The purpose of this research paper is to examine how language at University of Illinois may impact the identity of African American/Black students. Focus is placed on student self-identification and labeling, preferred labels by others, use of labels on other groups of people, and associations surrounding certain language. The question addressed in this study is how African American/Black students self-identify and what their preference is on racial/ethnic language in relation to their identity. The research will also address: the language students use to describe themselves and others of the same racial/ethnic group, the language students prefer to be used to describe themselves and their racial/ethnic group, the associations students have in relation to specific racial/ethnic language, and the opinions of racial/ethnic language used in higher education, specifically at the University of Illinois.

Higher education is becoming more diverse and it is a university’s responsibility to be inclusive to all students. Language at an institution has the potential to include students by coinciding with their own self-identification or exclude students by marginalizing them through offensive words. This research will shed light on how language in higher education may be affecting African American/Black student’s own identification. The goal of
this research is to find the most appropriate and inclusive racial/ethnic language that could be used in higher education. On a deeper level, using the data obtained, the research is expected to discover a better understanding of why certain labels are preferred over others and why certain labels are used more frequently than others. By using inclusive language, higher education institutions will create a more inclusive environment for African American/Black students, fostering a positive racial identity among students as well as a more respectful atmosphere on campuses.

**Plan:**

**Timeline**

March 6: Found all sources

March 16: Complete literature review

March 16: Finalize interview questions

March 17–20 or March 30–April 3: Conduct interviews

March 27: Complete all of paper except for Results, Discussion, and Conclusion

April 10: Complete transcriptions
April 17: Complete coding

April 27: Complete Results and Discussion

May 1: Complete Research Paper

Data:

Discuss:

EUI Links:

Reflect: As a white student on campus, this topic was of interest because I noticed myself questioning the appropriate language to use. I am from a small town and did not experience a diverse environment until college. My perspective and background experience will most likely be different than the participants. It is my hope that they are different so I can develop a better understanding of the appropriate language to use, why it is appropriate, and how that language can be transferred to a more universal inclusive language on campus.

The different ethnicities of the researcher, Caucasian, and of the participants, African American, may hinder the discussion of race/ethnicity among the researcher and participant during the interviews. A high level of rapport must be developed at the beginning of the interview to fend off any uncomfortable feelings that may obstruct honest responses. It is important for the researcher to be careful when analyzing the data. Different perspectives between the researcher and participants may have an effect on the amount of information disclosed by the participant and on the analysis of the researcher.