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Broadening Diverse Participation and Multicultural Collaboration in Public Relations Education

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BROADENING DIVERSE PARTICIPATION AND MULTICULTURAL COLLABROATION
IN PUBLIC RELATIONS EDUCATION

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Introduction

Diversity is one of the eight tenets that Florida State University teaches and emphasizes to students during their freshman orientation and throughout their collegiate experience. However, student groups and individuals have begun to challenge the realities of diversity among the student body and faculty outside of athletics. For the graduating class of 2016, outside of athletic recruits, only 90 black males were enrolled at Florida State University out of 5,600+ incoming freshman. This startling statistic was one of the catalysts for student activity calling for administrative action to increase minority recruitment. Recent events happening across predominately white institutions similar to Florida State such as the University of Missouri and Princeton have further sparked discussions and reflections of the role race plays on these campuses. These events included protest at the University of Missouri, which called for the resignation of their university president due to lack of action against ongoing racial tensions. Additionally, Princeton recently experienced students protesting President Woodrow Wilson’s name be removed from campus buildings because of his racist views. Finally, Florida State has experienced protests from students regarding vandalism at the Black Student Union house and racial comments made on Vine during a weekly student gathering.

Using a survey of public relations students, this study examines whether students recognize the disparities of diversity within the classroom, whether they would be in favor of increasing diversity and if they believe exposure to diversity is important to the practice of public relations. Ultimately, this study identifies best practices for improving diversity among public relations programs at universities. Such a study is important as increased diversity in the classroom also potentially translates into increased diversity in the public relations field.
This study specifically targets the College of Communication and Information’s Public Relations major. In the last four cohorts that average 30 students a total of 12 blacks were admitted. Within the 12 blacks across four cohorts, only 4 were black males. This information inspired further inquiry into the role of diversity within the classroom and which could be expanded to the university academic expectations and the practice of public relations.

Scarce research was available specifically discussing diversity amongst public relations practitioners and the literature surrounding diversity within public relations education was essentially non-existent. Thus the research conducted in this thesis is intended to pioneer new discussions about diversity within public relations academic classrooms and the expectation students have about diversity through statistically relevant data. This study intends to identify whether students are in concert with various groups who are pursuing increased multicultural collaboration. These other groups include identity-based organizations on campus that often propose diversity efforts should extend to the classroom. However, in order to enact these efforts, statistical data from the students that are in these academics spaces would be beneficial. It will identify the expectations that a representative sample of students have of their classroom experience and anticipate their reaction to the suggestions that administration can make to address the issue of diversity. Additionally a comparison between the results found in related fields of study and the public relations program at Florida State University will be made in order to best identify best practices that could start within the major. The implications within the field of public relations concerning the effects of increased participation in terms of diversity and multicultural collaboration within the classroom are what will be elucidated by the data found from respondents.
Literature Review

While beginning preliminary research for this study, a basic understanding of the following became relevant: diversity, the elements of its meaning and its application in multiple contexts. The lack of content from public relations researchers and practitioners led to a search for analogous studies in marketing, business and advertising to serve as points of reference for the study's direction. The research reviewed provided a definition of diversity, a description of its need in other academic disciplines and tangible expectations for how to increase its presence.

Defining Diversity

Diversity is a multifaceted and multidimensional term that has varied meaning across disciplines varying from organizational work groups to the physical sciences (Katz 2013 and Dibble 2013). However the commonality between the varied meanings is an emphasis on differences between individuals, entities and organisms. Organizational work groups define diversity in terms of skills and assets that team members contribute. Physical sciences refer to diversity as the genetic makeup or differences that lie between organism, reactions and substances. Merriam-Webster defines diversity as the quality or state of having many different forms, types, ideas or the state of having people who are different races or who have different cultures in a group or organization.

In the context of this thesis, the definition of diversity stems from the definition provided by Anderson and Collin (2004, p.1) stating “diversity is about an awareness of and sensitivity to the intersections of race, class and gender (primary), about seeing linkages to other categories of analysis, including sexuality, age, religion, physical disability, national identity and ethnicity (secondary), and about appreciating the disparities of power that produce social inequities”
(2004). The primary and secondary aspects mentioned in the aforementioned definition of diversity are innately understood across academia and from a sociological perspective that an average student might have. Those aspects of diversity can often be physically seen and are easily understood when discussing among students. This thesis, however, will focus on the last portion of the definition that begins with “appreciating.” This particular term has been substituted by the researcher for “acknowledging” in order to best serve in the definition for diversity throughout the study. Acknowledge is defined by Merriam-Webster as saying you accept or do not deny the truth or existence of something; to express gratitude or obligation for something. Acknowledging was selected in place of appreciating due to the congruence of its connotation and necessity for action toward proposing a solution. This necessity is due to diversity being “how we deal with divisiveness that comes from differences” (Castania, 2006). The primary and secondary distinctions are made to identify aspects of diversity that are unaltered – primary – by persons and what can be shifted or changed – secondary– by the beholder.

The Need for Diversity

When considering the practice of public relations generally, Pompper uses the Department of Labor Statistics research to report that African-American women hold 4.5 percent of management public relations jobs, white women hold 39%, and white men hold 49.3% (Pompper 2004). This research is over a decade old, which highlights the importance of these numbers into question and why there isn’t more research n the development or changes in these statistics. Additionally, “The National Black Public Relations Society 2004 membership directory listed 190 practitioners (Pompper, 2005, p.298); and the over 20,000 member Public
Relations Society of America’s Directory of Multicultural Public Relations Professionals and Firms listed only 227 African-Americans professionals, 48 Hispanic practitioners, and 30 Asian-American practitioners” (2005, p.298). These statistics allude to the state of physical diversity within public relations, only 10 years removed. However, with a strategic mindset, the expectations for the field’s potential composition must be considered. Looking toward the future, the United States will be “more racially and ethnically diverse as well as much older” according to the U.S. Census (U. S. Census, 2008). These statistics provide strong evidence for the need to increase diversity across primary and secondary categories in order to ensure the disparities and social inequities are addressed.

Furthermore, Harvard Business School research suggests tangible, business benefits of increased diversity. Thomas and Ely, the Harvard experts, argued that a diverse workforce “increased profitability, but beyond financial measures, encompasses learning, creativity, flexibility, organizational and individual growth, and the ability of a company to adjust rapidly and successfully to market changes” (Thomas, D. A. & Ely, R. J. 1996 pp. 79-80) A learning environment should encompass learning, creativity, flexibility and individual growth. Thomas and Ely’s assertion that diverse workforces provide these benefits is why diverse participation within classrooms and multicultural collaborations can be assumed to provide similar benefits to classrooms.

From an educational perspective, the Commission on Public Relations Education asserted, “practitioners, educators and students must develop introspective awareness of their own individual, cultural, socialization and privileges...” (2006 p.29) The study goes on to further highlight the important difference between culture and diversity. According to the report, culture is defined as “the sum total of ways of living, including behavioral norms, linguistic expression,
styles of communication, patterns of thinking and beliefs and values of a group large enough to be self-sustaining and transmitted over the course of generations,” however, in comparison to the established definition of diversity for this thesis, the difference is on the individual level and not generalized to an entire group (2006, p.28). Additionally this concept of separating diversity from culture is elaborated upon when the report implies what public relations practitioners should be able to accomplish. It is stated that practitioners should know “how to identify what elements of diversity are salient in various situations and must acknowledge that saliency often is based on whether individuals identify with the culture or characteristics associated with that dimension of diversity” (2006). The ability for practitioners to identify saliency and their own ties to a dimension of diversity calls for education at the student level and highlights the importance of diversity in education. It is also important to note the language used in the final quote from Castania in 2006, specifically where he states, “must acknowledge…” because the connotation of the term acknowledge in this quote is analogous with the definition of diversity being used throughout this thesis.

The Millennial and Diversity

The justification for the presence of diversity in the classroom is elucidated by how the presence of physical diversity brings an apparent and implied awareness of the lack thereof. Dibble and Gibson discuss multicultural collaboration in an organizational and working group context. They describe multicultural collaborations as temporary entities that are apart of an overall experience, such as a group project or a group pitch.(2013). Their study identifies complications faced by multicultural collaborations and provides insight into the possible outcomes of increased diversity and multicultural collaborations within classrooms. These
possible outcomes are that students are able to adjust their thinking and learning processes to adapt to the changes that multiple cultures brings to a work group environment. The changes that come with multicultural collaborations are the cultural backgrounds, experiences and perspectives that form how students think and learn.

Additionally, a recent study in the field of computing sciences suggests monetary and experiential values incentivized increased diversity and broadening participation (Gilbert, Jackson, Dillon, Charleston, 2015). Increased diversity refers to those individuals within the field of computing sciences. Broadening participation in reference to the report by Gilbert et al refers to increasing the number of African Americans earning Ph.D degrees in computing sciences, adding more diverse researchers and engaging more students in training opportunities.

This mission can be transferred to others areas of practice outside of computing sciences. The report by Gilbert et al has an emphasis on students and altering the future of their field. This mindset if comparable to what this study intends to implement should research show that diversity is necessary for student success once in the profession. Therefore, because the study is imperatively designed to assist the future practitioners, it is important to gain and understanding of how the current student generation, or millennial, view diversity. The call for increased diversity in this current age would be ineffective without millennial support.

A study released by the Billie Jean King Leadership Initiative and Deloitte University Leadership Center's Christie Smith discussed why millennials see a need for diversity in all aspects within the classroom. Senior Vice Dean Katherine Phillips from Columbia Business School is quoted in the report saying, “The conclusion I draw from decades of research from organizational scientists, psychologists, sociologists, economists, and demographers is that if you want to build teams capable of innovating, you need diversity. Diversity enhances creativity. It
encourages the search for novel information and perspectives, leading to better decision-making and problem solving. Diversity can improve the bottom line of companies and lead to unfettered discoveries. Even simply being exposed to diversity can change the way you think” (Smith, 2015, p.18). The report goes on to support that millennials value the opportunities for growth that Phillips describes. While only 21% of non-millennials are likely to focus on representation, 35% of millennials are likely to focus on unique experiences when defining diversity.

Smith, the managing principal at the leadership center presents support for the success of increased diversity being tied to buy in from millennials. Her executive summary says, “At the heart of this work [diversity and inclusion] is a generational gap that suggest that millennials view inclusion as having a culture of connectedness that facilitate teaming, collaboration and personal growth” (2015). This is in stark contrast to prior generations who traditionally consider diversity from the perspectives of “presentation and assimilation” (Smith, 2015). Smith asserts that of non-millennials, 28% focus on fairness of opportunity while 71% of millennials focus on teamwork. The discrepancy between generations is elucidated when you apply the differences between millennials and non-millennials to the three models for detecting organizational diversity efforts created by Mazzei and Ravazzani (2008). The figure below from Mazzei and Ravazzani is titled “From Assimilating Minorities, to Managing Diversity, to Leveraging Differences.” Prior to reviewing the figure, consider the characteristics provided by Smith when describing both millennials and non-millennials
The first model of assimilating aligns with an older interpretation of diversity that rests on the idea of integration. The terminology of minorities is descriptive of a smaller or lesser group and divides those who fall into the minority from the majority. The aims of legal correctness are not grounded in understanding or acceptance but rather focus on not breaking any laws. The means through which assimilations happens is quotas systems which are milestones organizations can meet but do not place an emphasis on understanding the individuals who are apart of the quota. Overall assimilating is an oversimplification and equation for ensuring diversity. Managing is an improvement from assimilating because it begins to go beyond grouping individuals but acknowledging their differences and understanding the benefits of these differences. The means are more understanding of diverse groups’ needs and require an understanding of the social inequities that the diverse groups might face. However, leveraging is the ideal model for a 21st century approach to understanding diversity. It focus is on identities is doesn’t separate one
group from the majority but recognizes everyone has varying identities. This application of identifies allows the aims of leveraging to surround knowledge creation and the possibilities diversity brings. Additionally, the means through which leveraging occur require action from all parties involved and increase awareness, understanding and acceptance through action.

Considering the three concepts illustrated in figure 1, based on the insight from Smith in combination with Mazzei and Ravazzani, it follows that leveraging is potentially the most effective means of communication and enacting greater diversity in a major, college and university level. Leveraging would be most effective on these levels because of the opportunity to actuate the means mentioned in leveraging. Classrooms afford opportunities for intercultural communication and training for cultural sensitiveness. Assimilating and managing do not have the same focus on education and long-term commitment to acknowledging diversity because they do not emphasize its focus on differences and the benefits different identities can bring.

**Research Questions**

Based on the understanding of diversity and the perspective of millennials, there are still questions about how students perceive diversity and whether it’s a necessity for their academic experience. Below are several questions that this study answers:

- R1: Do students recognize a lack of diversity in the classroom?
- R2: Do students’ support the idea of increasing diversity within the classroom?
- R3: Do students perceive diversity to be important in the profession as a whole?

**Method**

To test the research questions presented, a survey was distributed to students majoring in public relations to gather information on the students’ perspective regarding receptiveness to
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diversity and expectations regarding their academic and professional experience. The expectations were specific to their in-class experience, what they may learn from increase diversity and how they feel diversity impacts their learning environment. The survey measured interest in diversity, personal exposure to diversity, and attitude in regards to educational and professional expectations. The survey also gathered details about why they chose their major and how accessible the major is to the general population of students. Participants also saw the following definition of diversity prior to answering items within the questionnaire. Diversity is about an awareness of and sensitivity to the intersections of race, class and gender (primary), about seeing linkages to other categories of analysis, including sexuality, age, religion, physical disability, national identity and ethnicity (secondary), and about appreciating the disparities of power that produce social inequities. The aforementioned definition of diversity was provided to establish a similar understanding of diversity for all participants.

Design

There were a total of 49 items in the survey. The survey began with items concerning interest in the major and the field of public relations. The definition of diversity for respondents to keep in mind throughout the survey was then provided. The survey then included Likert-type questions ranging from 1 to 7 regarding diversity within the major and diversity’s effect on learning. The next set of items identified each respondent’s exposure to diversity in respect to their friends, extracurricular involvements and classmates before and after being admitted to the major. The questions then asked for the level of agreement with statements regarding special consideration for minorities and expectations for multicultural collaboration once in the work force. Positive and negative worded statements were used throughout the survey to alleviate participant bias. The survey concluded with demographic questions in respect to the participant.
Items at the end of the survey also asked for their parents or former legal guardian's educational background and economic standing.

Sample

The sample of students in the major was obtained via the convenience method. The current number of public relations students is 70. The majority of students are age 17-24. In order to ensure a valid sample, the survey was only provided to students who majored in public relations at Florida State University.

Participants

The participants were purposefully comprised of only public relations students from three cohorts whose responses were collected via the convenience method. This group was selected to ensure that the responses were from students interested in the field of public relations and to gain an understanding of their expectations for their learning environment and workforce experience. Of the 55 surveys started, 54 completed and usable we included in the subsequent analysis. Of the surveys completed, 52 (96%) of participants were female, and 2 (4%) were male. The public relations major at FSU is __% women, __% men, __% white, __ African-American and __% Hispanic. The age range of participants obtained was 18-23. The racial breakdown of respondents is as follows: 38 white/Caucasian, 3 African American, 9 Hispanic and 4 who identified as multiracial. For the sake of clarity, individuals who were under the age of 18 were not included in the data results. Most of the participants are currently in the Public relations while others are recent graduates in the last two years or graduate students.

Measures

Diversity within the major was measured through a total of 8 items. The level of diversity was measured by students' perceptions of how diverse the major is or was during their
experience. Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement on a 7-point Likert-type where 1 meant strongly disagree and 7 meant strongly agree which reported their perceptions of diversity within the major. For a complete list of all items, please see the full survey in Appendix 1.

How diversity affects an educational environment was measured using 7 items. Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement on a 7-point Likert-type questions where 1 meant strongly disagree and 7 meant strongly agree. For a complete list of all items, please see the full survey in Appendix 1.

Attitude toward expanding diversity was measured using a 7-point Likert-type where 1 meant strongly disagree and 7 means strongly agree. There were 3 items for which respondents could report their level of agreement regarding taking special considerations for minorities in three categories: academic support on campus, financial aid, and the admission process.

Diversity within the field of public relations was measured by 11 items where respondents reported their level of agreement ranging from 1 strongly disagree to 7 strongly agree. For a complete list of all items, please see the full survey in Appendix 1.

There were demographic items at the end of the survey that measured age, race, gender, education, language, financial standing, citizenship and political ideology. There were also items that allowed respondents to report their guardians’ exposure to education. For a complete list of all demographic items, please see the full survey in Appendix 1.

Results

The 54 individuals that completed the survey provided the following results. The majority of items within the instrument were Likert-type questions that asked respondents to
indicate their level of agreement with each statement knowing that 1 means strongly disagree and 7 strongly agree. Therefore mean (M) and standard deviations (SD) referenced throughout this section are reflective of this scale. For the aforementioned values, see Appendix 1 in the Appendices.

Research Question #1 asked, “Do students recognize a need for increased diversity?” 77 percent of respondents recognized a need for increased diversity in the Public Relations major at Florida State University (M = 5.48; SD = 1.59). 48.1 percent of respondents were dissatisfied with demographic breakdown of their peers. 20 percent of respondents were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the demographic breakdown of their peers. (M = 3.67, SD = 1.727). There is a negative correlation between students who agree there is a lack of diversity and students dissatisfied with the demographic breakdown of their peers (r = -.652; p < .01). Respondents agreed that going into a major that features a diverse population is important to them due to 64.8 percent agreeing however, 20.4 percent neither agreed nor disagreed which might be signs of social desirability bias. The bias is that students choose not to agree or disagree because agreeing that going into a major that is diverse important would contradict their current placement in the Public relations major which they previously identified being dissatisfied with the demographic breakdown of their peers.

Students’ responses regarding their overall learning not being affected by the level of diversity in the major had negative correlations with two other items. The first was students who agreed there is a lack of diversity in the major (r = -.428; p < .01). The second being students who agreed that increasing diversity within the major would improve the learning experience within the major (r = -.701; p < .01).

Research Question #2 asked, “Do students’ support the idea of increasing diversity?”
Respondents overwhelmingly agreed, 75.9 percent, to the statement “I need to be exposed to diverse points of view to grow intellectually” \( (M = 5.91, SD = 1.137) \). There is statistical significance \( (r = .488; p < .01) \) regarding the correlation between students believing there is a lack of diversity within the public relations major and students agreeing with increasing diversity within the major to improve the learning experience. A large majority, 91.7 percent of respondents, disagreed that having a higher level of diversity in the major would negatively impact their overall learning \( (M = 1.74, SD = 1.25) \). Additionally, 74 percent of respondents agreed to an extent that increasing diversity within the major would improve the learning experience within the major \( (M=5.43, SD=1.47) \).

Students responded inconsistently to the item that inquired about the effect diversity has on overall learning within the major, with 46.3 percent believing their learning is effected and 35.2 percent agreeing learning is not effected by the level of diversity. A negative correlation exists between students who supported the statement that increasing diversity within the major would improve the learning experience and the lack of satisfaction with the demographic breakdown of one’s peers in the public relations major \( (r = -.692; p < .01) \). Student responses that supported increasing diversity within the major to improve the learning experience positively correlated with students who agreed a major’s diverse population is an important factor when choosing a major \( (r = .555; p < .01) \). Additionally students who supported increasing diversity within the major also had a positive correlation to those who agreed with the need to be exposed to diverse points of view to grow intellectually \( (r = .485; p < .01) \).

There was a negative correlation between students being dissatisfied with the demographic breakdown of the peers in the major and both students who agreed a major’s diverse population being important to them \( (r = -.453; p < .01) \) and their need to be exposed to
DIVERSE points of view to grow intellectually \((r = -0.458; p < .01)\). There is a negative correlation seen between students expecting their overall learning not to be affected by diversity within the major and their expectations for diversity upon selecting a major \((r = -0.558; p < .01)\) and their need to be exposed to diverse points to grow intellectually \((r = -0.480; p < .01)\).

Research Question #3 asked, "Do students perceive diversity to be important for the profession as a whole?" Respondents who believe to potential success with clients being minimized by lack of exposure to diverse cultures also believed the importance of diversity and integration as valuable traits when working in public relations \((r = 0.691; p < .01)\). This means students recognize that diversity is valuable in the major because it's a contributing factor to success with clients. Respondents' answers to items that identified public relations as a profession requiring collaboration with different cultures more often believed in valuing diversity as a trait when working in public relations \((r = 0.555; p < .01)\). Finally, Students who believed the lack of exposure to diverse cultures could inhibit success with clients more often believed that the PR profession requires collaboration with different cultures \((r = 0.509; p < .01)\).

Responses to the item stating: The lack of exposure to diverse cultures inhibits potential success with clients, directly correlated positively to both the answers from students regarding increasing diversity to improve the learning experience in the major \((r = 0.405; p < .05)\) and student's need to be exposed to diverse points of view to grow intellectually \((r = 0.53; p < .01)\). Respondents who answered the item stating public relations professions requires collaboration with different cultures also positively correlated with both the answers from students regarding increasing diversity to improve the learning experience in the major \((r = 0.297; p < .05)\) and student's need to be exposed to diverse points of view to grow intellectually \((r = 0.404; p < .05)\). Respondents who agreed that diversity and integration are valuable traits when working in public relations.
relations more often agreed that increasing diversity within the major would improve the overall learning experience within the major ($r = .476; p < .01$). Additionally, students who agreed that understanding the value of diversity and integration being beneficial in the work force also thought there was a need to be exposed to diverse points to grow intellectually ($r = .586; p < .01$).

Respondents were also asked to answer an item regarding whether they could afford to attend their college or university without outside student loans and scholarships. 37 percent answered yes, 61 percent answering no, and 1.9 percent preferred not to answer ($M = 1.65, SD = .520$). Levene’s test was significant ($F = 5.931, p < .05$) therefore equal variances were not assumed, thus a significant difference existed between whether students who can ($M = 4.0, SD = 1.835$) or cannot ($M = 5.06, SD = 1.367$) afford to pay for college on their opinion of whether or not special consideration should be considered of minority populations for additional academic support on campus. Levene’s test also showed there was not a significant difference ($F = .950, p > .05$) between students who could attend university without additional support ($M = 6.50, SD = .607$) and those who could not ($M = 6.48, SD = .834$) on their opinion regarding the increasing diversity and minority representation being over emphasized.
Discussion

The purpose of the current research study was to understand how public relations students perceived diversity of students in the major. They were asked to indicate whether diversity should be increased to better their student experiences and if they believed it was important to their future work experiences. This research provides empirical data that supports the overarching idea that diversity, its physical presence and its overall effect within an education environment is perceived as important among these PR student respondents.

The response from most students was an acknowledgement that there is a lack of diversity within the public relations major at Florida State University. Frequencies and correlations were the primary form of data analysis. Running correlation tests which provided negative and positive relationships aided in checking for congruency amongst participants’ responses. Therefore, items with a positive correlation illustrate that when respondents agreed or disagreed with a particular item, the cross-referenced item also had a similar rise in agreement. A negative correlation as mentioned throughout the analysis and research portion of this study illustrates that the agreement between two items were moving in opposite directions. All of the items mentioned above were intended to answer the three research questions.

The first section of the research aimed to determine students’ awareness of the lack of diversity in the public relations major in order to answer Research Question #1. In general results showed students believed lack of diversity was a problem in the PR major. Still, they didn’t tend to believe that their overall learning was affected by this lack of diversity. A possible explanation for this could be a social desirability bias. For example the item that states “my overall learning is not affected by the level of diversity within the major was not overwhelming agreed upon by participants. A possible explanation for this could be that respondents understood diversity as an
enhancer for their learning experience but not critical to the classroom experience. However, this contradicts the majority of responses that agreed with the item “I need to be exposed to diverse points of view to grow intellectually.” Admitting that when diversity is lacking, your education is not as salient would mean that the current students would be demeaning their current education based on their agreement with the items that suggest our program lacks diversity. This conflict was assumed at the beginning of this study and is the main reason negative and positive statements were used and certain items that were related to one another are not grouped in liker scale tables. All students that participated in this study have taken courses on research and survey building. Therefore extreme intent was utilized throughout the process to ensure clarity and significance could be found in the results. Additionally, the distributor of this survey was the only African American male in his cohort. Others that participated might have known his investment in diversity and either increased their desire to support his expectations or detrimentally caused unrealistic responses to maintain a status quo. Though the research shows no evidence of this, it is important to consider the full circumstances surrounding the timing and location of this survey.

The second section of the research and analysis aimed to synthesize the responses of students and verify if they actually support the idea of increasing diversity within the classroom. With 75.9 percent agreeing they want more diversity exposure in the classroom and almost unanimously agreeing that increasing diversity will not serve as a detriment, it can be inferred that students are in favor of increasing diversity. As mentioned in discussion of the first research question, students are aware of the lack of diversity within the major. The 91.7 percent of respondents that disagreed with the idea of diversity negatively impacting the major and overall learning should be reason enough to consider increasing its presence. However, 74 percent
believe it would improve their learning experience. The disparity between these two percentages echoes the possible influence of social desirability, small sample size, and circumstances surrounding data collection may have on results. Further research could be done to understand why students believe it wouldn’t hurt their experience, yet still are not in full support of increasing the presence of diversity. However it is important to reference the literature from Smith and the figure from Mazzei and Ravazzani. The responses to these items identified ways that leveraging diversity can occur within the classroom. This affirms the perspective of diversity that millennials have. Further research would need to be done to confirm that non-millennials disagree with certain items in this survey in order to confirm their beliefs on assimilating and managing.

Additionally, the public relation major is one of the limited access majors available to students. Its competitive nature inspires students to be intentional with their selection knowing they might not be admitted. However, the students who responded to this survey identified diversity within the major as an important aspect in major selection, therefore, it is important that academic majors not only challenge students intellectually but meet their expectations for diversity as well. What are the implications for students who are seeking exposure and preparation for diverse environments however, where their institution of higher learning lacks that very element? This is a question faculty that develop curriculum and handle admissions should consider. It is also important to inquire if students possibly receive the necessary exposure to diversity elsewhere.

The negative correlations mentioned under results for Research Question #2 provide insight into the conflict of recognizing the major is not diverse but students still wanting to grow intellectually through diverse experiences or interactions. Their expectation for the major to
provide diversity is not met yet they are unwilling to say they have missed a portion of their intellectual growth despite agreeing that diversity provides that same growth. Dibble and Gibson express the importance of multicultural collaboration in the study mentioned during the literature review and their justification that physical diversity's presence or lack thereof is what most often allows for a change to be made and active strides being taken to increase it's presence. A multicultural collaboration is an opportunity for the students to gain the intellectual that they agreed comes from diversity.

The third section of the research and analysis aims to highlight how students perceive diversity to be important for the profession as a whole. The correlations between how you anticipate to interact with clients and the necessary exposure to diversity is apparent though the statistical significance. Students expect to work with diverse clients, and thus also agree that increasing diversity within the learning environment will be beneficial to their education. Additionally there is empirical evidence that shows the respondents perceive an understanding of diversity as an important trait within the profession. Therefore if we consider the physical presence of diversity being an element that teaches tolerance as described by Dibble and Gibson, the lack thereof can be inferred as a detriment to students. The experience of students within the classroom is what will prepare them for their futures in the professions. This can be inferred from students' responses and the overall purpose of education. If students expect something to be required in order to be successful within their profession, that element should be taught or learned within the classroom.

Items such as "increasing diversity within the major would improve the leaning experience within the major" embody multicultural collaboration. Just as emphasized by Smith, Dibble and Gibson, there needs tot be engagement, interaction and relationship building. Student
support of this statement has a positive correlation to students believing lack of exposure will inhibit success with clients. One goal of the College of Communication and Information and our major is to place students in positions and employments where they will thrive and excel. If students believe lack of exposure will inhibit their success with diverse clients, and agree the major lacks diversity, are students already in the mindset that they are less equipped for their future roles within the field of public relations? These questions may seem controversial or targeted but the intent is not to negate the positive work occurring within the major. On the contrary, the goal is to bring the often-considered taboo topic of diversity out of the brainstorming stage and apart of the list of areas for improvement. The importance of this study is concentrated in the population that was surveyed to achieve its results. The students who responded are currently in the program, recently graduated or are just beginning in the major. Students are taught in class that research and empirical evidence should influence decision making when working for a client. However, research that measured student opinion is highlighting a disconnection between students’ expectations and the program’s deliverables. One would assume that a strategic plan is the next step towards a solution.

The last section of the results covers the T-tests that were ran to compare how students who might be of elevated means would be less or more likely to support diversity. However, due to more students being reliant on scholarships and student loans, the first Levene test has significant statistical data and shows equal variances are not assumed when academic support is being discussed. Essentially students in the major who rely on financial support are more likely to support additional resources for minority students because they too receive a benefit. However, is this concept applicable to diversity? If the majority of students were benefitting from having diverse friend groups and diverse participation in their major, would they be more
willing to increase that within their major? The idea here is not to vacillate untested questions but discuss the possibilities for the student experience within the classroom to meet the expectations that they shared via this survey.

If a more diverse demographic breakdown of each cohort cannot be attained then implementing the presence of diversity through guest speakers, diverse content or diverse faculty should be considerations after reviewing the statistically significant data from the research provided in this thesis.

**Limitations and Further Research**

Due to a lack of resources in collecting a complete sample of the population of public relations majors at Florida State University there are limitations on the results and conclusions drawn. These limitations include a convenience sample of participants who were contacted via email and Facebook, which unfortunately did not attain everyone currently in the public relations major. There is also no notation of when students were admitted into the program. Identifying how many members of each cohort answered the survey is not currently available and affects the understanding of how cohorts interpret the items in the survey. A purpose of this research was to gain a complete understanding of how students in the public relations major were affected by diversity and their expectations surrounding it. However, all minority students were not able to participate in the survey and therefore the participants who produced the results lack the slight diversity that does exist.

Additionally the majority of the items in the survey were Likert-type questions that might have induced participant fatigue. The number of items in the survey could have also caused fatigue. Discussions within the major about diversity have occurred specifically within the senior
cohort of the major and therefore previous biases to the topic of diversity could have prevented authentic answers. All students within the major have taken research courses and are aware of how surveys include positive and negative statements, which could influence how they chose to respond to certain items. Social desirability bias was also potentially a variable that prevented authentic responses. For example acknowledging that increasing diversity within the major would benefit the learning experience but understanding that you are homogenous with the other members of the cohort might cause internal conflict regarding your access to the program if special considerations were made for diversity sake. This social desirability bias also plays a role when considering students who would not be able to afford to attend college without loans or scholarships are more likely to support special considerations for students who also need loans; which most often include minority populations. Therefore taking special consideration for diverse groups would increase competition for scholarships and might motivate participants to not support special considerations for financial aid.

Further research specifically concerning the tangible ways diversity might be increased including but not limited to advertising to diverse populations, special consideration in the major application and negative affects of multicultural collaboration could be conducted to better support Research Questions #1 and #2. Further solutions in regards to Research Question #3 could be acquired by interviewing current public relations professionals and see if the expectations of students meet the actual reality of the work force in regards to diversity and its role as a practitioner.

A larger sample size and comparison of respondents who are public relations major at other universities could provide more insight. If correlations exist amongst other students’ responses in different regions or programs that are currently more diverse than Florida State, a
comparison between results could provide more insight into what tangible solutions can solve the diversity issues. It would be interesting to also consider the workforce expectations students at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and whether the homogenous nature of their classrooms is also perceived as a detriment or centralized education directed at a certain minority group. This idea stems from the origins of HBCUs as institutions that are equipped to educate black students and ensure their success.

Additional t-tests could be run with the answers of participant’s political ideologies possible effects on the likelihood of supporting diversity due to historical beliefs that accompany political views. Further correlations and analysis of variables such as race and exposure to diverse populations outside of academics might provide insight into how to actively seek solutions to the diversity issue identified throughout this thesis.

There was also an opportunity for the respondents to misinterpret the intention of an item within the instrument. The two items where this could have existed is the negative and positive statements concerning diversity’s effect on the learning experience within the major. When the statement is made in a positive form, affirming diversity adds to the learning environment, respondents are more agreeable. However, when this item is in negative form saying, the level of diversity within the major does not affect my overall learning, there are less statistically significant results. This can most sensibly be explained through social desirability bias where the respondents would not want to decrease their education or experience because diversity was lacking. The dissonance that comes with acknowledging the public relations major lacks diversity and supporting the positive form of one statement but neglecting the statement in negative form is one aspect to be considered in a future survey.
Conclusion

University campuses engaging in diversity and inclusion campaigns after racial and religious macro aggressions have led to a broadened conversation regarding educational landscapes. However, this conversation is destined to extend into the classroom. Public relations is specifically based on mitigating communication problems between larger populations. Its focus is crafting messages that convey a message or cause an action within a population. This study aims to call attention to the need for diversity’s physical presence in the classroom. This study expands beyond the primary and secondary aspects of diversity that are often discussed by elevating the dialogue to recognize there are disparities of power (Anderson and Collin 2004). These disparities are mostly highlighted through the answers for Research Question #3. However, the acknowledgement of the disparities is tackled on two levels: that the importance of multicultural collaboration and diverse participation are increasingly important. Research Question #1 and #2 embody these two levels. In order to enact these two elements it was imperative that the data collected reflects an acknowledgement from students that diversity is lacking. It is also important to understand how these students view diversity and the role they expect it to play in their future. This was achieved and any idea of expectations that students have of diversity can serve as guidance for the tangible solutions for the deep-rooted issue that is diversity on predominately white campuses.
References


Appendices

Appendix 1: Survey

Diversity and Multicultural Collaboration

Q64 Thank you for agreeing to participate in this survey. All responses to the following items will be for research purposes only. Your responses will be kept confidential and anonymous. Please answer all questions to their fullest extent. This research study is being conducted by Laurence Thompson under the supervision of Dr. Patrick Merle in the College of Communication and Information at Florida State University. For more information on the study and regarding the results, please email ltt12@my.fsu.edu. Go Noles!

Q1 What initially lead you to apply to be in the Public Relations Major? (Check all that apply)
- Career Interest
- Preparation for graduate school
- Enhance Writing Skills
- Other

Q3 Please specify other reasons that initially lead you to apply to be in the Public Relations Major.

Q4 Do you have a specific interest in social media?
- Yes
- No
- Unsure/Otherwise

Q5 Internships are crucial to cementing skills learned in academic coursework.
- Yes
- No
- Unsure/Otherwise

Q7 Diversity is understood as the acknowledgment of various identities including: race, gender, religion, ethnicity and physical ability. Please consider this definition for the following items.
Q8 Please indicate your interest in the topic of diversity:
○ 0
○ 1
○ 2
○ 3
○ 4
○ 5
○ 6
○ 7
○ 8
○ 9
○ 10

Q11 For the following statements, please indicate your level of agreement knowing that 0 means strongly disagree and 7 strongly agree:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is lack of diversity in the Public Relations major at Florida State University.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing diversity within the major would improve the learning experience within the major.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am satisfied with the demographic breakdown of my peers in the public relations major at Florida State.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going into a major that features a diverse population is important to me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
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<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I need to be exposed to diverse points of views to grow intellectually.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a higher level of diversity in the major would negatively impact my overall learning.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My overall learning is not affected by the level of diversity within my major.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q65 For the following statements, please indicate your level of agreement knowing that 0 means strongly disagree and 7 strongly agree:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diversity is an important aspect to a learning environment.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most students do not know that Public Relations is a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>limited access major.</th>
<th>The field of public relations in the United States is diverse.</th>
<th>I perceive the public relations program to be hard to get into.</th>
<th>The selective process dissuaded me to apply to the public relations program.</th>
<th>Public relations professionals are diverse.</th>
<th>There is sufficient knowledge about the Public Relations program application process.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next series of questions will require you to consider each statement in multiple contexts regarding your personal experiences.
Q36 Rate your level of agreement to the following statements, knowing that 1 means strongly disagree and 7 means strongly agree.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Special consideration for minority populations must take place during the admission process</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Special consideration for minority populations must be in place for financial aid         | 0                 | 0       | 0                 | 0                         | 0              | 0     | 0              |

| Special consideration for minority populations must be in place for additional academic support on campus | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
Q66 For the following statements, please indicate your level of agreement knowing that 0 means strongly disagree and 7 strongly agree:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The practice of public relations requires working with diverse populations.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is not likely that your clients will be demographically similar to you.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is likely that your coworkers will be demographically similar to you.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of exposure to diverse cultures inhibits potential success with clients.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The public relations profession requires collaboration with different cultures.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding the value of diversity and integration are valuable traits when working in public relations today.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q67 For the following statements, please indicate your level of agreement knowing that 0 means strongly disagree and 7 strongly agree:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being a well-rounded professional includes being able to work with different racial groups.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing diversity and minority representation is often over-emphasized.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You don’t have to collaborate with diverse people when working in public relations.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical diversity constitutes the presence of diversity.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a well-rounded professional includes being able to work with different ethnic groups.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe there’s too much emphasis placed on increasing diversity.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q63 The following questions are strictly for research demographic purposes. All responses will be kept confidential and anonymous.

Q53 What is your gender?
☐ Male
☐ Female
☐ Other (please specify) ________________________

Q56 What year were you born?
☐ 1986
☐ 1987
☐ 1988
☐ 1989
☐ 1990
☐ 1991
☐ 1992
☐ 1993
☐ 1994
☐ 1995
☐ 1996
☐ 1997
☐ 1998
☐ 1999
☐ 2000

Q58 How old are you?
☐ 17 or under (please specify) ________________________
☐ 18
☐ 19
☐ 20
☐ 21
☐ 22
☐ 23 or over (please specify) ________________________
Q60 What is your race?
- White/Caucasian
- African American
- Hispanic
- Asian
- Native American
- Pacific Islander
- Other (please specify) ________________

Q67 Could you afford to attend this college/university without outside student loans, scholarships or a paying job?
- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to answer