

3 May, 2019

# Honors Thesis Proposal

Working Title: Racial and Cultural Ideologies: Is being different bad?

## Project Purpose

The purpose of this project is to distinguish the effect of the lack of diversity at BYU on the lives of BYU students. It is well known that BYU student population is itself is 99% LDS and 82% White, with faculty statistics being quite similar (90% white). (College Factual 2019) The purpose of this project is to distinguish if this lack of diversity has any effect on how students rate their experience at BYU, and which specific factors are correlated with negative and positive experiences at BYU.

## Project Importance

Having been part of the Multicultural Student Services office for the entirety of my time at BYU, I have had the luxury of interacting with most of the minority students that have been at BYU for the last five years. A common theme during many of these interactions is how out of place minority students have felt at BYU due to how they are perceived by their peers. With the Restore Honor movement being centered around the discrimination felt by minority students (be that racial, ethnic, gender or LGBTQIA+ minorities) it is apparent that this is a common sentiment. Thus, I feel that finding an empirical link between student experiences and their racial, ethnic, and social identities, would be crucial to helping BYU become a better place by recognizing where things are lacking. Sociology centers around recognizing social problems and how they disproportionately affect groups in society, and by doing so encourage progress. This project seeks to do the same.

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Much research has been done about the experiences of minority students in colleges across the United States. Many have focused in on narrow groups (i.e. Latinos in STEM majors, experiences of Asian-Americans or Pacific Islanders [AAPI], etc.) and the different factors that

are at play when it comes to their college experience. In a study done on AAPI students at the University of California, Los Angeles, researchers found that faculty of the same ethnicity as students not only gave AAPI students role models, but also gave students a sense of belonging. (Nguyen et al. 2018) We know that a sense of belonging has been identified in the literature as an important contributor to student success. (Cole and Espinoza 2008) In the study on AAPI students at UCLA it was found that students who had relationships with AAPI faculty members tended to report a positive impact on their experience and view of campus climate. (Nguyen et al. 2018) In a separate study, it was found that “students who had positive interpersonal relationships with faculty are less inclined to report observations and experiences of campus prejudice,” and that these relationships with faculty helped mitigate the negative campus climate. (Cress 2008) This project seeks to analyze the factors associated with positive and negative views of campus climate here at BYU. These views of campus climate affect student experience overall, and due to the aforementioned lack of diversity, could be of greater impact on BYU students than we can currently see.

### Project Overview

In a study done on 130 American colleges campuses, it was discovered that overall students of color “have racialized experiences, encounter racism on predominantly White campuses, and perceive campus climate more negatively than their White peers.” (Nguyen et al. 2018) The literature gives us reason to believe that there could be a negative view of campus climate from students of color. In this same study, it was reported that students of color were also more likely than their white peers to notice acts of discrimination against members of the LGBTQ community, which also contributed to their view of a negative campus climate. This is important because it was the act of noticing discrimination that helped in the creation of the students view of the campus climate as negative. This therefore demonstrates that a negative

view of campus climate is not exclusive to people of color, but to anyone that notices acts of discrimination.

Thus, in seeking to research overall student experience, this project will give insight into what factors contribute to views of negative campus climate and positive campus climate, specifically at BYU. A positive campus climate would provide students with a sense of belonging, which is an important contributor to student success, so understanding these factors would be extremely valuable. Understanding the factors that lead to negative views of a campus climate would be equally, if not more important, to understand because “a negative campus climate is associated with student depression, substance use, and academic disengagement... these are correlated with lower grade point average (GPA), lower ratings of academic knowledge and skills, and lower ratings of academic and social self-concepts.” (Cress 2008) With the tragic suicide of a student of color earlier this year, which shook the BYU community as a whole, seeking to understand whatever small factors affect views of campus climate would allow for movement towards a sense of inclusion for all.

This project plans to examine student experiences through the attached Qualtrics survey. This survey will give insight as to which factors can be correlated with positive and negative views of BYU climate. The factors this project specifically plans to examine are: country of origin, state of high school graduation, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and political views. These factors will then be weighted individually based on response and how much each factor impacted student overall experience. Data analysis may vary based on sample size, but currently this project plans to run a series of ANOVA's and t-tests, through which factors and the groups within those factors will be able to be identified that are associated with positive and negative views of BYU climate. This survey is in the process of being approved by the IRB and upon

approval will be issued to students through the MSS office as well as through email to the top-5 most age-diverse GE classes during this coming fall semester. This focus on diversity, or the lack thereof, and its effect on the student body as a whole, not just minority students, will create room for progress to be made through understanding the total impact of diversity on the BYU student experience overall.

### Thesis Committee

Advisor: Dr. Jacob Rugh

Dr. Rugh is a well-qualified in this role as faculty advisor for many reasons. He is a well-published and noted scholar in many areas, with publications dealing with race and space as well as racial discrimination. His M.P.A. and Ph.D in Public Affairs from Princeton make him an excellent resource for knowledge of the role of race and other social identities in the lives of everyday people. I developed the idea for this thesis while taking his class on the sociology of race and ethnicity as well as while writing a capstone paper for his class on race and immigration, which helped me to further understand how strong social identities play into public and private manners.

Reader: Dr. David James Gonzales

Dr. Gonzales is an assistant professor in the History department here at BYU. With an M.A. and Ph. D in History from USC, Dr. Gonzales is extremely well qualified in his role as faculty reader. Dr. Gonzales is well known for his work on the struggle for Latino civil rights in Southern California. With a solid background in race relations amongst the Latinx community, Dr. Gonzales will be of great help by providing insights into the history of the Latinx community, as well as the history of people of color in predominantly white institutions in the past. When I began writing my Great Questions essay, which centered around racial identity and



what it meant to be Latinx, I was told to meet with Dr. Gonzales, and upon completion of this proposal was also invited to meet with him by my faculty advisor.

Honors Coordinator: Dr. Del Scott

### Project Timeline

June 2019 - August 2019: Literature review and background development, creation and finalization of Qualtrics survey

June 2019 – September 2019: Survey sent out, data gathered, initial analysis run

October 2019 – November 2019: Preliminary results gathered from data, draft thesis based on results found

November 2019 – December 2019: Final results, thesis defense

### Culminating Experience

I intend to submit my research for publication in a journal for undergraduate research, such as the *Inquiries Journal*, a journal about the social sciences and art. I also intend to present the research done here in a professional capacity, at either the Mary Lou Fulton, Pacific Sociological Association, or American Sociological Association conferences in the upcoming year.

### Works Cited

College Factual. "How Diverse Is Brigham Young University - Provo?" College Factual. February 22, 2019. Accessed April 30, 2019.

(<https://www.collegefactual.com/colleges/brigham-young-university-provo/student-life/diversity/#chart-faculty-ethnic-diversity>.)

Nguyen, Mike Hoa, Chan, Jason, Nguyen, Bach Mai Dolly, Teranishi, Robert T. 2018. "Beyond Compositional Diversity: Examining the Campus Climate Experiences of Asian American and Pacific Islander Students". *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*. 11 (4): 484-501.

Cole, Darnell, Espinoza, Araceli. 2008. "Examining the Academic Success of Latino Students in Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Majors". *Journal of College Student Development*. 49 (4): 285-300.

Cress, Christine. 2008. "Creating inclusive learning communities: the role of student-faculty relationships in mitigating negative campus climate". *Learning Inquiry*. 2 (2): 95-111.