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Closing The Gap: Greater Retention And Achievement Through Service-Learning At Wayne State University

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**CLOSING THE GAP: GREATER RETENTION AND ACHIEVEMENT THROUGH
SERVICE-LEARNING AT WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY**

by

MONITA H. MUNGO

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

2016

MAJOR: SOCIOLOGY

Approved By:

Advisor

Date

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my loving and supportive family: Team Mungo! Without your love, support, and understanding, this project would have been a distant dream sitting on a dusty shelf called “could have.” To Morgan, who in all of her six years of living, has had a mother who was in school: thank you. Thank you for listening quietly and attentively to theory readings and journal articles while feeding as a baby. Thank you for listening actively and searching for pictures and asking questions as a toddler. To Trey, who taught me that quality time beat out quantity time – every time: thank you. Thank you for the quality time; it renewed my drive. Thank you both for making me the most blessed mother on the planet. To Will, whose unwavering support and willingness to help in any way, made this dream a reality: thank you. I could not have had the peace of mind and the large amounts of time to write if it weren’t for you being mom and dad often. *I am because we are.* Thank you.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Commercials, like the one shown by Cadillac during Super Bowl XLVIII, remind us that Americans who work hard deserve a luxurious lifestyle. The large pool alongside the spacious and modernly designed house with its flat screen television and wall to ceiling windows, nestled on a palm tree lined street epitomizes an affluent suburban neighborhood. Further, the luxury carmaker tells viewers via the attractive and poised actor, “You work hard, you create your own luck, and just gotta believe that anything is possible.” The commercial evokes the American ideology that embodies pride in hard work and implies that hard work leads to financial rewards that allow Americans to experience a luxurious lifestyle as a reward (Rytina, Form and Pease 1970; Kluegel and Smith 1981). The actor invokes agreement with the audience as he sits in his electric Cadillac dressed in a tailored suit by saying “N’est-ce pas?” However, for many individuals of color in the United States, such a luxurious lifestyle remains a fantasy, and hard work and a belief that anything is possible is not always enough to overcome the barriers between them and the American dream of property, career, and financial stability. Despite the ideals of the achievement ideology that invade every facet of American life, there remains a large population of people who are not able to access the basic tool – education – needed to make the American dream a reality.

The lack of educational opportunities for Americans of color is an important social issue because their systemic exclusion from higher education has significant implications for America’s economic future beyond social justice and equality. Americans espouse the ideology of equality and opportunity, and the educational system has always been structured on the notion of preparing individuals with skills for the work force (Ogbu 1987). However, black¹ Americans have been

¹ Race is a social construction of rigid categories given to groups based on the hue of their skin color and physical characteristics, especially black Americans. For this reason, I do not recognize “black” as a proper noun in need of a capital B since it is not an indicator of a geographical ethnicity but a label of difference.

denied access to experience the opportunities provided by a good education. The United States has traditionally been the world leader in higher education, and policy makers have linked the United States' status as the most wealthy, powerful country on earth to our national commitment to education, and our highly educated populace. For instance, in 1960, the United States had 40% higher education enrollment, making it the first country to achieve mass higher education. However, obdurate inequalities in educational attainment based on race could threaten the economic and social standing of the United States in the coming decades. The U.S. Census Bureau predicts that the majority of the United States population in 2043 will be composed of black and Latino Americans. If the opportunities available to create an educated populous remain limited for certain groups and educational disparities based on skin color, ethnicity, and social class continue to characterize the United States education system (Welner and Carter 2013), an increasingly diverse population could threaten the United States' status as the world's leader in higher education.

In addition, higher education is a major engine of economic development (Altbach et al. 2009). A highly educated populace serves as the basis of a strong and thriving middle class, which in turn is responsible for a large share of economic activity and consumer spending (Reich 2014; Florida 2006). After the decline in median household incomes in 2009, consumer spending has decreased and so has membership in the middle class. When there are fewer possibilities for upward mobility via educational attainment, the middle class may decline in numbers and the American economy could stall (Reich 2014).

Finally, inequality undermines American democracy since wealth is “concentrated in the hands of a few” (Brandeis 1897). The democratic process is hijacked because the uneven distribution of wealth creates polarization along the lines of the have and have-nots. Those

that “have” are able to wield influence in a myriad of ways, including political power. Those that “have not” work hard but see minimal economic gains and have little to no political influence. Thus, Abraham Lincoln’s famous phrase “governing of the people, by the people, for the people” becomes “governing of the people by the wealthy for the wealthy.” Diverse and dynamic post-secondary institutions are needed to provide the knowledge necessary for the social mobility and economic progress essential to our society. According to Altbach et al (2009), expanding participation in higher education is a force for democratization only when participation is representative of the population as a whole. Thus, ensuring equal participation in education in the United States is a vital concern for the coming decades.

The Structure of American Education

When the Supreme Court decision of *Brown v. The Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* in 1954 negated the “separate but equal” law of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, it forced public schools to be desegregated (Weber 2010:50; Spring 2010:102). For the first time in U.S. history, black people were allowed to attend white schools. However, what the *Brown* decision did not do was create an educational system that welcomed its newcomers, as it took almost ten years to implement desegregation in public education (Carter 2009:335). Into the 21st century, many Americans of color are still denied the crucial resources and opportunities needed for educational success (Welner and Carter 2013:5). Today, a high school diploma does not offer the same promise of social mobility and stability that it once did. As an academic credential, the college degree has taken its place as a de facto requirement for a middle class life-style. Some sixty years after, the current challenge is improving completion rates at the college level. Nationally, the six-year completion rate for black undergraduate students is 20% less than their white counterparts (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2014).

Since schools do not exist as independent social institutions separate from economic, political, cultural and social contexts, they can neither be insulated from the challenges that each context provides (Carter and Welner 2013:218), nor can they remain blind to the resolutions needed. Although prejudice, discrimination, and disadvantage did not begin within the university, the university is obligated to address these issues since they impede progress (Altbach et al 2009). Thus, it is imperative that post-secondary institutions challenge the very foundation they stand on in regard to policies and procedures, especially questioning its delivery of academic functions: what is being taught; to whom; how; and most importantly, is it working?

Entrance into schools does not automatically improve the quality of life for subordinate groups when the generational practices of exclusion are embedded into the educational system. Despite numerous attempts to improve how subordinate groups are educated, it never seems to be enough to shift the balance of power (Weber 2010:49). I argue that deficit thinking undergirds many programs aimed at helping people of color succeed academically. Instead of examining the policies, practices, and programs and their effect on student outcomes, educators and administrators often blame students and their families for low performance in schools (Garcia and Guerra 2004:150-151). Students are labeled “at-risk” because specific characteristics are ascribed to them such as having a low socioeconomic background, being a first generation college student, and attending an under-resourced secondary school. The systems and structures in which they reside are not considered “at-risk.” Berman et al suggest that there is inadequate analysis of institutional practices; programmatic assumptions and processes that may contribute to or hinder student academic achievement (1999:10). Further, the research effort to explain school failure has gained researchers and practitioners nothing more than new theories and new ways to blame or defend students (McDermott 1987). Generalizations based a student’s demographic

characteristics lead educators to overlook the systemic factors within the educational system that may contribute to the underperformance of students (Garcia and Guerra 2004:159). Generalizations about students can also lead to the creation of programs and policies that have honorable intentions but fall short in addressing the root causes of low student achievement at an institution.

As a public good, higher education contributes to society by educating citizens, improving human capital, encouraging civic engagement, and boosting economic development (Altbach et al 2009). Student populations are increasingly diverse in many ways. Student bodies constitute a myriad of races, socioeconomic backgrounds, educational preparation and intellectual abilities, which complicate the teaching and learning process (Altbach et al 2009). A diverse student population requires a diverse curriculum to make higher education accessible and to allow students to be successful within the walls of the institution. Many colleges and universities that face this challenge struggle to meet the need of its students. For example, changing advising practices as well as the creation of scholarship and tutoring programs have been utilized to address the challenge. However, retaining and graduating students remains a growing problem. Completion for all student groups should be the primary goal of colleges and universities. A diverse student body is motivation to be innovative and creative about approaches to accomplish this goal. New pedagogical strategies must be explored because research shows that classroom teaching has an effect on student engagement in the classroom (Kuh 2008; Tinto 1982, 2003, 2006, 2012).

Since the legacy of racism is embedded in every social institution in American, the tools of racism – the mainstream educational approaches that are intractably and implicitly linked to white supremacist assumptions - cannot be used to examine and subsequently change its outcomes (Lorde 1984). Therefore, Critical Race Theory (CRT) is useful to explore the subtle ways racism

operates in higher education. CRT provides an appropriate theoretical lens to assess an institution's policies and practices in regards to underrepresented students and how they experience the campus environment and its policies. CRT acknowledges that racism is ingrained in the fabric of American life, and focuses on the effects of race and racism, while simultaneously addressing the hegemonic system of white supremacy on the ostensibly meritocratic system of schooling (Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995; Ladson-Billings 1998; DeCuir and Dixson 2004). The education system is dependent on the larger social system and is bound to reproduce that system without more foundational changes. Recognizing that institutional racism is pervasive in the dominant culture, CRT examines existing power structures that are based on white privilege. CRT also offers a way to rethink traditional education scholarship (Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995).

My research critiques the notion of liberalism in higher education. The concept of colorblindness, the neutrality of the law, and incremental change are each facets of liberal ideology that draw ire from CRT scholars. Colorblindness has been used as a justification to change race-based policies that were created to address social inequity (Gotanda 1991) and to maintain white privilege, because according to the color-blind ideology, it is best to ignore issues of race and act as if race does not exist (Bonilla-Silva 2010). Colorblind racism refers to the "new" manner in which race matters are framed in neutral and subtle ways that imply change yet maintain white privilege (Bonilla-Silva 2010:210-211). The concept of colorblindness fails to account for the persistence and permanence of racism, the construction of people of color as other, and normative white supremacy (DeCuir and Dixson 2004). Neutral policies which flow naturally from a colorblind ideology ignore the fact that inequity, inopportunity, and oppression are historical artifacts that will not easily be remedied by ignoring race in contemporary society (DeCuir and Dixson 2004). In order for post-secondary institutions to be genuine in their efforts toward

diversity, a critical assessment that includes an in-depth analysis of the complexities of race and how students experience racism is essential. An institution must rely on solutions that enhance the academic experience for people who have been marginalized by the educational system itself. Institutions cannot continue to ignore their role in the matter by labeling and creating programs and policies that rely on deficit thinking, the belief that a student's demography, culture and familial context solely contribute to their low academic achievement. Instead, institutions should make changes that alter their approach to teaching and learning.

The Achievement Gap at Wayne State University

Wayne State University (WSU) is an urban, public, Research I institution located in Detroit, Michigan (WSU Fact Book 2012-2013:2). WSU's mission is to "create knowledge and prepare a diverse body of students to excel in an increasingly complex and global society" (WSU Fact Book 2012-2013). According to the 2012-2013 Fact Book, the total amount of undergraduate students enrolled at Wayne State University in the fall of 2012 was 19,342. The racial and ethnic make-up of the student body as reported was 50% white; 36% minority; 12% unknown; and 2% international (WSU Fact book 2012-2013:10). Wayne State University suffers from a gap in retention and graduation rates between black and white students. In 2010, the Journal of Blacks in Higher Education reported that Wayne State University had a black graduation rate of 10% compared to white students at 44%. In 2012, the graduation rate of black students has increased to 20% but so did the gap between white and black students. In that same year, 60% of white students graduated with a bachelor degree (WSU 2012-2013 Fact Book: 19). According to the Greater Retention and Achievement through Diversity (GRAD) Report (2013:7) created by the retention advisory committee, white students are four times more likely to graduate than black students. The achievement gap has been an ongoing challenge for the university. Like many

postsecondary institutions across the country, Wayne State University is seeking ways to improve the persistence and graduation of historically underrepresented student groups. To combat the gap in graduation rates at the institution, a retention advisory committee was established to recommend appropriate strategies to assist the university with achieving its retention and graduation rate goals. Using Critical Race Theory to analyze the GRAD report, I demonstrate that this report represents a continuation of the liberal rhetoric and policies that have failed to achieve educational equality because it does not directly confront the challenge that racism brings to its front doors.

In addition, this research assesses service-learning as a pedagogical solution to assist students in achieving academic success at Wayne State University. Service-learning is a pedagogical approach to teaching and learning that uses community service as an extension of the classroom, thereby providing a real-world relevance to the course learning objectives. Unlike other academic and social programs that add advising and additional support resources for students based on their perceived ability to succeed or not at the collegiate level, service-learning is an active and creative pedagogy that integrates community service with academia in order to strengthen students' ability to think critically, solve problems practically, and function as a citizen in a democratic society (Billig 2004; Kuh 2008). Service-learning does not rely on deficit thinking in its attempt to improve student achievement; instead, it enhances classroom curriculum by using community members and organizations as resources for learning (Harkins et al 2007). Based on the findings of researchers, service-learning may be a unique and fiscally responsible approach to decreasing the low achievement indicators as well as assist in improving other institutional outcomes such as preparation for working in the real-world, improved critical thinking and complex reasoning, lifelong dedication to helping others, and enhanced communication skills, among others. In an attempt to assess service-learning as a pedagogical solution for the

achievement gap and the imbalanced opportunity structure problem specifically at Wayne State University and generally in the literature, the following research questions form the basis for this research:

1. Do students who take a service-learning course persist at Wayne State University longer than comparable students who do not take a service-learning course?
2. Are grade point averages higher for students who take a service-learning course than comparable students who do not take a service-learning course?
3. Is taking a service-learning class a predictor of graduation?
4. Does race moderate the effect of service-learning on graduation?

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Education and its ideals of meritocracy have failed to assist underrepresented individuals achieve upward mobility in the United States. There is a persistent disparity of educational outcomes between groups, based on socioeconomic status, race, and gender. The research literature describing the causes of the gap in educational achievement is expansive. For decades, researchers have grappled with trying to identify and measure the varying factors that contribute to low academic achievement of minority groups. Racial disparities in specific achievement indicators dominate policy discussions emphasizing significant differences in test scores and graduation rates (Welner and Carter 2013). This phenomenon continues to fester in society affecting the foundational principles upon which the American Dream is built, resulting in consequences that can have a profound effect on the labor market. Opportunities to achieve benchmarked success, i.e. a college degree, remain difficult for people of color. Below, I present a synthesis of the academic literature on racial disparities in educational outcomes.

“What do you do with a former slave when you no longer need his labor?” is a question Congressman Augustus Hawkins asked when meeting with Jonathan Kozol (1991:188). Used to highlight the insidious nature of race and poverty in the urban education system, the question serves as a conundrum for policymakers since the stigma of slavery is attached to the black race. The belief system that justified slavery continues to color every facet of the black experience, including how and where one is educated. To black families whose children attend under-resourced and underfunded schools, the question serves as insight into the thought processes of policymakers, explaining why their children receive used computers and outdated textbooks while being crammed into windowless classrooms (Kozol 1991). The question is also a reminder to black individuals that they are members of a stigmatized group, reaping the disadvantages of

slavery, racism. It is considered “normal” and certainly unremarkable that black students attend worse schools; that is the normativity of white supremacy. Racism is a normative and pervasive organizing principle of society. From the opportunities to attend specific schools to the resources available to educate students, inequality in the education system is a fact. Persistent racial disparities exist in educational institutions at all levels (Roscigno, Ainsworth-Darnell 1999:158; Carter 2009:333; Kozol 1991; Feagin et al 1996; Orfield 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2013; Merolla 2013; 2014; Merolla and Jackson, 2014). Inequality in education can be observed and measured in many ways. However, the root causes of racial inequality in educational outcomes remain a matter of scholarly debate.

Biology

Past and present research examines why the achievement gap persists in post-secondary education. Some researchers suggest that the unstable structure of black families is to blame (Moynihan 1965, William Julius Wilson 1999). Others believe achievement disparities exist because of the historical, political, economic, and moral decisions made over time (Kozol, 1991; Ladson-Billings 2013). Some believe that the biological make-up of blacks makes them intellectually inferior. In *The Bell Curve*, Herrnstein and Murray (1994) argue that intelligence is correlated to economic, social, and overall success. Accordingly, Herrnstein and Murray make the case for biological variation as the cause for ethnic differences in cognitive ability since blacks and whites differ most on tests that are putatively the best measures of general intelligence (Herrnstein and Murray 1994:270). Foundational assumptions of *The Bell Curve* rest on three premises. First, there is one single measure of cognitive ability (intelligence). Secondly, IQ test are not culturally biased and are the appropriate instrument by which to measure cognitive ability. Finally, there are discrete “real” racial groups which can be differentiated based on physical

phenotypic characteristics. Ruling out socioeconomic factors and environmental differences, blacks were found to be one standard deviation (15 IQ points) from whites and east Asians were a fifth of a standard deviation (3 IQ points) from whites (Hernnstein and Murray 1994:298). Hernnstein and Murray describe racial differences in IQ as innate and argue that 60 percent of IQ is heritable (Hernnstein and Murray 1994:298). Among the many challenges of Hernnstein and Murray's research is their conceptualizations, analyses and subsequent conclusions of race and its role in the social lives of "genetically inferior people" that explains away any historical, economic, and political contributions to a lower IQ. Further, the political implications of the conclusions and the scientific evidence used to stake their claims perpetuate racism and provides the ammunition for conservatives to advocate for eliminating welfare, reducing preschool programs, and curtailing affirmative action, because if biology is the true cause of racial inequality, such program are destined to be ineffective (Gould 1994). Studies similar to the one produced by Hernnstein and Murray, contribute to the stigmatization of black people by utilizing science as an objective measure of difference, resulting in the crystallization of stereotypes of black people in American society. As subsequent studies have shown, however, racial differences in test performance result from environment rather than biology (Sowell, 1994, 1995).

Throughout US history, black people have been characterized by white people as having an inherent deviant nature characterized by violence, laziness, a reckless sexuality, and a need to over-reproduce. In a depiction of the harsh conditions of urban schooling, Jonathan Kozol recounts a statement from a psychiatrist about his suburban neighbors and their feelings toward black people:

When they hear of all these murders, all these men in prison, all these women pregnant with no husbands, they don't buy the explanation that it's poverty, or public schools, or racial segregation. They say, 'We didn't have much money when we started out, but we led clean and decent lives. We did it. Why can't they? ... They don't have it.' What that

means is lack of brains, or lack of drive, or lack of willingness to work. 'This is what they have become, for lots of complicated reasons. Slavery, injustice, or whatever.' But they really do believe it when they say that this is what they have *become*, that this is what they *are*. And they don't believe that social changes will affect it very much. (1991:192)

This research examines how racialized students are conceptualized and how the assumptions of administrators affect practices and policies that ignore the realities of students' lives. The example above illustrates the assumptions that may seep into decision-making and policy creation in higher education. The hum of meritocracy underlies the statement without regard for the social structures that put black people in the positions described by the psychiatrist.

Socioeconomic Status

Social class is another factor that scholars note contributes to racial disparities in educational outcomes. Instead of seeing the biological differences of race/ethnicity as the cause, they argue that the socioeconomic status (SES) of parents affects a student's ability to do well in school. Specifically, SES differences cause achievement differences. Warren (1996) found that background differences accounted for most of the disparity between native-born Mexican Americans and whites. The level of achievement for both groups are comparable if they had the similar SES backgrounds. Duncan et al. found that family income has a strong association with achievement and ability-related outcomes (1998). The association is found to matter most in early childhood and has a bigger impact on completed schooling than did income during middle childhood. The importance of school readiness is offered as the reason why income in early childhood appears to matter more for achievement since school readiness determines the educational path for children. Poverty has a strong association with a low level of preschool ability, which is associated with low test scores, grade failure, school disengagement and dropping out of school later in childhood (Duncan et al 1998). The association remains when controlling for maternal schooling, household structure and whether welfare was received in the home.

Duncan and his colleagues also found that the estimated impact of family income on completed schooling to be larger for children of low-income families than those of high-income families (1998).

As a factor describing the cause of educational inequality, it is important to note the varying conceptualizations of SES. For example, Warren's definition in the study mentioned above measures parental education levels as an indicator of socioeconomic status (SES). Duncan and his colleagues defined SES as parental income. Consequently, the relationship between socioeconomic status and academic achievement has become a debatable subject since there is not a concrete and widely accepted definition used by researchers who utilize SES as a variable for statistical analyses (White 1982; Duncan and Magnuson 2005). Using SES as a readily accepted indicator for educational achievement (as cited in many SES and achievement related articles) may be negligent since how the variable is measured is extremely important. Using SES as an indicator, especially when analyzing secondary data may cause researchers to interpret data in a manner that suggests SES (or poverty, to be specific), rather than race, is the primary cause of low academic achievement among black Americans. SES and race as indicators are important because together they predict the outcomes of racial inequality, historical disadvantage, and the significance of race in structuring who gets what economic resources. Moreover, the normative nature of white supremacy makes the marked inequalities seem normal and unproblematic for many Americans.

Resource Distribution

Researchers also attribute the achievement gap to the residential segregation that occurs in urban areas which results in school segregation; these disadvantaged communities suffer from a decrease of school funding, and fewer resources with which to educate minority children, leaving them ill-prepared for higher education (Massey and Denton 1993; Kozol 1991; Carter 2009:333;

Orfield 2013). Low-income families tend to live in impoverished neighborhoods and attend under-resourced schools which do not present children with the same educational opportunity as schools with adequate resources. In the United States primary, middle and high schools are funded by property taxes collected from the surrounding neighborhood in which the school resides. If the surrounding neighborhood is impoverished then the resources the school receives to educate and prepare its students for post-secondary education is meager. Most poor and underperforming schools reside in neighborhoods in which subordinate groups reside. The residents are black or Latino, poor, and disproportionately single mothers. If the surrounding neighborhood is wealthy then the resources the school receives to educate and prepare its students for higher education are abundant. The residents of wealthy neighborhoods belong to the dominant group and are white, middle or upper class and married. When students graduate, both prepared and underprepared compete for the same resources to finance their undergraduate education. Both groups of students, underprepared and prepared, sit in the same college classrooms as if they are on a level playing field and are assessed in the same manner. The acceptance of uneven playing fields reflects a dark unspoken sense that some children are inherently more valuable than others (Kozol 1991:177).

As a result of the unequal distribution of financial resources, affluent neighborhoods have more funding for schools and learning opportunities outside of and after school, as well as during the summer months, while poor neighborhoods do not. The discrepancy in funding for schools creates a disparity in the quality of education and the learning opportunities available to a child as well as the quality of preparation a child receives. The manner in which schools are financed contributes to the achievement gap since it perpetuates inequality by distributing resources unequally among schools and ignores the effects of under-resourced schools on intergenerational poverty, underprepared students, and the economy as a whole. Dr. Lillian Parks, superintendent

of the East St. Louis schools, interviewed by Kozol, laments “Gifted children are everywhere in East St. Louis, but their gifts are lost to poverty and turmoil and the damage done by knowing they are written off by their society” (Kozol 1991:33-34). Moreover, if they are lucky, they go to college and begin anew with its culture of inequality.

Alexander, Entwisle, and Olson found that schools make a difference in the lives of poor students (2001). As a powerful tool for students’ academic development, school plays an important role when outside support for learning is weak. Therefore, inequities in the distribution of school resources contribute to educational inequality and the consequences of decreased opportunities to learn. The unequal distribution of resources renders education an institution that divides since it systematically denies complete and equal access to a lawfully sanctioned benefit for all students. By using property taxes as a means to fund public schools, the marginalization becomes invisible and the source of inequality becomes invisible because it is embedded in the ideology of institutional practices.

Rothstein (2004) cites the absence of after school and summer learning opportunities as one of the many reasons the achievement gap exists. A study by Alexander et al (2001) showed that the lack of out-of-school resources available during the summer contributes to low achievement in the fall when school resumes. Denial of “the means of competition” is perhaps the single most consistent outcome of the education offered to poor children in large urban schools (Kozol 1991:83).

A prevailing ideology of the American educational system is based in the meritocratic belief that by getting an education and working harder, one can achieve the American dream. Minority families subscribe and perpetuate this “cultural faith”: if you pull yourself up by your bootstraps, you will be successful; as if improving one’s social location comes solely from within

(Steele 2003:679). While “cultural faith” refutes the cultural deficiency theory that blames black culture as the culprit for low achievement, it does not recognize the social forces that work to marginalize people who reside in inferior social statuses.

Stereotype Threat

A relatively recent explanation cited as a cause for the low achievement of minority students is called stereotype threat. Stereotype threat refers to the threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype, or fear of doing something that would confirm that stereotype (Steele 2003:679). Stereotype threat occurs when groups who are negatively stereotyped in society perceive a “threat” under certain conditions. In the classroom, stereotype threat operates by decreasing academic performance of the students who perceive themselves in a threatening situation. Steele and his colleagues designed an experiment to test if the stereotype threat that black students might experience while taking a difficult test could affect their performance on the test. The experiment showed that when the stereotype is removed, black students performed better.

The dominant group uses stereotypes to create and sustain images of dominance and inferiority associated with race. Characteristics such as ability, preparation, motivation and aspiration are called into question when black students do not perform well academically. For blacks, negative stereotypes about intelligence exists. According to Steele (2003), the weight of the negative stereotype dampens achievement because it causes anxiety about learning situations that may be primed to treat racialized students stereotypically.

Social Reproduction

Another reason cited for the achievement gap can be explained using the concept of social reproduction. Social reproduction refers the generational transmission of social inequality through social structures such as the educational system (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Sullivan 2001;

Sullivan 2002; Doob 2013). Social reproduction occurs because the ideology in the United States, which characterizes education as a means for social mobility available to all who want it, implies meritocracy, therefore blaming the lack of success as being the fault of the individual. This ideology ignores the reality of how underrepresented groups experience education. It also minimizes the importance of wealth, status and power since the philosophy of schooling is based on dominant group culture (Sullivan 2002; Harker 1990). As a social structure, education socializes students for specific roles in society that reflect economic class inequalities. A student's success in school goes beyond mastery of the formal curriculum. It is also dependent on their ability to acquire and wield cultural and social capital. Cultural capital refers to the systems of values of meaning, shared outlooks, beliefs, knowledge and skills that an individual acquires from their position in society. The degree to which an individual can attain cultural capital, that is to participate in dominant culture, determines their access to resources and opportunities (Lynch 1990; Sullivan 2002). Consequently the opportunity to succeed as defined by the dominant group is also influenced by cultural capital. Social capital refers to the various relationships, networks and potential resources that are beneficial an individual's success. Whereas what you know and how you use it are important in the acquisition and wielding of cultural capital, who you know is most significant for acquiring and wielding social capital. Even high achieving and motivated, first generation college students may not have the social or cultural capital required to succeed in post-secondary institutions. Knowing what resources are available to assist with challenges in class, how to approach a professor, and how to navigate byzantine degree requirements are examples of social capital and cultural capital that may not available to all students.

The college environment reflects dominant culture in society (Bourdieu as stated in Sullivan 2002). One form of cultural capital in college is the ability to understand and to use the

middle class language that is privileged in the education system. An assumption relied upon by colleges and universities is that all students come to campus with equal amounts of cultural capital. The assumption is inaccurate since the possession of cultural capital varies with social class. The assumption creates systemic challenges for lower class students to succeed in the education system because they cannot understand the “pedagogic message” that their professors are teaching (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Sullivan 2002).

Oppositional Culture

One of the most well-known arguments for the achievement gap is attributed to John Ogbu who used case studies and other qualitative methods to examine the social structures and historical processes that contribute to the underachievement of racial minorities. His body of work has led to the oppositional culture theory that seeks to explain the racial disparities between whites and blacks. The oppositional culture model distinguishes between how minorities came to live in the United States, citing the difference as the significant factor that impacts an individual’s chances for success. Those who migrated voluntarily tend to be more successful than those who came to this country through slavery or colonization (Ainsworth-Darnell and Downey 1998:536-537; Fordham and Ogbu, 1986).

In regards to educational achievement, Ogbu argues that black youth develop an oppositional identity relative to whites. Black students do not perform well in school in order to avoid the label of “acting white” since performing well in school is associated with the behavior of whites. According to Ogbu, involuntary minorities view participation in a society that historically compelled their behavior as an act of disloyalty to the group. Thus participating in dominant cultural practices such as doing well in school is an act of betrayal. In his study in Shaker Heights, Ohio, Ogbu found that students describe behaviors such as speaking Standard English

and taking advanced placement courses as “acting white.” Fordham and Ogbu argue that black students consciously or unconsciously reject any educational achievement behaviors such as taking challenging courses and studying hard to avoid being labeled as “acting white” since those traits describe what white students do (Carter 2005:5). Ogbu also suggests that black students do not try hard because they do not believe that social mobility – the American dream, is attainable through education (Kao and Thompson 2003). He attributes their lack of effort to the fact that black students are increasingly “mistrustful, ambivalent, and skeptical” of the school environment as they move through the educational system and keeping their black identity intact is important to them (Ogbu 2003:41).

Critics of the “acting white” hypothesis believe that Ogbu and subsequently Fordham oversimplify the black experience and their achievement aspirations toward education. For example, Tyson (2002) qualitatively examined the attitudes of black elementary school children. She found that black children began school engaged, achievement-oriented, and that the rejection of school norms does not describe the larger black culture. She also found that the development of negative school attitudes were affected by the schooling experience and the emphasis school administrators place on changing parts of black culture such as speaking standard English. Tyson argues that this implies an inadequacy of being black resulting in a failure to do well in school. She also argues that the negative attitudes are part of a developmental and not a cultural process (Tyson 2002). There are obvious limitations to Tyson’s work. First, she was limited to one year of observations. Secondly, her research participants were not high school students as Ogbu’s were. However, her work does highlight a critical point. If culture was the basis for oppositional behavior in schools, black elementary children would resist being engaged in school and would not put effort toward being achievement-oriented.

In order to test Ogbu's oppositional culture theory, Harris quantitatively examined the major tenets of the theory (2006). First, black children perceive fewer returns to education and more limited opportunities for upward social mobility than white children. Second, black children have less favorable attitudes toward school than whites. Third, black children exhibit greater resistance to school than whites. Fourth, high achieving black children are negatively sanctioned by their peers more than high-achieving white children (the "acting white" hypothesis). Lastly, peer groups of black children have a greater resistance to school culture than those of white children. Harris' study revealed two major findings. First, the five major tenets were not supported by data, a pattern that calls into question the existence of a pervasive oppositional culture among African Americans. It also indicates that the resistance model does not account for the variability of experience and aspirations in the black community. Second, student maturation after the seventh grade had little impact on group differences in the outcomes. This study along with myriad other evidence indicates that oppositional cultural theory's ability to explain the racial achievement gap is limited (Harris 2006:824-825; Merolla 2014).

Family Structure

Linked to the oppositional culture argument is the breakdown or dysfunction of the black family as a contributing factor to low educational achievement. This perception has been perpetuated by various scholars such as Coleman (1966) and Moynihan who wrote policy reports blaming low academic performance on the crises experienced by black families. It is widely accepted that inequalities in family circumstances and social environments cause challenges to educational achievement. Family structure is associated with school persistence and achievement (Cavanagh and Fomby 2012; Wojtkiewicz 1993). The sample in a study by Duncan and Magnuson (2005) showed rates of single-parenthood averaged 15% for white children, 24% for Hispanic

children, and 50% for black children. Black children are more likely to be born outside of marriage and white children are more likely to experience divorce. Single parent homes are five times more likely to be poor than two-parent homes; and children of teen mothers face socioeconomic hardships, including lower educational attainment (Duncan and Magnuson 2005:43). Although the data paints a bleak picture for children in single parent homes or of young mothers, Duncan and Magnuson found that parental characteristics such as educational attainment account for more of the achievement gap than family structure or maternal age.

The literature regarding the achievement gap has found myriad of reasons as to why students of color do not perform as well as their white counterparts. What is not accounted for through the lens of those being studied is the cultural background of students of color – their life experiences, familial values, and other social interactions – which inform everything they do. Individuals cannot ignore their cultural experiences when entering post-secondary institutions. Since post-secondary institutions are based on dominant group culture, a gap is created before students walk into the classroom because norms that dictate the college experience and subsequent assessment are not geared toward students of color (Ratner and Brummit 2006). “Rarely do we question our own values and knowledge base and how those beliefs emerge and help sustain the notion of a racially neutral and democratic social order that works for all people” (Lopez 2003:85). Underlying assumptions of administrators cannot be divorced from the individuals making the decisions. They bring to the proverbial table their lived experiences with and prior knowledge of race when making policy decisions.

Higher education is essential for upward mobility in society. It is a social and economic indicator of social location and status. It is both necessary and required in order to attain the socially constructed “American Dream.” It is also the key to getting a good job that pays a higher

salary with benefits, thus increasing one's quality of life (Weber 2010:49). Systemic racial inequality is a reason for low academic performance; the achievement gap is a predictable result of systemic causes that affect the opportunities available for students of different racial, ethnic, socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds (Welner and Carter 2013:9). The model of achievement in the literature is a biased one based on white, middle class values that fails to account for the varying ways minority groups translate educational aspirations and achievement. Scholars have analyzed many factors thought to cause educational inequality. As research shows, there is less consistency in what factors account for racial and ethnic differences in educational achievement (Kao and Thompson 2003). However, research also shows educational inequality exists and persists in post-secondary institutions. Since the education system is dependent on the larger social system, reproducing that system becomes inevitable without foundational changes.

Service-Learning

Colleges and universities are extending their classrooms into the community more than ever hoping to provide an educational experience for their student that represents a "microcosm of the world we live in" (www.wayne.edu). Service-learning and pure service activities are two of the pedagogical approaches through which post-secondary institutions attempt to accomplish this goal. Service learning is defined in many ways to encompass its broad impact and hopeful outcome. For the purposes of this research, service-learning is defined as a pedagogical approach to teaching and learning that uses community services as an extension of the classroom thereby providing a real-world relevance to course learning objectives.

There are numerous definitions that frame the purpose and intention of service-learning at various institutions. However, the two main components are always the same: community service and academic outcomes, which are realized through reflection. Carefully crafted descriptors to

describe the learning process such as *pure, discipline or academically based, experiential, and community based* are used to distinguish one pedagogical approach from another (Heffernan and Campus Compact 2001; Harkins et al 2007; Rama and Zlotkowski 1998; Soska and Butterfield 2005). Service-learning has been described as a teaching and learning strategy that incorporates meaningful community service with classroom instruction and reflection (servicelearning.org; Brubaker and Ostroff 2000; Lisman, Harvey, and AAHE 2000; Colby 2003; Scheibel, Bowley, and Jones 2005; Hadlock 2005). This teaching pedagogy serves to accomplish tasks that meet genuine human needs and conscious educational growth (Stanton et al. 1999; Brubaker and Ostroff 2000; Godfrey, Grasso and AAHE, 2000; Jacoby, 2003; Harkins et al 2007; Kaye 2004; Kuh 2008). There is an on-going process of service and reflection so that students learn the skills, knowledge, and competencies necessary for active and responsible community participation (Brubaker and Ostroff 2000; Heffernan 2001; Seperson, Hegeman, and Foundation for Long Term Care 2002; Hadlock 2005; Payne 2000; Kuh 2008).

In the collegiate context, service-learning is supervised by faculty or academic staff and is associated with course credit or graduation requirements (Rhoads 1997; Silcox 1993). The service-learning process aids students in developing empathy, compassion, and responsiveness to others in need while encouraging personalized experiences and individual development for students when paired with reflective teaching (Brubaker and Ostroff 2000). It is an active and creative pedagogy that integrates community service with academia in order to strengthen a student's ability to think critically; solve problems practically; and function as a citizen in a democratic society (Billig 2004; Kuh 2008). Classroom curriculum is enhanced by using community members and organizations as resources for learning (Harkins et al 2007). Service-learning courses are considered to promote retention by enhancing students' academic integration

and commitment to the institution (Reed et al, 2015). Definitions of service-learning inform the structure, intent, purpose, and goal of the work. For this proposal, service-learning is defined as any community service component that is added to course curriculum as a graded assignment.

Research is emerging about the effect of service-learning courses on institutional outcomes such as retention and graduation. Although the data's ability to be generalizable can be questioned, it provides insight into the success that institutions are having by utilizing a service-learning pedagogical model. In all, service-learning has been found to promote persistence toward graduation in undergraduate students. Controlling for grade point average, Lockeman and Pelco (2013) found that undergraduate students who participate in service-learning courses are more likely to graduate in six years than students who do not participate in service-learning classes. They also found that minority and low income students who took service-learning classes were more likely to graduate than their peers within this period as well. Their study sought to analyze the longitudinal relationships between student characteristics, service-learning class participation and degree completion of the FTIAC (first time in any college) population at one mid-Atlantic institution (Lockeman and Pelco 2013:19). While exploring the role of service-learning in promoting undergraduate persistence, Reed and colleagues (2015) found that it benefitted part-time and full-time students' persistence evenly. Students who enrolled in service-learning classes were more likely to reenroll in subsequent terms, especially in the first and third year. They also found that service-learning was a stronger predictor of persistence than a student's age, gender or race. Other researchers have found service-learning to have positive effects on students, including an increase in academic efficacy and grades, sense of civic responsibility, and decision –making (Lockeman and Pelco 2013:19; Batchelder and Root 1994; Astin and Sax 1998). Bringle, Hatcher and Muthiah (2010) found a positive relationship between fall-to-fall retention and service-

learning class enrollment. By evaluating the effect sizes for service-learning outcomes in 62 studies with control group designs, Celio, Durlak and Dymnicki (2011) found that service-learning can be an effective practice for encouraging students' academic success.

Based on the findings of researchers, service-learning may be a unique and fiscally responsible approach to decreasing the low achievement indicators as well as assist in improving other institutional outcomes such as preparation for working in the real-world, improved critical thinking and complex reasoning; lifelong dedication to helping others; and enhanced communication skills, among others. Arum and Roksa (2014) found that 23% of the 1000 students tracked two years after college graduation were underemployed or unemployed; 24% lived at home, and 74% received financial assistance from their parents on a consistent basis. The authors argue that the slow economic recovery is not the sole cause of the results of their study. Instead, Arum and Roksa (2014) explain the transition to adulthood was not a successful one for their group of students, citing a need for 21st century skills such as critical thinking and complex reasoning. There are two key components of service-learning: application and reflection (Kuh 2008:11). Students are able to apply what they learn in a real-world setting and reflect on their service in a classroom. Through reflection, students make the curricula connections to their service. This act improves critically thinking and reasoning skills. Chaison found that communication skills, multicultural and cross-cultural competency skills, and personal efficacy, defined as confidence and leadership, improved for freshman students who participated in an international service-learning trip. All of the students in this study were retained for their sophomore year (Chaison 2008).

Service-learning is described by scholars and practitioners using the same type of language and phrases that proponents of multicultural and diversity programs utilize. The difference is that

service-learning allows for full participation in the community and direct connection to class curriculum. Service-learning as a pedagogical tool may assist higher education in reaching their benchmarks for teaching, learning, and preparing students for the real-world by assisting all students, specifically under-prepared students, with acquiring the cognitive and noncognitive skills necessary to succeed. Research on the effects of service-learning on student characteristics as well as institutional outcomes is fairly new. This research will add to the literature by examining the relationship between service-learning class participation and student achievement at Wayne State University. I hypothesize that students who take service-learning classes will have higher grade point averages and persist toward degree completion at a rate higher than students who do not take service-learning courses. Further, I expect this outcome to be higher for students of color. The proposed research will add to the achievement gap literature by providing empirical evidence to show how engaging students with learning and volunteering can accomplish institutional goals by increasing graduation and retention rates and student performance in college.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The achievement gap at Wayne State University has been a challenge for several years. However, its economic impact is being felt as a result of the State of Michigan's decreased financial support. In 2012, the State of Michigan changed its funding structure for higher education by awarding funds based on performance metrics such as retention and graduation rates. In that same year, the university estimates lost tuition due to inequality of outcomes was \$13.9 million (GRAD Report 2013:14). Since 2012, Wayne State University has received the smallest funding increase by percentage each year (Jesse 2015). Therefore, it is imperative that WSU solves the achievement gap problem since it has been predicted that the deleterious economic impact of low retention and graduation rates will increase in the near future. Instead of looking to other institutions for models of the best practices for fixing the retention and graduation rate, I argue that WSU should take the initiative to better utilize high impact practices, such as service learning that already exist on campus. Since one of the founding principles of serving and serving others is that there is an innate ability to help yourself; Wayne State University should use the pedagogical model of service-learning for those outcomes.

Teaching and learning in higher education is based on a middle class standard. Namely, the assumption is that students have available time to immerse themselves in the educational process because their sole responsibility is being a student. Practices and policies at Wayne State University follow the same logic and students who do not have the middle class experience are penalized as a result. Many students at Wayne State University work or have domestic responsibilities to assist their household that take precedence over schooling. The fact that a decision has to be made to forgo writing a paper because extra hours at a job are needed to pay a household bill does not indicate that education is not seen as being important. In fact, there are many studies that show black families have high aspirations for educational attainment (Kozol

1991; Tyson 2002; Ogbu 2003; Carter 2005; Tyson, Darity and Castellio 2005; Harris 2006). Instead, it is an indication that the lived experiences of underrepresented students do not mirror middle class experiences and the practices of colleges and universities need to reflect this reality.

Framing of Completion

As we know, the most common definition of completion in higher education is graduation, the conferring of the baccalaureate degree. The college degree is the foundational credential for access to opportunity (Welner and Carter 2013:4). When a student graduates, she/he is considered a success and the institution from which the student graduated is considered successful. When students do not complete, they are not considered as being successful. However, the institution does not endure the label of being unsuccessful since it is a social norm for the individual to be at fault for their failings. Rarely is the institution, its policies or practices called into question. Graduating from college is considered one of the highest achievements of success an individual can obtain. However, the attainment of success implies a common process: develop good behaviors, work hard, get a good education and work your way up in a company. Unfortunately, the inequality begins with the first step in the process. Higher education is now implicitly mandatory for all since a college degree is a common requirement for most middle class jobs. However, the privileged structure of accessing higher education results in inequities that constrain one's chances to obtain success. This implicit mandate is problematic since the massive structure of the educational system is a reality that determines life chances and choices (Newman 2012: 279). Scholars who study college student success define it in terms of access, retention, graduation and grade point average, all which point to student learning.

Critical Race Theory

The legacy of racism is embedded in every social institution in America, including the education system that continues to tout ideologies of meritocracy and equal opportunity. As a result, an achievement gap exists that is part of a larger system of structural inequities. Universities and colleges are complex systems with policies and practices that result in the continued oppression of certain students. The very culture of universities and colleges often create boundaries that prevent students of color from enjoying the same amount of academic success as their white peers, yet disparities tend to be attributed to the actions and characteristics of student themselves. We cannot deny the disparity in college retention of students of color as compared to their majority counterparts. Therefore, Critical Race Theory (CRT) is useful to explore the various ways racism and the assumptions of race operate in higher education limiting academic success for certain students. Recognizing that power structures are based on white privilege and supremacy, CRT is an analytical tool used to expose race and racism that serve as a source of othering marginalized individuals (DeCuir and Dixson 2004). Specifically, CRT provides an appropriate theoretical lens for which to interrogate an institution's policies and practices in regards to underrepresented students and how they experience the campus environment, thus providing the tools needed to examine the realities of students of color attending Wayne State University. There is a great need to acknowledge the varied lived experiences that exist among the student body, experiences that affect how students confront college, which cannot be divorced upon admittance. CRT provides an interpretive framework that asserts the needs of marginalized populations while critically analyzing the presumptions and reasoning that underlie educational policies (Teranishi 2007).

How racial issues are described and discussed shape our perception and response to these issues (West 2001:3). Therefore, it is important that an analytical assessment of the campus's culture, policy, and practices include how race is conceptualized and operationalized. Critical Race Theory acknowledges that racism is engrained in the fabric of American life. CRT focuses on the effects of race and racism, while simultaneously addressing the effect of the hegemonic system of white supremacy on the meritocratic system (DeCuir and Dixson 2004: 27). CRT also recognizes that institutional racism is pervasive in the dominant culture. The analytical lens that CRT uses examines existing power structures based on white privilege and supremacy. Critical Race Theory offers a way to rethink traditional education scholarship by challenging the traditional claims of objectivity, meritocracy, color blindness, race neutrality and equal opportunity as well as the dominant discourse of race and racism by examining how educational theory, policy, and practice have been used to subordinate racial groups (Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995; Solorzano 1998). There are five fundamental tenets that form the critical analysis of race and racism in CRT: (1) counter-storytelling, (2) the permanence of racism, (3) Whiteness as property, (4) interest convergence, and (5) the critique of liberalism (Matsuda 1993; Bell 1992, 1995; Lawrence 1995; Harris 1993; Bell 1980; Crenshaw 1988).

Counter-storytelling

A tenant of CRT is the privileging of stories told by people of color who highlight their lived experiences in a highly racialized social order: stories where social institutions and its practices serve the interests of white people (Lopez 2003:85). The use of counter-storytelling in a CRT framework analyzing education research has been essential to giving voice to the personal and community experiences of people of color as sources of knowledge (DeCuir and Dixson 2004: 27; Dixson and Rousseau 2005). Delgado and Stefancic (2001:144) define counter-storytelling as

a storytelling that “aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority.” Counter-storytelling allows marginalized groups to have a voice and name their own reality since they are able to use narratives to illuminate and explore experiences of racial oppression (Delgado and Stefancic 1993). Counter-storytelling is a means of critiquing dialogues and challenging the privileged discourses of the majority that perpetuate racial stereotypes (Delgado 1989; DeCuir and Dixson 2004).

Scholars of CRT believe that there are two different accounts of reality: the dominant reality that “looks ordinary and natural” (Delgado 1995: xiv), neutral, and just to most individuals (Lopez 2003:84); and the racial reality (Bell 1980) that has been suppressed or censored (Lopez 2003:84). Counter-storytelling is helpful to “understand what life is like for others, and invite[s] the reader into a new and unfamiliar world” (Delgado and Stefancic 1993:41). Subordinated groups have experiential knowledge that is legitimate as well as appropriate to explain the meaning and consequences of the racialized experience (Brown 2003). In 2013, when President Obama identified himself with Trayvon Martin, he was heavily criticized for “injecting himself and racial division into matters best left alone” (Branch 2013:9). The dominant story about race in our country in the form of complaints against President Obama was prevalent in media coverage. Pundits charged President Obama with betraying “the great achievement of our society, the possibility of not talking about race” (Branch 2013:9). By identifying with Trayvon Martin, President Obama gave voice to and named the reality of what it means to be a black man walking down any street in our society. His comments exposed a racialized experience that is ordinary for many people of color. These lived experiences are not natural, yet they occur at high frequencies and are hidden behind a cloak knitted with post racial jargon. It is not a surprise that the dominant group took issue with President Obama’s remarks. How could the first black president of the

United State of America – a symbol of “post racial” meritocracy at its greatest – violate the neutrality and censorship that governs colorblind ideology in our great nation?

The Permanence of Racism

Racial stratification is “ordinary, ubiquitous, and reproduced in mundane and extraordinary customs and experience,” and affecting the quality of life’s choices and chances of racial groups (Brown 2003:294). The concept of the permanence of racism suggests that racist hierarchical structures are a permanent component of American life which govern all political, economic, and social life, including education (DeCuir and Dixson 2004; Dixson and Rousseau 2005). Historically, race emerged as a social structure – a racialized social system that awarded privileges to Europeans, the people who became white, over non-Europeans, the people who became nonwhite (Bonilla-Silva 2010). Race’s existence is connected to the distribution of jobs, power, prestige, wealth (Lopez, 2003; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller & Thomas, 1995), educational access, and opportunity. Acknowledging the permanence of racism moves beyond the popular colorblind American ideology about race that renders racism an individual and irrational act in a world that is neutral, rational, and just (Lopez 2003; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller and Thomas 1995) and places racism at the forefront of critical inquiry by acknowledging its pervasive role throughout society. According to CRT scholars, the reason why society does not see racism is that it is a normal, ordinary and taken for granted daily experience. Thus, we fail to see how racism functions and shapes institutions, relationship, and ways of thinking (Lopez 2003).

Educational institutions fail to see how policies and models that are touted as best practices work to reproduce racial stratification. The Wayne State University GRAD Report is an example of the systemic racism that impedes forward thinking to solve many challenges that the institution faces, mainly retention and graduation. For example, the report lists six “primary thrusts” as

critical initiatives to improve achievement outcomes (GRAD Report 2013:10-11). They are (1) curricular improvements, (2) expand academic advising, (3) overhaul and expand the Office of Teaching and Learning, (4) support for under-prepared students, (5) first year experiences and learning communities, and (6) financial aid. Student learning is paramount for increasing retention and consequently, graduation rates. By improving the curriculum, Wayne State University hopes to “better support student learning and our graduation goals” (GRAD Report 2013:12). However, the challenge is, how to realize that hope when basic courses that teach lifelong skills such as computer literacy are no longer part of the general education curriculum (WSU Undergraduate Bulletin), yet are an essential component of student life while enrolled at the institution, and of work life almost everywhere for college graduates. By making this change, students who do not have computers at home or have not had consistent access to a computer will not have the basic computer skills needed to succeed in school and beyond. Not having basic computer skills can make a difference in accessing Blackboard (WSU’s web-based course management system), emailing an instructor, paying tuition bills, writing a paper, along with many other aspects of college life. Changing the general education curriculum in this way could exacerbate social stratification by restricting access to a basic skill that is needed to succeed at the institution and beyond. On the surface, eliminating the Computer Literacy requirement from the general education roster of courses seems ordinary and mundane since removing and adding courses for general education curriculum is a common practice in higher education. However, the absence of computer skills maintains a racial social order that restricts the opportunity structure – succeeding in college and finding a job – mainly for all students, but more so for students of color.

The permanence of race operates in insidious ways on the institution as a whole. Situated in Detroit, Michigan, Wayne State University lauds its ability to provide a quality education filled

with opportunity and excellence in a vibrant metropolitan city. Billboards, radio and television commercials advertising Wayne State University's uniqueness as a result of being located in an urban environment fail to mention that the sins of the city affect the institution. The racism that haunts the city is so pervasive that its extraordinary effect on the institution goes unnoticed except for the under-prepared students that enter its doors each fall semester. Recognizing underprepared students is easy to do when the numbers of students who enroll and graduate are not comparable. However, the challenge is recognizing the myriad of ways that the institution reproduces racial stratification through its mundane, race-neutral procedures and policies. By not addressing the surrounding racially charged atmosphere that permeates the university environment, solutions generated to increase retention and graduation rates will be limited in their scope.

Whiteness as Property

White privilege includes the presumption that whiteness does not need to be mentioned in any discussions of identity and privilege - including educational privilege as well as other forms of economic, social and cultural capital (Harris 1993; DeCuir and Dixson 2004). Legal CRT scholars contend that whiteness can be considered a property interest as a result of the legal reification of race in the United States (DeCuir and Dixson 2004). The notion of whiteness as property refers to whiteness as the ultimate property which whites alone possess (DeCuir and Dixson 2004). Property not only describes things or the rights of persons with respect to a thing, it also characterizes the rights in things that may be intangible or legally defined (Harris 1993). Thus whiteness, as defined by law, affirms who is white; what benefits are afforded to that identity; and what entitlements result (Harris 1993). According to Harris, essential attributes of property rights are the right to: possession, disposition, exclude, use and enjoyment (1993; DeCuir and Dixson 2004). Harris argues that these rights have been used to establish whiteness as a form of

property (1993). Within a Critical Race Theory framework, whiteness is valuable and is property, granting privileges and making the American dream a more likely and attainable reality for whites citizens. Whiteness grants privileges to the owner that a renter (or a person of color) would not be afforded. Researchers of educational inequity utilize whiteness as property in a CRT framework to examine the myriad ways that school district policies and practices reify whiteness as property by asserting rights to possession, use and enjoyment, and disposition to white students. That is, whiteness gives many white students an entitlement to safe and well-equipped schools, high-quality, rigorous curriculum, honors and gifted programs, and advanced placement courses while excluding access and use to students of color (Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995; Solorzano and Ornelas 2002; DeCuir and Dixson 2004). Programs and policies that reinforce white privilege at Wayne State University undermine efforts to improve retention and graduation rates. By privileging practices that have evolved from white, middle class values, the institution unwittingly devalues other cultural norms and assign labels such as “at risk,” and “under-prepared,” when students do not meet the expectations (GRAD Report 2013:11).

Interest Convergence

Another tenant of Critical Race Theory is the notion of interest convergence. Interest convergence refers to the belief that “whites will tolerate and advance the interests of people of color only when they promote the self-interests of whites” (Lopez 2003:84). It describes the occurrences of gains and opportunities provided people of color as a result of America’s interests being met (DeCuir and Dixson 2004). For example, Bell (1980) suggests that the famous *Brown v. Board of Education* decision came about because of the United States need to politically appease its allies in the third world during the cold war and not as a result of the historical plight and social conditions of blacks (Lopez 2003). Civil rights legislation and the limited success of *Brown v.*

Board of Education came about because conferring basic rights to minorities, converged with the self-interests of the dominant group at the right time. “Such a convergence not only ensures that racism always remains firmly in place but that social progress advances at the pace that white people determine is reasonable and judicious” (Lopez 2003; Bell 1980). Further, DeCuir and Dixson (2004) argue that any gains for people of color will not make a substantive difference in their lives since it is not in the self-interests of elite whites.

Another example of interest convergence is the population counts in the early 1800’s that legally counted three out of every five slaves as one white person to resolve the representation and taxation debate between northern and southern whites (<http://constitution.laws.com/three-fifths-compromise>). Prior to 1787, slaves were property to be taxed and not people to be counted as members of the population. However, southern whites wanted more political representation in the House of Representatives but did not want to be taxed as a result of having more slaves than the northern states. Thus, the “Three-Fifths Compromise” was created to outline the process for states to count slaves in order to determine representation and taxation for the federal government. Inclusion in the population count did not come as a result of whites’ wanting to give slaves political representation. Counting blacks as three-fifths a person came about because the political interest of southern whites’ converged with a slight improvement of slave life.

The strategy and goals outlined in the GRAD Report were created to address a critical issue for Wayne State University: the gap in retention and graduation rates between students of color and white students. The issue is more critical because the State of Michigan implemented performance-based funding in 2012. Since then, Wayne State University has received the smallest increase by percentage each year (Jesse 2015). If the university had higher six-year graduation rates, the funding it receives from the state would be considerably larger. According to the GRAD

report, “had African-American and Hispanic undergraduate full-time FTIAC students been retained at the same rates as white students, tuition revenue would be much greater. In 2012, the estimated amount of lost tuition due to inequality of outcomes is \$13.9 million” (2013:13-14). The goals and strategies are considered an “investment” (Grad Report 2013:14) by the report creators since the return on the investment would increase funding from the state as well as tuition income. Remedies to improve the achievement gap at the university came about when the financial future of the university was threatened. The interests of the university converged with the interest of its lower performing students.

The Critique of Liberalism

The concept of colorblindness, the neutrality of the law, and incremental change are notions of liberal ideology that draw indignation from CRT scholars. First, the idea that the law is colorblind and neutral ignores the history of racism in the U.S., specifically since rights and opportunities were given and withheld based on race. Therefore, the concept of colorblindness fails to account for the persistence and permanence of racism and the construction of people of color as “other” (Lopez 2003; DeCuir and Dixson 2004). Second, colorblind ideology, the belief that that race does not matter and racism no longer exist, has been used as a justification to reverse race-based policies that were created to address social inequity (Gotanda 1991). According to Brown (2003:294), race problems are difficult to grasp and “possibly impossible to remedy because claims of objectivity and meritocracy camouflage the self-interest, power, and privilege of whites.” Colorblind ideology positions racism at the individual level and ignores other ways in which it functions in society (Lopez 2003). An example of a race-based policy change is the United States Supreme Court upholding of Michigan’s constitutional amendment banning the use of race in public university admissions’ practices (Barnes 2014). Chief Justice Roberts’ famous

statement from his 2007 opinion on another race-based policy case regarding public school districts' use of race to determine what schools students can attend, is invoked here to demonstrate the majority opinion of the court "the way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to stop discrimination on the basis of race" (Barnes 2007). In her dissent of the Michigan case, Justice Sotomayor called Roberts' statement from 2007 "too simplistic" (Barnes 2014). CRT scholars would argue that Roberts' statement conflates racism and discrimination as well as implies a level playing field that does not account for the crystallization of racism in America's structures. According to CRT, the problem is not discrimination per se, but racial oppression and stratification that comes as a result of such discrimination. By equating any differential treatment with discrimination, Roberts ignores that the social structure routinely "discriminates" in favor of whites. Neutral policies ignore the fact that inequity, inopportunity, and oppression are historical artifacts that will not be remedied by simply ignoring the role of race in contemporary society (DeCuir and Dixson 2004).

Finally, gains for oppressed groups must occur at a pace that is acceptable to those in power (DeCuir and Dixson 2004). DeCuir and Dixson (2004) argue that the difference between the eradication of inequality and inequity accounts for incremental change. Seeking equality does not address the processes, structures, and ideologies that justify inequity. Inequality based solutions assume that all citizens have the same "equal" opportunities and experiences. The dual society in public education goes unquestioned (Kozol 1991:4). However, inequity based solutions recognize that the playing field is unequal and addresses the inequality. Since racial experiences are not equal, especially for people of color, an unequal situation is created. Incremental change, therefore, benefits those who are not unfavorably affected by social, economic, and educational inequity that comes as a result of racism (DeCuir and Dixson 2004). In addition, individuals who are satisfied

with incremental change are those who are less likely to be directly affected by oppressive and marginalizing conditions (DeCuir and Dixson 2004).

One of the primary “thrusts” of the GRAD report recommends “support for under-prepared students” by expanding Supplemental Instruction, tutoring, academic success courses, and learning communities (2013:11) in order to engage students since “educationally-purposeful forms of engagement” (GRAD Report 2013:40) have been found to enhance student success (Kuh 2008). As inequality based solutions to increase retention and graduation rates, the initiatives assume that all students have the same “equal” opportunities and experiences to recognize that supplemental instruction, learning communities, and academic success courses as opportunities to increase their chances at doing well at the university as opposed to extracurricular activities that require extra time and effort. Further, these initiatives do not address the processes, structures, and ideologies that collide to label students as “under-prepared” and “at risk.” Instead, the responsibility is placed on students, specifically students of color to understand the importance of participating and self-select into the various programs.

Ladson-Billings and Tate introduced the use of Critical Race Theory in educational research a decade ago and ever since it has proven to be a powerful theoretical and analytical framework (DeCuir and Dixson 2004: 27). However, CRT has not been fully utilized since education research tends to focus on the counter-storytelling and the permanence of racism tenets (DeCuir and Dixson 2004: 27). The proposed research will add to Critical Race scholarship by utilizing the critique of liberalism to examine the educational culture and environment of an urban institution of higher education. Critical Race Theory provides an analytical tool to examine the subtlety, pervasiveness and salience of race and racism in higher education and how it manifests

in various ways. CRT also challenges researchers to critique school practices and policies that are overtly and covertly racist, making race the central focus (DeCuir and Dixson 2004).

CRT as an interdisciplinary theory of race and racism, can be used to highlight why the use of “diversity” as a mechanism for excellence is a flawed model that promulgates oppression instead of eradicating it. Diversity has become increasingly commodified through the institution accreditation process and the political/financial pressure to increase retention. The GRAD report assumes a campus culture that supports diversity and inclusiveness while ignoring the current environment that is filled with practices and policies that serve as barriers to students of color. The report, which is examined further in the following chapter, is an example of how systemic routine racism impedes forward thinking and creative problem-solving to resolve the retention and graduation problem at Wayne State University.

A Critical Race Theory framework implies social change (DeCuir and Dixson 2004), and seeks to discover and disrupt institutional cultural policies, and practices that continue to marginalize students of color and limit their academic success in college. Accordingly, this research will address the challenge of low retention and graduation rates by utilizing service-learning as a pedagogical approach – an institutional change – to increase higher education outcomes for students of color.

The body of research exploring and explaining the low achievement outcomes of students of color has been both quantitative and qualitative in nature. Research on the efficacy of service-learning in improving educational outcomes is fairly new and focuses on the self-reported perceptions of participants and not its effect on retention and graduation rates. My research examines the relationship between educational outcomes of FTIAC students and the effect that taking a service-learning class has on those outcomes. I am especially interested in how service-

learning may or may not improve the graduation and retention rates of students of color at Wayne State University.

Using critical theory as a framework throughout this research, I examine the possibility and transformation of outcomes that service-learning may have on academic achievement. Following the tradition of critical social sciences, this research (1) seeks to understand the experiences of students of color in higher education institutions in light of policy restraints and prescriptions; (2) recognizes the significance that race plays in structuring human subjectivity; and (3) gives credence to the impact of racial difference when creating practices and policies that are put in place to determine the life chances and choices of students. “Critical social science embraces practical, moral, and ethnically and politically informed research” (Stage 2007:6). My research offers a critique as well as solutions for an urban Research I university that is experiencing challenges with retaining and graduating students of color.

CHAPTER 4: CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE GREATER RETENTION AND ACHIEVEMENT THROUGH DIVERSITY REPORT

The Greater Retention and Achievement through Diversity (GRAD) report outlines several recommendations for utilizing diversity as a mechanism to achieve institutional goals including closing the achievement gap at Wayne State University. The committee characterizes diversity as a component of academic excellence that is needed to achieve the retention and graduation goals of WSU, and can only be attained by a commitment to a unified vision of inclusive excellence for all admitted students (GRAD Report 2013:4-5). The report defines diversity as the differences in age, ideas and perspectives, abilities, creed, ethnicity, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, veteran status, national origin, race, religious and spiritual beliefs, and the socioeconomic and geographic composition of its students, faculty, administrative professionals and staff (GRAD Report 2013:14).

The academic mission of WSU includes diversity, multicultural knowledge, and inclusive excellence. This mission informs the motto “Aim Higher” (GRAD Report 2013:5). The crafters of the report question the reality and success of the mission for all students at WSU, acknowledging the small successes that currently exists as well as admitting the need for commitment to a unified vision of inclusive excellence for all students (GRAD Report 2013:5).

The GRAD Report identifies six areas which the University should focus its retention initiatives (2013:10-11).

1. General education curriculum
2. Academic advising
3. Support for teaching and learning
4. Support for under prepared students
5. First year experiences and learning communities

6. Financial Aid

While an improvement in each of these six areas may demonstrate success on a small scale, I argue that long-term success of this approach will be limited because none of the areas identified and described in the report proactively resolves the achievement gap. As described below, patchwork “support” in each area will not be sustainable to warrant future adaptation, particularly if WSU’s enrollment increases in coming years.

Wayne State University administrators have described the retention and low graduation rates of people of color in terms of individual students’ race, rather than racism embedded in institutional practices, which has led to the proposed recommendations of the GRAD committee, which promotes the use of diversity as a mechanism for attaining academic excellence. When social problems are understood as being caused by race rather than racism whether implied or explicit, it restricts the solutions to individual based solutions that focus on the actions of students of color. This approach ignores the historical, political, ideological, social, and economic factors that play a significant role in the life chances and choices of racialized individuals. The GRAD report is an example of the flawed logic that Bonilla-Silva and Zuberi (2008:4, 6) refer to as “white racial logic” because it interprets racial disparities as a causal effect of individual student’s race. That is, this approach views individual characteristics of students of color, rather than race relations in American society, as the main driving force of group differences. Further, any analyses aimed at describing and prescribing the minority experience on campus without including minority voices is incomplete.

The words and phrases used in the GRAD report point to a lack of understanding of how language informs policy. For example, students who are not prepared academically for WSU are labeled “at risk.” The “at risk” label presumes individual not systemic responsibility. Although

embedded in discussions about policy and practice reformation that will assist “at risk” students, the prescribed change relies heavily on the student to recognize her “at risk-ness”; access the opportunity created to “fix it”, without a fundamental change in how the institution addresses the decreased success of its students.

Universities and colleges are complex systems with policies and practices that result in the continued oppression of certain students. Since the legacy of racism is embedded in every social institution in America, including the education system, the culture and institutional practices of universities can create boundaries that prevent students of color from academic success. Discourse analysis is a practical approach to uncovering the particular ways social life is represented in text and talk (Fairclough 1995a; Gee 2010). However, to understand and expose the inequality and power imbalance that persists in institutions of higher education, a critical examination of institutional policies and practices is needed. Critical discourse analyses examine the relationship between discourse and power, and the way social dominance is enacted and reproduced by text and talk in the social and political context (van Dijk 2008; Phillips and Jorgensen 2002). Critical discourse analysis is concerned specifically with how discourse constructs the social world. Policy and reports have the tendency to have an anonymous feel when constructing discourse, especially when it is a committee effort. The institutional context of a report gives it power since it, in essence, is the collective voice of an institution’s administrators often guiding practices. According to Critical Race Theory, the voice that speaks through such official discourse is a white, middle class, male voice (Ladson-Billings 1998). A micro-level analysis explores the social order through the use of language, discourse, verbal interaction and communication. Macro-level analyses focuses on inequality, power, and dominance between groups (van Dijk 2008: 354). Through interaction and experience, the micro-level and macro-level analyses form a complete critical analysis (van

Dijk 2008: 354). This chapter examines how the Greater Retention and Achievement through Diversity (GRAD) report represents social life in its description of diversity on the campus of Wayne State University and how the strategic goals reproduce social dominance.

For this analysis power is defined in terms of control, including controlling access to social resources as well as the content and context of discourse. An institution has power if it is able to control the acts and minds of other groups by rewarding or restricting access to important resources by wielding discursive power. Such power may or may not be absolute; can be situational; and dominated groups may resist, accept, comply with, or legitimate such power, and find it normal (van Dijk 2008: 355). “The power of dominant groups may be integrated in laws, rules, norms, habits, and even a quite general consensus” and take the form of hegemony (van Dijk 2008: 355). Power may not be exercised in overt ways instead it may operate in taken-for-granted actions of everyday life (Essed 1991). In institutions of higher education, power operates in the taken-for-granted actions of everyday life because of the meaning and value imputed to whiteness and the practices and policies that were created for white students by white administrators. Critical Race Theory, as an intellectual tool, deconstructs oppressive structures and discourses; reconstructs human agency; and constructs equitable and socially just power relations (Ladson-Billings 1998).

Diversity

The persuasive power of the GRAD Report is based on knowledge, information, and authority. The power is derived from the discourse in the report that constructs and contextualize student experience from the assumptions and perspective of administrators. As a source of power, it controls the actions of administrators and students alike by setting the context for how the university will achieve its retention and graduation goals and close the achievement gap (GRAD Report 2013). The context is *diversity*. Specifically, the report recommends adopting the “inclusive

excellence” model, integrating the institution’s educational mission to efforts of diversity and inclusion purposefully (GRAD Report 2013:4). By adopting this model, the authors of the GRAD report set the context of the campus environment as being *diverse*. Further, as an instrument of information and authority, the report sets the definition of diversity:

At Wayne State University, we benefit from having a rich diverse campus. Yet, serious inequalities persist, preventing our institution from reaping the benefits of an increasing diverse population (GRAD Report 2013:4).

It also defines how it will operate in the campus environment:

Diversity, as a component of academic excellence, is essential to the relevance of higher education in the twenty-first century. At Wayne State University, we cannot achieve our retention and graduation rate goals without closing our achievement gaps. While there are certainly factors in student success beyond our control, it is important to know that many other colleges and universities have narrowed and even closed such gaps by making appropriate investments in their students (GRAD Report 2013:4).

As a “builder” of things, discourse, in this case, language, constructs reality (Gee 2010). Therefore, how *diversity* is used; described in theory as well as practice; recommended, identified, and connected to the university context, is significant since it will “build” the reality for which Wayne State University will achieve its retention and graduation goals.

This model, and the success of institutions that have committed to it has been a major influence on this report and on the development of the activities and programs that we recommend. In this context, diversity, multicultural knowledge, and inclusive excellence are understood as part of our academic mission (GRAD Report 2013:5).

Contextually, *diversity* as it is described and used in the background section of the report is ambiguous. For example, in the first passage above, the term refers to the racial composition of the university population. The phrase “...we benefit from having a rich diverse campus. Yet, serious inequalities persist...” frames Wayne State University’s problem as an objective condition experienced by all students. It does not label the stunning disparities that exists on campus, thus conflating the experiences of students of color in the classroom and on campus while

simultaneously “denying the reality of a racialized society and its impact on ‘raced’ people in their everyday lives (Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995). Yet in the second passage, *diversity* refers to a pedagogical approach that will help the university achieve its goals through instruction.

Discourse does not only contribute to shaping the social world but it also reflects them. (Phillips and Jorgensen 2002). The second passage is also a discursive representation of social life on campus by indicating the nature of power in the relationship between students and the university. First, it commodifies students as products in which to be invested as opposed to individuals being served. Second, it ignores the reality of students having power as a result of their agency to leave the university at any time they choose. On the face, “making investments in their students” seems as a noble action to take in order to achieve its goals. However, the language used to construct the reality of how diversity is defined and will operate is vague and indicates a level of ambiguousness that may be purposeful in establishing and maintaining a social order on campus since the institution is using it strategically. Diversity as a strategy, CRT argues, is a component of liberal ideology that also includes notions of colorblindness and multiculturalism, which fail to take into consideration the persistence and permanence of racism and the construction of people of color as “other” (DeCuir and Dixson 2004; Bonilla-Silva 2010). Further, diversity as a strategy does not have a mechanism for the extensive changes needed in order confront and change racist patterns (Ladson-Billings 1998).

Strategic Goals

The GRAD report was created by the Retention and Advisory Committee at Wayne State University to strategically address the challenges that the institution is experiencing as a result of low retention and graduation rates of its students. Further, the report gives recommendations on how to achieve each strategic goal. Each goal is stated and defined as well as linked to a specific phrase from the overall Wayne State University strategic plan. This chapter discusses the

implications of the strategic goals 1 – 4 and 6, the linked section of the strategic plan and the indicators of each goal.

Strategic Goal 1: Educational Excellence and Achievement - Promote and support excellence in the form of high quality education and high achievement for all students.

WSU Strategic Plan: *“We are committed to providing our students ... an environment in which academic achievement is accompanied by personal growth.”*

The above passages indicate the inclusiveness of both the strategic goal as well as the strategic plan by the use of “all students” and “our students” in the statements. However, the indicators listed to assess the success of the strategic goal suggests that the goal is specifically for students of color since the first indicator is listed as “GPA of graduating minority students” (GRAD Report 2013:35). Further, the description that follows the list of indicators for this goal speak directly about students of color:

Increasing the success of students of color means more than closing gaps in graduation rates. It’s important that Wayne State University provide opportunity and support for academic rigor and achievement in the Irvin D. Reid Honors College, in STEM disciplines, in Undergraduate Research, and other similar programs (GRAD Report 2013:36).

The above description denies one stark reality for students of color within the halls of schools: “academic rigor” in the form of gifted and talented programs as well as honors curriculum have been used historically as a strategy of exclusion. As a form of intellectual property, Critical Race Theory argues, knowledge and what is constructed as rigorous belongs to whites, who created and control the cultural practices that laid the foundation of schooling (Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995). As a result, when students of color do not measure up to the standards, they are excluded through “objective” means.

The dissonance between the goal, the strategic plan, and the list of indicators represents an institutional use of power to contextualize the experience of students of color on campus. For example, the list of indicators include “Participation in high quality educational experiences such

as internships, undergraduate research, service-learning, etc.”; “Successful completion of competitive programs, e.g. STEM disciplines”; and “Successful admission to graduate/professional school” (GRAD Report 2013: 36). The strategic goal takes a passive approach to achieving educational excellence and achievement by using words such as “support and promote,” while the strategic plan takes an active approach describing the universities commitment to be a provider “we are committed to providing our students.” Unlike the discursive power used to convey authority on *diversity* in the background section of the GRAD Report, the indicators of success do not suggest mandatory compliance in their language usage. However, the list provides a representation of social order reproduction on campus by describing the university as the gracious provider of activities and programs that require additional, outside of classroom time in order to be involved, “Participation in high quality educational experiences such as internships, undergraduate research, service-learning, etc” (GRAD Report 2013:36). This specific indicator denies the lived experiences of students of color who may work and/or have familial responsibilities in addition to attending the university. Moreover, none of the indicators listed measure the university’s effort to provide the opportunities.

Strategic Goal 2: Retention and Degree Attainment – Increase retention and degree attainment for under-served, under-represented, and minority students.

WSU Strategic Plan: *“Implementation and evaluation of programs designed to improve retention and graduation rates.”*

Strategic Goal 3: Educational Access and Opportunity – Provide meaningful access to higher education for under-served, under-represented and minority students.

WSU Strategic Plan: *“Opportunity is embodied in the chance for a diverse array of students from down the street and around the world to study at a major research university and prepare for a lifetime of success.”*

The second and third strategic goal indicate inclusiveness of several groups of students “under-served, under-represented, and minority,” which includes not only race but gender and socioeconomic standing as well as non-traditional students. However, the list of indicators for both goals use the term *minority* when describing how it will assess the success of achieving each goal, “Retention rates for minority students...”; “Pass rates for minority students...”; “Degree attainment for minority students...”; “Admission and enrollment rates and numbers for minority students”; “Need-based financial aid numbers for minority students”; and “Merit-based financial aid numbers for minority students...” thus signifying that the goal is for a specific group of students and is not as inclusive as it may seem (GRAD Report 2013:36-37). Discourse can be used to build identities of others resulting in an enactment of our own identity (Gee 2010). By using the term *minorities*, the discursive power of the GRAD report reconstructs an identity of a specific group of students that carries a history of otherness and social inequality while simultaneously enacting and privileging the identity of the middle-class norms that institutions of higher education reflect.

Strategic Goal 4: Diversity Learning and Development – Enhance the strategic value of diversity and diversity learning to the entire campus community.

WSU Strategic Plan: *“The diversity of [WSU’s] students, faculty, and staff mirrors the real world, providing a unique experience for students that better prepares them to succeed upon graduation. At Wayne State, students and faculty don’t just study concepts — they live them.”*

Strategic Goal 6: Campus Climate - Promote a campus climate that supports, values, and demonstrates a commitment to diversity by the entire University community.

WSU Strategic Plan: “Nurture a culture of pride among University students, faculty and staff.”

Texts are created and consumed (perceived and interpreted) through discursive practices that contribute to the construction of the social world, including social relations. (Phillips and Jorgensen 2002). Strategic goals four and six refer to diversity in various ways. In strategic goal

4, diversity is used as a pedagogical approach yet in the link to the university's strategic plan, it refers to difference. The dissonance in the terms usage is furthered in the list of indicators of success because the list does not actually supply measures for assessing goal attainment. Instead, a list of what is perceived as already happening is supplied:

Indicators for Strategic Goal 4:

- Intercultural knowledge and competence is a learning outcome achieved by all WSU students (for example, through general education).
- The diversity of the campus is perceived as valuable by our students, faculty, staff, and external stakeholders.
- Wayne State University shows evidence of a learning culture, especially with respect to diversity, multicultural, and student success issues (GRAD Report 2013:37).

In strategic goal 6, diversity is used as a term signaling difference. As an instrument of knowledge and authority, the GRAD report creates the context as well as an identity of a university that is well situated for using diversity as a tool of inclusive excellence because it is already doing it, “Wayne State University shows evidence of a learning culture, especially with respect to diversity, multicultural, and student success issues and it is perceived as valuable by our students, faculty, staff, and external stakeholders” (GRAD Report 2013:37). The dissonance in the use of *diversity* in both strategic goals reflects a social reality of the campus environment as being disconnected and politically charged. The discursive power of both strategic goals and their indicators signify the relationship that the authors of the report want to enact using diversity as a social good. However, the awkward use of the indicators of success suggests that it is relying on its power and authority to coerce the relationship by using words such as “value,” “valuable,” and “better.”

While the recommendation section of the GRAD report are not being analyzed for this research, I want to make a general point about the use of discourse and how it is used to signal power relationships. The GRAD Report situates faculty as a crucial factor in achieving its strategic goals (Grad Report 2013:39, 41, 42, 43). By doing so, it makes particular assumptions about their

skillsets. When describing the various recommendations on how to achieve the strategic goals, the report presumes faculty are equipped with a specific skillset that allows their “expertise” to be leveraged as a response to the challenges described in the background section of the report (GRAD Report 2013:39). I surmise that the “expertise” does not include *diversity* since in the 2014-2015 academic year, one year after the GRAD Report was created, the Wayne State University professoriate was made up of 67% whites, 22% Asians, 7% black, and 4% others, with an average age of 52. The presumption itself creates the context for how the recommendation unfolds. Instead of teaching faculty how to teach “students who are different from them...” the recommendation is “support faculty in teaching students who are different from them...” (GRAD Report 2013:39). The difference lies in the action that the word connotes. *Support* signals that the skill has already been acquired, it just may need a tune up. *Teach* indicates a deficiency that needs to be solved. Because faculty are a source of power within the university structure, to depict them in a way that lessens them is to displace that power. Yet in instances where the report hints at a faculty weakness, the recommendation is passive “We recommend that faculty be *supported* in *trying* or *experimenting* with these approaches, perhaps through a faculty learning community...” (Emphasis mine) (GRAD Report 2013:40).

Higher education is an important resource that has the potential to change the life choices and chances of students. Education as a social resource goes beyond the campus environment since ideally those who possess it are able to increase their social mobility. As intellectual property according to CRT, education allows individuals who possess it certain rights. When the social order is reproduced within the university context as a result of discursive power that is embedded in practices and policies, access to fully take advantage of the resource and the rights afforded is restricted and in some cases denied.

CHAPTER 5: QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE EFFECTS OF SERVICE LEARNING ON GRADUATION AND GRADE POINT AVERAGE

In order to examine service-learning as a pedagogical solution for the achievement gap at Wayne State University, I analyze existing institutional data collected by the university. Specifically, data for this study was derived from the university's Student Tracking Advising Retention System (STARS). STARS is a web-based application that interacts with a collection of databases that enable convenient access to university data at both an individual and aggregate level for advising, retention, curriculum tracking, and program evaluation.

Sample

The sample for this research consists of 2,728 first time in any college (FTIAC) Wayne State University students from the fall 2008 and fall 2009 cohorts who took either SOC 2000 or ENG 3010, courses that often contain a service-learning component, during their time at Wayne State. The sample is restricted to students from the fall 2008 and fall 2009 cohorts because students in these cohorts had eight to ten semesters to graduate by 2013. Although students of the Honors College are required to take a service-learning class, they are excluded from the sample because they could potentially bias the results. Students of the Honors College are retained at higher rate and tend to graduate in four or five years unlike many non-honors students. Honors College students are also required to have a 3.30 or higher grade point average in order to retain honors membership. In order to assess service-learning as a possible means to improve retention and graduation rates at Wayne State University, it is important that the sample being analyzed was representative of the general student population and not the special population of Honors students.

Table 1. Means (or proportions) and Standard Deviations (in parentheses) of Variables by Ethnicity

	Total	Asian (N=242)	Black (N=906)	Hispanic (N=89)	White (N=1212)	Unknown (N=213)
Graduated	730	40.9	8.9	13.5	36.5	33.8
Stop-Out	1053	24.8	59.5	46.1	27.1	27.7
Still Enrolled	945	34.3	31.6	40.4	36.5	38.5
Service-learning (1=yes)	10.6	10.8	21.9	3.1	55.2	8.7
Female (1=yes)	64.3	8.4	39.2	3.1	39.6	7.3
Detroit High School (1=yes)	23.9	1.8	86.2	4.4	4.0	3.5
ACT		22.91	17.33	19.43	22.67	20.60
		(4.83)	(3.20)	(3.76)	(3.97)	(4.02)
HS GPA		3.49	2.90	3.16	3.46	3.38
		(.61)	(.61)	(.63)	(.60)	(.61)

Source: Student Tracking Advising Retention System, Wayne State University

See text for description of variable metrics

Measures

Dependent Variables

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for all variables used in the analysis. The first dependent variable gauges students' college enrollment status as of the Fall 2013 semester. Specifically, the first dependent variable classifies students into three groups, graduated by Fall 2013, stopped out or not enrolled in Fall 2013, or remained enrolled during the Fall 2013 semester. In the sample, 27% graduated, 39% stopped out, and 35% remained enrolled in college during the study period.

Grade point average is the second dependent variable. Grade point average is an important outcome because it is monitored as an indicator of student performance (DiMaggio 1982; Kao and Thompson 2003), and used as a ranking system to sort and restrict or reward educational resources such as scholarships. *Final grade point average* is measured as the student's cumulative grade point average received at Wayne State University during their final enrolled semester as of Fall 2013. Both grade point average and final grade point average are measured on the standard 4-point scale. The mean final grade point average in this sample is 2.70.

Independent Variables

Because this research argues that service-learning is a teaching pedagogy that may improve educational outcomes for students, data from general education courses that often include a service-learning component were used. Although, individual departments and colleges offer service-learning courses for various reasons, they are not institutionally mandated or tracked. Further, the mission of the university to "sustain our role as an engaged university in an urban environment" (<https://wayne.edu/about/>) is rendered an unfunded mandate that privileges research and not service to the community since a centralized office heretofore has not been created;

however the university maintains its Carnegie designation for community engagement. As a result, data on service-learning classes is difficult to gather.

For this analysis, English and Sociology courses that often contain a service-learning component were examined. I determined which sections of these courses had service-learning component because the Honors College requires that its students take one service-learning course in order to graduate with an honors distinction. By using their tracking system, two classes were identified as often having a service component as part of the classroom curriculum and as being offered regularly in an academic year. In addition, both courses are general education courses that have no required prerequisites, and tend to enroll a large percentage of first and second year students.

Importantly, when students enroll in either SOC 2000 or ENG 3010 they are not aware that their specific section of the course had a service-component, because this information is not available on the schedule of classes. Thus, students essentially “randomly” choose these specific sections based on the fact that each course is part of the general education requirement at Wayne State University. *Service-learning*, is measured as a dichotomous variable comparing students who took a service-learning class (1=yes) and those who did not. 11% of the sample took a service-learning class during their Wayne State career.

This research recognizes the powers of articulation and explanation of research on populations that are historically as well as currently oppressed. This study also recognizes that categories of race are socially constructed (Omi and Winant 1986; Bonilla-Silva 2010) and as such, the racial categories have history, meaning, and prescriptions for the lives of the individuals whose membership is awarded based on skin color as perceived by the dominant group. This study does not seek to perpetuate racial inequality by attributing race as a cause of specific academic behavior.

Instead, I seek to highlight the academic behavior as demonstrated by the students who have membership in various racial categories as grouped by the institution studied. To that end, in this study, race is defined using the standard categories which universities are required to report to the federal government. The categories available are black, Hispanic, Asian, white, Native American, unknown, two or more races, and non-resident alien². For this study *ethnicity* is operationalized using four dichotomous variables for black (1=yes), Hispanic (1=yes), Asian (1=yes), white (1=yes) and unknown (1=yes). Students identifying as belonging to either two or more racial categories or Native American were removed from the sample because small sample sizes make results for these groups unreliable. Students identified as non-resident alien were added to the category unknown because the race/ethnicity of students placed in this category is not known. For example, many foreign students at Wayne State University are Canadian. The ethnic composition of the sample is black 33%, Hispanic 3%, Asian 9%, white 44%, and unknown 10%.

Gender refers to the self-reported gender category as selected by the student during the admissions process. It is measured as a dichotomous variable, comparing female (1=yes) to male respondents. Sixty-four percent of the sample is female. The variables *ACT* and *High School Grade Point Average* are included as variables to ensure the students in the sample are comparable. The mean ACT score is 21 and the mean high school grade point average is 3.26. *Detroit* is a dichotomous variable, comparing students who are from a Detroit high school (1=yes) and those who are not. Twenty-four percent of the sample are from a Detroit high school.

To determine the representativeness of the analytic sample, I compared the statistics in Table 1 to available official institutional data published by Wayne State. In most cases, the data

² According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, a non-resident alien refers to a person who is not a citizen or national of the United States and who is in this country on a visa or temporary basis and does not have the right to remain indefinitely. I acknowledge that this is neither a racial nor ethnic category.

suggest that the sample analyzed is representative of the students in the 2008-2009 cohorts. For instance, the official 6-year graduation rate of the Fall 2008 cohort was 33.8%, which is slightly higher than the 27% for the sample here. This difference is likely attributable to the removal of Honors College students from the analytic sample. The racial composition of the sample is generally consistent with Wayne State enrollment data from 2009. In 2009, Wayne State reported a racial composition of 48.7% white, 31.4% African American, 2.8% Hispanic and 10.6% unknown. In addition, in 2009, Wayne State reported an average freshman ACT score as 20.7 and an average High School GPA of 3.16. One difference between the sample analyzed here and the available institutional data is that the sample here contains a higher representation of female students (64.3%) than the official reports from 2009 (55.3%). Thus, overall it appears that the sample analyzed is generally representative of non-Honors College Wayne State students from 2008-2009, with the exception of an over-representation of female students.

Analysis

Retention and Graduation

In order to examine the educational outcomes of students who have and who have not taken a course that has a service-learning component, multinomial logistic regression is used. I chose multinomial logistic regression because it is designed to describe the relationship between a polychotomous dependent nominal variable and a mixture of continuous and binary independent variables (Liao 1994). Here the dependent variable is a polychotomous nominal variable with three levels (graduated, stopped out, and retained). For the models estimated here, *stopped out* serves as the reference category; as such the multinomial logit estimated as a model for *graduated* relative to *stopped out* and a model for *still enrolled* relative to *stopped out*. For instance, a model with only the binary service-learning (SL) variable is:

$$\log \left[\frac{\text{Prob}(y_{ik} = j_k)}{\text{Prob}(y_i = J_1)} \right] = \alpha_k + \beta_{1k} (SL)$$

Equation 1 depicts the log odds of student i being in category j on the dependent variable, relative to J_1 , which is the reference category of stopped out. In this model, α_k can be interpreted as the log odds of a non-service either graduating or remaining enrolled relative to stopping out. β_{1k} is interpreted as the difference between in the log odds of service learning students either graduating, or remaining enrolled compared to non-service learning students.

$$\log \left[\frac{\text{Prob}(y_{ik} = j_k)}{\text{Prob}(y_i = J_1)} \right] = \alpha_k + \beta_{1k} (\text{Female}) + \beta_{2k} (\text{Black}) + \beta_{3k} (\text{Hispanic}) + \beta_{4k} (\text{Asian}) + \beta_{5k} (\text{Unknown})$$

All predictors are added to the model in the same way. For instance, equation 2 shows the model with the variables indexing race and gender. Here, α_k is the log odds of a white male student either graduating or remaining enrolled relative to stopping out. β_{1k} represents how the log odds change when the student is female and β_{2k} represents how the log odds change when the student is black compared to white. Because the magnitude of log odds coefficients can be difficult to interpret, I also report Odds Ratios (OR) to aid in interpretation. Odds ratios reflect the difference in the odds of the outcome in question for a 1 unit increase in the independent variables and are computed by exponentializing the log-odds coefficients. For instance, in equation 2, $e^{\beta_{1k}}$ is interpreted as the ratio in the odds of either graduating or remaining enrolled for female compared to male students. Further, I present graphs of predicted probabilities of graduation based on the multinomial logistic regressions.

Final GPA Models

In order to examine the final grade point average as an indicator of performance, I use ordinary least squares (OLS) regression. I use OLS for the final GPA models because the

technique is a standard way to analyze the relationships between continuous, interval level outcomes and a mixture of binary and continuous predictors (McClendon 1994). Equation 3 below shows an OLS model with just the binary service-learning variable used as a predictor.

$$y = \alpha + \beta_1(SL)$$

In equation 3, α represents the mean GPA for non-service-learning students. β_1 represents the mean difference between a service-learning student and a non-service-learning student. For continuous predictors (e.g. GPA), coefficients from the OLS models represent the predicted change in the outcome for a 1 unit increase in the independent variable.

Results

Table 2 shows the results of the multinomial logistic regression models. Model 1 uses the binary service-learning indicator as the sole predictor variable. In model 1, students who took a service-learning course had odds of graduation compared to stop-out that were nearly 2.4 times greater ($B=.873$, $p<.001$, Odds Ratio= $e^{.873}=2.39$), than students who did not experience service-learning during their college career. The difference between service-learning and non-service-learning students for remaining enrolled was not statistically significant.

Model 2 uses race and gender as the predictors. The results for Black students in Model 2 are stunning. Specifically, model 2 indicates that Black students' have odds of graduation that are nearly 89% lower than their white counterparts ($B=-2.179$, $p<.001$; OR=.113). Moreover, black students are also 58% less likely to remain enrolled in courses ($B=-.860$, $p<.001$, OR= .423). Disadvantages for Hispanic students are also evident. Hispanic students ($B=-1.491$, $p<.001$, OR=.225) have odds of graduation that are nearly 78% lower than white students and odds of remaining enrolled that are about 33% lower than white students ($b=-.404$, $p<.001$, OR=.667).

Table 2. Multinomial Coefficients of Outcome Variable on Selected Independent Variables

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	Graduated	Still Enrolled	Graduated	Still Enrolled	Graduated	Still Enrolled	Graduated	Still Enrolled	Graduated	Still Enrolled
Service-Learning	.873 *** (.150)	-.056 (.172)							.555 *** (.174)	-.309 (.178)
Female			-.048 (.112)	-.299 ** (.101)			-.121 (.121)	-.366 *** (.104)	-.149 (.122)	-.359 *** (.105)
Black			-2.179 *** (.145)	-.860 *** (.107)			-.833 *** (.192)	-.418 ** (.147)	-.816 *** (.192)	-.424 ** (.147)
Hispanic			-1.491 *** (.338)	-.404 (.245)			-.788 * (.360)	-.163 (.254)	-.771 ** (.359)	-.165 (.255)
Asian			.188 (.179)	-.012 (.186)			.170 (.192)	-.009 (.189)	.180 (.193)	-.010 (.189)
Unknown			.024 (.191)	.085 (.190)			.384 (.206)	.207 (.194)	.385 (.206)	.205 (.195)
Detroit					-1.079 *** (.170)	-.345 ** (.113)	-.552 ** (.202)	-.078 (.137)	-.560 ** (.202)	-.076 (.137)
ACT					.145 *** (.015)	.061 *** (.013)	.121 *** (.016)	.040 ** (.014)	.118 *** (.016)	.041 ** (.014)
High School GPA					1.128 *** (.100)	.509 *** (.081)	1.061 *** (.103)	.511 *** (.084)	1.047 *** (.104)	.515 *** (.084)
-2 Log Likelihood	2788.179		2478.572		2258.603		2205.797		2178.134	

Note: * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001

The patterns in Model 2 show the disturbing racial disparities that were the impetus for the GRAD report referenced above.

Model 3 uses Detroit, ACT, and High School GPA as predictors. Model 3 again shows unfortunate but expected patterns. Students who attended a high school in Detroit had odds of graduation that are 66% (B=1.079, $p<.001$, OR= .340) and odds of remaining enrolled that are 29.2% lower than student who attend high school outside of Detroit. For every unit increase in the ACT score, students' odds of graduation increased by 15% (B=.145, $p<.001$, OR=1.15) and odds of remaining enrolled increased by 6.3% (B=.061, $p<.001$, OR=1.063). HS GPA also had a predictable positive effect on both graduation and remaining enrolled. Specifically, a one-unit increase in GPA was associated with an increase in the odds of graduation of over 200% (B=1.128, $p<.001$, OR=3.089), and a 66% increase in the odds of remaining enrolled (B=.509, $p<.001$, OR=1.66).

Model 4 depicts the log odds of a student being retained, stopping out or graduating as a function of all of the independent variables except service-learning. Comparing the racial differences in Model 4 to those observed in Model 2 allows me to determine the extent to which differences in high school location, ACT scores and HS GPA explain racial differences in student outcomes at Wayne State. For instance, with the addition of the other variables, the difference between Black students and white students for graduation decreases by over 61% ($2.179-.833/2.179$) and the difference for remaining enrolled decreases by 51.3%. Thus, if black and white students had identical values on ACT scores, HS GPA and school location, black students' odds of graduation would be 56% less than their white counterparts ($b=-.833$, $p<.001$, OR=.434) and their odds of retention would be 34% lower ($b=-.418$, $p<.001$, OR=.658).

Turning to Hispanic students, with the addition of the other variables, the difference between Hispanic students and white students for graduation decreases by over 47% and the difference for remaining in school is decreased to non-significance. Thus, if Hispanic and white students had identical values on ACT scores, HS GPA and school location Hispanic students' odds of graduation would be 55% less than their white counterparts ($b=-.788$, $p<.001$, $OR=.455$) and would have similar odds of retention. Further analyses (not shown) using interaction effects explored whether the effects of service-learning on students' college outcomes varied systematically by any of the other independent variables. No interaction effects were detected indicating that the effect of service-learning on college completion status is constant across students from different backgrounds at Wayne State.

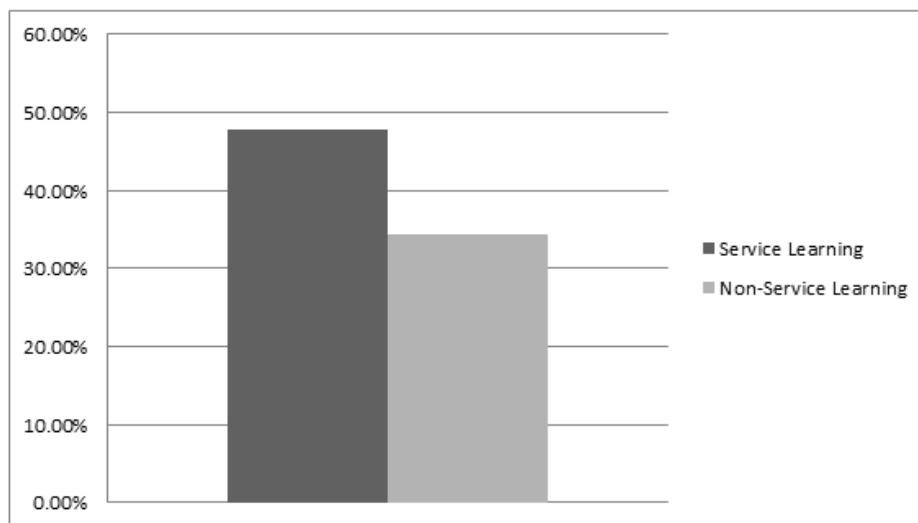


Figure 1. The Effect of Service Learning on Graduation for All Students

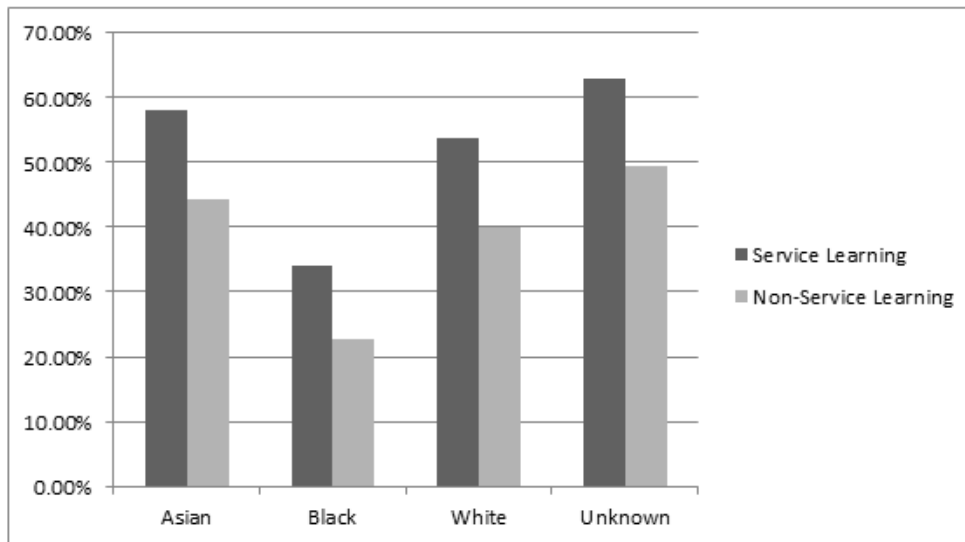


Figure 2. Effect of Service Learning on Graduation by Race

To illustrate further the results for service-learning on graduation, Figure 1 presents predicted probabilities from Model 1 with all variables except service-learning fixed at the sample mean. These probabilities can be interpreted as the counterfactual probabilities that we would observe if all students had the mean values on all independent variables except service-learning and serve to illustrate the effect that service-learning has on graduation compared to stop-out at Wayne State University. Figure 1 shows that among students with service-learning experience, the model predicts 47.7% to graduate (among students who either graduate or stop-out). However, for students without service-learning experience, the model predicts only 34.4% to graduate. Thus, service-learning has the potential to increase graduation rates markedly at Wayne State. Moreover, the benefit of service-learning is equal among students of all racial backgrounds. Figure 2 illustrates this pattern by displaying predicted probabilities of graduation by service-learning and race. Figure 2 demonstrates that service-learning, while not reducing racial disparities in graduation, does increase the chances of graduation for all students. In a typical year, Wayne State University enrolls around 3,000 FTIAC students; the results here suggest that if all students were

required to take service-learning courses, nearly 400 additional students in each incoming class would graduate within 6 years rather than stopping out.

Table 3. OLS Coefficients of Final Grade Point Average on Selected Independent Variables

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Service-Learning	.381 *** (.067)				.151 ** (.057)	-.025 (.102)	-.777 * (.315)
Female		.043 (.040)		.012 (.038)	.006 (.038)	-.019 (.040)	.001 (.038)
Black		-.960 *** (.043)		-.454 *** (.057)	-.450 *** (.057)	-.449 *** (.056)	-.452 *** (.056)
Hispanic		-.351 ** (.105)		-.052 (.102)	-.050 (.101)	-.051 (.101)	-.045 (.101)
Asian		-.059 (.069)		-.082 (.065)	-.078 (.065)	-.079 (.065)	-.073 (.065)
Unknown		-.233 ** (.070)		-.166 (.067)	-.114 (.067)	-.114 (.067)	-.114 (.067)
Detroit			-.459 *** (.045)	-.226 *** (.053)	-.226 *** (.053)	-.225 *** (.053)	-.228 *** (.053)
ACT			.044 *** (.005)	.032 *** (.005)	.031 *** (.005)	.031 *** (.005)	.030 *** (.005)
High School GPA			.418 *** (.030)	.373 *** (.031)	.368 *** (.031)	.366 *** (.031)	.343 *** (.032)
Female X Service-Learning						.255 * (.123)	
HS GPA X Service-Learning							.269 ** (.090)
R ²	.015	.198	.268	.291	.293	.294	.292

Note: * p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

Final Grade Point Average

Table 3 presents the results of the OLS regression models for final grade point average. Model 1 enters the service-learning indicator variable only. Model 1 indicates that students who had experience with service-learning had final GPAs that are .381 (b=.381, p<.001) above students who did not take a service-learning course, and that service-learning experiences explain about 1.5% of the variation in final GPA among the sample.

Model 2 depicts the relationship between a student's final grade point average as a function of the independent variables ethnicity and gender. Model 2 again shows the powerful role that race plays in shaping students educational outcomes. Specifically students who are categorized as black fare the worst at Wayne State with grade point averages that are .960 lower than their white counterparts ($b=-.960, p<.001$). Moreover, Hispanic students ($b=-.351, p<.001$) and students from unknown backgrounds ($b=-.233, p<.001$) also lag behind white students in their GPAs. There are no significant differences between Asian and white students. Model 2 further suggests that race explains nearly 20% of the variation in GPA at Wayne State.

Model 3 regresses *final grade point average* on the independent variables high school grade point average, attendance at a Detroit high school, and ACT score. The three coefficients in Model 3 are all statistically significant. The final grade point average of students who attended a Detroit high school are .46 lower than non-Detroit students ($b=.46, p<.001$), holding ACT and high school grade point average constant. In addition, for every one point score increase of a student's ACT, their final grade point average will increase by .04, holding high school grade point average and attendance at a Detroit high school constant. Finally, students' final grade point average increases by .42 for every point increase in their high school grade point average ($b=.423, p<.001$), holding the other independent variables constant. This model indicates that the three academic background variables explain approximately 27% of the variability found.

Model 4 depicts the relationship between final grade point average and the independent variables high school grade point average, ethnicity, gender, and ACT score. This model shows the degree to which the academic background variables explain racial variation in GPA. Model 4 indicates that the differences between Hispanic and white students and the differences between students from unknown backgrounds and white students are completely explained by the academic

background variables, as the coefficient for these groups are not statistically significant. However, the academic background measures do not completely explain the gap between black and white students. Model 4 suggests that even after holding academic background constant, black students have final GPAs that are .454 lower than their white counterparts. This pattern suggests that academic background explains 52.7% of the GPA gap between black and white students. All other variables had similar effects in Model 4. Overall, model 4 explains approximately 29% of variation in GPA.

Model 5 adds the service-learning variable to the model. This model tests whether service-learning experiences can explain variation in GPA beyond what is explained by the predictors in Model 4. Model 5 indicates that service-learning experiences ($B=.155$, $p<.01$) indeed has a unique effect on student GPA. Even controlling for all of the background variables and race, students who take a service-learning course have GPAs that are .155 higher than student who do not take a service-learning course.

To determine if the association between service-learning experience and GPA is constant for all students, I estimated interaction effects between the service-learning dummy variable and all of the independent variables. Two significant interaction effects were detected which are displayed in Models 6 and 7. Model 6 shows the interaction effect of female and taking a service-learning class on a student's final grade point average. The interaction effect in model 6 ($b=.255$, $p<.001$) indicates that the effect of service-learning is stronger for female students compared to males. Specifically, the results suggest almost no effect of service-learning for male students ($b=-.025$, $p>.05$). However, for female students, having service-learning experiences lead to an increase in GPA of .230 ($-.025+.255=.230$).

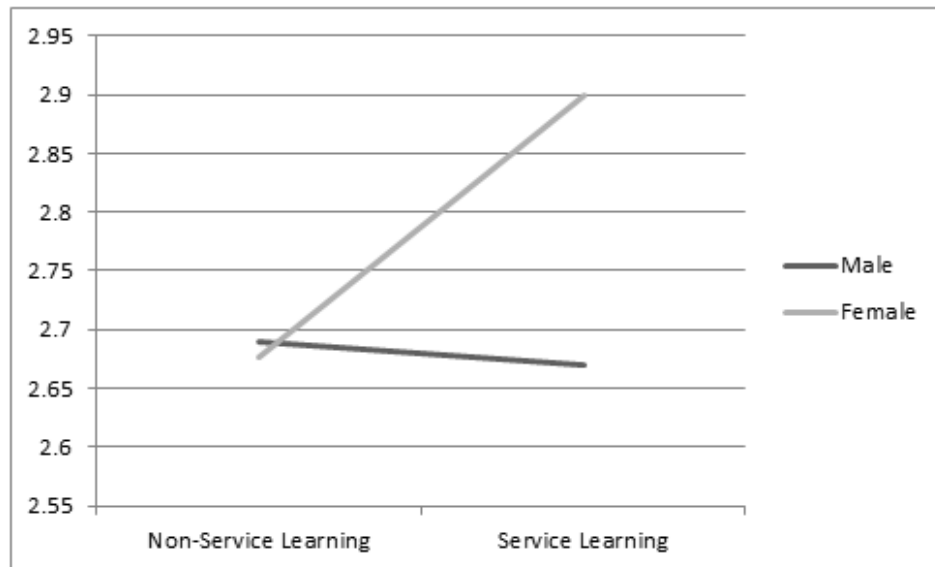


Figure 3. Effect of Service Learning on GPA by Gender

Figure 3 shows the interaction effect graphically. Figure 3 clearly shows that among male students, the effects of service-learning are modest. However, female students see a substantial increase in their GPA when they experience service-learning. The figure also shows that differences between female and male students are larger among students with service-learning experiences.

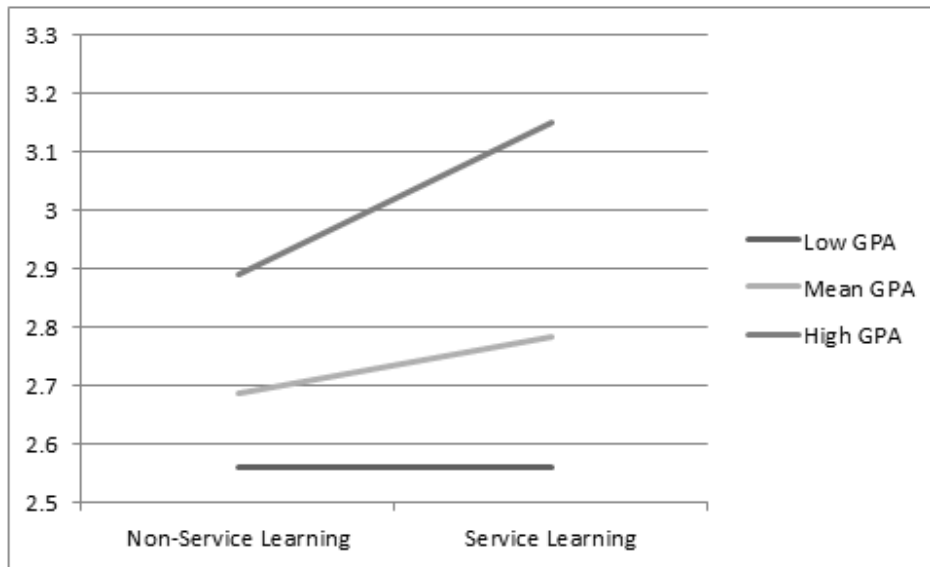


Figure 4. Effect of Service Learning on College GPA by High School GPA

Model 7 presents the results of the interaction of high school GPA and service-learning. The significant interaction effect ($b = .269, p < .01$) in Model 7 suggests that the positive effects of service-learning are most positive among students with higher high school grade point averages. In other words, the positive effect of service-learning increases as students' high school GPA increases. Figure 4 shows the results graphically. Figure 4 shows that although students with average high school grade point averages see a modest increase in their college GPA when they experience service-learning, the effect is most dramatic for students with high school grade point averages above the mean. Moreover, this pattern suggests that differences based on high school grade point averages are exacerbated by service-learning. That is, it appears that the most academically prepared students benefit the most from these experiences.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The consequences of unequal education have a terrible finality. Those who are denied cannot be “made whole” by a later act of government. Those who get the unfair edge cannot be later stripped of what they’ve won. Skills, once attained – no matter how unfairly – take on a compelling aura. Effectiveness seems irrefutable, no matter how acquired.” (Kozol 1991:180)

Educational attainment is important for adult economic outcomes in the US (Kao and Thompson 2003); an individual who graduates with a bachelor’s degree makes \$1 million more over her lifetime than a high school graduate (Day and Newburger 2002). However, racial disparities continue to impede some individual’s chance of success in education and a brighter economic future. If a person of color wants to capture a piece of the American dream through higher education, they must subject themselves to the rampant inequality that pervades higher education. As ideological institutions responsible for creating, distributing, and perpetuating ideas for and about society, colleges and universities transmit knowledge with the purpose of preparing individuals to live “productively” in society. As a social institution, the education system is also responsible for the choices and chances provided to the individuals it serves.

This study took a two-pronged, mixed methods approach to examining the racial gap in academic success at Wayne State University. Specifically, I used critical race theory to provide a critical analysis of the GRAD Report, a report that represents the institution’s official response to a funding crisis brought about in part by the failing students of color at the university. Further, I conducted a quantitative analysis of service-learning as a potential pedagogical approach to improve student success at Wayne State University. This research shows that service-learning is a pedagogical approach that has the potential to improve student success at Wayne State University, yet the implementation of strategies such as service-learning is hampered by institutional logic that fails to fully acknowledge the nature of racial stratification at the university.

This study recognizes the social, political and economic dynamics that work to produce racial differences. Findings from this research suggest that in order for post-secondary institutions such as Wayne State University to realize their democratic mandate to provide ladders of opportunity for all students, both structural and pedagogical changes must occur. Pedagogically, this study offers service-learning as a transformative strategy equipped to make institutions of higher education the “great equalizers,” they ostensibly aspire to be. Specifically, this study finds that broader implementation of service-learning could assist Wayne State University with decreasing its achievement gap. Structurally, this study finds that in order to maximize the potential of approaches such as service-learning, the university must move beyond its current organizational logic that is hindered by a student based ‘deficit’ approach. By not acknowledging certain structural biases inherent in the educational system, Wayne State University reproduces white supremacy by adhering to processes and policies that legitimizes dominant, white, [middle and] upper-class, male voices as the [normative] and standard knowledge students need to know (Swartz 1992).

Service-learning, as a teaching and learning pedagogy that links community service with classroom instruction, aims to fulfill identified community needs and conscious educational growth (servicelearning.org; Stanton et al. 1999; Brubaker and Ostroff 2000; Lisman, Harvey, and AAHE 2000; Godfrey, Grasso and AAHE, 2000; Colby 2003; Jacoby, 2003; Kaye 2004; Scheibel, Bowley, and Jones 2005; Hadlock 2005; Harkins et al 2007; Kuh 2008). I hypothesized that students who take service-learning classes will have higher grade point averages, and would persist toward degree completion at higher rates than students who do not take service-learning courses. Further, I expected this benefit of service learning courses to be greater for students of color compared to their white counterparts.

Results showed that service-learning is efficacious for both graduation and GPA. Results here indicate that students who take a service-learning course graduated from Wayne State University at a rate 2.4 times higher, and had better final grade point averages than comparable students who do not take a service-learning course. These findings add support to existing literature that describes service-learning as enhancing relevance to course content and connection to the institution; changing student attitudes; strengthening a student's ability to think critically and solve problems practically; and function as a citizen in a democratic society (Erich 1995; Giles and Eyster 1994; Harkavy 1992; Billig 2004; Kuh 2008; Reed et al 2015). Notably, I find a beneficial impact of service-learning on student outcomes despite a somewhat crude measure of service-learning. That is, I was unable to gauge the quality of service-learning experience, or how much effort students exerted on their service-learning course component. Future research should attempt to develop more detailed measurement approaches that can capture the quality of service-learning experiences to add additional insight on why this pedagogical approach leads to better student outcomes. Additionally, future research should explore the unexpected finding that students who took a service-learning course were not more likely to remain in school compared to stopping out of college.

To put the findings from this research in context, of students who took a service-learning class, 47.7% are predicted to graduate rather than stop out of college. However, for students who did not take a service-learning class, only 34.4% are predicted to graduate. The current six-year graduation rate for Wayne State University is 34.3% (WSU Quick Facts Fall 2015). Thus, service-learning has the potential to increase graduation rates at Wayne State University for all students by over 28%. Additionally, service-learning experiences were found to have the same effect on college completion status for all students no matter their racial background. Thus, in contrast to

my expectations race does not moderate the effect of service-learning. Nevertheless, by increasing the number of students from all backgrounds who graduate, increasing the use of service-learning at Wayne State University would result in increasing graduation rates for racial minorities and could assist the University in increasing the performance based revenue it receives from the state.

Critical Race Theory begins with the premise that racism is “endemic to American life” (Matsuda et al 1993). It views racism and assumptions of racism as normal daily facts of life so entrenched in the political and economic structure of society that it is almost unrecognizable (Crenshaw et al 1995; Delgado 1995; Morfin et al 2006). Race, as a persistent historical construct, is accountable for the educational outcomes of students of color since their educational resources and the quality of the schools they attend rely on the larger economic structure of society that depends on property values, which also has been affected by racism. Therefore, race plays a powerful role in shaping students’ educational outcomes, and the situation at Wayne State University reflects this broader trend. Students who are black or Hispanic have odds of graduating that are 89% and 78% respectively, lower than students who are white, and Black students are also 58% less likely to remain enrolled in college after six-years. Students who are black, Hispanic, and categorized as unknown also have lower final grade point averages than students who are white. These results show disturbing racial disparities that resulted in the article written by the Journal of Blacks in Higher Education in 2010, and the creation of the GRAD report.

Beyond race, academic preparation also has an impact on graduation. Findings suggest that attending a Detroit high school, ACT, and high school grade point average served as significant predictors of both student’s final grade point average as well as graduation. Specifically, this study found that the higher the ACT score and high school grade point average of a student, the higher their odds for remaining enrolled and graduating. Students who attended

a high school in Detroit had odds of graduating that are 66% and odds of remaining enrolled that are 29% lower than students who attended high schools outside of Detroit. These findings are unfortunate yet expected and point to the fact that school location matters. “A diploma from a ghetto high school does not count for much in the United States today” (Kozol 1991:29). School location matters for this study because attending a Detroit school allows Wayne State University administrators to presume how students were or were not prepared for college. Knowing where a student attended high school allows Wayne State University policy makers to make assumptions about what resources were and were not available to prepare students for college. I argue that these assumptions guide the deficit thinking that creates programs and policies for academic achievement in higher education especially in relation to underrepresented student groups. Generalizations, stereotypes, and falsehoods that are not grounded in empirical research function as roadblocks that inhibit the development of programs and policies that can improve educational outcomes for students (Teranishi 2005b; Teranishi 2007).

When adding all of the predictor variables except service-learning, findings highlight the effect of high school location, ACT score, and high school grade point average on racial differences in student outcomes at Wayne State University. By adding the other variables, the difference between black students and white students for graduation decreases by over 61%. The difference for persistence decreases by 51%. The difference between Hispanic students and white students for graduation decreases by over 47% and the difference for remaining in school is decreased to non-significance. These findings are consistent with the literature on college preparation that shows ACT scores and high school grade point average as indicators of success at the collegiate level, and explain a large portion of the racial gap in graduation rates and.

Service-learning was also found to have a significant unique effect on student GPA, as students with service-learning experiences performed better in their courses than their counterparts without service-learning experiences. However, results also indicated that service-learning is most beneficial to students who have above average high school grades. Thus, service-learning experiences increases GPA disparities based on high school performance. This pattern is typical for educational interventions because better students tend to benefit more from them. This pattern is likely found because students with better academic preparation possess the cultural capital needed to navigate the higher education environment, whereas students who perform worse academically may not. As this research study shows, at Wayne State University these students are more likely to be black, attended a high school in Detroit, and enter the university with lower ACT scores and worse high school GPAs. An unexpected finding was that female students benefit more from service-learning than their male counterparts. Future research should determine if this pattern generalizes to other universities and service-learning experiences.

The racial differences noted above in both graduation and student performance, were the impetus for the GRAD Report. My critical analysis of the GRAD report suggests, consistent with CRT, that the institutional response to stark racial disparities is unlikely to lead to a large-scale change in racial disparities. Specifically, the student-focused recommendations found in the GRAD report are unlikely to lead to major changes in student outcomes because, under current policies, the implementation of such programs only benefit the students who self-select into the activities. Students who lack cultural capital likely do not know that supplemental instruction, learning communities, service-learning classes, and research projects are educationally-purposeful forms of engagement that serve to enhance student success (Kuh 2008). As DeCuir and Dixson (2004) point out about the persistent and oppressive nature of the normativity of whiteness, the

high impact practices that are recommended in institutional responses such as the GRAD Report “are offered as remedies to under-achievement and educational disparity [that] may not be in the best interest of marginalized groups, but rather serve the elite. I argue that the major flawed assumption of all of the student-led recommendations found in the GRAD Report is that all students, especially those that need the educational interventions most, will know and be able to participate in them. If students do not know and understand the educational value in the activity then they may not participate, rendering the recommendation futile. In addition, the types of high impact practices implemented are often in addition to regular coursework. Thus, students who work long hours and have familial responsibilities are less likely to be able to make an *additional* investment in their education due to the constraints that they face.

My analysis suggests that by viewing the achievement gap mainly as a problem of underprepared students, institutional responses can only solve one part of the challenge. Ways of thinking about the challenge become constricted as opposed to free and inclusive. Language use also shapes the framing of decision-making. Thereby using diversity as a “component for academic excellence” (GRAD Report 2013:4) becomes a great moniker; however, in real terms this approach ignores how “diversity” affects the chances and choices of the individuals that the report is labeling diverse. Further, diversity as is it utilized in the GRAD report represents a liberal perspective that CRT argues is code for the presumption of a “homogenized we celebration” as opposed to confronting racism head on (Ladson-Billings 1998). As Bonilla-Silva (2010:3) argues, “[contemporary] racial inequality is reproduced through ‘new racism,’ practices that are subtle, institutional, and apparently nonracial.” Here I show that by allowing the problem of racial inequality to be framed by the label of “underprepared students”, the writers of the GRAD Report and its intended audience fails to see how the university structure perpetuates the racist system in

which it is embedded. CRT criticizes the race-neutral perspective that sees deficiency as an individual phenomenon and not the failure of generic teaching skills (Ladson-Billings 1998). By failing to see the reproduction of racial stratification, solutions to solve the achievement gap problem focus only on student related interventions and not pedagogical ones. That is, rather than asking what the university *can* do differently to have different outcomes, the report focuses on what students *should* do differently.

Service-learning is a prime example of this approach. Despite having community engagement as part of Wayne State University's mission and knowing that service-learning can improve student outcomes, implementation of service-learning lacks full institutional support. Some students end up in a service-learning class by chance, and thus the potential of this pedagogical approach to help the university improve the way it serves students goes unmet. The fact that service-learning is more beneficial to students with higher high school GPAs exemplifies the point; when pedagogical approaches are implemented in a disorganized manner without strong institutional backing, they can exacerbate rather than ameliorate disparities between students. For example, students of color may have dropped the course when the service-learning portion of the class was discussed due to working or other domestic responsibilities since volunteering in the community as part of a class assignment can be burdensome to a student who is juggling more than an academic course load. Thus, some students benefit from experiences with service-learning and others do not.

Thus, based on both empirical analyses, this research study recommends implementing service-learning as a teaching pedagogy to improve educational outcomes for students of color at Wayne State University. Service-learning can assist higher education with improving the quality and productivity of instruction in ways that reduce educational inequality (Driscoll et al 1996).

For example, service-learning pedagogy allows the voice component of CRT to be expressed through a reflection process which is a significant part of the service-learning experience. Storytelling is an important function of CRT since it allows marginalized groups to give voice to and construct their reality (Delpit, 1988; Delgado 1990; DeCuir and Dixson 2004). The experiential knowledge gained through the service-learning process allows students to construct, connect, and have a voice in their own learning through reflection that is designed to link the learning and service. Unlike programs that are created for “at risk” student and rely on deficit thinking, service-learning has the potential to level the playing field; however, this outcome can only occur if service-learning is implemented in ways that align this teaching pedagogy with general curriculum requirements as opposed to an extracurricular activity. Specifically I suggest that Wayne State University should make service-learning a part of the required general education curriculum for all students. This change would minimize the need for students to self-select into service-learning sections, and as this study shows would go a long way in improving student outcomes such as higher grade point averages and graduation rates as well as increase performance based revenue from the state.

The rationale of this research is that problems within Wayne State University are not mainly matters of pedagogy, lack of diversity, or inequality, but insufficient information for faculty and administrators about teaching and learning strategies for diverse students. As a result, colleges and universities become spaces in which programs reproduce rather than alter a system of racial hierarchy and social inequality, which by design, privileges white students over students of color (Lopez 2003). In regards to learning, one size does not fit all. Yet teaching strategies must accommodate all students who enter the institution. Thus, it is imperative for institutions of higher education to develop antiracist educators who recognize the reproductive functions of schooling

and have the courage to envision different possibilities for schooling and teach and provide opportunities accordingly (Lopez 2003).

Study Limitations and Future Research

This research study was not without limitations. Most of the limitations here were due to the use of institutional data which does not include measures of the myriad of constraints that may have played a role in service-learning not being beneficial to students of color. Many important indicators of family background and cultural capital could not be a part of the empirical analysis presented here. Also, since service-learning is not clearly defined in the literature as well as at Wayne State University, it is difficult to track and assess; thus as noted, the study relies on a crude indicator of whether the student had a service-learning experience. This study utilized a tracking system used by one of the colleges at Wayne State University but the tracking system does not record the actual service that was performed in each class. cursory knowledge about the service-learning experience in the ENG 3010 was found but not reported in this study because it could not be verified.

Conclusions

The achievement gap at Wayne State University is a problem that is endemic to higher education across the United States. Approaches and strategies used by colleges and universities to decrease the gap must address the underlying cause in order to make significant gains. Confronting the hegemonic system of white supremacy on the superficially meritocratic system of schooling will go a long way in addressing the root causes of the achievement gap. Service-learning, as demonstrated by this study, can assist with this endeavor.

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ABSTRACT**CLOSING THE GAP: GREATER RETENTION AND ACHIEVEMENT THROUGH SERVICE-LEARNING AT WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY**

by

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Despite the ideals of the achievement ideology that invade every facet of American life, there remains a large population of people who are not able to access the basic tool – education – needed to make the American dream a reality. The lack of educational opportunities for Americans of color is an important social issue because their systemic exclusion from higher education has significant implications for America’s economic future beyond social justice and equality. Americans espouse the ideology of equality and opportunity, and the educational system has always been structured on the notion of preparing individuals with skills for the work force (Ogbu 1987). However, black³ Americans have been denied access to experience the opportunities provided by a good education. Into the 21st century, many Americans of color are still denied the crucial resources and opportunities needed for educational success (Welner and Carter 2013:5). Today, a high school diploma does not offer the same promise of social mobility and stability that it once did. As an academic credential and a social symbol of success, the college degree has taken

³ Race is a social construction of rigid categories given to groups based on the hue of their skin color and physical characteristics, especially black Americans. For this reason, I do not recognize “black” as a proper noun in need of a capital B since it is not an indicator of a geographical ethnicity but a label of difference.

its place. Some sixty years after *Brown v The Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, the current challenge is improving completion rates at the college level. Nationally, the six-year completion rate for black undergraduate students is 20% less than their white counterparts (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2014). An institution must rely on solutions that enhance the academic experience for people who have been marginalized by the educational system itself. Institutions cannot continue to ignore their role in the matter by labeling and creating programs and policies that rely on deficit thinking, the belief that a student's demography, culture and familial context solely contribute to their low academic achievement. Instead, institutions should make changes that alter their approach to teaching and learning in order to improve college completion rates for students of color. Using data from an urban, public, Research I institution located in the Midwest region of the United States, this study assess services-learning as a teaching and learning strategy to improve the educational outcomes for students of color that the institution.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Monita H. Mungo was a first generation college graduate, receiving a Bachelors of Science in Business Administration from Pepperdine University; a Masters of Art in Dispute Resolution from Wayne State University; and lastly, a Doctorate in Sociology. Along her academic journey, a love for humanity and social justice developed. That love has displayed itself in various forms through program creation and course development. In 2007, Monita breathed life into a failing program that aimed to assist under-prepared college students with matriculation at Wayne State University. The success of that program led the university to scale it to include more students. In 2010, with the assistance of grant funds from the Michigan Campus Compact, Monita created a summer program called “College JumpStart” in order to assist middle and high school students from Detroit on their college preparatory path. That program is now an annual occurrence and receives general fund money from Wayne State University.

Monita is a Lecturer at the University of Toledo and works part-time to assist the Irvin D. Reid Honors College with their service-learning efforts.