

**Pew Research Proposal
Fall 2016**

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1. **Title of the Project:** An Exploration of Campus Racial Climate at Union University
2. **Statement of the End Product:** The project will produce the following end products:
 - Articles for submission to scholarly journals (e.g. *Issues in Interdisciplinary Studies, Ethnography and Education, Social Work and Christianity*)
 - Research that will catalyze efforts at Union related to the racial reconciliation strategic plan
3. **Explanation of the Scholarly Activity:**

Statement of the Scholarly Activity: The purpose of this qualitative research project is to cultivate a narrative of race, with particular emphasis on the experiences that African-American students have on the campus of Union University. Exploring the academic, residential, extracurricular, and spiritual experiences of Union's African-American students—as well as the race-related perceptions, values, and intentions of its broader white community—this research will contribute to the crafting of a highly contextualized and integrative narrative of the complex nature of race as it plays out in our predominantly white, southern, Christian university.

Specifically, we frame this research around the following overarching points of inquiry (with a research approach that allows for additional themes to emerge):

- What interracial experiences, if any, have these research participants had prior to coming to Union?
- What are research participants' perceptions of life at Union for African American students?
- What are research participants' stories of interracial experiences while at Union?
- How do research participants articulate their understandings of Christianity as it relates to interracial engagement? To racial reconciliation?
- What improvements, if any, do research participants suggest for racial reconciliation on Union's campus?

Description of the activity and its goals:

This collaborative research project exploring African American students' experiences at Union has two broad goals: the generation of lived-experience data for our own community to consider as it moves forward on campus diversification; and research relevant to the broader community in interdisciplinary arenas that address the complex interface among race, identity, and higher education.

This project is structured around a unique, integrative intercultural approach to research that grounds qualitative data in multidisciplinary theory and research (Ryan et al., 2014). Upon approval by Union's IRB, this research will include a variety of qualitative data collection approaches (Agar, 1996; Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) designed to afford the researchers a range of insights into this particular phenomenon, including the following:

- Ethnographic interviews. These interviews, based on open-ended prompts and designed to elicit a "thick, rich description" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008) will typically be conducted by both researchers, affording greater interpretation of participants' insights.
- Focus group interviews. Structured similarly to the ethnographic interviews, these interviews will afford participants with an opportunity to address the phenomenon from a more collectivistic perspective
- Observant participation. As stakeholders at Union University, involved with multiple race initiatives and teaching race content in our courses, we intend to incorporate our observations of race at Union into the qualitative data (Creswell, 2013).
- Social media/artifactual data collection. This component will allow insight into how our participants and the institution represent race in the public sphere.

Researchers will code and analyze qualitative data for emergent themes, then integrate the emergent themes with relevant multidisciplinary theory and research for information sharing within the Union community as well as publication endeavors. The result is a comprehensive understanding (Repko, 2012) of the complex phenomenon of race as lived experience at a predominantly white higher education institution.

In general terms of project management, we anticipate the following sequence of events:

1. Begin the multidisciplinary literature search (October 2016)
2. Submit qualitative research to Union's IRB for approval (December 2016)
3. Begin the qualitative data collection process (February 2017)
 - a. Store all qualitative data on a secure digital data-sharing site
 - b. Transcribe interviews
 - c. Incorporate participants in the articulation and verification of the emergent themes (Lassiter, 2005)
4. Organize our emergent themes and analyze them using theory and research from the multidisciplinary literature search (Repko, 2011; Ryan et al., 2014). (February 2018)

5. Develop a document/presentation for the Union community (spring 2018)
6. Develop an academic monograph for submission to a journal (e.g., *Issues in Interdisciplinary Studies*, or *Ethnography & Education*). (Spring 2018)

Regarding our praxis-driven goals, we argue that this type of research provides invaluable data for both the Union community and the broader academic community as well. The Union community, now engaged in a comprehensive racial reconciliation initiative, needs meaningful research, based on lived experience, to address more effectively this initiative. With data from this research project, stakeholders in this reconciliation initiative will be better positioned to enact a range of possible actions, including the following:

- Bringing race to the forefront of the Union community's collective awareness
- Improving aspects of campus life in order to enhance the experience of African-American students
- Re-visiting coursework and curricula to better integrate the experiences and worldviews of the African American community
- Bolstering the role of African American students in leadership
- Enhancing campus culture to make Union more accessible and appealing to African American students (and faculty and staff)

In addition, this research has significant potential value beyond the Union community. Currently, there is a range of academic journals committed to education and social issues that embrace qualitative research.

Theoretical Framework and Brief Literature Review:

The phenomenon we are focusing on for this research—race at Union University—is highly complex; it has a range of contributing factors, implications, and stakeholders' viewpoints. Thus, for this particular research, we are constructing an integrative framework of current disciplinary theory and research from both the humanities and the social sciences. This integrative approach, outlined in the literature on interdisciplinary theory and research, affords us a more comprehensive set of lenses upon which to analyze our qualitative data than a single disciplinary lens can provide.

According to a 2012 study by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA (HERI), underrepresented students experience more racial discrimination at low-diversity institutions. Sylvia Hurtado, the author of the study and director of the institute, states, "It's important that colleges are aware of their campus racial climate and the specific challenges that their underrepresented students face. Improving the diversity of a campus is a first step, followed by working to improve interracial relations to build students' skills for citizenship in a multicultural society." The 2012 HERI study found that "College is an ideal environment for students to encounter racial/ethnic differences, build awareness and appreciation of difference, and learn how to treat each other as equal citizens. This is best accomplished in racially/ethnically diverse learning environments." They also concluded that "In order to realize the benefits of diversity on a campus,

students need opportunities in classrooms and co-curricular experiences to interact with others from different backgrounds, perspectives, and beliefs.” The 2012 HERI study concludes with the assertion that campuses must “employ proactive strategies to ensure students are educated in and with diversity, and that faculty and staff are skilled to facilitate learning across difference.”

Campus culture and climate can affect the entire experience of students, faculty, and staff on college campuses. This underscores the importance of research by campus leaders to understand the experiences of underrepresented groups whose voices may not be heard through normal institutional processes of assessment (Museus, 2007; Rankin & Reason, 2005). Campus racial climates that are not attentive to diversity concerns can result in feelings of marginalization, isolation, and distress for students of color. Predominantly White institutions often maintain a campus racial culture that normalizes White, Eurocentric values, perspectives, and symbols that contribute to the distress and marginalization of underrepresented groups. (Kiyama, Museus, & Vega, 2015; Johnson, Soldner, Leonard, Alvarez, Inkelas, Rowan-Kenyon, & Longerbeam, 2007).

University faculty and staff in low diversity institutions can be unaware of the subtle, but persistent experiences of race discrimination and bias that underrepresented groups encounter on their campuses. Many campuses, including Union University, have not studied sufficiently the problems or challenges that racial/ethnic groups face on their campus. Yet, the research in the HERI report of 2012 shows that “feelings of exclusion from campus events and activities in peer environments are more prevalent in low-diversity institutions.”

Research has established a link between campus climates and a variety of student outcomes. A HERI report in 2015 noted that research had demonstrated the negative effect on the educational outcomes and retention when students have experiences of discrimination and a sense of exclusion on campus. Campus leaders are charged with the responsibility for shaping a campus climate that is conducive to the best possible educational outcomes. Equipping faculty and staff with sensitivity to the possible experiences of underrepresented groups on campus and equipping them with skill to facilitate a more positive, non-discriminatory campus climate can ensure more positive educational outcomes and can enhance the possibility of increasing the overall diversity population of the school.

Diversity experiences of college students are associated with gains in cognitive outcomes. According to Bowman (2010), particular types of diversity experiences have varying influence on student outcomes with positive interpersonal interactions as being the most strongly related to better cognitive outcomes. Campus structural diversity and classroom diversity matter, but the interactional and relational experiences that may happen more informally on campus are most strongly related to cognitive development.

As a predominantly White institution, Union University faculty, staff, and students who are White may not have many diverse experiences and relationships. They may be protected from race-based stress experienced by underrepresented minorities and thus unaware of the stress experienced by those students. DiAngelo (2011) suggests that this protection actually creates White Fragility, a “state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves.” She concludes that it is critical that White people address their “fragility” by engaging in intercultural relationships and activities. Systemic racism continues to flourish in environments in which White Fragility is most present.

4. How Christian Faith Relates to this Scholarly Endeavor

The first theme of the Union University strategic plan approved in December 2015 is entitled “Bearing Witness to the Transformative Power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.” One of the goals for this theme is to “provide students, faculty, and staff with opportunities to explore and pursue racial reconciliation while seeking to increase Gospel-centered diversity throughout the campus.” This Pew research proposal has emerged as one part of an overall strategy to accomplish this strategic goal. Studying the experience of students of color on campus will provide information to enable us to serve students well, to assist the entire community toward racial reconciliation on campus and in the broader society, to increase the representation of diverse students, faculty and staff on campus, and ultimately to be a better witness of the transformative power of the gospel.

The University’s Christian orientation and commitment toward integrating faith, learning and service demands attention to all aspects of campus life. While the University’s mission statement and core values state the University’s intent, the nature of the campus *climate* and *culture* reflect tacit values, norms, beliefs, and assumptions of an institution’s environment. The climate and culture of a community convey to members of the community their worth and “fit” within the overall community. This research project aims to study the campus climate and culture as it is perceived and experienced by an underrepresented group, African American students, with the goal of ensuring that these students have an optimum experience of Christian life and belonging as part of the community.

Research has shown that underrepresented groups on predominantly White campuses do not have the same kind of experience as White students and that the experience is often one of marginalization, isolation, and distress (Hurtado & Ruiz, 2012; Kiyama, Museus, & Vega, 2015). The transforming power of the gospel offers an opportunity to remove barriers that divide and marginalize as emphasized in Ephesians 2:14-18. This research will assist in evaluating the campus climate and culture as experienced by underrepresented groups who may have confronted barriers to a sense of belonging so that all members of the community share in a grace-filled and loving community.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ calls us to be especially attentive to those in our midst who are vulnerable, dependent, or marginalized. Jesus modelled this throughout His earthly ministry with the care, compassion, and healing that he offered to those on the margins of first century Palestine. The continuing work of the Gospel beckons us to ensure that, in our own communities, none are marginalized or mistreated. The metaphor of light in the Scriptures speaks of God's creative power (Gen 1:3), his salvation (John 1:9), justice and liberation (Isa. 9:2; 58:8), and the people of God in the world (Matt. 5:14). Recent tragedies across the country have offered painful reminders that racism continues to plague our culture. It may not be coincidental that a number of these calamities have occurred on college campuses. This research and the overall racial reconciliation initiative is an effort to shed God's light on the promise and possibility of God's shalom in our community.

The professors applying for this Pew Research Grant are two of the three leaders for the race reconciliation initiative on the campus (Matthew Marshall is the third leader of the initiative). Our leadership of this initiative reflects our own commitment to scholarship and education that incorporates our Christian faith with the work that we do within our disciplines and as part of the Union community. Both of our disciplines require that we prepare our students to understand and navigate intercultural relationships and dynamics, to be bridge-builders across chasms of difference and hostility, and to advocate for justice in the spirit of Micah 6:8.

5. Time Frame for Completion and Dissemination of the Project

This 24-month project, beginning October 2016, will include twelve months of data collection and analysis and twelve subsequent months of information dissemination within the Union community—reports and presentations—as well as the development of a journal article submission (see timeline provided under “Description of Activities and Goals”).

6. Budget

Transcription - 230 interview hrs x 6 transcription hr each x \$8/hr	\$ 960
Research assistant (Director, Center for Racial Reconciliation)	\$ 540
Stipend- Lead researchers \$1500 x 2	\$3000
TOTAL	\$4500

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