institutions across the country (Crombie et al., 2003; Griffin et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2017). Low student–faculty engagement impacts can lead to low retention (Coleman et al., 2021). It is not enough to simply offer opportunities for engagement. Institutions must find ways to increase utilization to truly combat low retention for racially minoritized students. The first section of this chapter provides the justification for choosing a basic qualitative research design and research questions. The next section examines the participants and discusses the separation of the sampling population into categories. The last section addresses data collection methods and instrumentation that were used to deliver and code the data for this study.

Research Design

Qualitative research involves identifying a research problem based on trends or needs in a particular field (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). An unfortunate trend that needs to be addressed in the discipline of education is low retention among racially

minoritized students (Carey, 2004; Kinzie et al., 2008; Owolabi, 2018). The general focus of this qualitative study was to understand best practices to increase student–faculty interactions for first-time racially minoritized students. Qualitative research is designed to capture how people "make meaning of an activity, experience, or phenomenon" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 23). Therefore, the attempt to understand the meaning related to student–faculty experiences would be classified as a phenomenon of qualitative research. The specific methodological approach chosen is the basic qualitative research design. Basic qualitative research is likely the most frequent form of qualitative research found in applied fields of practice such as education in which data are gathered through interviews, observations, or document analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described the purpose of a basic or generic qualitative research design as one that is intended to understand how people make sense of their experiences. They explained how the analysis of the data uncovers themes or patterns that characterize the data. At the conclusion of determining themes from the data and interpreting the participants' understanding of their experiences, effective strategies and practices were revealed. A basic qualitative research design guided the research in the following ways:

1. Participants shared their own experiences as racially minoritized first-year students.
2. Researchers sought to understand how racially minoritized first-year students interpret their interactions with faculty.
3. Researchers sought to understand how racially minoritized students construct meaning of their interactions with faculty by discovering recurring patterns and themes.

For this study the researchers utilized a qualitative semistructured interview design. The researchers sought to perform an in-depth exploration of student–faculty engagement with racially minoritized students who identified as first-time first-year college students. More specifically, recognizing that student–faculty engagement is a critical solution to increasing retention for racially minoritized students, this qualitative study sought to answer the following primary research question: How can institutions increase student–faculty interactions for racially minoritized students who identify as first-time first-year students? The following subquestions assisted the researchers with identifying areas of opportunity for increasing retention through student–faculty interactions:

1. What are the reasons that students do not use office hours, which are one of the sole support options faculty offer their students?
2. Do first-generation students perceive student–faculty engagement differently?
3. Do in-class interactions influence the approachability of faculty outside of the classroom?
4. Does the racial identity of faculty play a role in how minoritized students interact with some faculty and not others?

The researchers anticipated that the experiences of racially minoritized students were different than their White peers. Recognizing the institutional and psychological barriers that many of these students endure (Banks & Dohy, 2019; Duranczyk et al., 2004), the researchers planned to create a space for students to share their campus experiences freely. Student–faculty engagement is known to be one factor that increases student retention (Griffin et al., 2014). Although student–faculty engagement promotes

student success, students are not taking advantage of these engagement opportunities. (Briody et al., 2019; Cox et al., 2010; Griffin et al., 2014; Johnson et al., 2020). The researchers were interested in understanding how students perceived their faculty. Faculty characteristics such as approachability and accessibility were reviewed. Understanding how students perceived office hours and out-of-class communication was also reviewed. Identifying common themes and experiences helped the researchers understand the meaning that racially minoritized students ascribed to their interactions with their faculty. The researchers were able to provide recommendations regarding how to better support racially minoritized students and increase student–faculty interactions.

The interview was designed as a semistructured interview. This method was chosen primarily to provide more information and to ensure that a deeper understanding of behavior could be assessed. Qualitative interviews are described as intimate, flexible, and open. The interviews are described as meetings in which the interviewer and interviewee(s) can converse and exchange information (Hernández et al., 2014). The research interview process consisted of the interviewer posing questions to which the participants responded, and during this process, meaning and understanding were achieved. Interviews create a space for participants to express their thoughts, feelings, and opinions openly. Interviews also allow for the possibility to discover a variable that was not anticipated by the research team (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The alternative to conducting interviews was survey research. The research team felt that surveying first-year students toward the end of the first year would result in a low response rate and they would not have access to the deeper understanding that the interviews provided.

The researchers purposefully selected individuals based on membership in a subgroup that has defining characteristics (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). These defining characteristics included students who identified as racial minoritized populations.

Recognizing that these students had unique academic experiences at predominantly White institutions (PWIs), the researchers explored the types of student–faculty engagement opportunities that these groups of students prefer. The researchers were interested in understanding individual opinions, beliefs, and attitudes regarding student–faculty engagement as well as understanding how student–faculty engagement can be enhanced to retain more racially minoritized students. The researchers sought to collect data about the students' present views regarding student–faculty engagement. Students were asked open-ended questions to collect thick descriptions related to the research. Acknowledging that approximately 30% of first-year students at 4-year institutions do not matriculate to their sophomore year (Demski, 2011), the researchers interviewed racially minoritized students at the end of their first year.

Participants

The purpose of this study was to address retention by identifying strategies to increase student–faculty engagement with racially minoritized students who identify as first-time first-year students at a medium-sized midwestern university. The unit of analysis for this study was the individual student who identified as racially minoritized and was enrolled as a first-time first-year college student. This study used the racial/ethnic minority categories specifically defined by the university. These categories included: American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic Latino, multiethnic, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and non-resident

alien. These students were sampled during the end of the spring semester of their first year. Using data retrieved for retention in Table 4, the research team estimated that the sample size for this population to be over 150 students. Sampling this population provided the qualitative data required to support the study.

Students were emailed an invitation to participate (see Appendix A). The potential participants were asked to fill out a small demographic survey (see Appendix B). This survey assisted the researchers in identifying a diverse group of individuals to interview which included the following demographics: race, ethnicity, gender, first-generation status, and if they were a first-year student.

Nineteen students were chosen for the interview. The researchers chose a diverse sample of possible participants. The qualitative research sample size was based on the context and research needs and dictated an understanding of the phenomena (Hernández et al., 2014). Each interview was conducted by two research members. One researcher led the interview and the other researcher took notes. In addition to extracting relevant information and highlighting key ideas, the notetaker observed and recorded the nonverbal cues of the interviewee. Having two researchers present was a flexible approach that solidified the accuracy and integrity of the interview. Cointerviewing allowed for immediate debriefing and a discussion of significant concepts and their interconnectedness (Velardo & Elliott, 2021). Another benefit of the two or more interviewers' approach was their ability to react to ambiguous answers or expressions and ensure the participant did not lose focus (Hernández et al., 2014).

In an effort to incentivize this study, each subject received a $20 Amazon gift card. This was a reward for participation to demonstrate appreciation for each

participant's time. Another reason to incentivize was to attract participation due to gift cards yielding higher response rates. The researchers believed $20 was a fair and noncoercive compensation for approximately 20 to 30 minutes of time for each participant. Gift cards were electronic and emailed to each participant upon completion of the interview.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

The first year in college is a challenging year for student retention as well as for student engagement (Tinto, 1993). College retention of nonracially minoritized students is higher than racially minoritized students (Patterson Silver Wolf et al., 2021). For racially minoritized students, some of the benefits of high-quality engagement are persistence, retention, and better academic performance (Yamauchi et al., 2016). As a means to answer the research question, How can institutions increase student–faculty interactions for racially minoritized students who identify as first-time first-year students?, this study collected data on attitudes and beliefs about student–faculty interactions and campus events that the university offered by conducting interviews with racially minoritized students who were enrolled at the university. The responses provided the researchers with insights into present conditions and proposed ways to increase retention by addressing student–faculty relationships.

Sampling Procedure

The students who matched the recruitment criteria received an email to their institutional email addresses as an invitation to participate in this research (see Appendix A). The email contained closed-ended demographic questions (see Appendix B). Some of the benefits of closed-ended questions included that they were simple and could be

completed quickly by the participants, and their responses helped researchers to make comparisons among responses (Hernández et al., 2014). One implication regarding closed-ended questions is that they required the researchers to know the possible response alternatives.

In order to facilitate participation and provide legitimacy, the email to qualified students was sent by the office of diversity, equity, and inclusion (EDI). The email included a link to a demographic survey. The prescreening survey ensured that there was a diverse group of participants. It also ensured that different minoritized groups could be selected. Individuals who were not selected received a follow up email to inform them that they were not selected (see Appendix C). Selected participants were contacted by email to set up the interview date and time. If the participant did not respond to email they were contacted by phone.

The data collection method for this study was interviews with racially minoritized students who were identified based on the data retrieved from the university student information system (see Appendix D). This data was obtained from the offices of Institutional Research, and the Enrollment Systems, Research and Analysis at the university. Therefore, the researchers obtained approval from the host university's institutional review board (IRB) office to conduct the research study.

A purposeful homogeneous sampling approach was used to ensure that the participants who represented the population sample had a similar trait: racially minoritized backgrounds. According to Hernández et al. (2014), the homogeneous sample comprehensively described the participants because they had the same profile, characteristics, and shared similar traits. The purpose of a homogenous sample was to

focus on highlighting issues or processes of this specific social group. The scale of measurement for the interview was open-ended questions, which are described as helpful to explore in-depth opinions and reasons for behaviors (Hernández et al., 2014).

The data results and students' responses sought to reveal information about what was working and what was not working in terms of student–faculty engagement. Student experiences and input enlighten institutions regarding the improvements that need to be made to increase these interactions. This research suggested connections regarding the potential impact on the racially minoritized students at the university. The researchers also determined what can be hypothesized for future research.

Data Collection Procedure

The researchers applied to obtain written UMSL IRB and host university IRB approvals before initiating any aspect of the research study. The UMSL and host university IRB applications included: a plan for recruiting subjects, conducting the study, managing the data, and managing potential risks of harm to the subjects; lists of who was involved; recruitment materials such as emails and letters; informed consent; and the instruments, such as interview questions. The researchers ensured participants were fully informed about the research using the informed consent form. Some of the essential information included was: the purpose of the study, what participants were expected to answer, voluntary participation and the free option to withdraw at any time, any foreseeable risks of harm, privacy and confidentiality terms, and conflict and interest issues.

Measures for privacy and confidentiality were documented in the informed consent, which students agreed to before conducting the interview. The identity of

participants remained confidential, as no information in the research revealed their identity. Institutional email addresses were used only for recruitment purposes. Data collected via these interviews was stored securely using vetted software. The information derived from interviews was only used and shared until the end of the study. Upon completion of the research, all personal data was deleted.

Data Analysis

The interviews provided qualitative measures of attitudes, beliefs, and practices. For example, information such as the participants' attitudes regarding interacting with faculty inside and outside the classroom, actual reported behavior of their interactions, beliefs about which interactions were the most beneficial, and how to increase interactions.

Each participant was given a participant number. This number was maintained, along with demographic information and contact information. In a separate secure area, the Zoom video and transcription were saved by participant number only. Table 5 demonstrates how the research team organized this information. This identifying information was only retained until transcription was completed. After transcription was complete, the videos and contact information were deleted.

Table 5

Participant Demographic Example

Participant Number	Gender	Race
1	Male	Black
2	Female	Black
3	Female	American Indian
4	Male	Asian
5	Female	Black
6	Male	Hispanic
7	Female	Black

The research team transcribed the entirety of the interview, which is considered to be the best method for accurate and thorough analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Because full transcription is extremely time-consuming, the interviewers used the Zoom transcription feature. Utilizing the video transcription feature allowed the researchers to review the recording for accuracy and analysis. The video functioned as a method to capture any notable nonverbal behavior (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Uploading the video recordings and transcripts to the research teams' Google Drive allowed the team to disseminate the files for transcription verification. The researchers were able to review recordings for additional clarification. The Google Drive contained folders that were organized by participant number. Each folder contained a coding template for each participant. The researchers used the coding template to assign descriptive labels to identify related content.

Each interview was individually coded by each member of the research team. These codes were entered onto a spreadsheet to allow individual coding to be viewed collectively. The codes were reviewed to determine the most comprehensive and accurate

list. Appendix E illustrates an example of the organization of first and second level codes. From these codes, categories and subcategories were constructed.

After the coding process, codes were grouped into a category and then further refined into subcategories. Appendix F displays how these sections were organized by research question, subresearch question, and the specific interview question. Organizing the data into these categories and subcategories enabled the identification of patterns and the development of overarching themes. The themes were established by identifying the frequency and patterns of the interactions that affected the quantity and quality of student–faculty interactions. The themes were placed under each research question (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Validity Strategies

The researchers validated the instrument by conducting a pilot test. Five participants volunteered to be interviewed from the participating university. Testing the instrument is important to establish validity and to improve questions and format (Creswell, 2014). The comments of participants who were included in the pilot test were not integrated into the final analysis. However, the students identified as racially minoritized students. The interviewer read the interview protocol and the interview was conducted. Each interview was recorded, with the permission of the participants. Each interview session consisted of two interviewers. This allowed one interviewer to concentrate on the interview and ask probing questions while allowing the other interviewer to make notes and observations. The transcript provided by Zoom was reviewed by watching the recorded video to ensure that the transcript was accurate. The transcripts were coded in two stages. The primary codes were taken from the

interviewees' responses. The second round of coding included identifying themes. The results from the pilot test were what the researchers anticipated. The instrument was updated with additional probing prompts and more defined terms were added.

Chapter Summary

In the United States, racially minoritized students have significantly lower retention rates than their White peers (Heiman, 2010; Sweat et al., 2013). In addition to racially minoritized students, first-year college students are also afflicted by low retention rates (ACT, 2015). Research supports that student–faculty engagement has a powerful impact on student's career development, motivation, and retention (Carr et al., 2021; Griffin et al., 2014; Kim & Sax, 2014; Trent et al., 2021). Although the proven benefits of student–faculty engagement are substantial, institutions struggle to increase these interactions (Briody et al., 2019; Cox et al., 2010; Griffin et al., 2014). The overarching goal of this research was to seek ways to increase student–faculty interactions specifically for racially minoritized first-year students.

The purpose of qualitative research is to uncover how people interpret their experiences and what these experiences mean to them (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Utilizing a basic qualitative research design helped guide the researchers in determining how racially minoritized students interpreted and made meaning of their interaction with faculty. This was accomplished by utilizing a semistructured interview process designed and validated by the researchers. This instrument was chosen for its thoroughness in collecting opinions, attitudes, and beliefs. Testing the instrument prior to administering it to the target population was an integral part of the validating process. Five students were identified to participate in a pilot test of the instrument. After transcribing and coding the

results, minor changes were made to the instrument to improve the questions and format. It was determined by the researchers that the instrument accomplished its intended goal which was to establish a basis for increasing student–faculty interactions among first-year racially minoritized students.

First-year racially minoritized students were identified through an emailed survey to participate in the study. Following IRB approvals, 19 participants were interviewed during the end of their first year and received a small incentive for participating. Each interview was conducted by two interviewers to ensure accuracy and reliability.

Analyzing the data included transcribing each interview using the Zoom recording feature. After transcribing, researchers used a coding structure to identify patterns and themes amongst the interviews. During this in-depth exploration, attitudes and beliefs of first-year racially minoritized students related to their interactions with faculty were discovered. Understanding why racially minoritized first-year students are reluctant to interact with faculty was an important approach to uncovering best practices to increase student–faculty engagement. After understanding why these students were reluctant to engage, special attention was given to learning what initiatives faculty and institutions engaged in to improve student–faculty interactions. Chapter 3 explains the procedure for data collection, instrumentation, participants, and preliminary analysis.

Chapter 3: Findings and Analyses

Although student–faculty engagement is underscored by research as an important factor to improve student retention, these student–faculty interactions are infrequent (Cox et al., 2010). Students, due to different factors, are not interacting with faculty frequently. As a result, the academic experience of all students is impacted, with a particularly detrimental impact on racially minoritized students (Carey, 2004; Kinzie et al., 2008; Pascarella et al., 1996). Recognizing that student–faculty engagement was a critical solution to increasing retention for racially minoritized students, this qualitative study sought to answer the following primary research question: How can institutions increase student–faculty interactions for racially minoritized students who identify as first-time first-year students?

The following secondary research questions assisted the researchers with identifying areas of opportunity for increasing retention through student–faculty interactions:

1. What are the reasons that students do not use office hours, which are one of the sole support options faculty offer their students?
2. Do first-generation students perceive student–faculty engagement differently?
3. Do in-class interactions influence the approachability of faculty outside of the classroom?
4. Does the racial identity of faculty play a role in how minoritized students interact with some faculty and not others?

Participants were asked several interview questions that addressed each of the secondary research questions. The participant responses answered the primary research

question by describing the role institutions should play in increasing student–faculty interactions. Through the participants' personal stories and examples, the researchers were able to discern effective strategies to increase student–faculty engagement. Research supported that office hours are critical for the academic support that faculty provide to their students (Fowler, 2021). Students, however, do not use them often (Fowler, 2021; Griffin et al., 2014; Johnson et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2017). The researchers were not only interested in understanding participants' reasons for not using office hours, but it was also important to determine how to increase the frequency of office hours usage. Because over 50% of college students identify as first-generation (Fischer, 2007), the researchers were interested in determining if first-generation students perceived student–faculty interactions differently from students who were not designated as such. The researchers anticipated that due to the academic and social challenges that these students face, student–faculty engagement would be crucial for their academic success and overall college experience.

Likewise, in order to determine if in-class interactions influence the approachability of faculty outside of the classroom, the researchers were interested in learning if in-class interactions influence the approachability of faculty outside of the classroom. Research supported that connection with others through meaningful interactions are key factors that motivate students to engage in proactive learning behaviors (Sweat et al., 2013). The secondary research question related to the approachability of faculty outside of the classroom was important in order to determine the specific interactions that motivate students to engage with their professors. Lastly, understanding the impact of professors' racial identity regarding student–faculty

interactions was important in order to determine how to increase those interactions.

In the review of literature, the researchers discussed the discrepancy between the racial diversity of faculty and the student body. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau of 2018 stated that almost 36% of undergraduate students were Black or Hispanic (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). In contrast, according to the NCES (2022a) in 2022, only 8% of faculty in U.S. colleges and universities were Black or Hispanic. The academic success of students in educational institutions has been associated with both a racially diverse student population and a diverse assembly of faculty and staff members who serve as role models and reflect the students themselves (Culver et al., 2022). The researchers anticipated that students would have a preference for engaging with faculty who looked like them.

This chapter provides a deep analysis of the results. The researchers first describe how the data is analyzed, which includes a discussion of the data collection and instrumentation. The researchers link the data collected to the research questions. Each secondary research question is restated, and a discussion of how each question corresponded with the results of the study is provided. Student responses and research from our literature review that supported our findings are also included. The researchers conclude the chapter by sharing the themes that emerged and provide support through research and students' responses of how those themes aligned with our primary research question: How can institutions increase student–faculty interactions for racially minoritized students who identify as first-time first-year students?

Data Collection and Instrumentation

First-time students face many challenges in terms of engagement and retention (Tinto, 1993). Research has shown that racially minoritized students are the least likely student population to persist to graduation and they experience different challenges for student engagement (Patterson Silver Wolf et al., 2021). If racially minoritized students are exposed to high quality engagement and academic career opportunities, the personal benefits are many and valuable (Yamauchi et al., 2016). This current qualitative research study intended to showcase that student–faculty interactions impact student retention. In this section, a rationale of the methodology that is used for the data collection and instrumentation is provided, which culminates with the results.

Instrument

As part of the methodology, the researchers developed the research question: How can institutions increase student–faculty interactions for racially minoritized students who identify as first-time first-year students? The interview questions were designed for participants to share their experiences (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Hernández et al., 2014) about student–faculty interactions and other opportunities for engagement at the university. The researchers interviewed students who were racially minoritized, first-time first-year, and enrolled during the Spring 2023 semester. The data retrieved from the interview responses informed the researchers about current practices and behaviors pertaining to student–faculty engagement and how it impacted student retention.

During the Spring 2022 semester, the researchers obtained UMSL IRB and host university IRB approval. Both IRB applications included a plan for recruiting

participants, conducting the study, managing the data, managing potential risks of harm to the subjects, lists of who would be involved, recruitment materials, such as emails and letters, informed consent, and the instruments, such as the interview questions, were included in the application as well. Before conducting interviews, participants received emails with the informed consent document. This document included information such as the purpose of the study and the concepts and questions participants were expected to address. Additionally, participants were informed about voluntary participation with the option to withdraw at any time. Lastly, the consent document discussed possible risks of participating, privacy and confidentiality terms, and any conflicts and interest issues.

The informed consent described the measures that the researchers implemented to maintain participants' privacy and confidentiality. The researchers committed to a nondisclosure agreement regarding the participant names and any other personal information. The data and information collected from this research was stored securely and was only used for this dissertation. Recruitment and communications with participants were done using the participants' institutional email. Official communications, recorded interviews, and data were stored on a secure server.

Participants

The office of Institutional Research at the host institution provided the data pertaining to the potential participants. Students who matched the criteria of being a first-time first-year, racially minoritized student enrolled during the Spring 2023 semester received an invitation to participate in the research (see Appendix A). The invitation to participate was emailed to the students' institutional email account. The email contained a link with instructions to complete a demographic survey which contained closed-ended

questions (see Appendix B). Closed-ended questions are easy and fast to complete by participants, and forecast possible responses by researchers (Hernández et al., 2014). Participants who were not selected for participation received a follow-up email informing them of this decision (see Appendix C). The researchers contacted selected participants by phone or email. Purposeful homogenous samples were used as a way to guarantee only racially minoritized students were selected. To study the participants in an exhaustive way, the interview questions were developed as open-ended questions (see Appendix D). Open-ended questions allowed researchers to see trends on the specific issues and behaviors that emerged from this collective group (Hernández et al., 2014).

The study included a diverse group of participants spanning various genders and ethnicities. A significant portion of the participants, 18 of 19 students, were under the age of 22. This age distribution, along with gender and other demographic details, is presented in Table 6. Specifically, the gender distribution comprised 11 females and eight males. The participants were categorized as follows: one identified as both American Indian or Alaska Native, two were Asian, 13 identified as Black or African American, and three participants were Hispanic or Latino. Among the participants, 11 were first generation, and eight were not first generation.

Table 6

Study Demographics

Category	Count
Age	
Under 22	18
22-30	1
Gender	
Female	11
Male	8
Ethnicity	
American Indian or Alaska Native, Hispanic-Latino	1
Asian	2
Black or African American	13
Hispanic-Latino	3
First-Generation College Student	
Yes	11
No	8

To offer a comprehensive perspective and a direct comparison, Table 7 compares the institution's ethnic profile with that of our study participants. The institution's ethnic profile included 54.04% Black or African Americans, 14.29% Hispanic or Latino, 13.04% Asians, those who identified with two or more races constituted 16.15%, and 2.48% American Indians and Alaska Natives. In contrast, the demographics of our study participants represented a larger percentage of Black or African Americans (68.42%) and Hispanic or Latinos (15.79%). There were no participants in our study who identified as American Indian and Alaska Native or Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander.

Table 7

Institution Ethnicity vs. Study Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Institution percentage	Study percentage
American Indian and Alaska Native	2.48	0.00
Asian	13.40	10.53
Black or African American	54.04	68.42
Hispanic or Latino	14.29	15.79
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0.00	0.00
Two or More Races	16.15	5.26

Data Analysis and Coding

An inductive approach was utilized to analyze the data. This allowed flexibility when determining patterns and themes instead of having predetermined categories or assumptions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The data guided and shaped the researchers' analysis by transitioning from raw data to more abstract categories and concepts. This coding process was an important dimension that allowed the researchers to explore various viewpoints and attitudes of participants. The researchers checked for high-frequency words and concepts to assist with structuring categories. Initially, 17 categories emerged from the data after coding was completed. Then the researchers reduced and combined those into the following four manageable themes:

- Students desire a welcoming and comfortable learning environment.
- Students desire professors who exhibit characteristics and behaviors that promote relationship building.
- Students navigate through barriers that hinder academic progress.

- Students value holistic support and personal development to enhance their educational experience.

This study was informed by Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) theory of student departure which enabled the researchers to focus on research questions and interpret the data. Tinto's framework was not tested deductively; rather, the framework informed the researchers' understanding of perspectives related to student retention as opposed to using Tinto's schemes and codes for data analysis. Inductive content analysis was exploratory and emergent in nature, which allowed findings to be grounded in data.

The interview process was documented through complete transcriptions, a strategy deemed effective for precise and comprehensive examination, as suggested by Merriam and Tisdell (2016). Due to the labor-intensive nature of a full transcription, the interviews utilized Zoom's transcription service. This transcription expedited the process and provided the means to cross-check the recordings for both accuracy and in-depth analysis. Additionally, the video served as a tool to observe and record significant nonverbal cues (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The videos and corresponding transcripts were uploaded to the research team's Google Drive. This drive was only accessible to the research team and was password protected. This allowed for easy access and review of the materials. The Google Drive was organized with individual folders labeled with participant numbers and each folder included a specific coding template for each participant.

Each interview was individually coded by each member of the research team. These codes were entered onto a spreadsheet to allow individual coding to be viewed collectively (Appendix E). The codes were reviewed to determine the most

comprehensive and accurate list. From these codes, categories and subcategories were constructed. Appendix F displays how these sections were organized by research question, secondary research question, and the specific interview question. Organizing the data into these categories and subcategories enabled the identification of patterns and the development of overarching themes.

The analysis of students' responses revealed themes regarding student–faculty engagement and its impact on student satisfaction and retention. Through the use of interviews as a medium allowed students to voice their experiences and make suggestions for improvement, and this current dissertation is the channel through which stakeholders can hear their perspective. In Chapter 4, the researchers propose ways to improve and repair student–faculty interactions, which will impact student retention.

Results

As the methodology of the study has been established, the focus shifted to the results that were revealed during the participant interviews. Five results were determined. First, the researchers focused on student usage of office hours. Second, the researchers examined student–faculty communication by discussing student preferences and the barriers and concerns that shaped these interactions. Next, the research team explored perceptions of first-generation college students. The fourth question of interest was faculty approachability and it was assessed through their characteristics and behaviors, in-class academic support, and out-of-class engagement. Lastly, the researchers examined racially diverse faculty by discussing diverse representation, same race student–faculty interactions, and same race faculty mentorship.

Result 1: Utilization of Office Hours

Considering that out-of-class interactions increase student retention (Griffin et al., 2014), it is important to examine one of the main sources for outside interactions. The study conducted by Griffin et al. (2014) stated that 66% of undergraduates never visited office hours. This lack of engagement during office hours led our team to discuss the mechanisms behind this phenomenon. In order to find out more about these mechanisms, participants were asked about their preferred method of communication with their professor to determine if the methods of communication preferred by students were not conducive to traditional office hours. Traditional office hours refer to a specific time set aside by professors when they are available in their office to meet with students (Pfund et al., 2013). The hours are typically listed on the syllabus for a specific hour of the week determined by the professors' schedule.

Participants were remarkably consistent with the desire for additional communication and awareness of faculty office hours. They expressed a need for frequent classroom announcements regarding office hours. The idea of additional reminders and regularly mentioning office hours in the classroom aligned with the study by Griffin et al. (2014) that indicated that even the most approachable professors need to invite students to office hours. Specifically reminding students about office hours was suggested by Participant 23, "It would be nice . . . if they kept reminding us . . . I have them written down . . . but I know not everyone does that. I think it would be very important for the professors to just mention them."

Griffin et al. (2014) demonstrated that an invitation to office hours not only displays the openness of the professor but shows a direct desire for the students to use

office hours. The participants in our study echoed Griffin's findings. The participants in this study did not want it to just be an item that is listed on a syllabus, but an intentional method of student assistance that was provided by invitation. This substantiated the claim by Cox et al. (2010) that students' perception of professor openness can be determined by the way office hours are presented in the class and on the syllabus.

Students perceived these invitations to office hours as an indication that the professor cared about them and their success. Participant 23 noted, "I think that is very important for them to keep repeating it and mentioning it to basically invite everyone to them." Participants reported that invitations showed the professor's helpfulness and openness to developing a deeper relationship. Conversely, a lack of invitation came across as unfriendly. Some participants had anxiety or did not have the confidence for one-on-one conversations, so a personal invitation could help alleviate some of the apprehension to attend office hours.

The purpose of office hours should be conveyed to students. Participant 15 summed this up by saying, "[Professors should] tell the benefits of it because they'll just tell you to go to office hours, but not really give you any benefits behind it, of why I'd be going to office hours." The participants wanted to know what to expect and the benefits of using office hours. These participants validated the findings of Smith et al. (2017) that many students are unaware of the advantages and benefits of office hours. Some of the participants suggested a possibility of incentives as a benefit. Extra credit and rewards were proposed as potential motivation to use office hours.

Lastly, accessibility and flexibility of office hours was another primary participant suggestion. Participants desired more office hour formats and an expansion of available

times to accommodate schedules. They felt limiting office hours to one particular time per week and only in person was too restrictive. Three participants specifically mentioned adding Zoom options. These suggestions reinforced the Li and Pitts' study (2009) that found students desire more options.

Result 2: Student–Faculty Communication

Learning more about how participants like to communicate with their professors shed light on their preferences. It is crucial to recognize the diversity in these preferences among interviewed participants. When participants discussed available communication preferences in situations where they experienced time constraints, their preferences varied as not every method was viewed as appropriate by each individual. Thirty-seven percent of the participants expressed a preference for email, and 53% said that was their least favorite communication tool. The results also varied for face-to-face preference. The face-to-face interaction gave some participants anxiety and others valued personal communication and connection. In this study, 21% reported face-to-face as their least favorite communication preference, whereas 53% preferred this method. To continue to emphasize varied preferences, some participants opted for online and virtual options and others found these methods too impersonal. For instance, of the 19 interviews, seven participants favored email, and 10 disliked it. The goal was to understand how participants like to communicate in order to capitalize on engagement opportunities.

The words easy, quick, and immediate were frequently mentioned during the interviews, demonstrating participants' desire to get their needs met conveniently. Participants described email as being convenient when they need quick clarification or immediate feedback for simple questions. Participant 1 emphasized, "Email, just because

of how easy it is," and Participant 19 simply stated, "I guess it's [email] just the one that's more convenient." Some participants' interactions with their professors were shaped by convenience and effort, with an emphasis on informal communication strategies that yield quick responses regardless of the communication preference. According to Smith et al. (2017), some students find in-person office hours to be inefficient or inconvenient, preferring to email their professors with questions and concerns. Participants shared that their preferred method of communication can depend on the information that is needed. For example, when participants needed an in-depth explanation of an assignment, such as a paper or a grade review, they would choose in-person interactions. Regardless of the communication preference, participants desired convenience and efficiency.

Similarly, scheduling conflicts and limited availability influenced office hour attendance. This finding correlated with Briody et al.'s (2019) study where students claimed they were too busy to attend office hours. Many participants had consecutive classes, hindering them from asking questions after class concluded. Student responses in the current study were consistent with the findings of Briody et al. (2019) who reported that students were too occupied to meet with their professors, and alternate methods like email were more expedient than finding time to meet or attend office hours. To provide further support, Participant 11 said "Due to my schedule I can't really go to like the physical office hours, because it's usually either on a day where I have . . . another class or it's on the day where I have to work." Participants found other methods to be easier and more timely.

In-person interactions were also a common response for the participants' preferred communication method. A majority of those interviewed, specifically 10 out of 19, favored face-to-face interactions. Some participants preferred the face-to-face interactions of office hours but acknowledged that occasionally it was simpler to converse with the professor immediately before or after class. These participants believed that utilizing time before and after classes for communication was optimal for quick matters because they could ascertain immediate feedback in real-time, as Participant 2 noted: "I like to approach my professors in person, because it's easier and quicker way to find a solution and emails sometimes can take multiple hours or days." Some participants also voiced appreciation for the human connection inherent in in-person engagement. They viewed office hours not only as a means for academic support but also as an opportunity to strengthen student–faculty relationships.

Direct in-person communication during office hours was occasionally preferred over less personal methods like email. Participants recognized the role of office hours in enhancing academic comprehension and fostering student–faculty relationships. These sessions offered a means to grasp the course material potentially missed during regular class hours. The significance of personal connections was emphasized. By attending office hours, participants became more recognizable to the professor. Participants indicated that their office hour attendance made them stand out and distinguished them in their professors' perception.

Although many participants described email as convenient, there were several who categorized email as inconvenient. Organizing sentences and longer response times were common responses for participants who deemed email as cumbersome. Many

participants also recognized that there is an ambiguity when using email that often makes it difficult to gauge emotion. Participant 4 communicated, “You can’t really see how they’re feeling or see how they say things,” and Participant 18 responded with “emails have like no tone . . . you don’t know if they’re joking around when they answer certain questions, you don’t know if they are happy or if they sound annoyed or anything.” These challenges with gauging tone and emotion in emails further complicate the communication process for students.

Beyond these emotional ambiguities, email was also reported as being a hassle due to the formality required for professional communication. Participants mentioned that the requirement to use correct grammar and language in email acted as a hindrance to this communication method. They noted that some professors would not read emails that were not written properly and may interpret their responses in ways not intended by the participant. This supported the idea that students who may need help the most will not seek it out (Ames & Lau, 1982). Participants expressed their dislike for the time and effort it takes to construct professional emails. Additional disadvantages to email communication were the lack of personal connection, the potential for misunderstandings, the possibility of emails getting lost in spam, and long response times by faculty. Zoom was also mentioned by some participants as being an unfavored method of communication. They believed Zoom was less effective due to the possibility of distractions and disruptions in an online environment. Participants who mentioned Zoom reported this method as a hassle because it is difficult to explain problems and share screens. Examples of this included difficulties explaining math, science, and in-depth

concepts through a screen. The screen served as a barrier to efficient understanding and the participants' ability to communicate effectively. Participant 5 conveyed:

> Whenever I talk about . . . [what] I need to do. I would just ask him . . . how I should go about it. It's not easy to do that during Zoom because I would have to share my screen and then, I'm gonna have to point and click and I just have to explain it to him through that. And it's just too much work and hassle.

In summary, inquiring into students' communication preferences with professors revealed that there is no best approach. A wide spectrum of preferences was identified. This highlighted the necessity for flexibility and adaptability on the part of faculty. Beyond flexibility, professors must adapt to various communication preferences and provide options to meet the unique needs and preferences of their students. Interestingly, this was supported by the Li and Pitts (2009) findings. Students wanted to have more options for student–faculty interactions available to them because they were not satisfied by traditional office hours; however, virtual office hours were still underutilized.

Barriers and Concerns

To increase positive interactions among students and faculty, it is important to identify the barriers that students experience related to communication. The primary barriers addressed in this study were anxiety toward in-person communication, professor approachability, and issues with electronic communication. Understanding participants' least favored preference of communication helped clarify the reasons why students are less likely to reach out to their professors for assistance. Some participants reported anxiety as a deterrent to pursue in-person engagement for help. They described being afraid of asking a "silly question," apprehension of negative feedback, and overall

discomfort with social interactions. Participant 7 observed, “Over email is easier for me. Like with my anxiety, [I’m] not really as nervous,” and the same participant also noted “I [would] just rather email them.” The participant’s response echoed the findings that students avoid office hours due to feelings of discomfort and anxiety (Smith et al., 2017). The participants’ responses were aligned with Kitsantas and Chow (2007), who determined that students found in-person communication more daunting than other methods, such as email. The participants’ preference for email instead of in-person communication due to its perceived less daunting nature corroborated prior research findings. Briody et al.’s (2019) research indicated that professor avoidance is often due to students feeling intimidated or apprehensive about asking questions they perceive as foolish. The responses of the participants as well as the literature provided insights into challenges institutions might encounter in fostering these interactions.

Participants’ anxiety levels were influenced by their professors’ approachability. Participants were less likely to use office hours with professors who were identified as “mean” or unapproachable. Participant 14 made this clear by saying, “For the professors where I would not feel comfortable . . . they don’t . . . say good morning or . . . be friendly . . . they give off the impression that . . . office hours . . . will be a waste of my time . . . they’ll . . . treat me . . . condescendingly.”

Regarding electronic communication, such as email, some participants reported feeling embarrassed over last-minute email questions and appearing unprepared, which produced additional anxiety for some. This reinforced the idea that students might avoid their professors due to feelings of discomfort or intimidation. They may also believe that they are imposing on their professors, thus avoiding the office hours (Smith et al., 2017).

Result 3: Perceptions of First-Generation College Students

First-generation college students are increasingly prominent on college campuses. Of the 19 students interviewed, 58% of them identified as being first-generation college students (see Table 6). This finding confirmed Fischer's (2007) research that 56% of all college students are first generation. These students are characterized as being the first in their family to complete an associate's or bachelor's degree (Checkoway, 2018; Fischer, 2007; Hopkins et al., 2021). Although their parents may have attended or currently attend college, they have not completed a postsecondary degree (Checkoway, 2018; Fischer, 2007; Hopkins et al., 2021).

The researchers expected that first-generation students' engagement preferences would differ from those of their peers who do not come from first-generation backgrounds, due to the distinct academic and social challenges they encounter (Fischer, 2007). McCallen and Johnson's (2020) qualitative analysis underscored the pivotal role of faculty as a significant source of social capital, particularly concerning first-generation students' perceptions of their college success. Social capital is the concept that an individual's community, family, and social connections influence them through shared knowledge, norms, and resources (McCallen & Johnson, 2020).

The researchers expected the responses from the first-generation participants would further highlight the importance of increasing student–faculty interactions for all students, but especially for first-generation students. In contrast, however, there was not a difference in faculty engagement for first-generation participants. First-generation participants shared similar thoughts, experiences, and examples related to student–faculty engagement.

Result 4: Faculty Approachability

Participants had a preference for interacting with professors who made them feel comfortable. Establishing trust with students created comfortability with professor interactions, which increased professor approachability. The trust established between participants and professors resulted in participants increasing their interactions with professors who exhibited positive, welcoming, and open attitudes. Participant 18 expressed:

> Trust is what helps you feel comfortable enough to talk to them more, or what helps them feel comfortable enough to talk to you more. It feels two-sided, and it's mutual, and that's what makes you feel good about it, and it's not going to be something that you avoid in fear of rejection.

Participants also shared that professors who had a friendly tone of voice, demonstrated active listening, and had an engaging personality increased student–faculty engagement. Participant 13 expressed, **"**I like professors that I feel like are actually listening to what I'm saying and they're not just treating me like I'm just an everyday student, but more so like a person." The participant's perspective underlined the importance of students wanting to be treated as a human being and as an individual. Participants did not want to be treated as just another student focused on getting a good grade in the class. They valued a more holistic teaching approach that combined teaching with personal growth and academic development.

Greetings, brief conversational exchanges, and creating a warm and attentive presence were viewed positively by participants as well. These brief pleasantries fostered student comfortability and helped to eliminate power dynamics. Participants often relied

on teachers' behaviors and physical signals to decide when to engage in interactions outside of class. Participant 1 expressed, "I feel like the professor just knowing your name. And like being able to say hi to them like in the hallways like that kind of thing, too. That'd be nice. It'd be a nice gesture." Not feeling rushed or dismissed, displaying welcoming facial expressions, maintaining eye contact, and showing a smiling face were also faculty behaviors that increased student comfortability.

In contrast, participants shared behaviors that made professors unapproachable. Research supports that students who are more uncomfortable talking with their professors are first-year students who are new to college and have low confidence (Cox et al., 2010). Participants tended to limit their engagement with professors who they perceived to be mean, strict, and standoffish. When asked, "What makes a professor approachable to you?," Participant 6 said, **"**I guess not so strict or if I realize in class that they're really formal or strict, then I probably would try to avoid them maybe, or I probably wouldn't engage with them as much." Other participants were negatively impacted by their professors' teaching styles. Professors who spoke with a monotone voice, excluded in-class activities, and responded angrily to participants' questions were characterized as unapproachable. Participant 18 expressed, "If someone asks a question and they respond in a more hostile mode or way, or if it's just more monotone. It discourages you from talking to them." When professors seemed unreceptive, avoided interactions, and had a stern demeanor, participants felt uncomfortable and were less likely to speak to professors out-of-class.

Similarly, professors' level of communication impacted participant interactions. Participants were less likely to interact with professors who they perceived as having

ineffective teaching and communication styles. Examples provided by participants included unresponsive to participant inquiries, lack of support, and unorganized lectures. Participant 13 described:

> I feel like if they can't answer my questions or if they just never have time to talk, I try to stay away from those professors. I don't really like interacting with professors that don't have teaching styles that just don't interact with my preferences.

When there was a nonexistent in-class relationship, participants were less likely to pursue out-of-class interactions. For example, participants showed a reluctance to visit office hours when professors were not approachable.

Participants who expressed satisfaction with their current level of professor engagement shared their justifications as well. Some participants shared they were not looking for additional support such as tutoring or mentorship. In response to the interview question, "Do you want to engage more with your professors?," Participant 4 shared, **"**I feel like what I'm doing right now is appropriate, you know, not meeting with them all the time, not trying to ask them to be a mentor . . . Just go in there. If I have a specific question." Other participants shared that they never saw a professor in the hallways or at any events. Participant 1 expressed:

> Never have seen a professor at an event of any that I've gone to. Rarely will I ever see one of my professors in the hallway . . . the only time I'll see them in the hallway is if we're . . . walking in the class at the same time and then we'll just give each other like a smile or a little hello. But I don't think I've ever seen my professors just out and about in the hallways.

Time constraints were a factor as well. Participant 6 shared, “All my classes are 50 minutes long and there’s 10 minutes in between . . . if I’m spending five minutes . . . speaking to one professor, I’m either late to one class or I don’t have enough time to speak with that professor.” Participants engaging only with professors for specific questions or to address concerns was common.

In-Class Academic Support

If participants feel academically supported in the classroom, they are more likely to interact with their professors outside of class. Participants wanted to feel valued and understood. Professors who assessed for class understanding and made sure the lesson was clear were key for participants feeling valued. Participants wanted to know they could receive help if they were struggling and address in-class concerns. Participants disliked having to initiate conversations with their professors. Instead, they preferred professors who would approach struggling students and engage them in conversation. Participant 4 shared:

> I know a lot of students nowadays are shy, or even when the teachers say anybody got any questions, they’ll [students] never raise [their] hands. I feel like teachers actually have to like go out of their way to find people [students] who need help or really go out of their way to call on people [students].

Receiving positive affirmations from professors also helped participants feel academically supported. The positive affirmations made participants feel encouraged that they were doing well. Participant 18 specifically mentioned positive affirmations from a professor when “[the professor] said, that you’ve come this far. You got this . . . don’t throw it all the way. You might feel discouraged and unhopeful in the moment. But once

you get it done, you're gonna feel . . . relief." The fact that the participants specifically mentioned the power of positive affirmations resonated with the literature. The language that creates rapport is important because it encourages students to seek out interactions outside of the classroom (Jaasma & Koper, 1999).

Equally important, participants enjoyed engaging with professors who were passionate about the subject matter. Professors' passion positively impacted student learning. Participants voiced that when their professors are passionate about what they are teaching, they try to engage with them more, which increases out-of-class interactions. Our findings echoed the Jaasma and Koper's (1999) study, where it was found that the amount of informal interactions that students have with their professors depends on their professor's teaching behaviors.

Classes that were related to participants' major or course of study prompted more out-of-class engagement. Participants who experienced class difficulty or considered their classes as hard, interacted more with their professors. More specifically, participants expressed interest to seek help with assignments, clarification, understanding course materials and success strategies, and gain feedback on completed work. Classes that were viewed as easy or that were not relevant to participants' major led to less interactions. Participants' academic standing in a class impacted the frequency of interactions as well. High grades in a class reduced the frequency of interactions. Participant 2 expressed:

> I definitely have a stronger connection with the professors in those classes that are more difficult. I don't feel that necessity to approach them and ask questions if I'm doing good in the class compared to the ones where I have trouble understanding the topics and the assignments.

Likewise, professors who created a positive classroom environment were viewed favorably by participants. More out-of-class engagement occurred if professors created a welcoming and supportive in-class environment that fostered student comfortability, which motivated participants to approach their professors. When asked, “What can professors do to increase student–faculty interactions?,” Participant 7 expressed, “I would just be open and welcoming to make students want to come to you [Professor], to just talk to you about anything that may be helpful for them.” Creating a positive classroom environment allowed participants to have a better understanding of the class, which led to a better relationship with their professor. As participants’ relationships with their professors strengthened, their class attendance and participation increased. Participants were more motivated to attend class and participate in class discussions if they had a positive student–faculty relationship. Class participation was also impacted by class size and instructional style. Due to the intimate nature, smaller class sizes created more opportunities for interaction than larger classes.

Professors’ instructional style impacted student–faculty engagement as well. The instructional style that participants preferred was defined as relaxed. Participants did not enjoy professors who were hostile and focused only on the instruction. Instead, they enjoyed professors who were humanistic and attentive to student questions and concerns. Participants also enjoyed professors who were relatable and shared personal stories and similar interests. Participant 18 described, “I feel like during class the more personal information they disclose, or more personal stories that they include in certain lessons really gives you like that trust. It helps you build that trust.” The personal stories showcased their professors’ desire to build rapport and create in-class relationships. This

finding was supported by Sidelinger et al. (2016), who found out-of-class interactions increased when in-class relationships were successful.

Out-of-class Engagement

Participants' decision to engage professors outside of the classroom depended on whether the student had a relationship with the professor or if the professor appeared open. If a relationship existed, participants were more likely to stop to engage; although participants without a relationship may not wave or initiate an interaction. Participants were more motivated to build personal connections with professors who smiled, initiated conversations, and who demonstrated a willingness to talk. Professor treatment was important. Participants needed to feel that their professors cared. Participant 17 expressed, "If a professor is just going to sit there and not really care about teaching students, students aren't really gonna care about what the professor is going to say." This response duplicated Carr et al. (2021) findings that students work harder academically, exhibit more confidence, and demonstrate higher levels of engagement when they feel cared for by professors.

Participants did not want to engage with the professor if they felt like the professor was in a bad mood or if they were not receiving "good vibes." Instead, participants preferred more informal interactions with their professors that allowed them to develop a personal connection. When participants recognized that their professors shared common interests and similarities, they were more likely to engage in out-of-class interactions. Although participants recognized the professional nature of their professor interactions, they liked when professors tried to relate to them by meeting them on their level. Participant 18 shared:

> But once . . . the teaching mode in a sense switches off, and they're in socializing mode, they'll probably mention something from their personal life first or somewhere during the conversation, and then they're just kind of talking to you like if you're their friend.

These responses validated the study by Carr et al. (2021), who reported that students are more equipped to develop more substantial learning experiences if faculty dedicate time to develop relationships with students. These relationships helped participants become more socially integrated, which made the classroom environment more comfortable.

Moreover, participants understood the value professors could provide to their personal and professional development. Professor engagement was critical to educational and occupational goal attainment. Participants were more in favor of seeking personal guidance from their professors if they had positive in-class interactions. The personal guidance that participants sought was related to recommendations for jobs, postgraduate opportunities, and building a professional network. Participant 18 noted:

> What motivates me to engage with my professors is, since I want to pursue graduate school, I know that you need letters of recommendation, and the only way you can really get a good one of those is, if you build relationships with faculty.

Students also liked having their professors serve as mentors and sources for advice. Mentorship provided students with a space to be open and vulnerable. Mentorship also helped students maximize their time on campus, which included participating in extracurricular and volunteer organizations. These organizations created students with a

network of support. The participants' responses aligned with the findings of Crawley et al. (2019), which showed when students have a strong network of support, their sense of belonging increases. Our research also mirrored Crawley et al.'s (2019) finding about the support professors provide to their students increases students' social capital, and equips students with relevant information, strong networks, and realistic goal-setting necessary for college access and connection.

Result 5: Racially Diverse Faculty

Research has established beneficial impacts for a diverse faculty body (Bartlebaugh & Abraham, 2021; Trent et al., 2021). Student academic achievements have been linked to institutions having not only a diverse student body but also a diverse body of faculty and staff that students see themselves reflected in (Culver et al., 2022). However, a disparity exists between the diversity of students and faculty on college campuses. According to 2018 Census data (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018), nearly 36% of college students are Black or Hispanic and only 8% of faculty are Black or Hispanic according to 2022 statistics from the NCES (2022a). Understanding the disproportion, the researchers wanted to determine if a participant resembling the perceived racial identity of their professor was important to them. Eight out of 19 participants agreed that it was important for professors to look like them. Seven out of 19 participants stated it was not important. Four out of 19 participants stated they were unsure or that it was both important and possibly not important.

Some participants described having little to no exposure to professors of a different race, while also acknowledging the need for a more diverse faculty representation on campus. For example, Participant 11 said, "There's not a lot [of

diversity] on this campus . . . I would say it was definitely good to have people that look like that [racially diverse]. Participant 4 explained, “It never really hits you until you finally get your first Black teacher . . . So I mean, it’ll be great to have more Black teachers.”

There were numerous responses that centered around the perceived benefits of participants sharing the same race as their professor. Participants reported feeling more comfortable with same-race professors as well as feeling more welcomed. Participant 5 shared, “It does help on Hispanic and Latinos to feel more welcome.” Participant 7 stated, “I think it’s important, because I’m just more comfortable because, you feel, you can relate to them.” Participant 16 said, “It’s very important. So I think, for universities to have those different professors around makes students more comfortable.”

Although several participants stated it was not important that their professors look like them, many of those same participants recognized the perceived benefits of a diverse faculty body. Participant 10 expressed, “Personally, I feel it’s not important. I know a lot of people think it is, because having someone that looks like you makes you more comfortable.” Participant 13 stated, “I don’t really know. It’s just sometimes you just feel comfortable with them [same-race professors]”.

Participants also stated they could relate to professors of the same race, sharing personal struggles and cultural backgrounds. Among other benefits, same-race professors were perceived as being caring, understanding, and willing to help participants. Participant 8 explained, “In one of my classes, it’s all Black students and the professor just relates to us . . . and our struggles going on through life.” Participant 8 added, “So I feel like that helps in relatability, and I can still approach other professors. But I feel like

it's more personal with Black professors." Participant 12 described relatability this way, "If someone had to grow up in that same environment, they could understand, not only your personal struggles, but just the willingness to help as a Black teacher, the willingness to help other Black students I feel like is higher."

A few participants noted that certain courses should be taught by a specific race of faculty. For instance, an African American literature course should be taught by someone who identifies as African American. Participant 17 noted, "I would say it [the professor's racial identity] matters depending on the class like, for example, if it was an African American studies related class. It definitely matters if it's a history related to class."

Some participants reported race as having no significant importance, specifically stating that appearance does not matter and that professors' individual personality and ability to assist students were essential qualities over race. For instance, Participant 6 stated, "Well, I can't really control what professors look like, if they look like me, I guess, to me it's not important. It's just if you can help me, then yeah." Participant 10 added, "But I don't really think it matters because we are all people."

Same-Race Student–Faculty Interactions

Participants were asked "How does the racial identity of your professor influence your interactions?," to determine if race played a role in how students interact with their professors. Learning more about factors that influence student engagement with their professor helped the researchers understand what inspired participants to engage or not engage, thereby improving student–faculty relationships. This study aimed to explore how professors of different races affected interactions with students from minority backgrounds, noting that some students felt hesitant to engage with White professors.

Variations of the term “comfort” appeared several times in participant responses. Many participants described higher levels of comfort with professors of the same race. Participants stated that they would feel more comfortable if they talked to professors of the same race, noting that these professors provided support and understanding. Participants reported a perception of better understanding and empathy from same-race professors. For example, Participant 11 stated, “I feel like if it’s a professor of color, or person of color, I’d probably be more comfortable speaking to them versus if it was like a White professor or anything of the sort.” Participant 11 continued, “I’d probably be slightly apprehensive, or maybe . . . a little scared, not really scared, but not as confident.” This statement not only explained the comfort of speaking with same-race professors, but it also supported prior research that some racially minoritized students may feel that White faculty are less approachable, making it easier to connect with other minority professors (Guiffrida, 2005).

Some participants described the observation of how professors treated other students and noted the importance of treating everyone with respect regardless of race. Additionally, participants shared stories of unfair or prejudiced treatment from professors. Research has shown that racially minoritized students are more likely to encounter active and passive racism (Jain & Crisp, 2021). When confronted with differential treatment from professors, Participant 14 described their frustration in this way, “I’ve had some professors where I feel like they would kind of favor the students who look like them rather than me, even though if I was working harder or if I was paying attention in class.” Some participants also described incidents of culturally insensitive humor and a lack of cultural understanding from professors. Incidents such as

these negatively impacted participants' perceptions of professors and discouraged some participants from authentically participating in class.

Some participants reported race as having no influence on their interactions with professors. Responses included students who felt neutral about the racial identity of their professors. Some participants described professors simply as individuals and said that race was not a factor in how they interacted with their professors. Furthermore, some participants stated that race did not matter and that they did not interact any differently with their professors based on racial identity. Conversely, many of those same students also reported a myriad of benefits if had access to professors of the same race, including but not limited to feeling more comfortable and receptive to conversing with them. For example, Participant 15 stated, "It doesn't really influence it [interactions with professors], but I can see more comfortability with people more of my ethnicity."

The responses to this question were mixed yet still informative and aligned with the literature. Although some participants pointed out that racial identity had little to no impact on how students interact with their professors, other participants agreed that it can have positive effects. Upon analysis, it was clear that comfort, understanding, and openness were perceived as positive traits of professors.

Same-Race Faculty Mentorship

Minority students can gain valuable insights from minority professors who serve as mentors. The process of mentoring has been connected to the improvement of college retention for minoritized students (Dahlvig, 2010; Nagda et al., 1998). Professors can promote student growth beyond the classroom with things such as networking, career counseling, and research opportunities (Briody et al., 2019). An essential component of

student academic success is supportive relationships with mentors (Dahlvig, 2010; Lund et al., 2019; Raposa et al., 2021). Research has found that the benefits of mentoring are particularly strong for racially minoritized students because these students may experience additional barriers or challenges in college (Nagda et al., 1998).

Recognizing that mentorship can serve as a supportive resource for minoritized students, the researchers wanted to know if participants perceived these benefits as well. The researchers asked participants how a matched-race professor mentor could be beneficial to them. Relatability was an overarching contention that participants repeatedly brought up as a response. For example, Participant 7 explained, “It would be beneficial, because they probably have experienced the same things as me, and like they probably could show empathy and understand me more than someone from a different race.” Professors and students who both identify as the same race or ethnicity supported the idea that both groups have a shared understanding of each other’s lived experiences and shared struggles. In addition, if professors and students shared the same race and/or ethnicity, participants perceived that these professors could provide a stronger connection to the participants’ experience. Some participants responded that if they do not share the same racial or ethnic identity as the professor, the professor may struggle to make connections and understand cultural references.

With regard to professors and participants who had the same racial and/or ethnic identity, participants perceived that those professors could provide encouragement, support, and advocate for students. Participant 1 explained, “Being a minority, you go through certain things that other people don’t have to go through and it’s different for every minority.” Participant 1 added, “So someone, the same race or ethnicity as me, if

they mentored me, they would be able to warn me or teach me about the things that they had to go through as a person that looks like me." Participant 4 stated, "They're able to mentor me and they can really just walk me through how they get through the situation I'm in." Participants also identified the following benefits: eliminating feelings of isolation, decreased fear of racial bias, comfortability discussing difficult topics, and the confidence to speak up more in class.

The answer to the subresearch question, "Does the racial identity of faculty play a role in whether or not minoritized students interact with some faculty and not others?," was yes for some participants. For many participants, the racial identity of a professor did, and potentially could, play a role in student interactions. Foremost, many participants expressed a need for more diversity among faculty. Although some participants expressed that there was no influence on their perception of those professors who share similar identities, they did acknowledge the need for more diverse faculty in the classroom. Participants perceived the advantages of shared identities and recommended having more diverse mentors and faculty in higher education. The researchers interpreted these patterns to conclude that students desire faculty members who reflect their own identities, leading to a transformation in the perception of what a scholar's image should be.

Participants identified various advantages to building relationships with professors with whom they racially identify. Academic support, relatability, and comfortability were a few of the most common trends related to the perceived benefits of these relationships. Overall, participants perceived that if they can identify with or connect with their professors based on race, coupled with a quality-of-care mindset, this positivity impacts student comfort and academic success. Participants desired role models

who can create a sense of belonging whilst contributing to their emotional and professional growth.

Themes

The subsequent section highlights the four overarching and broad categories of ideas that emerged from the analysis of results (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Theme 1 delved into the challenges that participants experience while navigating barriers that impede their academic progress. In Theme 2, the focus shifted to understanding how student educational experiences can be strengthened by professors who provide holistic support and personal development. Theme 3 explored the participant preferences for professors who exhibit specific characteristics and behaviors that are conducive to relationship building. Lastly, Theme 4 delved into participant desires for a welcoming and comfortable learning environment. Together, these themes offer valuable insights into the varied perspectives of students.

Theme 1: Students Navigate Through Barriers That Hinder Academic Progress

The participants reported barriers to educational success before they even enrolled into college and they continued to experience them during their academic pursuit. They experienced both internal and external barriers. These are referred to as preentry attributes according to Tinto's work (1975, 1987, 1993). The participants' initial perceptions of college professors were influenced by high school experiences and media portrayals, leading students to view professors as unapproachable or strict. Preconceived notions contributed to a sense of anxiety and reluctance to engage with professors. The approachability and teaching styles of professors played a role in this dynamic because of the participants' perceived faculty indifference or unprofessionalism that made them

hesitant to participate in student–faculty interactions. Scheduling conflicts with office hours and varying communication preferences among participants further complicated student–faculty interactions. Additionally, the presence or absence of faculty diversity impacted participant feelings of connectedness and involvement in academic writing.

Each of these barriers presented unique challenges and implications. These barriers permeated through all aspects of a student's experience. Occurrences inside and outside of the classroom, during office hours, and in their social and familial groups combined to form complex challenges. These challenges were not purely academic but also social, cultural, and psychological. The combination of difficulties and obstacles was difficult to fully comprehend because these barriers overlapped and were often unique to the individual. Consideration of the conceptual lens of Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993) implies that these are the institutional experiences and the social and academic integration that a student encounters during the college experience.

High school teachers and the media portrayal of college make an impact on participant perceptions of the profile of college professors. Participant 8 said, "I thought they [professors] would be a lot meaner than they were, as we get told in high school . . . I was just surprised by how . . . nice they were." These participants came to college with the preconceived notion that their professors would be strict and unhelpful. They assumed that college was more of a self-study journey without personal interactions. With these ideas formed during high-school, participants arrived at college expecting professors to be unapproachable and standoffish.

These initial perceptions either created or enhanced other barriers such as anxiety and fear of judgment, perception of professor approachability, and lack of student–faculty

relationship. Participant anxiety was evident in the hesitation to engage with professors inside or outside of the classroom. They feared looking "silly" in front of their peers and were afraid of negative feedback. Some of this originated from preconceived notions about professors, but it also stemmed from the general perception of the approachability of the professor.

Participants communicated in various ways how interactions with professors depended on their approachability, professionalism, perceived empathy, and teaching styles. If participants perceived professors as unfriendly or unapproachable, they were less likely to engage with the professor or in the class. Participant 12 said, "You can tell that they care about their students and [are] not just teaching . . . [those that care] . . . they're naturally more approachable because of how they carry on." Unprofessional behavior, like canceling class or being consistently late, also led the participants to engage less. Professors who were perceived as indifferent or lacking empathy created an environment in which participants felt unmotivated to engage, believing their efforts would not make a difference. Lastly, some teaching styles were perceived as less engaging. Professors who lectured throughout the class, distributed work and then remained silent, and dismissed questions, and those who left immediately after class without entertaining postlecture queries were viewed negatively. Such behaviors led participants to perceive these professors as unapproachable, unwelcoming, and unempathetic, thus diminishing their willingness to interact.

Due to anxiety, preconceived ideas about professors, and the lack of professor approachability, participants tended to form fewer student–faculty relationships. Fewer student–faculty relationships then became another barrier. The lack of a relationship led

to less engagement and limited opportunities for learning and support. These are the students who are less likely to ask for assistance when it is needed (Ames & Lau, 1982). The participants who had a positive relationship were more likely to stop to greet a professor outside the classroom or to utilize engagement opportunities such as office hours. This was apparent in the response by Participant 16, "I did have a professor . . . [you could] stop by to talk to him either about class or just about life, [because he] is a very open person . . . [other professors] I only see them during class."

Participants also experienced challenges with office hours, specifically due to scheduling conflicts and limited availability. Participants reported that after-class interactions were not always possible due to the need to travel across campus for the next class. They also encountered situations in which the professors' office hours overlapped with another class. This impacted participants who had extracurricular activities or work schedules. Sometimes the professor had scheduling conflicts. The professor would either not be present during office hours or cancel them.

Varied communication preferences among participants led to barriers to effective engagement. Although 37% of participants preferred email, 53% considered it their least favorite form of communication. Face-to-face interactions were favored by 53% of participants, but 21% found it least appealing. Some participants appreciated online and virtual methods, but others deemed them impersonal. Given the lack of a universally preferred method, it is crucial for professors to acknowledge these varied preferences to enhance student engagement. Participants emphasized that more frequent and flexible options would minimize this barrier.

While some of the participants reported that the race of the faculty did not matter, participants noted the benefits of more diverse faculty. Participants who valued faculty diversity expressed how much it impacted their level of connectedness and sense of belonging on campus. Participants were more willing to engage in class discussions and were more likely to develop student–faculty relationships when they felt that their faculty represented their racial identity. Therefore, even though students might not have explicitly identified a lack of diversity among faculty as a barrier, it was evident that they recognized the benefits of being taught by a diverse faculty. The absence of these benefits effectively constituted a barrier.

Theme 2: Students Value Holistic Support and Personal Development to Enhance Their Educational Experience

Students wanted professors to support them both academically and personally. When asked the interview question, "Do you want to engage more with your professors?," Participant 16 expressed, "Yeah. It [professor engagement] makes the class more enjoyable and wanting to be there. You'd actually . . . have some sort of connection with the teacher." This participant's perspective supported Carr et al.'s (2021) study that student learning experiences are strengthened when faculty take time to build a connection with their students. Providing academic support, engaging in informal interactions, and discussing professional development goals were all opportunities to increase social capital, which positively impacted retention for racially minoritized students (Crawley et al., 2019).

Professors who provided positive affirmations to participants showcased care for student learning as well. Positive affirmations motivated participants to continue to

persist through the class. They also provided reassurance to participants that they were doing well in the class and their academic standing was recognized. When asked, “Can you tell me about a time that you had a positive experience with a professor?,” Participant 3 shared:

> I feel like all my interactions with him [professor] were positive, though he was always just so uplifting and . . . always positive like you guys are great. You guys are good. I’ve got you. whenever you need something. I’m here for you, and just . . . everything was positive with him, and he always just made me feel so smart.

Similarly, participants wanted to know that if they were struggling or if they needed help in a class, their faculty would be understanding. Participant responses aligned with White’s (2011) research that when students know that they can receive assistance in the classroom, they have a positive and effective learning experience. Students are encouraged to actively engage in class discussions and with the course content (White, 2011). When asked, “What conversations with professors do you consider to be the most beneficial?,” Participant 14 expressed:

> Conversations about the material, and if they talk about it in a way that is not condescending or they genuinely seem they want to help. I feel like those are the most beneficial to me. Because if they are condescending, even if they do help me understand better, I’ll still feel pretty bad. But if they are very helpful and genuinely caring, then I’ll feel a lot better and it’ll probably make me want to go back and talk to them again.

Engagement in informal conversations with professors was also mentioned as a form of support. Participants appreciated the human connection when interacting with

their professors. Participants respected their professors as professionals, but they also sought to develop a personal relationship with them. In response to the question, "What conversations with professors do you consider to be the most beneficial?," Participant 8 shared:

> Conversations that don't relate to school, because if it's personal, you can relate to them, and it doesn't feel . . . transactional. So just more if it's more about like personal things or things that you're interested in than just like schoolwork that makes them more meaningful.

Participants also enjoyed speaking to professors individually and having conversations that were not class related. Initial impressions and the personality of their professors mattered to students as well. Professors who smiled and initiated conversations showcased their care and support. Participant 4 described, "A professor is approachable to me when they're not standoffish. When I first go in, I usually judge who I'm going to keep seeing throughout the semester off of my first time meeting them." Students appreciated the personal information that their professors incorporated into class lectures as well. Professors who solely lectured were not viewed favorably by students. Participant 19 expressed:

> I would want to talk more with my psychology professor right now because she seems like a good person. I like the way that she lectures. I like how she involves . . . her own personal life, and that makes me think that she's a good person. It's like I'm learning more about her, and she seems like an interesting person. I like when they bring in their own home life, because it makes them seem more like a human rather than just a professor.

As students continue to view their professors as human, the frequency of student–faculty relationships increases, which leads to more substantial learning experiences (Cox, 2011; Cox et al., 2010).

Equally important, professors who helped students develop skills and behaviors that extended beyond the classroom were viewed positively. The student responses aligned with prior research that when students seek out their professors for career guidance, their overall career development is positively impacted (Komarraju et al., 2010). In response to the question, "How do you see professors supporting your personal development?," Participant 2 shared, "When they talk to you about other things that don't necessarily have to do with your class that can help you develop into a better student or help you succeed in your career, that really helps." Participants appreciated the conversations with their professors that were non-class-related but focused on their postgraduate plans. Participants also witnessed a benefit when connecting with professors who taught their major-specific classes. Participant 5 expressed:

> I think I should have more of a connection with the psych teachers because obviously they have more experience in my major. They also do have connections to organizations and they could refer me to somebody that could help me in my career for therapy practices.

Participants realized the valuable connections that their professors had in both the academic and professional world. By building a personal relationship with their professors, networking opportunities could become available that would be helpful for their future endeavors. Similarly, professor mentorship was shared as a preferred method of engagement. Research supports that professor mentorship has been an invaluable

resource for promoting academic success (Dahlvig, 2010; Lund et al., 2019; Raposa et al., 2021).

Racially minoritized students, especially, experience unique barriers as they navigate college. Through the personal connections that are developed during mentoring relationships, professors can provide guidance related to networking, career planning, and research opportunities (Briody et al., 2019; Cole, 2007; Nagda et al.,1998; Raposa et al., 2021). Participant 12 shared:

> The mentorship . . . the advice, having that open space to talk about life problems and stuff like that. and helping me if I'm confused on like a certain route to go with certain things. Those kind of conversations will definitely be beneficial. It helps make more clarity, especially when I was trying to change my major.

Receiving holistic support from their professors reassured participants that they are not only academic learners, but they are also individuals with unique needs, aspirations, and challenges. Participants benefited from more than the traditional role of professors. Because of the diverse needs and challenges that students, especially racially minoritized students, experience on campus, a well-rounded educational experience is crucial. Participants valued professors who showcased care and empowered them to succeed academically, personally, and professionally. When students feel that their professors care about their overall well-being and success, they begin to have a more positive and effective educational experience.

Theme 3: Students Desire Professors who Exhibit Characteristics and Behaviors That Promote Relationship Building

The environment and climate created by student–faculty interactions can significantly impact student engagement (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The experiences a professor offers to students are contributing to both the academic and social aspects of institutional experiences, which are aligned with the Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) student departure theory. In the current study, insights from participants' responses indicated the desired professor characteristics and behaviors that are ideal to establish student–faculty relationships. Participants' responses also highlighted the undesirable professor behaviors that negatively impact learning, engagement, and interactions. The researchers identified the theme as "Students desire professors who exhibit characteristics and behaviors that promote relationship building."

When the researchers asked, "What makes a professor approachable to you?," participants provided examples of characteristics and behaviors that demonstrated cues of an approachable professor for them. Smiling was frequently mentioned as a desired behavior and a foundational element for initiating interaction. Participant 12 explained, "Talking to people in general is . . . a lot easier when the first thing they do when you speak to them is smile. This is getting to feel for the personality."

Participant 1 explained, "I feel like if they know my name and they are the type of person to smile and wave at me in the hallways, that makes them approachable." Other approachable characteristics were further described by Participant 1 as "warm and welcoming," displays "patience," and "gentle, calm, friendly, like, always smiling."

Examples of characteristics related to professors' communication styles included utilizing a friendly tone of voice, demonstrating active listening, exhibiting genuine care and interest, being open, attentive, and understanding. Participant 11 stated:

> Definitely friendly. I would say, that's probably the biggest thing. And willing to want to talk to you and . . . not brush you off . . . I would say an attentive listening experience, between, like the professor and the student. Actively listening to you.

Participants valued professors who were good listeners and consistently punctual, highlighting the importance of communication and responsiveness.

Other specific examples contributed to more personal interactions and building rapport as well. Those examples entailed faculty knowing students' names and remembering important student facts, being open, and displaying a willingness to share about their personal life and interests. Participants favored when a professor engaged in small talk, inquired about their well-being, and offered a brief greeting. These actions made participants feel welcome and appreciated. Building rapport and connection was thoroughly described by Participant 2 when it was stated that professors "Make you feel special in a way, that they remember your name, or they're like, 'Oh, you said in class that you were going to this place. How was it?' . . . Or that they remembered you asked a question."

Lack of rapport and connection with participants also led to fewer student interactions. A specific example that was provided included a situation in which a professor would immediately begin to assign in-class assignments without any other interaction. Participant 5 said, "We would . . . just do our assignments on the computer and she would just sit there and just not talk . . . but the thing is she didn't really speak at

all in class apart from the beginning of class." The environment in class was silent, featuring limited communication from the professor and computer-based assignments rather than more human-interaction-rich activities. This professor only interacted with students who had taken her prior courses and would sit down after explaining assignments. This teaching style was harmful for student–faculty engagement. Responsiveness, authenticity, and professionalism were key components for participants who decided whether or not to interact with professors. Participant 14 stated that a professor can show approachability when "A professor that is not afraid, . . . to admit that they're wrong" and continued, "I've had professors who, even if they do make a mistake, they're very hostile." Approachability through professionalism also included professors who are diligent to demonstrate concern for students' welfare and persistent to support them despite the circumstances.

Participants reported that the professors' characteristics and behaviors influenced student engagement and student–faculty interaction. Participants said that factors such as understanding students' strengths and interests, having similarities, and maintaining a good relationship with the professor helped to make them comfortable. Participant 2 responded in support of this sentiment by saying, "He [the professor] made me feel really comfortable approaching him, and he would explain to me very well how to organize my essays and how to succeed in that class. So that was very important for me." Participants defined professionalism in a professor as being helpful, good at explaining course material efficiently, and having a positive attitude. Effective communication with participants was exemplified when professors were active listeners and asked questions, supportive and available for help, and approachable and open to interacting with students.

The participants' desire for genuineness and authenticity underscores the importance of professors who are sincere and believe in their abilities. Participants pointed out that authentic conversations happen naturally, without being forced. One example by Participant 10 described when the professor was concerned about their mental health and asked if they needed any nonacademic support. This participant highlighted, "He was asking me . . . how am I mentally? Do I need anything outside of class." Professors' passion was a catalyst for students' motivation to attend office hours. Consequently, approachability and accessibility were described as a professor that smiles, has a sense of humor, tells jokes, is funny, not too serious, and is open to student interactions. This aligned with the Jenkins' (2016) study that posited approachability and effective teaching are a blend of intangible qualities such as being good-natured, professional yet accessible, humorous, and demanding but fair. Finally, for relatability and shared experiences, participants found that having a relationship and having similarities with professors made it easier to start interactions such as asking questions. This was supported by Participant 14:

> She's [the professor] a Black graduate student . . . she helped me guide my way into figuring out what I wanted my minor to be . . . she gave me a lot of pointers and advice on what it might look like after I do graduate.

Familiarity, or having the ability to have comfortable interactions with professors, were crucial for successful student–faculty conversations. Participant 2 expressed, "The professor making you feel special I feel like definitely makes it feel more comfortable for a student to approach them if they ever have a problem."

A recurring theme was the strong link between relatability, shared experiences, and effective teaching dynamics. Participants valued engagement with professors to whom they could relate and share aspects of their personal lives, including interests and experiences. In regard to relatable teaching style and relatable experiences, Participant 19 detailed, “When they seem more human and actually interesting to me because some of them . . . you’re boring . . . I don’t really want to be around you or I just get annoyed” and continued, “I guess it just depends on how their own personal life . . . relates to mine at all.” Participants desired professors who demonstrated their human side. Participant 15 explained, “If a professor gives off a more comfortable vibe, like they’re not just the professor . . . like humanizing themselves.” Participant 5 underlined, “I like to be around people that are really friendly and just open about stuff that they like to do.”

Sidelinger et al. (2016) noted student social integration is affected by professor rapport that initially occurs in class. In the current study, many of the responses demonstrated opportunities that allowed students and professors to connect aside from traditional roles, such as casual conversations and deeper engagement and rapport. Opportunities for rapport could begin with casual conversations that clearly emerged from participants’ responses (Cox et al., 2010).

In contrast, participants mentioned the negative professor characteristics and behaviors that would decrease student–faculty interactions. As far as teaching styles and dynamics, professor behaviors such as being strict or responding to questions in a dismissive manner were discouraging. Participant 2 exemplified unapproachable behaviors, “If someone is mean, I might have a little more doubt on approaching them, but I still would if I have a question. There’s no doubt about that.” This aligned with

Jaasma and Koper's (1999) research which highlighted that student perception of faculty behaviors would determine the frequency and length of out-of-class communications.

Professor behaviors relate to physiological approachability (Cox et al., 2010). The interviews revealed that when professors appeared unreceptive, were avoiding interactions, seemed standoffish, and exhibited a stern demeanor, participants felt uncomfortable and were less likely to initiate conversations with professors outside of class. Behaviors such as appearing rushed or dismissive were also mentioned as a detraction from approachability. Participant 4 described what they desired a professor to showcase: "They don't seem in a rush. They're [not] trying to get rid of the conversation that makes them more approachable, because I know they actually tried to care and make you feel welcomed."

Participant 18 expressed how discouraging and disappointing the professors' behaviors could be in regard to class participation and engagement: "Maybe they're not that friendly, and I don't really want to talk to this person, because who knows? Maybe that's really how they are. And then at that point you're just kind of disappointed because you expected something else." Professors who exhibited behaviors that emphasized a hierarchical relationship, belittled students, or implied a lack of student intelligence directly impacted participant levels of frustration. Participant 14 described a painful experience when the professor was condescending and laughed at questions about a final assignment:

> He was very hard to approach and then, so when I was really struggling on our final project, I had no choice, so I had to go up to him and he . . . was very condescending and I asked him a question and he laughed at me. . . . And I don't

know, that just kind of made me stop trying to participate in his class for like the rest of the few weeks of the school year.

Behaviors like a professor who arrives late and frequently cancels class demotivated participants to attend class. Participant 19 recalled: “My professor showed up 20 minutes late and then sent an email saying that class was canceled . . . not fun. [The class] was at 9:30. I’m not a morning person. I did not want to wake up at the time.” Instances of unapproachability and accessibility were emphasized when professors exhibited rudeness and condescension. Undesirable behaviors consistently led to hesitancy in initiating future interactions.

Research has demonstrated that professors’ teaching dynamics and behaviors act as signals for students in search of informal interactions (Jaasma & Koper, 1999). This theme revealed participant reluctance to engage when professors seemed unapproachable. Also, when there was a lack of a foundational relationship in the classroom, one of connection and rapport, participants were disinclined to seek further interactions. Negative experiences with previous professors who were unapproachable appeared to influence interactions with the current professor. Ultimately, for participants of this study, the characteristics and behaviors that professors exhibited had a ripple effect on the academic and social integration, and consequently the decision to return to campus.

Theme 4: Students Desire a Welcoming and Comfortable Learning Environment

The theme “Students desire a welcoming and comfortable learning environment” aligned with the findings because in order to increase student–faculty interaction, the researchers needed to understand the requirements of participants in order to foster valuable relationships with their professors. The researchers could not discuss how to

increase interactions until they learned what motivated these interactions. The researchers discovered during the coding process and thematic analysis, that in order for participants to reach their utmost potential, they need to feel comfortable with their professor and want to feel welcome in and outside of the classroom.

In nearly 85% of the interviews, the terms “welcoming” and “comfortable” were mentioned in some capacity. Whether participants were describing how they felt around some of their professors or articulating their expectations, it was evident that participants highly valued a learning environment characterized by warmth and ease. Participants shared experiences that amplified their desire to make connections with professors depending on certain variables. For instance, circumstances centered around whether or not to approach a professor can depend on how comfortable the professor makes that student feel. Participant 10 shared a story about his geology professor and the level of discomfort that he felt going to the professor’s office hours for the first time. The participant said, “[I] just wanted to get it [the meeting] over with.” The participant continued, explaining that the professor was unexpectedly nice and the experience resulted in a very positive and constructive outcome. Another example of a variable that participants reported when they were discussing comfort was whether the student felt cared for. Participants expressed a longing to feel their professor cared for and understood them. They valued professors who presented themselves as student centered and took time to get to know their students.

A significant number of participants expressed increased comfort when noting racial similarities with their professors. Some participants shared their feelings about being more comfortable around professors with whom they identified racially. They

stated that having a connection with a professor with a similar racial background can lead to a better understanding of personal struggles, increased openness, and an overall bond. These patterns indicate a direct connection between the racial identity of a professor and the comfort level of some participants. For example, Participant 8, a Black male, shared positive experiences that he had with a Black professor. The participant described how he formed connections more easily, related to personal struggles that the professor shared, and felt that the professor "Brings an HBCU [Historically Black Colleges and Universities] feel" to an otherwise predominantly White institution (PWI). Research supports that authentic and meaningful relationships often originate from same-race student–faculty relationships (Guiffrida, 2005; Dahlvig, 2010).

In regard to developing and maintaining meaningful relationships with professors, participants described feeling comfortable and welcome as essential elements to building trust, creating a sense of belonging, and establishing a human connection. Research has shown that creating a sense of belonging for students in college is essential to academic persistence (Gopalan & Brady, 2020; Trent et al., 2021). When executed effectively, participants contributed to building a relationship with their professors. Conversely, if done inadequately, participants may not feel at ease or valued, making them less inclined to interact with their professors. This can lead to an underperformance of the student because they avoid interactions with their professors when they need academic support. Thus, some students prioritize comfort over comprehension of course content. To illustrate this point, Participant 2 described a positive experience from a prior semester. She depicted a strong relationship with her political science professor, highlighting his ability to explain course material, create a comfortable environment, and advise her on

future courses to take. The participant mentioned, “I feel like I created a good relationship with him, and he really helped me out in school,” so much so that she is taking another class with him.

This theme emerged easily due to “comfortability” and “welcoming” as words that participants used to describe a plethora of experiences, feelings, and situations. Variations of these words appeared 122 times across participant transcripts. The researchers now have a better understanding of the magnitude of comfort and whether or not a student will engage with their professor. Research has shown that student–faculty engagement leads to persistence, retention, and better academic performance, especially for culturally-diverse students (Yamauchi, et al., 2016). If professors wish to increase retention by engaging more with students, it will be critical to prioritize creating a welcoming and comfortable learning atmosphere that students find themselves developing and succeeding.

Chapter Summary

Low student–faculty engagement is a problem among universities and colleges nationwide (Briody et al., 2019; Cox et al., 2010; Griffin et al., 2014, Johnson et al., 2020). Higher education institutions have been faced with this dilemma for decades and solving this problem is no easy feat. There is clear evidence that student–faculty interactions have positive impacts on student success (Carr et al., 2021; Griffin et al., 2014; Hausmann et al., 2007; Hussain & Jones, 2021; Kim & Sax, 2014; Komarraju et al., 2010; Tatum, 1999; Trent et al., 2021; Trolian et al., 2021; Walton & Cohen, 2011). Unfortunately, these positive impacts alone are not enough to convince students to engage with faculty.

The purpose of this study was to reconcile the disconnect between minimal student–faculty interaction and the proven benefits of these interactions. The efforts of this study were to identify improvement strategies specific to racially minoritized students because they are especially susceptible to lower retention rates. An interdependent and interconnected relationship exists among students and faculty. Increased student–faculty engagement results in a multitude of advantages for all stakeholders.

The researchers identified and interviewed 19 racially minoritized first-time first-year students nearing the end of the Spring 2023 semester at a 4-year public university in the Midwest. After collecting the data and becoming familiar with it, the researchers set out to organize it in meaningful ways. Then, an inductive approach was utilized to generate codes and search for themes. After the researchers analyzed the findings, they categorized them into broader themes, all while staying focused and making connections to the research questions.

The results section of this chapter uncovered outcomes and findings derived from the following: aspects of office hours, characteristics of professor behaviors, elements of teaching dynamics, creating relationships, and components of faculty diversity and racial identity impacts. These findings were substantiated by a multitude of participant quotations and references from the literature.

The results revealed several significant aspects of the study and led to the following key themes:

- Students desire a welcoming and comfortable learning environment.

- Students desire professors who exhibit characteristics and behaviors that promote relationship building.
- Students navigate through barriers that hinder academic progress.
- Students value holistic support and personal development to enhance their educational experience.

These themes indicated and described participants' needs to be supported, both academically and personally by their professors. The researchers discovered opportunities for professors to maximize their efforts to retain students as well as give them the holistic support they require to be successful. Awareness of students' needs, coupled with intentional techniques on the professor's behalf, has the potential to be transformative for students' academic experiences.

Chapter 4 includes limitations, recommendations based on study results, and proposes a design for dissemination and implementation. Lastly, it explains the program design and the justifications for it.

Chapter 4: Action Plan and Recommendations

Despite research that emphasizes the significance of student–faculty engagement for the enhancement of student retention, these student–faculty interactions are limited (Cox et al., 2010). The various factors that contribute to the infrequency of student–faculty engagement impact the academic experiences of all students, but especially racially minoritized students (Carey, 2004; Kinzie et al., 2008; Pascarella et al., 1996). The researchers of this qualitative study acknowledge the critical role of student–faculty engagement in addressing retention challenges for racially minoritized students, and we aimed to answer the research question: How can institutions increase student–faculty interactions for racially minoritized students who identify as first-time first-year students? The researchers also created subcategories, seeking to understand the areas of opportunity for increasing retention through student–faculty interactions:

1. What are the reasons that students do not use office hours, which are one of the sole support options faculty offer their students?
2. Do first-generation students perceive student–faculty engagement differently?
3. Do in-class interactions influence the approachability of faculty outside of the classroom?
4. Does the racial identity of faculty play a role in how minoritized students interact with some faculty and not others?

This chapter documents the insights derived from the research study. The primary focus was to articulate the recommendations that were grounded in the study results. More specifically, active participation and engagement are necessary from both faculty and students. Faculty approachability emerged as a behavior that is necessary in order to

foster an environment that is conducive to meaningful academic interactions. The researchers underscore the importance of professor accessibility and availability for students in order to strengthen the engagement between professors and students as well. Additionally, the recommendations also stress the importance of clear communication and feedback from faculty, which enhances the holistic development of students, creates a comfortable learning environment, and compels schools to develop institutional policies that are focused on the enhancement of student–faculty engagement.

More specifically, the researchers discuss the creation of a faculty program that is designed to disseminate the research, present results, and highlight the recommendations. The faculty program creates a space to engage faculty in a meaningful discussion about the implications of the study. The program consists of seven modules. Each module has a description for learning outcomes, performance indicators, and hands-on exercises. From building personalized relationships to fostering a comfortable learning environment, each module addresses critical aspects of student–faculty engagement. The program design encourages flexibility and allows institutions to select modules based on their needs. This creates a collaborative approach to professional development. The researchers aim to equip faculty with practical strategies to foster a positive and impactful learning environment.

Finally, although the study offers valuable insights into student–faculty engagement for racially minoritized college students, the researchers identify the limitations and opportunities for future research. Because the study was conducted at a specific midsize 4-year public institution in the Midwest with a limited sample size of 19 participants, the researchers recognize the potential variations in results across different

institutions and the need for a more diverse participant pool. The researchers also identify subjectivity concerns due to the qualitative nature of the research, prompting suggestions for utilizing a mixed-methods approach. Opportunities for future research, such as exploring the faculty perspective and gaining a better understanding of how technology influences student–faculty interactions are discussed as well. These limitations not only highlight areas for improvement but also serve as valuable directions for future research endeavors related to student–faculty engagement.

Limitations

Similar to the majority of studies, this study is not exempt from certain limitations. It is important to address these constraints to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the findings of a study (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). First, this study was conducted at a midsized 4-year public institution in the Midwest. Results at private, 2-year, and other types of institutions may vary. Another limitation of this study is the sample size of 19 participants. Although a point of saturation was met with 19 participants, results may not be generalizable or fully represent the diversity of the broader population. While this study aimed to include a range of racial backgrounds to achieve maximum variation, nearly 69% of the participants in this study identified as Black or African American. This could impact results because it may not be representative of other minority groups' experiences, thus creating a sample bias.

This qualitative research presents subjectivity issues. This investigation is limited by the researchers who interpreted their own meaning based on the participants' responses, and might not necessarily express the participants' realities (Hernández et al., 2014). This qualitative research used self-reported memories from participants,

potentially resulting in difficulties for participants in recalling specific details of their experiences. Additionally, due to time constraints, participants may have not developed more thorough and detailed responses.

Although the researchers acknowledge the potential limitations, this study contributes valuable insights to the research on student–faculty engagement of racially minoritized college students. These limitations may also serve as a potential link for suggesting areas of exploration for future studies (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Recommendations

Several suggestions for improvement manifested based on the findings and analysis presented in this study. Each recommendation aligns with the themes that were discovered and provides guidance for future actionable steps. These recommendations can serve as a framework for institutions that aim to increase interactions between racially minoritized students and faculty, thus improving retention. The recommendations focus on specific strategies that can lead to improved outcomes and increased effectiveness of student–faculty interactions. These recommendations address the gaps in understanding the ongoing academic discourse regarding student–faculty interactions.

Recommendation 1: Building Relationships Through Personalized Engagement

Higher education institutions recognize the importance of building strong connections between students and faculty (Cox et al., 2010; Trent et al., 2021). Some of the benefits of building these relationships include student persistence, increased retention, and academic ambition (Carr et al., 2021; Griffin et al., 2014; Kim & Sax, 2014; Trent et al., 2021). The results of this study are consistent, as most participants share favorable experiences and outcomes from courses in which they establish a positive

rapport with their professor. One of the findings of this study indicated that students value professors who can personalize their approach to teaching and appear as relatable individuals. Several participants shared that they appreciate professors who present themselves as people and not just professors. Therefore, it is recommended that professors find commonalities with students to promote relationship-building. For example, professors can engage in casual conversation at the beginning of class, integrate personal anecdotes into lectures, and encourage students to share personal information if they feel comfortable. Professors who make intentional efforts to connect with students on a personal level can equip them to create more substantial learning experiences.

Another finding of this study revealed that participants appreciate professors who show genuine interest in their lives. Therefore, it is recommended that professors demonstrate genuine curiosity about what students are passionate about. Professors should ask questions, seek to understand students, and show enthusiasm for their interests. Professors can also achieve this by attending student events on campus and acknowledging student achievements. Professors who actively engage with and support student interests can create a more dynamic and personalized relationship with students. Ultimately, this can lead to increased engagement and academic motivation on the student's behalf because they feel valued.

An additional finding of this study revealed that several participants value relationships with same-race professors. Genuine quality and meaningful connections frequently arise from student–faculty relationships that share a common racial background (Guiffrida, 2005; Dahlvig, 2010). When professors believe they share similar racial or ethnic backgrounds with their students, they may be more inclined to establish

and build relationships with them. This inclination is based on the idea that shared characteristics, such as race or ethnicity, can create a sense of commonality and understanding. This perceived similarity can lead to increased trust, communication, and rapport between professors and students. Therefore, professors who believe they share similar racial or ethnic backgrounds with students may consider developing these relationships further in the following ways:

- invite students individually to office hours
- ask open-ended questions about students' interests and cultural experiences
- incorporate diverse perspectives into curriculum and teaching materials
- share personal experiences and struggles to demonstrate commonality and relatability
- expose your own mistakes to build trust and display humanizing characteristics

It is important to note that although shared backgrounds can be a starting point for connection, professors should be mindful to avoid generalizations and recognize that individual experiences may vary.

Findings from this study also revealed that participant interactions with professors can depend on the perceived empathy of the professor. Participants who perceived professors as unempathetic were less motivated to engage with their professors. Therefore, it is recommended that professors demonstrate empathy and understanding to build relationships with students. For example, professors can respond to students' concerns or questions with empathy by acknowledging their feelings, and if appropriate, sharing their own experiences or challenges. This can demonstrate understanding and

relatability. Another strategy in which professors can demonstrate empathy is to schedule regular check-ins to inquire about students' well-being and academic progress. Check-ins could be integrated quarterly or at midterms. This proactive approach shows the professor cares about their students' success and is invested in their overall development. The researchers recognize that scheduling regular check-ins with all students may not be practical for all professors. Professors who demonstrate empathy effectively can create a sense of trust and support for students.

Recommendation 2: Approachability

Based on our research results, the researchers recommend some of the behaviors faculty must have to make evident approachability. Professors can consider themselves approachable, but some of the physical cues may communicate a different message to students. Research shows that out-of-class approachability can be controlled/influenced by faculty (Griffin et al., 2014). The research team concludes that professors must build rapport and make connections in order to help ease student anxiety and discomfort during office hours. In this section, the researchers emphasize some of the behaviors that participants consider in order to mitigate anxiety and consequently begin interactions.

One recommendation is to smile. Our study shows that smiling is a behavior that transfers to students as approachability. Many participants describe the benefits of doing this, such as becoming familiar with the professor's personality and making interactions easier. One example of implementing this behavior is waving and smiling in the hallways when receiving students in the classroom, before initiating any conversation, or during class sessions.

Another recommendation that surfaces from participant responses about approachability behaviors is to be a good listener. Participant responses highlight that professors can demonstrate approachability by having a friendly tone of voice, being active listeners, plus having a pleasant personality. One example of a physical cue for approachability is the tone of voice (Brooks & Young, 2016; Cox et al., 2010). Professors can implement a friendly tone of voice using active listening techniques. Examples of this would be paraphrasing, clarifying, asking additional questions to gain from the student's context.

The third recommendation under this category is for professors to show their human side. Chapter 3 highlights that participants want to be treated as human beings; equally, they also want professors to be human. One remarkable example mentioned is that showing the human side can be practiced by professors who should be open to admitting when they have made a mistake. Examples of this would be showing empathy, understanding, and genuine concern. When professors can provide a more comfortable communicative environment and demonstrate their engaged personality to students, students will likely see the professor not only as a teacher but also as a system of broader support.

The fourth recommendation for this approachable demeanor is to maintain a positive and encouraging attitude. Professors can demonstrate empathy and understanding, especially toward students who seem hesitant to engage. Another example of cultivating this behavior is by avoiding actions that might be perceived as indifferent or unprofessional. Another recommendation that will help with student anxieties is to foster a positive and empathetic academic environment. This recommendation traces

Pascarella & Terenzini (2005)'s research when they underlined the climate created by student–faculty interactions as a faculty role to attaining students' persistence and retention.

Our recommendations that help to cultivate an approachable demeanor to counteract initial student anxieties are sustained by participant responses. Humanizing the faculty and breaking hierarchies between students and professors can be done with more student–faculty interactions (Cox, 2011). In conclusion, professors are approachable to students when they practice behaviors that ease anxieties that are barriers to initiating interactions.

Recommendation 3: Advancing Accessibility and Availability for Students

Students are actively seeking more ways to connect with their professors. Traditionally, office hours were considered the primary and sometimes only means of additional interaction and communication with a professor. Later, email was introduced as an additional communication method. Today, professors have added virtual options like Zoom, online portals such as Blackboard and Canvas, and platforms like GroupMe. Some professors even go so far as to provide a cell phone number for phone calls and text messages.

Educational institutions and professors need to adopt a flexible and varied approach to communication and interaction with students. Students are aware that professors have a number of options available. Students may find professors who do not offer options as inaccessible, inflexible, and intimidating, thus reducing their engagement. Professors should continue to hold office hours and actively incorporate

modern methods. Doing so actively acknowledges and respects busy schedules, provides a better academic and personal balance, and creates opportunities for engagement.

While having multiple options available to students is essential, professors must be prompt and available for the options provided to their students. Professors should establish a personal tenet of responsiveness and timeliness in their responses. One such example of a tenet is:

> I commit to responding to all student emails within 24 hours on weekdays. If the question requires more time, I will send an initial response to acknowledge your request and give you an estimated timeframe. Additionally, I will reserve 15 minutes before and after each class for in-person student questions to ensure that I am available to you.

Professors should make an effort to be a part of the campus community. This recommendation acknowledges that professors encounter time constraints and engaging in outside the classroom activities may be difficult. However, a collective effort by professors to engage in outside the classroom activity can change the campus culture. Even a small interaction can play a role in enhancing student–faculty relationships. Students who see professors outside of the classroom will feel more at ease and connected with them. It breaks the formal barrier which leads to professors seeming more approachable and relatable. This can alter a campus culture to become one that is more open and collaborative in which students feel valued and supported.

Overall, students would like their professors to be more accessible. Although continuing to use accepted methods like office hours, faculty must recognize and utilize modern methods. However, these methods still require the professor to be timely and

responsive to student inquiries. In addition to using these methods and being timely, professors should make an effort to be a part of the campus community.

Recommendation 4: Communication and Feedback

Establishing clear lines of communication at the beginning of the semester is fundamental for student learning. Students enter college with an interest in engaging with their professors. Faculty who create clear lines of communication allow students to fully understand class expectations, feel comfortable asking questions, and reduce stress and anxiety. It also increases student engagement in the course material. Students are more inclined to find their classes more meaningful if clear instructions, explanations, and feedback are provided.

More specifically, a well-designed syllabus is a powerful communication tool for students. Because it is usually the first introduction students have to a class, it sets the tone and rhythm of the learning experience. Students often refer to the syllabus to review class expectations, assignments, deadlines, and grading criteria. The more clarity students can receive from the syllabus, the less confusion and misunderstandings they will have. Another benefit of crafting a well-designed syllabus is that it can provide guidelines for student–faculty interactions. Professors can communicate their preferred methods of communication, response times, and format of the class.

Similarly, students want professors to communicate the importance of office hours. Office hours are a fundamental resource for students to receive out-of-class support. While some participants were aware that office hours exist, they were unclear about how they can seek assistance or clarification. Effective and frequent communication of office hours enhances the student learning experience. Clearly stating

office hours on the syllabus as well as making it a first point of reference for students is critical. The first day of class can be a wonderful opportunity to emphasize the purpose and benefits of office hours.

Moreover, professors should consider using various communication channels such as email, learning management systems, and virtual platforms to communicate important information to students. Because students have varying schedules, offering flexibility in student–faculty engagement as well as providing alternative methods of contact is beneficial. Participants shared that they want to know that they can still engage with their professors even if they cannot attend meetings during the designated times. Professor flexibility also showcases to participants that they are committed to accommodating diverse schedules and learning styles. This allows students to manage their academic responsibilities more effectively. Participants appreciated professors who use responsive communication strategies as well. When participants receive a communication response promptly, they feel that their professors care about their learning.

Additionally, professors should consider seeking student feedback throughout the semester. Student feedback can be crucial in measuring the effectiveness of the class. Although it is impossible to cater to every student's individual needs, student feedback allows professors to make adjustments and accommodations as needed. Seeking student feedback also establishes clear and open lines of communication, which encourage students to share their questions and concerns. Overall, clarity in professor communication promotes student learning and success.

Student Professional and Personal Development

The support that professors provide their students is multifaceted. Professors strive to not only support students in their academic pursuits but in their personal and professional growth as well. Professors have a unique opportunity to guide students through the exploration of their interests, share advice on potential career paths, and relate course content to real-world applications. This strategy allows students to understand the practical relevance of what they are learning. Although students have many reasons for enrolling in college, the application of what is learned in college to a postgraduate opportunity is a common goal. Professors must engage students in conversations that challenge and broaden their perspectives. This not only creates a culture of care but allows students to build a supportive network to share their thoughts and opinions.

More specifically, challenging students' preconceptions from the media and high school is important. Many students graduate high school with many misconceptions about college. Participants expressed feeling nervous about their college professors being hostile and unhelpful. They admitted being pleasantly surprised when they learned otherwise. By directly addressing these misconceptions, an environment where students feel empowered to question assumptions is created. Students will not only feel more comfortable sharing their personal experiences, but it will also teach them how to make informed decisions and navigate difficult situations.

Similarly, professors need to encourage students to set personal and academic goals throughout the semester. Checking in regularly and discussing students' progress toward completing those goals is equally important. Faculty who provide students with

opportunities for discernment and self-reflection will motivate them to persist to degree completion. Professors who schedule individual goal-setting meetings with students are a personalized method of understanding student aspirations. The timing of these meetings is important to consider. Professors who schedule the meeting at the beginning of the semester serve as a powerful introduction for students, while scheduling the meeting in the middle of the semester serves as a check-in meeting. Those who ask students to journal regularly throughout the semester can also benefit students. Journaling provides a place and space for students to process what they are learning and reflect on how they will apply it to their long-term goals.

Additionally, professor mentorship significantly contributes to students' personal and professional growth. Participants share how they view many of their professors as role models. They seek the guidance and advice of their professors regarding how to succeed in a career. Mentorship has the potential to expand beyond the academic relationship, allowing students to develop life skills and create an individualized plan for success. It also helps students discover postgraduate opportunities, such as career events, research opportunities, and networking contacts they may have previously overlooked.

Lastly, professors should consider their students' mental health. While many professors may not be experts on healthy coping mechanisms, they should be informed about the campus support resources available to students and learn how to refer students as needed. Promoting self-care, open communication, flexibility and understanding, and a positive learning environment are examples of how professors can contribute to students' overall mental health. Professors should create an environment that focuses on the holistic development of students to increase student–faculty engagement.

Comfortable Learning Environment

Professors are not only responsible for teaching course content; they are also responsible for creating conducive learning environments. This study revealed that students appreciate and thrive in learning environments that cultivate comfort and care. For institutions wishing to increase retention, it is recommended that educators establish a comfortable and welcoming learning environment for students. One way professors can achieve this is by learning and using student names. Professors may also consider using icebreaker activities at the beginning of the semester. This not only allows them to familiarize themselves with their students but also serves as an opportunity for students to familiarize themselves with their professors. Findings from this study indicated that participants who feel they know more about their professors are more likely to feel comfortable engaging with them.

Professors can also encourage their students to ask questions and give feedback free of judgment to build welcoming learning environments. For example, professors should utilize “and” statements versus “but” statements when conversing with students. The word “but” tends to negate and dismiss whatever precedes it and may evoke future apprehension and/or defensiveness on the student’s behalf. Using “and” instead acknowledges what the student said and may invite further student discussion, thus fostering more effective communication. Constructive feedback from students can help professors understand student needs, goals, and perspectives. It is important to note that professors should be mindful when soliciting quiet students in class. Students who are asked to respond to questions in class can elicit anxiety.

Additionally, professors can use positive reinforcement to build student confidence and increase participation. Effective positive reinforcement should be immediate, frequent, and enthusiastic. Emphasis on student strengths in and outside the classroom can enhance the rapport that professors establish and can motivate further student engagement. Examples include but are not limited to giving praise on students' feedback, nominating students for awards, using students' work as examples with their permission, using student input to develop assignments, and offering commendable students letters of recommendation.

This study also revealed that students experience stress while managing their academic workload. Several participants described the inability to complete an assignment because of work or family obligations, lack of resources, or not understanding the assignment. Many described wanting to complete the assignment but not being given another opportunity to do it. Therefore, it is recommended that professors allow some flexibility in assignment deadlines to accommodate students' personal commitments and challenges. The researchers are not suggesting a no-penalty policy but rather constructing a policy that acknowledges students' time commitments and provides room for flexibility. For example, professors could adopt a late assignment policy that penalizes students with a point deduction or implement an extension request in which students must submit an explanation for a deadline extension. It is important to note that different subject matters may not conform to these parameters. When learning is the primary goal in a classroom, it may be counterproductive to deny students the opportunity to complete an assignment. Showing compassion and empathy can make students feel valued and can lead to increased motivation and engagement.

To maximize student learning, professors should create a welcoming and comfortable learning environment that promotes a sense of belonging and encourages students to express themselves without fear of judgment. Professors must find a balance that accommodates students' unique circumstances while maintaining academic rigor and standards. This approach can significantly contribute to a more effective and enjoyable learning atmosphere in which students actively participate in their learning.

Recommendation 5: Policies for Increasing Student–Faculty Engagement

Educational institutions must implement clear and effective policies to actively guide and encourage increased and quality interactions between students and professors. In order to do this, they should not just focus on developing professors but also on the importance of diversity and inclusion initiatives. These policies include measures that assist professors in enhancing engagement skills and also ensure that the university is striving to hire a diverse staff and build an inclusive academic environment.

Training programs focused on approachability, empathy, cultural sensitivity, and inclusive teaching methods are essential for increasing interactions with students. The focus of these training sessions should be specific. For example, how to increase office hour engagement by offering more flexible options or exploring student communication preferences. These programs should convey that it is important to continue to learn and adapt teaching practices and to promote a more welcoming and understanding atmosphere where students from all backgrounds feel valued and supported.

While training can be an effective tool to increase student–faculty interactions, student feedback should be utilized to identify areas of opportunity for improvement. End of semester evaluations are not always geared toward empathy and approachability.

These evaluations should be modified to not only assess academic performance and course content but also to gauge the effectiveness of professors in creating an empathetic, approachable, and inclusive learning environment.

In addition to using the end of semester evaluation to garner feedback from students, universities should consider implementing a comprehensive university-wide climate survey. These surveys may have an advantage over the end of semester evaluations because the students may feel less likely to have a grade affected by their response. End of semester evaluations are often completed before an official grade is posted so the climate survey may allow for less fear of repercussions and more candid feedback.

Universities and professors need to take the feedback from end of semester evaluations and the climate survey seriously, using it for continued professional development of professors and development of institutional policy. Rather than just a review of student comments, a process for setting specific goals for improvement should be implemented. This will allow a more targeted approach to improvement and allow the professors to focus on specific areas for the classroom while the university can focus on policy.

Lastly, universities need to ensure their hiring policies are contributing to fostering diversity. The university should have a hiring and retention strategy for diverse candidates and employees. Having a strategy in place helps ensure diverse talents are hired and also nurtured and retained within the university. For the purposes of faculty retention, universities should establish mentorships and professional programs tailored to

support the unique needs of diverse staff. The goal is to cultivate an inclusive workplace that visibly values diversity.

Additionally, universities must have a strategy and recruitment team in place to expand the hiring network of the university. These networks require a dedicated effort to access diverse talent pools. Recruiters have to establish partnerships with organizations and communities to assist in reaching a wider selection of diverse candidates. Some of these networks are not easy to find and others are set behind paywalls.

Increasing student–faculty interactions should be the explicit goal of both the professor and the administration. Although it is advantageous to encourage professors to be approachable, empathetic, and possess other similar qualities, it is also important to provide training and to evaluate student perception. Evaluating student perception can be done using professor evaluations and university-wide climate surveys to strategize on goals for improvement. Lastly, students will benefit from a formalized university strategy for the faculty retention and hiring of diverse professors and staff.

Future Research

Reflecting on our current research, How to increase student–faculty engagement for the retention of racially minoritized students?, areas of improvement and avenues for future exploration are recommended. One example is the use of a mixed-method approach. Using a qualitative approach allows us to gather student narratives and opinions. While valuable insights emerge, the quantitative dimension is absent, particularly regarding the size of the student population and the distribution of their sentiments. For example, some students reported that having a same-race professor is not important, but some of those same students recognized the benefits. An addition to the

survey instrument could be a question which probes whether respondents have ever had a professor of the same race. The addition of this question sheds light on whether students' responses are grounded in personal experiences or assumptions, which adds depth to the interpretation of their perceptions. Quantitative data about communication preferences, approachability, and questions about office hours provide a more comprehensive picture of the student–faculty relationship as well. Future research could implement two instruments to recollect participant responses rather than solely use recorded interviews (Hernández et al., 2014).

Similarly, because the interest was in the experiences of racially minoritized students, only students who identified within this group were surveyed. The inclusion of a comparison group, such as White students, is advised. This allows researchers to explore potential variations in responses to interview questions. Surveys were limited to students who identified as first-year students, aiming to explore student–faculty engagement during students' first year of college. Future research that focuses on older students or tracking students over time could showcase how student perceptions of faculty evolve or even change through the course of their academic experience. Likewise, exploring the perceptions of students who graduated or were not retained could offer insight into the long-term impact of student–faculty relationships as well.

Additionally, the current research focused on exploring student–faculty interactions from the student perspective. Expanding the scope of research to include faculty perspectives in a similar study would provide a holistic understanding of student–faculty relationships. The insight that faculty could provide regarding their interactions with students, especially concerning race-related dynamics, could complement the

student perspective. Lastly, as technology is evolving, it would be beneficial to examine various digital communication methods between students and faculty. Gaining a deeper understanding of how students and faculty engage virtually can unveil additional layers of the student–faculty relationship. It can also shed light on the role technology has in shaping these interactions.

Dissemination

In order to effectively diffuse and implement the results of this study, the researchers outline a dissemination strategy. This approach includes leveraging multiple channels, namely employment/social media platforms, industry conferences, and the researchers' networks and institutional affiliations. The research team developed a single page summary (Appendix G) and a brochure (see Appendix H) capturing the most important results in a manner that was reader and social media friendly. LinkedIn was chosen as the online platform to disseminate the important results to other industry professionals. Additionally, the researchers disseminated the research through respective networks and institutional affiliations which predominantly operate within the education field. In those institutions, strategic outreach to offices related to student affairs, retention, and faculty development is deployed. Furthermore, plans are underway to present findings at relevant industry conferences and symposiums. This will allow for broader academic engagement and foster opportunities for collaborative research. The researchers presented this study at the 2024 National Conference for the American Association of Blacks in Higher Education.

Implementation

The program design describes the implementation plan for a developed course with seven modules titled: Strategies for increasing student–faculty engagement.

Learning is a never-ending process, even for educators themselves. Faculty, more than anyone else, understand the significance of continuous learning. Professional development for faculty is an essential component of improving the educational experiences of students. Workshops, seminars, and conferences are types of professional development techniques that are used regularly by institutions to promote professional growth and improvement of skills. In addition, leading workshops is an important source of scholarship for educators. Therefore, the researchers designed a course to effectively showcase the results of this study. Accordingly, each module is devised and structured to align with each recommendation of this study.

There are seven modules with an estimated time frame of one hour each. Each module has an overview that names the target audience, discusses the importance of the content, and describes the supporting research from this study. Each module also contains learning outcomes, performance indicators, and exercises. Explicitly stated learning outcomes give attendees a preview of what they are expected to learn in the module. Learning outcomes also help facilitators structure the module and design exercises and audience discussions. Each exercise is meant to be collaborative and interactive to engage the audience. Every module has at least two exercises. Integrating active learning practices amplifies engagement and promotes deeper learning. At the conclusion of each module, an assessment survey that measures performance indicators will be given to attendees and collected by facilitators. Performance indicators allow attendees to

demonstrate the knowledge and skills they have taken away from each module. Facilitators will use this information for future improvement of the course.

There are seven modules designed for the course. Modules are stand-alone, therefore, institutions will be responsible for designing the implementation timeline. Modules may be administered in any order the institution sees fit. Course completion is based on institutions that host all modules, thus completing the course with a toolkit of communication strategies to increase student–faculty engagement would be highly advantageous. The course design follows.

Course: Strategies for Increasing Student–Faculty Engagement

Students spend the majority of their academic experiences in the classroom. Therefore, faculty play a critical role in students' academic learning, career development, and retention. This course is designed for those who want to learn strategic ways to increase interactions among students and faculty. This course contains seven standalone modules. This course will equip faculty with a comprehensive toolkit of communication strategies, which will foster an environment conducive to student learning, engagement, and success.

Module 1: Building Relationships Through Personalized Engagement

Building positive relationships between professors and students is crucial for a supportive and effective learning environment. Establishing a dynamic, one-on-one relationship with regular interactions with faculty can result in higher retention rates. Additional benefits of building these relationships include student persistence, increased retention, and academic performance. These activities facilitate peer learning where attendees can share their experiences and learn from each other. This collaborative

approach allows for the exchange of ideas and strategies. Facilitators will emphasize the role of empathy in building relationships with students. Facilitators will also integrate aspects of same-race student–faculty interactions if it does not emerge in the attendee comments. Facilitators will describe supporting research and share personal stories of building relationships with students. They will also discuss how those experiences helped their students and themselves. During this discussion, attendees will reflect on their own examples of effective relationships they have had with students.

- **Target Audience:** Faculty
- **Learning Outcomes:**

    1. Attendees will demonstrate ways to build personalized relationships with students.

    2. Attendees will apply techniques for empathetic engagement, emphasizing understanding and responding to students' emotional and academic needs.

- **Performance Indicator:**

    1. At the end of this session, attendees will write down at least three new items they will implement immediately to build more effective relationships with students.

    2. Attendees will identify specific empathetic engagement strategies they plan to implement, reflecting the module's focus on the role of empathy in fostering effective relationships.

Exercise 1.1: Exploring Student Commonalities and Interests

Use Poll Everywhere and have attendees answer the following questions and discuss each:

1. What are some examples of commonalities you have found with students? Additional talking points- Playing the same instrument, playing the same sport, similar hobbies, same vacation destinations, etc.
2. How did you learn about commonalities from question one? Additional talking points- Ice breakers at the beginning of each semester,
3. What are other practical ways to learn about students' interests? Additional talking points- Casual conversation before and after class, integrate personal anecdotes into lectures, encourage students to share personal information they are comfortable disclosing., etc.
4. How can professors support and/or show genuine curiosity in students' interests? Additional talking points- Ask questions about students' interests, attend campus events students are involved in, acknowledge student achievements, etc.

Exercise 1.2: Mindful Relationship Building

Facilitate a group discussion and answer the question "What precautions should professors take or be mindful of when building relationships with students?" Facilitators will use this discussion as an opportunity to address potential concerns attendees may have regarding building relationships with students.

Module 2: Approachability

This module underlines the importance of cultivating approachable behaviors for student–faculty interactions and how to make them evident to students. It demonstrates how positive behaviors will ease students' anxieties during interactions. This module will focus on putting into practice approachable behaviors: smiling, being a good listener, showing the human side, and maintaining a positive and encouraging attitude. Specifically, it helps attendees understand how approachable behaviors contrast with unapproachable behaviors by utilizing role play activities to demonstrate these differences.

- **Target audience:** Faculty
- **Learning Outcomes:**
    1. Attendees will understand the importance of smiling
    2. Attendees will practice being a good listener
    3. Attendees will demonstrate effective nonverbal communication
    4. Attendees will recognize the benefit of maintaining a positive and encouraging attitude
- **Performance Indicators:**
    1. Attendees will self-assess what behaviors they need to address for positive student–faculty interactions.
    2. Attendees will implement behaviors that positively impact student engagement.
    3. Attendees will keep track of every student interaction and reflect on both positive and negative interactions.

Exercise 2.1: Office Hours Roleplay

Attendees will be asked to role play a scenario and be asked to reflect.

Scenario 1: Unapproachable professor. Attendees will be asked to roleplay an office hour scenario where a professor is unapproachable and the student has an unpleasant experience during the interaction.

The professor will portray negative behaviors that are disrespectful and unwelcoming for a student attending office hours. This professor is in his office after having a bad day. His face is angry and frustrated and does not want to be there. The professor is off and distracted.

The student is going to office hours in regards to his grade. When the student arrives at the office, the professor is standoffish and does not even greet the student. The professor does not remember the student's name. The professor's facial expressions are unwelcoming and he is being a bad listener by continuing multitasking. The professor's behaviors are making the interaction difficult and almost impossible.

Scenario 1: Reflection

1. What behaviors were inappropriate or disrespectful?
2. How was the professor a bad listener?
3. How did the student feel?
4. What kind of emotions would the student experience?
5. How did the professor's bad behaviors prevent the student from addressing his concerns?
6. What things can the professor do better next time?

Scenario 2: Approachable professor. Attendees will be asked to roleplay an office hour scenario where a professor is approachable and the student is able to address all concerns during the interaction.

The professor will portray positive behaviors that are respectful of and welcoming for a student during office hours. The professor is trying to achieve multiple things, be productive, and clean his office. Despite these distractions, the professor has a positive attitude and is waiting to receive students during office hours.

The student is going to office hours in regards to his grade. When the student arrives, the professor greets him and smiles at the student. He stops all activities and is mindful of this interaction. The professor remembers the student name and a relevant contribution the student made in class. The professor seems unhurried and welcoming and his voice is friendly. This time the professor is a good listener, and shows empathy and understanding. This is a productive meeting.

Scenario 2: Reflection

1. What were the benefits of eliminating distracting behaviors?
2. What were the approachable behaviors that made the interaction welcoming?
3. How did the professor show active listening?
4. How was the professor positive and encouraging?
5. Contrast the students' feelings from Scenario 2.1 and Scenario 2.2
6. What other approachable behaviors could the professor implement?

Module 3: Advancing Accessibility and Availability for Students

This module aims to enhance student–faculty communication and engagement within educational institutions. It emphasizes the importance of prompt responses in

communication and highlights the role of responsiveness in student–faculty interactions by fostering trust and ensures students are feeling valued. The module encourages faculty to actively participate in campus community activities. The session also focuses on introducing faculty to modern communication methods to improve accessibility for students and discusses how to effectively incorporate these tools into their classroom practices.

- **Target Audience:** Faculty
- **Learning Outcomes:**
    1. Attendees will be introduced to the importance of timely responses and availability for student interactions.
    2. Attendees will understand and implement a variety of communication methods to increase effectiveness.
    3. Attendees will understand how campus community engagement contributes to a positive campus atmosphere, enhances student–faculty relationships, and strengthens the sense of community
- **Performance Indicators:**
    1. Ability to articulate a plan for timely email responses
    2. Immediate application of communication strategies in hypothetical scenarios presented during the module.
    3. Intent to adopt multiple communication platforms
    4. Immediate application and understanding of various communication platforms through practical exercises or scenarios conducted in the module.

5. Development of a personal plan for campus engagement, outlining potential activities and time commitments.
6. Assess attendees understanding of the impact of campus community engagement through discussion or reflective writing.

Exercise 3.1: Effective Email Strategies

Provide examples of email response policies and get feedback from the attendees on why prompt feedback is important.

Exercise 3.2: Digital Teaching Tools

Present studies or examples of successful use of platforms like Zoom, Blackboard, Canvas, and others. Demonstrate one or more of the methods used in the example provided. Facilitate a conversational exchange where faculty share their current practices that they perceive to be effective.

Exercise 3.3: Faculty on Campus Activities

Share stories or testimonials from faculty that participate in campus events. If possible, bring a faculty member to the workshop who can speak to how their engagement impacts students. Have the attendees assess their own schedules to see if they could realistically dedicate time to campus activities. Have them identify lower time commitment opportunities that could have a high impact. They should consider their own strengths and interests.

Module 4: Enhancing Student–Faculty Communication

Attendees will learn the importance of implementing effective communication strategies to enhance student learning and success. The focus will be on establishing clear lines of communication, utilizing a well-designed syllabus, and seeking student feedback.

To equip faculty with a comprehensive toolkit of communication strategies, this module aims to foster an environment conducive to student learning, engagement, and success.

- **Target Audience:** Faculty
- **Learning Outcomes:**
    1. Attendees will understand the fundamental role of clear communication in student learning.
    2. Attendees will recognize the syllabus as a powerful communication tool.
    3. Attendees will learn how feedback contributes to class effectiveness and adjustments.
- **Performance Indicators:**
    1. Attendees will recognize and articulate common communication challenges between faculty and students.
    2. Attendees will create effective communication strategies tailored to address identified communication challenges.
    3. Attendees will analyze a sample syllabus and accurately identify key elements that are crucial for clarity in class expectations, assignments, deadlines, and grading criteria.
    4. Attendees will be able to articulate specific strategies for soliciting feedback from students.

Exercise 4.1: Clear Lines of Communication

Attendees will be provided with scenarios of common communication challenges between students and faculty. Professors will then be asked to outline a communication

plan for each scenario, emphasizing clarity, preferred methods of communication, and response times.

Exercise 4.2: Syllabus Review

Attendees will be provided with a sample syllabus and be asked to identify key elements of the syllabus that contribute to clarity. Facilitators will moderate a discussion on the importance of each identified element in setting expectations and reducing student misunderstandings with the syllabus.

Exercise 4.4: Student Feedback

Attendees will be provided with a template for soliciting midsemester feedback from students. A discussion on the benefits of midsemester feedback and how it can inform adjustments will be facilitated. Professors who already collect student feedback will be asked to share their experiences.

Module 5: Supporting Students' Professional and Personal Development

Attendees will learn how to implement a holistic approach to supporting students in their academic, personal, and professional growth. Attendees will also gain the skills needed to guide students in exploring their interests, potential career paths, and real-world applications of course content. By helping students understand the practical relevance of their academics, professors will enable students to bridge the gap between college learning and postgraduate opportunities. To motivate professors to implement multifaceted support strategies, this approach aims to enhance student engagement and holistic development.

- **Target Audience:** Faculty
- **Learning Outcomes:**

1. Attendees will learn to initiate conversations that challenge students' preconceptions influenced by the media and high school.
2. Attendees will be equipped to encourage students to set both personal and academic goals, which will foster a sense of direction and purpose.
3. Attendees will learn to schedule personalized goal-setting meetings tailored to students' aspirations.
4. Attendees will understand the benefits of providing students with a structured space for processing and reflecting on their academic journey.
5. Attendees will be informed about campus support resources for student mental health and learn how to make appropriate referrals.

- **Performance Indicators:**
    1. Attendees will demonstrate an ability to connect their identified preconceptions to potential challenges in student–faculty relationships.
    2. Attendees will articulate strategies for incorporating student goal setting into their regular interactions with students.
    3. Attendees will collaboratively brainstorm and share creative ways to integrate guided journaling into different course formats.
    4. Attendees will actively participate in sharing campus resources related to mental health support.

Exercise 5.1: Challenging Preconceptions

Attendees will be asked to take a few minutes to write down any preconceptions they had about college before they attended. Facilitators will encourage honesty and an

exploration of assumptions. Attendees will then be divided into small groups and asked to share their reflections. Facilitators will begin a discussion on how these preconceptions may have influenced their interactions with their professors or expectations about their professors. Each group will be invited to share one to two insights from their discussions. Facilitators will emphasize how preconceptions can impact learning dynamics and student–faculty relationships.

Exercise 5.2: Goal Setting and Progress Monitoring

Fictional scenarios that represent students with varying academic and professional goals will be developed. Each scenario will contain student challenges and aspirations. Attendees will be assigned roles. Some will play the role of a professor, and others will play the role of a student. Each professor will receive a scenario with instructions on how to embody the assigned role. Professors will then engage in simulated one-on-one goal-setting meetings. Professors will be encouraged to ask probing questions and provide guidance that is tailored to the individual goals of each student. A debrief session will be facilitated to discuss the benefits and challenges of individualized goal-setting meetings.

Exercise 5.3: Student Journaling and Reflection

A set of guided prompts related to personal and academic growth will be distributed to professors. Attendees will have 10 minutes to respond to the prompts in a reflective journal entry. Attendees will then be paired and asked to share their journal entries. A facilitated discussion on the experience and insights gained through guided journaling will occur. The exercise will conclude with another facilitated discussion on the guidelines and structure for incorporating reflective journaling into the semester.

Exercise 5.4: Mental Health Support

Facilitators will provide a brief presentation of the prevalence of mental health challenges among college students and the impact on academic performance. Attendees will be asked to reflect on their own experiences or observations regarding students' mental health challenges. A large group discussion will be facilitated on the importance of recognizing and addressing students' mental health in the academic context. Campus resources will be shared, and attendees will be asked to share insights and strategies that they may have used in the past.

Module 6: Comfortable Learning Environment

Faculty are not only responsible for teaching course content, they are also responsible for creating conducive learning environments. Students appreciate and thrive in learning environments that cultivate comfort and care. In this module, facilitators will discuss what a comfortable learning environment is and share supporting research. Facilitators will also discuss how they create a comfortable learning environment for their classes. These activities facilitate peer learning where attendees can share their experiences and learn from each other. This collaborative approach allows for the exchange of ideas and strategies.

- **Target Audience:** Faculty
- **Learning Outcome:**
    1. Attendees will be able to integrate knowledge to create a comfortable learning environment for students.

2. Attendees will employ strategies to personalize the learning environment, fostering a sense of belonging and engagement among students.

- **Performance Indicator:**
    1. At the end of this session, attendees will write down at least three new items they can implement immediately to create a more comfortable learning environment for students.
    2. Attendees will present a late assignment policy they plan to adopt, reflecting considerations for flexibility, fairness, and academic integrity.

Exercise 6.1: Flexible Late Assignment Policy

Facilitators will briefly discuss the benefits of having a late work policy and how it relates to creating a comfortable learning environment (5 minutes). Then, in small breakout groups, attendees will create a late assignment policy (15-20 minutes). The policy should be concise, specific, and allow for flexibility in assignment deadlines. Afterward, attendees will debrief with the larger group to discuss the policies they have written.

Additional talking points for Exercise 6.1: Professors could adopt a late assignment policy that penalizes students with a point deduction or implement an extension request in which students must submit an explanation for a deadline extension. How practical are the policies the attendees created? Can those policies work for all classes? Can those policies work for all assignments?

Exercise 6.2: Comfortable Learning Environment

Think/Pair/Share. First, attendees should individually answer the question "How do I currently create a comfortable learning environment for students?" For approximately five minutes. Then, attendees will identify a partner and discuss their answers for approximately five minutes. Lastly, attendees will debrief with the larger group and discuss their thoughts.

Additional talking points for Exercise 6.2: learning and using student names as soon as possible, integrating ice-breaking activities at the beginning of the semester, encouraging students to ask questions and give feedback free of judgment, using positive reinforcement, etc.

Module 7: Policies for Increasing Student–Faculty Engagement

This module emphasizes the importance of student–faculty interactions through policy change. This module illustrates how empathy, approachability, and inclusivity in administrative practices contributes to increased positive student–faculty interactions. It also highlights the necessity of regular faculty training programs and the significance of utilizing student feedback through evaluations and climate surveys.While it is important for faculty to address individual styles and teaching methods, the establishment of institutional policies ensures a consistent and comprehensive approach to these interactions.

- **Target Audience:** Administration and Faculty
- **Learning Outcomes:**
    1. Attendees will understand the role of institutional policies for promoting and sustaining student–faculty interactions.

2. Attendees will grasp the role of student feedback through evaluations and climate surveys in shaping policy.
3. Attendees will recognize the necessity of diversity and inclusivity in faculty recruitment and retention strategies.
4. Attendees will gain insights into organizing faculty development programs that emphasize empathy, cultural sensitivity, and inclusivity.
5. Attendees will acquire skills to strategically utilize student feedback to guide policy decisions and identify areas to improve faculty engagement and teaching methods.

- **Performance Indicators:**
    1. Attendees will be able to develop a concise plan that outlines how the institution can enhance student–faculty communication. This plan should include specific policy recommendations aimed at ensuring timely and effective interactions between faculty and students.
    2. Attendees will be able to discuss the usage of current evaluation and survey data and ideas for improvement.
    3. Attendees will be able to list potential strategies and advantages of integrating various communication platforms.
    4. Attendees will be able to provide a list of ideas for enhancing existing diversity and inclusion initiatives on campus. They will also be able to suggest strategies for hiring and retention practices to further support those ideas and to reinforce a diverse and inclusive campus environment.

5. Attendees will be able to engage in a reflective discussion where they can demonstrate their understanding of how policy can impact faculty involvement in the campus community and how this engagement is important to increase quality student–faculty interactions.

Exercise 7.1: Communication Plans

Attendees will work in groups to develop a plan outlining how the institution can enhance student–faculty communication. This exercise includes drafting policy recommendations to ensure timely and effective interactions.

Exercise 7.2: Assessing and Improving Student Feedback Policy

Attendees will work in groups to assess the effectiveness of existing policies governing student evaluations and climate surveys. They will identify opportunities for leveraging feedback from evaluations and surveys for improving student–faculty interactions.

Exercise 7.3: Communication Platforms

Attendees will participate in a brainstorming session to list potential strategies for integrating various communication platforms into the institutions's practices. This exercise will focus on identifying the advantages and challenges of each platform and how they can be used to improve communication.

Exercise 7.4: Inclusion Strategies

Attendees will develop a list of actionable ideas to enhance existing diversity and inclusion initiatives for inclusivity in the classroom as well as ideas for hiring and retention practices.

Exercise 7.5: Faculty Involvement

Attendees will engage in a discussion focused on how institutional policies impact faculty involvement in the campus community and how faculty involvement in the community can benefit students.

Chapter Summary

Low student–faculty engagement is a nationwide problem for higher education institutions (Briody et al., 2019; Cox et al., 2010; Griffin et al., 2014, Johnson et al., 2020). This study sought to identify strategies to increase student–faculty engagement for the retention of racially minoritized students. It was discovered that, although students have a desire to interact with professors, there were barriers that kept them from being active participants. Some of the barriers included, but were not limited to, apprehension in face-to-face communication with professors, approachability of professors, and challenges related to electronic communication. Understanding and addressing these factors can contribute to fostering more meaningful and proactive student–faculty engagement.

The researchers of this study offered recommendations that professors and institutions can implement to initiate a shift towards enhancing student–faculty engagement for racial minority students. Recommendations for professors to encourage relationship building included creating commonalities with students, incorporating personal information into lectures, and connecting with students whom they believe share similar racial or ethnic backgrounds. It was also recommended that professors aim to foster an approachable demeanor that counteracts initial anxieties students may experience in a college setting. Professors can achieve this by being good listeners,

having a friendly tone of voice, displaying a positive attitude, and showing empathy. Another recommendation was for educational institutions and professors to embrace a flexible and varied approach to communicating and interacting with students. Professors should employ diverse communication methods, be responsive and timely when communicating, and actively engage in the campus community.

Next, it is recommended professors establish clear lines of communication at the beginning of the semester. To accomplish this, professors should craft a well-designed syllabus, emphasize the importance of office hours, use various communication channels, and seek student feedback. Additionally, it is recommended that professors not only support students' academic experiences, they should support students' professional and personal development. Professors need to assist students in setting personal and professional goals, provide mentorship opportunities, and consider students' mental health wellness. It is also recommended that professors create a comfortable learning environment to cultivate comfort and care. To achieve this, professors should familiarize themselves with students, utilize positive reinforcement, and allow for flexibility in assignment deadlines.

It is also recommended that educational institutions garner administrative support and professional development opportunities for professors. Institutions should incorporate training programs related to cultural sensitivity and inclusive teaching methods. They should also modify course evaluations to encompass assessments of professors' effectiveness in terms of empathy, approachability, and promoting inclusive learning. Furthermore, practices such as conducting campus climate surveys and

implementing diverse hiring policies are recommended strategies for enhancing and achieving improvement goals for institutions.

The researchers identified areas for future investigation that could enhance and broaden the scope of student–faculty engagement in higher education. Future research could include utilizing a mixed-method approach, including a comparison group of White students, and incorporating the faculty perspective on this topic. The researchers also developed a dissemination plan to publicize the results of this study which includes a social media campaign on LinkedIn. Finally, a course was designed that can be implemented into practical use. The course includes seven standalone modules, each featuring a variety of exercises to be implemented.

Exploring the reasons behind the reluctance of racially minoritized first-year college students to engage with faculty was a crucial step in identifying effective strategies for enhancing student–faculty interactions. Increased interaction between students and faculty offers numerous benefits for students such as persistence, satisfaction, and degree completion. An interdependent relationship exists between the effectiveness of student–faculty engagement and the promotion of retention on college campuses.

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Appendix A: Prescreening Email

Subject: $20 Amazon Gift Card-Invitation to Participate in Study

Greetings (insert name of college) Student,

We would like to request your assistance with our dissertation research. We are doctoral students at the University of Missouri St. Louis. We are working on our dissertation research and need your assistance. Our research question is: How can institutions increase student–faculty interactions for racially minoritized students who identify as first-time first-year students? We are looking for study participants who identify as American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic Latino, multi-ethnic, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander.

Selected participants will be interviewed for 20-30 minutes to discuss interactions with faculty members and how those interactions might influence retention.

The interview will be conducted over Zoom and will be recorded. Participation is voluntary and you can opt out or decline to answer a question at any time. This study poses minimal risk but may bring up feelings about a past experience with a professor.

Students that participate in the interview process will receive a $20 Amazon gift card for participating.

If you are interested in participating in this research, please fill out the short survey at the following link. If selected, a member of the research team will reach out to schedule an interview.

INSERT LINK

If you have questions please feel free to reach out to any/all of the researchers listed below.

Shanee Haynes, MS, sehkt3@umsl.edu

Rayza Rolón-Nieves, MPA, ryr3k3@umsl.edu

Kevin Wathen, MPA, kmw9tw@umsl.edu

Jordan Watson, MEd, jmwwf5@umsl.edu

Appendix B: Prescreening Questions

1. Name:
2. Preferred email: to be used to schedule interview
3. Preferred phone: to be used to schedule interview and to call in the event of technical difficulties
4. Age
    a. Under 22
    b. 22-30
    c. 31-39
    d. 40-49
    e. 50 or over
5. Gender
    a. Male
    b. Female
    c. Transgender
    d. Non-binary
    e. Other
    f. Prefer not to answer
6. Ethnicity
    a. American Indian or Alaska Native
    b. Asian
    c. Black or African American
    d. Hispanic-Latino
    e. Multi-Ethnic
    f. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
    g. White
    h. Prefer not to say
7. First-generation student (A student whose parent(s) did not complete a two-year or four-year degree.)
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. unknown

Appendix C: Email to Rejected Participants

Subject: Your participation in research study

Greetings (insert name of college) Student,

Thank you so much for your interest in our research study. We understand that your time is important and we appreciate your willingness to assist us in our research.

We want to inform you that we have filled the interview schedule and will not require your assistance. Thank you again and best wishes on your educational pursuits.

Shanee Haynes, MS

Rayza Rolón-Nieves, MPA

Kevin Wathen, MPA

Jordan Watson, MEd

Appendix D: Interview Protocol and Questions

Interview Protocol

Thank you for volunteering to answer some questions for us/me today. My name is_____ and this is_____, we are EdD students at the University of Missouri–St. Louis. We are conducting research on how to increase student–professor interactions with racially minoritized students. We are defining student–professor interactions as those interactions that involve both in-class and out-of-class engagement with professors. Some examples include in-class approachability, chatting in the hall, office hours, professor mentorship, etc. The purpose of this study is to learn best practices for racially minoritized students as it relates to increasing interactions with professors. Information gathered here today may be used for the purpose of our dissertation study. The interview will take approximately 20 to 30 minutes. We would like to remind you that you can stop at any point or decline to answer any questions. As part of our note taking, we would like to audio record this interview. Only researchers on our team will have access to this recording. Would it be okay if we audio/video-record this interview? (yes/no). You were previously provided an informed consent document, do you have any questions about that or anything else before we begin?

Opening Questions/Rapport Building

We want to have a conversation and talk about your experiences. We'll tell you about us. Tell us about yourself. What is your major? What made you enroll in college. What did you think your professor would be like? Is that how they ended up being?

Research Question 1: How can institutions increase student–faculty interactions for racial minority students who identify as first-time first-year students?

1. What motivates you to engage with professors?
2. What interactions with professors do you have? Of those interactions, why did you pick those?
3. What led you to have more interactions with certain professors more than others?
    a. What led you to interact less with some professors?
    b. (Did they provide examples?)

Research Sub-Question 1a: Even though office hours are one of the sole support options faculty offer their students, why don't students use them more?

4. How do you like to communicate with your professor? Why?
    a. What is your least favorite way to communicate with your professor? Why?
5. Do you think office hours are important for students to attend? Why?
6. Why do you use office hours? (a one-on-one setting in which students seek assistance from their professors)
    a. If you don't use them, why not?
    b. If you do use them, tell me about your experience.
        - Why don't you use them more?
7. What could your professors do to make you come to office hours more?

Research Subquestion: Do in-class interactions influence approachability of faculty outside of the classroom?

8. There are other opportunities to engage with professors that are not during scheduled class time. (before/after class, hallway, sporting events, etc) What is your experience with these types of interactions?

9. What conversations with professors do you consider to be the most beneficial?

10. How do you see professors supporting your personal development (things outside of class)?

11. What can professors do to increase student–professor interactions?

12. Do you want to engage more with your professor?

13. What makes a professor approachable to you?

    a. Does that make you interact more or less with your professor outside of class?

Research SubQuestion: Does racial identity of faculty play a role in whether or not minoritized students interact with some faculty and not others?

14. Is it important that a professor look like you? If so, why is it important?

15. How does the racial identity of your professor influence your interactions? (did they offer an experience where race may be a factor)

16. In what ways would a professor mentor that is the same race as you be beneficial? (mentor: advisor in both education and non education related support)

Closing Questions

17. Tell me about a time that you had a positive experience with your professor.

18. Tell me about a time that you had a negative experience with your professor.

19. Do you plan to return to SIUE in Fall 2023?

    a. (yes) How has student–professor interactions impacted that decision?

        i. (has not impacted) How do you think these interactions could affect the decision to return either positively or negatively?

    b. (no) If you are NOT returning, how has student–professors interactions impacted that decision?

20. How can SIUE (_____) increase student–professor interactions?

Appendix E: Individual and Collective Coding Example

Participant #1	Individual First Coding	Collective Coding
Question	Researcher Name:	
What motivates you to engage with professors?		
What interactions with professors do you have? Of those interactions, why did you pick those?		

Appendix F: Developed Categories and Subcategories

Main Research Question	Subquestions	Interview Questions	Category	Subcategory
How can institutions increase student-faculty interactions for racial minority students who identify as first-time freshmen?	Rapport, Perception of College from High School	**1. What did you think your professor would be like? Is that how they ended up being?**	Expectations and Preconceptions	High School Influences Professor Expectations General College Expectations
			Professor Characteristics	Perceived Negatives Perceived Positives
			Teaching and Learning Methods	Classroom Dynamics Assignment Dynamics
			Student Professor Interactions	Communication Bias and Favoritism
			High School vs. College Comparisons	Differences Similarities
		2. What motivates you to engage with professors?	Academic Performance & Clarification	Struggles & Clarification Grades & Recognition
			Engagement & Participation	Class Participation Office Hours and Direct Interaction
			Relationship Building	Building Rapport Professional & Future Orientated Professors' Personality & Approach
			Learning Environment & Experience	Classroom Environment & Materials Course Content & Teachers
			Personal Factors & Perspectives	High School Background & Transition Individual Needs & Attitude Future Focus & Professionalism
			Feedback and Communication	Seeking Assistance & Feedback Casual Conversations & Communication Style
How can institutions increase student-faculty	How can	**3. What interactions with professors do you have? Of those interactions, why did**	Professor Communication	Virtual Communication In-Person Communication In-Class Communication
			Academic Support	Assistance with Assignments Seeking Professor Clarification
			Office Hour Usage	Frequency & Regularity Convenience & Timing
			Development of Personal	Nature of Interaction

Main Research Question	Subquestions	Interview Questions	Category	Subcategory
student-faculty interactions for racial minority students who identify as first-time freshmen?	How can institutions increase student-faculty interactions for racial minority students who identify as first-time freshmen?	**you pick those?**	Relationships with Professors	Personal & Cultural Connection
			Outside of class interactions	Before Class Interactions After Class Interactions Non-Class Interactions
			Perception of Professor Interactions	Positive Negative/Limited
		4. What led you have more interactions with Professors	Relevance to Major/Class rigor	Student Interest in Class Class Difficulty and Relevance to Major Increases Professor Interactions Easy Classes and Non-relevent classes decreases Professor Interactions
			Professor approachability	Positive Professor Negagive Professor Characteristics Professor Interest in Subject Matter First Impressions of Professor
			Professor Communication/Teaching Style	Positive Communication/Teaching Preferences Negative Communication/Teaching Preferences Academic Support & Assignment Clarification Class Environment & Structure
			Professor Responses to Student Inquiries	Detailed Responses Increases Interactions Short/No Responses Decreases Interactions
			Professor Cultural Understanding	Representation & Diversity Shared Experiences & Understanding Unspoken Connection & Perception
			Development of Personal Relationships with Professors	Personal Connection & Conversation Encounters outside the
How can institutions increase student-faculty interactions for racial minority students who identify as first-time freshmen?		**5. How do you like to**	Convenience	Email In-Person Communication Phone Call

Main Research Question	Subquestions	Interview Questions	Category	Subcategory
How can institutions increase student-faculty interactions for racial minority students who identify as first-time freshmen?	What are the reasons students do not use office hours, which are one of the sole support options faculty offer their students?	**communicate with your professor? Why?**		Zoom Text Message
			Inconvenience	Email In-Person Communication Zoom
		6. What is your least favorite way to communicate with your professor? Why?	Discomfort/Avoiding Anxiety	Talking in-person Electronic Communication
			Inconvenience	Email Zoom
			Desire for In-Person	Preference for In-Person Real time Connection
		7. Do you think office hours are important for students to attend? Why?	Perceived Importance of Office Hours	Positive Views Nuetral or Conditional Views Negative Views
			Benefits of Attending Office Hours	Academic Understanding and Assistance Student-Professor Relationship Student Performance and Stuggles Communication and Engagement
			Barriers and Concerns	Barriers to Utilization Benefits for Learning and Support Buiding Connections
		8. Why do you use office hours? (a one-on-one setting in which students seek assistance from their professors) If you don't use them, why not? If you do use them, tell me about your experience. Why don't you use them more?	Clarification & Understanding	General Clarification Topic-Specific Questions Grades and Performance Assignments & Tests Seeking Feedback
			Personal Interaction & Building Rapport	Building Relationship Professor Approachability
			Preference & Comfort in Communication	Privacy & One-on-One Interaction Avoid Group Judgement Digital vs. In-Person
			Scheduling and Accessibility	Constraints & Challenges Using Alternative Modes of Assistance Various Reasons
			Communication & Awareness	Reminders & Notices Clarifying Purpose

Main Research Question	Subquestions	Interview Questions	Category	Subcategory
How can institutions increase student-faculty interactions for racial minority students who identify as first-time freshmen?		**9. What could your professors do to make you come to office hours more?**	Motivation & Incentives	Driving Attendance Direct Encouragements
			Personal Interaction & Relatability	Building Relationship Overcoming Anxieties
			Accessiblity & Flexibility	Scheduling & Availability Improving Interaction Quality
			Content & Academic Assistance	Clarification and Guidance Materials & In-Depth Discussions Exploring Wider Topics
How can institutions increase student-faculty interactions for racial minority students who identify as first-time freshmen?		**10.There are other opportunities to engage with professors that are not during scheduled class time. (before/after class, hallway, sporting events, etc) What is your experience with these types of interactions?**	Frequency and Visibility of Professors	Limited Visibility Constraints & Limitations Occacional/Specific Visibility
			Nature of Interactions	Casual/Social Interactions Academic or Professional Interactions Influenced by Professor's Disposition/Mood Desire for More Interactions Quality of Interactions
		11. What conversations with professors do you consider to be the most beneficial?	How/When to Initiate Those Conversations	Timing and Context for Initiating Initiating Conversations
			Professor Behaviors and Characteristics	Approachability Treatment Comfort Professionalism and Care
			Benefits from Conversations	Building Positive Relationships Enhancing Learning and Acadimic Performance
			Academic Support	Building Relationship Enhancing Academic Performance
			Advising and Guidance	Career and Professional Advice Life Skills and Events
		12. How do you see	Post-Graduate Opportunities	Career and Professional Advice Scholarships & Graduate
				Major/Class Selection

Main Research Question	Subquestions	Interview Questions	Category	Subcategory
How can institutions increase student-faculty interactions for racial minority students who identify as first-time freshmen?	Do in-class interactions influence approachability of faculty outside of the classroom?	**12. How do you see professors supporting your personal development (things outside of class)?**	Academic Planning	Professor Knowledge & Exptertise
			Professor Positive Behaviors	Student Affirmations & Support Student Focused Engagement
			Out-of Class Engagement	Extracurricular Sport Volunteer & Community Service
		13. What can professors do to increase student-professor interactions	Professor In-Class Behaviors	Approachability Characteristics Negative Characteristics
			Structure of Class	Teaching Style/Class Instruction Class Environment
			Creation of Student Relationships	Student Treatment Preferences Out-of-class Engagement
		14. Do you want to engage more with your professor?	Engagement Level	Increased Decreased Comfort with Current Level
			Behaviors	Student Characteristics and Behaviors Positive Professor Behaviors Class Environment Student-Faculty Relationship Academic Support
		15. What makes a professor approachable to you?	Personal Interaction and Building Rapport	Engagment through Personal Connection Positive Professor Demeanor and Energy
			Professor Teaching Style and Dynamics	Engagment through Teaching Approach Fostering Classroom Freedom and Adaptability
			Professor's Characteristics and Behaviors	Positive Negative
			Specific Categories	Personal Connection and Approachability Classroom Dynamics and Freedom Communication and Responsiveness Genuine and Authentic Professionalism and Care Relatability and Appearance

Main Research Question	Subquestions	Interview Questions	Category	Subcategory
How can institutions increase student-faculty interactions for racial minority students who identify as first-time freshmen?		**16.Does that make you interact more or less with your professor outside of class?**	Affirmation and Benefits	Positive Responses Benefits from Outside of Class Interactions
			Factors That Makes Students Interact Less	Professor Negative Qualities Unapproachability Availability and Scheduling Different Treatment
			Factors That Make Students Interact More	Professor Positive Qualities Influences From Professors Teaching Style and Dynamics
	Does the racial identity of faculty play a role in how minoritized students interact with some faculty and not others?	**17. Is it important that a professor look like you? If so, why is it important?**	Perceived Benefits	Relatability and Shared Experiences Comfort and Well-Being Support and Mentorship
			Importance of Representation and Diversity Among Professors	Positive Impact of Representation Recognition of Limited Diversity Relavance of Ethnicity in Specific Courses
			Perception of Impact	Race Has No Impact Diversity is Valuable But May Not Be Critical
		18. How does the racial identity of your professor influence your interactions? (did they offer an experience where race may be a factor)	Little to No Impact of Interactions	Interaction Neutrality Viewing Professors as Individuals
			Comfortability with Same Race Professors	Comfort and Relatability Perceived Understanding and Empathy Building Supportive Environments Language Comfort and Communication
			Benefits of Same Race Professors	Connections Regular Check-Ins Diversity Seen in Profesors
How can institutions increase student-faculty			Professors As Individuals; Not Based on Race	Student's Approach to Professors Recognition of Diversity and Respect
				Perception of Professor Biases

Main Research Question	Subquestions	Interview Questions	Category	Subcategory
interactions for racial minority students who identify as first-time freshmen?			Stereotypes and Biases of Professors	Impact of Stereotypes and Predudices Differential Treatment and Frustration
		19. In what ways would a professor mentor that is the same race as you be beneficial? (mentor: advisor in both education and non education related support)	Benefits	Relatability Comfortability Advisor for Professional and Personal Matters Diversity/Representation
			Non-race Considerations	Experiences Other Considerations
How can institutions increase student-faculty interactions for racial minority students who identify as first-time freshmen?		**20.Tell me about a time that you had a positive experience with your professor?**	Academic Support	Course Content Assistance Positive Interactions
			Teaching Style and Dynamics	Positive Classroom Environment Feeling Valued Interactive and Engaging Methods Supportive Interactions Energy & Climate Emotional Support and Verbal Praise Out-of Class Alternative Settings
			Advising and Guidance	Academic and Career Guidance Mentorship and Support
			Professor Characteristics and Behaviors	Personal Connection and Building Rapport Professionalism Communication and Responsiveness Genuine and Authentic Passion Approachabiliy and Accessiblity Relatabbility and Shared Experiences Comfort
			Academic Style and Academic	Negative Academic Experiences

Main Research Question	Subquestions	Interview Questions	Category	Subcategory
How can institutions increase student-faculty interactions for racial minority students who identify as first-time freshmen?	Closing Questions	**21.Tell me about a time that you had a negative experience with your professor?**	Academic Style and Academic Support	Communication and Interaction Challenge Professionalism and Care
			Approachability and Accessiblity	Professor Attitude Impact of Student-Professor Relationship Cultural and Diversity Understanding Comfort
		22. Do you plan to return to this school in Fall 2023?(yes) How has student-professor interactions impacted that decision? (has not impacted) How do you think these interactions could affect the decision to return either positively or negatively? (no) If you are NOT returning, how has student-professors interactions impacted that decision?	Impact of Student-Professor Interactions on Decision	Positive Impact (Influence to Stay0 Neutral/Varied Impact
			Affecting Interactions	Transfer Consideration External Factors Need for Inclusion and Diversity
			Professor Impact	Positive Aspects of Professors Negative Aspects of Professors Role of Professors in Learning and Development
		23. How can this school increase student-professor interactions?	Office Hours & Accessibility	Scheduling and Attendance Accessibility & Promotion
			Class Engagement & Interaction	Classroom Dynamics Activities & Events
			Feedback & Communication	Feedback & Encouragment Support Mechanisms
			Relationship Building & Approachability	Trust & Connection Class Environment & Community
			Cultural Awareness & Inclusion	Promoting Inclusion & Diversity Cultural & Backgroung Understanding Training and Guidance

Appendix G: Single Page Summary

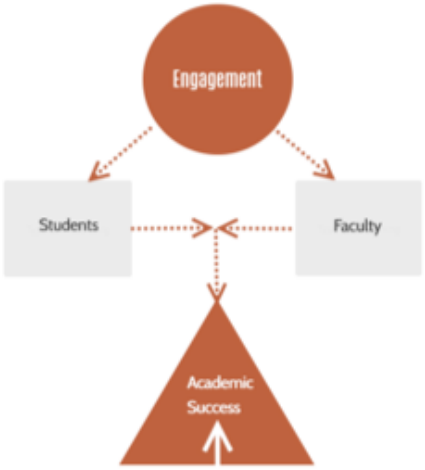
Student–Faculty Engagement Solutions for Retention of Racially Minoritized Students

SHANEE HAYNES, RAYZA ROLÓN-NIEVES, KEVIN WATHEN, & JORDAN WATSON

This document provides a comprehensive snapshot of our dissertation, including key findings, recommendations, and future research directions, making it accessible to a diverse audience.

Overview

Student–faculty interactions have positive impacts on student success. To increase academic performance through student–faculty interaction, both parties must provide and pursue those interactions.



Problem

Despite the acknowledged importance of student–faculty engagement in enhancing student retention, the frequency of these interactions remains limited, particularly impacting racially minoritized students. This qualitative study delves into the factors contributing to the infrequency of student–faculty engagement and aims to provide insights to increase interactions, focusing on first-year students.

Research Question

How can institutions increase student–faculty interactions for racially minoritized students who identify as first-time first-year students?

Subquestions:

- What are the reasons behind students' underutilization of office hours, a critical support option offered by faculty?

- How do first-generation students perceive student–faculty engagement, and does it differ from non-first-generation students?
- To what extent do in-class interactions influence the approachability of faculty outside the classroom?
- Does the racial identity of faculty play a role in how minoritized students interact with them?

Results and Themes

Results	Themes
Utilization of Office Hours	Students navigate barriers hindering academic progress.
Student–Faculty Communication	Students value holistic support for personal development to enhance their educational experience.
Perceptions of First-Generation College Students	Students desire professors to exhibit characteristics promoting relationship building.
Faculty Approachability	A welcoming and comfortable learning environment is crucial for student engagement.
Racially Diverse Faculty	Diversity in faculty positively influences student–faculty interactions.

Key Recommendations

Build Relationships Through Personalized Engagement: Emphasize peer learning, sharing experiences, and fostering a supportive community.

Establish Clear Lines of Communication: Develop comprehensive communication plans, highlight the importance of office hours, and utilize diverse communication channels.

Create a Comfortable Learning Environment: Encourage a late work policy and implement strategies for immediate feedback and positive reinforcement.

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Appendix H: Brochure

STUDENT-FACULTY ENGAGEMENT SOLUTIONS FOR RETENETION OF RACIALLY MINORITIZED STUDENTS

SHANEE HAYNES, RAYZA ROLÓN-NIEVES, KEVIN WATHEN AND JORDAN WATSON

This document provides a comprehensive snapshot of our dissertation, including key findings, recommendations, and future research directions, making it accessible to a diverse audience.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How can institutions increase student-faculty interactions for racially minoritized students who identify as first-time first-year students?

Subquestions:

- What are the reasons behind students' underutilization of office hours, a critical support option offered by faculty?
- How do first-generation students perceive student-faculty engagement, and does it differ from non-first-generation students?
- To what extent do in-class interactions influence the approachability of faculty outside the classroom?
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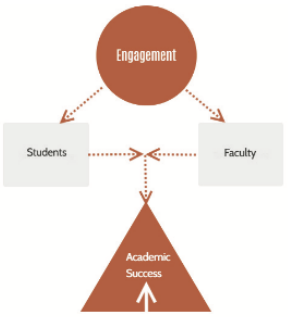
OVERVIEW

Student–faculty interactions have positive impacts on student success. To increase academic performance through student–faculty interaction, both parties must provide and pursue those interactions.



PROBLEM

Despite the acknowledged importance of student-faculty engagement in enhancing student retention, the frequency of these interactions remains limited, particularly impacting racially minoritized students. This qualitative study delves into the factors contributing to the infrequency of student faculty engagement and aims to provide insights to increase interactions, focusing on first-year students.

RESULTS AND THEMES

RESULTS	THEMES
Utilization of Office Hours	Students navigate barriers hindering academic progress.
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KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH PERSONALIZED ENGAGEMENT:

Emphasize peer learning, sharing experiences, and fostering a supportive community.

ESTABLISH CLEAR LINES OF COMMUNICATION:

Develop comprehensive communication plans, highlight the importance of office hours, and utilize diverse communication channels.

CREATE A COMFORTABLE LEARNING ENVIRONTMENT:

Encourage a late work policy and implement strategies for immediate feedback and positive reinforcement.

COURSE SUMMARY

To effectively address these findings, we've introduced targeted class modules designed to enrich student-faculty engagement. These modules focus on cultivating approachability, personalized engagement, effective communication, and holistic support, aiming to dismantle barriers to interaction, particularly for first-year and racially minoritized students.

MODULES

MODULE 1:

Emphasizes fostering positive professor-student relationships through personalized engagement, aiming to improve retention and academic performance.

MODULE 2:

Focuses on teaching faculty approachable behaviors to enhance student engagement and reduce anxieties, using role-play to illustrate effective communication.

MODULE 3:

Enhances faculty-student communication with modern tools and responsiveness, promoting accessibility and community engagement for better learning outcomes.

MODULE 4:

Improves educational experiences by teaching clear communication strategies, emphasizing the importance of syllabi, office hours, and student feedback.

MODULE 5:

Equips faculty to support students' holistic development, focusing on challenging preconceptions and setting personalized goals for academic and professional growth.

MODULE 6:

Creates a comfortable learning environment by fostering comfort and care, encouraging faculty to implement flexible policies and engaging practices.

MODULE 7:

Highlights the role of institutional policies in promoting student-faculty interactions, emphasizing empathy, inclusivity, and the strategic use of student feedback.