Intersection, does this living and learning community successfully develop the skills and knowledge for living in a multicultural society?

About the Author:

I am currently a third year student pursuing a major in Human Development and Family Studies and English. Throughout my journey at this prestigious institution, I have participated in several organizations and programs. One program that is close to my heart is the living and learning community that I lived in for two consecutive years (freshmen and sophomore year). While living in Intersections, I was exposed to different activities that allowed me to develop interpersonal skills. My experience as a resident was very pleasant and plays a pertinent role in how I am comfortable in interacting with people from varying backgrounds. Initially coming from a high school that was 99.9% African American, attending an institution with both a melting pot and salad bowl was refreshing.

Keywords:

Living and learning communities; diversity; societies

Abstract:

‘Maybe you’re a dreamer. Maybe you’re a doer. Maybe you are a little of both. Regardless, once you’ve decided to attend the University of Illinois, you’ll want your living arrangement to match your goals and ambitions—who you are, and who you hope to become.’ This quote comes from the University of Illinois narratives on living and learning communities. These forms of communities are templates for a cohort-based interactions and interdisciplinary approach to higher education. Intersection’s main goals are to encourage students to interact and embrace multicultural society. This research project will answer the question, Does Intersections, successfully develop the skills and knowledge for living in a multicultural society? The measure that I used to gauge the impact of Intersections consisted of conducting eight interviews. While conducting the ethnography, I will analyze the interviewee’s responses by using contact theory. Reflecting on my past experiences of being a residence, I will look at the effectiveness of this program. The participants consisted of eight females (7 students and 1 administrator) who have played intricate roles (residence, HOMI, resident advisor) in the functioning of the program. This representative sample was chosen so that the data could be compared (sets of 2 student participants attended the same high school and lived in the same community) and eliminate confounders. The results showed that the participant’s ethnic/racial background did not influence their opinion on diversity. On the other hand their neighborhood that they grew up in played a significant role in how Intersection impacted their perspective and interactions in a multicultural society.

Initial Exercises:

The Social Constructs of Inequality At Its Best

L-L-L . . . . . . . I-N-I, is yelled proudly by the University of Illinois students. Despite the vast shades or orange and blue displayed on the campus, the amount of diversity is still scarce. Less than four decades ago, minorities on this prestigious campus and others encountered institutionalized obstacles to purposely deter African American and Latinos to excel at a four year institutions. It is hard to believe that a campus that now has a large selection of tools to aid minority students; in the past subjected students to unjust treatment and a lack of resources that would increase the retention rate of minority students.

Reading both article, evoke so many emotions and made me appreciate all the resources that are available today. I could not envision this campus without the cultural houses, POSSE, OMSA locations, McNair program, ethnic based majors, BSU’s, just to name a few. The resources listed above have not only helped me become more acclimated to this campus but it has helped hundreds of other too. In the past, U of I was in desperate need of programs that would increase the graduation rate of minorities, integrated living spaces on campus, the ability to be involved in all campus and community related events, and most importantly the ability to acquire an education at a traditionally white institution. In spite of all the laws and acts that were passed to ensure an equal education for all students, administrators went to great lengths to exclude minorities. With the hard work and determination of organization (NAACP, BSU, Scribbler, advocates (W.E.B. Dubois), and researchers who are willing to identify the disparity between minorities, they started a battle that is still in existence.

Although the campus has a variety of resources to help minority adjust and excel in a four year institution; there are still changes that need to be made. The administrators on campus should become familiarize themselves with Critical Race Theory and its effects on this campus and others. My second suggestion, would be finding more funding for programs such as Law MAP and McNair, so that Latinos and African Americans can be more equip for both graduate and law school. Another suggestion that can be implemented again is the extended orientation period for minorities. The longer orientation allows the minority students to be more knowledgeable about the resources at their disposal. The suggestion of allocating more funds to minority based program and realizing that race is still an issue, can bring the University of Illinois and other campuses closer to have a climate that is inviting to everyone. By acknowledging the past, proposing feasible solution, everyone at the University of Illinois can proudly identify with an inclusive campus that is filled with people of all background.

Samatha Pittman

EPS 500

Assumptions Prior to Interviewing

By living on Intersection floor for two consecutive years, I had a lot of preconceived notions about the interviewee responses. I think that the residence of Intersection floor will be very enthusiastic and passionate about diversity related issues. I also assume that the residence that lived in urban areas would be more accustom to diversity versus the students who live in rural areas. Another assumption that I made is that people on the floor would be more effected (more motivated to be involve in diverse community) by peer interaction than Intersection’s guest. For the administrator interviewees and resident advisor, I believe that they would be more keen on diversity especially since they chose to work in a profession directly related to it. My last assumption was that students who did not choose to live on the floor, initially were less open minded about living in a community that mission statement is to foster and embrace a multicultural society.

Discourse Analysis:

Intersection

The University of Illinois has over ten public dorms available for their students. Over time, they developed different programs to help students become more acclimated to the campus and prepared for the “real world”. Urbana South (PAR, FAR, and LAR) housed several different living and learning communities. The one that I will be focusing on is Intersection located on Bahaceck 1 and 2 in Pennsylvania Avenue Residence hall. The sections that I critiqued on this website were the goals, academics, and events.

Looking at the website, the image that stuck out to me was the gentlemen writing on the dry eraser board. The picture portrayed a person (possibly bi-racial) teaching an audience about a topic. This image showed that this living and learning community is about informing the students and staff about different topics. After looking at the picture, my attention is
brought to the first sub-topic goals. The website states that the goal of the program is “designed to support students’ success in building skills and knowledge to participate in a multicultural society.”

The synopsis of Intersection goals makes an existential assumption. The coordinating committee is assuming that there is a need for students to be taught different skills in order for them to participate in a multicultural society. The goal is also making a value assumption by stating that those skills are valuable in the work force. I am not disagreeing with these preconceived notions, but the goal was formed with the base of those ideals. The other two sections on the website focused on the four maxims.

On the webpage, their statement on academics is focusing on the relevance and quantity of the program. By stating that the “academics are a central focus of Intersection” the author(s) is defining the program main objective without going a tangent. Giving concise description of the program goals in academics is beneficial to someone who is borrowing and needs to learn about Intersection fast. The webpage designer created links for viewers who are more interested in learning about the different opportunities that Intersection offers. The events section is very organized and user friendly.

Breaking each event into categories helps the audience learn about each program that is hosted by Intersection. The detail overview of each program is clearly stated (manner). Within the description of each program, they tie in common theme (relevance) of how they are trying to instill different tools that will allow the residence of the floor to interact in diverse environments.

Throughout the remainder of the text on the website the theme of Intersection being informative and full of opportunities was emphasized. According to this site the community would create stimulating conversations, organize events that will open doors, and broaden residence perspectives. Throughout the webpage they made several assumptions pertaining to the audience that would be interested in living on Intersection floors. Intersections website focused on acknowledging the importance of diversity. I recommend that the intention of this website is to recruit students who are passionate about diversity. Overall, there is a message that states that there is a need for students to be more versed and prepared with living in a multicultural society. Regardless of students acknowledging the importance of multicultural events, the topic should be further discussed and encouraged by the University of Illinois.

Question:

Research question: Is Intersection program successful in developing these skills and knowledge for living in a multicultural society?

Primary Questions:

1) Do students truly interact with people from other racial and ethnic backgrounds?

2) Do the scheduled program events really facilitate meaningful contact between students, faculty, and the guest presenters?

3) Does living in Intersection’s foster cross-campus interaction?

Plan:

My main objective for this research is to my three primary question that will ultimately answer, “Is this program successful in developing these skills and knowledge for living in a multicultural society?” The methodologies that I intend on using include the following:

I. Interview (in person)
   a. Administrator
   i. Resident Advisor
   ii. Resident Director
   iii. Program Coordinator

II. Students
   a. Floor Residence
   i. Students who have moved out the dorms can truly elaborate and express how effective living in Intersection was.
   ii. Their perspective will give a firsthand account on how the floor has or has not prepared them to be more comfortable with interacting (or intersecting) with people from all backgrounds (rather it is geographical, cultural, racial, or religious).

I. Interview Question Revised
   a. Students
   i. (Icebreaker) Are you prepared for this cold weather?
   ii. How is Champaign-Urbana weather compared to your home town?
   iii. Thinking about home makes me think of my friends. How many close friends do you have?
   iv. How many of your (number stated by interviewee ___) closest friends are the same ethnicity as you?
   v. How do you define diversity?
   vi. How racially diverse is your community?
   vii. Talking about diversity, so how did you like Intersection?
   viii. Why did you choose to live on Intersection floor?
   - Why did you choose to return to Intersection floor?
   - Why did you choose to leave Intersection floor?
   ix. What were your initial impressions of intersections fulfilled?
   x. When do you see people really interact across groups?
   xi. Where do you see the cross group interactions the most?
   xii. What multi-cultured program(s) did you attend?
   xiii. What can the housing administrators do to improve the programs and ultimately increase the turn out?
   xiv. What roles do the guest visitors plays in creating a diverse atmosphere?
   xv. How has intersection prepared you to interact in a cross cultured environment?
   b. Administrator
   i. (Icebreaker) Can you believe half of the semester is already gone?
   ii. So how long have you been working with Intersection living and learning community?
   iii. How do you define diversity?
   iv. How does Intersection create a safe-space environment?
   v. How do promote multi-racial interactions?
   vi. Does the guest-in residence really facilitate meaningful contact between the students?
   vii. What programs or events are held to encourage interaction between other racial and ethnic groups?
a.  Interview List
i.  2 residence, Caucasian, rural area
ii. 2 residence, African American, suburban and city
iii.  Resident Advisor, suburban area
iv.  Program Coordinator - Possible interviewee

a. Guest presenter

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Annotated Bibliography


This article was used to describe how different ethnicities react to racial related issues on their campus. Through out my interviews, people of different races (African and American) had different responses to the same interview questions. This article looked at racial climate of several different universities. The quotes from students mirrored and coincided with several responses that I received from residence on Intersections floor.


I want to use this book to reflect upon the dorm climate. One of my interviewee (the resident advisor) was very specific in her description and her mission to encourage diversity. She mentioned the different techniques that she incorporated to encourage interaction of different races. Her responses reminded me of My Freshmen Year section when she described how female residence create their own door decorations and how there were countless pluggers promoting students to become active in multicultural activities.


The last two sources that I used were to give the reader and myself background knowledge on the methodologies used. Both sources define ethnography and the purpose of the research methodology. Reading the purpose of ethnography and applied research help me formulate the “purpose of my study” section of my research paper. Majority of my review of literature will be taken from these two sources. In the book, Innovations in educational ethnography : theory, methods, and results, I will focus on chapter seven that emphasizes the importance of doing interview. This will help justify the measures that I used while completing my ethnography. This text also helped me create interview question that will ultimately answer my research question.

Data:

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Interview Analysis

As of today, I have conducted a total of four interviews. All four of the interviews are from students who were former residents of Intersection. One of the interviewee was the resident adviser (RA) for 2006-2008 school years. Hearing their responses to the interview question was very enlightening and surprising. Prior to conducting the interview, I had preconceived notions about how each person would respond.

The first person that I interviewed responses fit the trend or the assumptions that I had made. I interviewed my roommate of two years. Her responses to the questions followed the pattern of the program was beneficial and it prepared her to work in a diverse environment. She was very enthusiastic and grateful for the leadership opportunities that were available within the Intersections living and learning community. The resident advisor that I interview, her responses were very different.

The RA#2 interviewee’s definition of diversity “An environment that made to encourage interaction with people unlike you” was different. Comparing her definition to the other interviewee’s, she was the only one to include a verb that would promote the interactions of people from various backgrounds. Another response of hers that was unique was how she viewed her community. Both my first interviewee (former roommate) lived in the same community and attending the same high school; yet their demographic breakdown was completely different. The first thing that I considered was the age gap (the RA graduated in 2002 and the #1 interviewee graduated in 2006). Ironically, when I looked up the demographics of the high school online, the statistic only had a standard deviation of plus or minus two percent. Since the percentage was so low, I am uncertain about what contributed to the two students having different perspective on diversity and their demographic set up of their school and community. The other interviewee different from interviewee #1.

Interviewee #4, experience from Intersection was not as beneficial as others. She stated that Intersection did not introduce her to diversity in general, but helped her realize the importance of diversity on campus. She believed that her high school and community provided her with the necessary tools to excel in diverse environments. Although she stated that in her community was diverse (she lived there her whole life) but she was not sure of all the races that lived in her community. Overall the interviewing process, is allowing me to look at people from different walks of like perspective of Intersections. I am anxious of seeing the response of the program coordinator and resident director responses to the interview question.

Discuss:

Intersection. Does this Living and Learning Community Successfully Develop the Skills and Knowledge for Living in a Multicultural Society? Samatha Pittman University of Illinois EUI Research Project Abstract “Maybe you’re a dreamer. Maybe you’re a doer. Maybe you are a little of both. Regardless, once you’ve decided to attend the University of Illinois, you’ll want your living arrangement to match your goals and ambitions—who you are, and who you hope to become.” This quote comes from the University of Illinois narratives on living and learning communities. These forms of communities are templates for a cohort-based interactions and interdisciplinary approach to higher education. Intersection’s main goals are to encourage students to interact and embrace multicultural society. This research project will answer the question, Does Intersection, living and learning communities successfully develop the skills and knowledge for living in a multicultural society? The measure that I used to gage the impact of Intersections consisted of conducting eight interviews. While conducting the ethnography, I will analyze the interviewee’s responses by using the contact theory and reflecting on my past experiences of being a residence, I will look at the effectiveness of this program. The participants consisted of eight females (7 students and 1 administrator) who have played intricate roles (residence, HOMI, resident advisor) in the functioning of the program. This representative sample was chosen so that the data could be compared (sets of 2 student participants attended the same high school and lived in the same community) and eliminate confounders. The results showed that the participant’s ethnic/racial background did not influence their opinion on diversity. On the other hand their neighborhood that they grew up in played a significant role in how Intersection impacted their perspective and interactions in a multicultural society. Key Words: Living and
leadership opportunities that can create and foster an environment that upholds diversity. The multicultural advocates can network with the cultural centers, OMSA, and
resources to assist students of all backgrounds; and help them become more acclimated with the campus. With those efforts being commended by all, there are always different
forms of questions can be overwhelming for the interviewee. Another drawback, of using interviewing as a measure is that you receive bias responses from your participants.
response. After looking at other researcher’s interview question pertaining to living and learning communities, their questions were more well developed too. If I was to continue this
measure that I used to conduct my research was interviewing, but I did not have a representative sample of Intersections community. By choosing my participants, initially to eliminate
population were more involved in multicultural activities. Limitations and Future Research While conducting research, several limitations with my scientific design were identified. The
variable that played a major role in the researcher’s responses was the demographics of their high school population. Students who attended high schools with a more diverse
population were more involved in multicultural activities. Methodology The measure that I used to conduct my research was interviewing stakeholders of Intersection’s living
and learning community. It was a total of eight participants who were interviewed in central locations such as their office space, the campus union, or on Intersection’s floor. All of
the student participants (7) answer the same set of interview questions and the administrators answered a different set of questions. Participants The participants consisted of eight
females; age ranging from ages 19-45. Seven of the participants were University of Illinois students and 1 participant plays an administrator role with the University of Illinois. The
racial compositions of the participants were as follows: (4) African Americans and (4) Caucasians. The student participant neighborhood settings consisted of (2) living in a rural area,
(3) living in the metropolitan area, and (2) living in a rural area. Results The interview responses suggested that Intersection accomplished most of their (immediate, intermediate, and
long term) goals. Overall, the student participants believe that they gain skills on how to interact in a multicultural society in the context of this university. As far as interacting in a
diverse society outside of the university campus, the skills needed were already instilled within them prior to them being participants of the Intersections. Students who played
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encourage the residence to become more involve and use all of the resources that the university has to offer. Intersection also provides the opportunity for their residence to participate in internships. The internship opportunities listed on the website pertain to research (catalyst for change); but the residence can also take a hands on approach and volunteer with university and community organizations that support diversity. By creating more opportunities for the residence to become involved in, this can encourage them to participate more.

Everyone needs encouragement, by providing incentives (Intersection’s internship availability, gift cards donated by businesses in Champaign-Urbana area) to those who acquire points (attending different multicultural related programs); residence of Intersection will find themselves taking the role of being the brilliant leaders on University of Illinois campus. Another procedure that may be helpful is getting student’s feedback on specific programs. By having plus (positive comments) and delta (negative) cards, the administrators and students playing leadership role can modify or create events that are of interest to the residents of Intersection’s floor. That activity will allow the students to give feedback and see how their role as resident is important. Another suggestion is to really focus on building rapport with students after the orientation period. Different activities can be organized to create a safe place for discussion. Some ideas that I have seen work in other cohorts groups, is to have a symposium and reflection cards. By having a committee and or a conference, students can discuss multicultural issues that are relevant to their university and globally as well. A conference with diversity being the focal point can be the place feasible solutions proposed by students can be implemented into university procedures. At the end of the conference to get feedback, students can write warm and fuzzies. This is a time for the facilitators and students to reflect and express how participant’s responses impacted them; and the objective is to write responses of post it notes that will make the recipient feel warm and fuzzy inside. As a university, their main goal is to be an agent of change. One major approach that can be done is to expand the ideals and major concepts of Intersection’s. This community consist of only two floor in one hall, only one residence hall; yet the fundamentals that the community is build on are such that every University of Illinois student should encompass. If the immediate, intermediate, and long term goals of Intersection were incorporated into a course for incoming and transfer students, the campus would be filled with multicultural advocates. The university has created programs such as ACE-IT (alcohol awareness program) and FY-Care (rape prevention); but there is still a need for programs that promote diversity. Since, Intersection can only house so many students, the knowledge and opportunities available should not only be available to the residence of Babcock 1 and 2. The university should incorporate and EOL coursework to the college introductory courses that are mandatory for all incoming students. With making diversity a topic that is incorporated in every college or department curriculum, the campus climate will be more inclusive than ever. Works Cited: Jeffrey C. (2006). Ties Bond and Those That Don’t: Toward Reconciliation Group Threat and Contact Theories of Prejudice. Social Forces 84, 2179-203. Inkelas, Karen K., and Jennifer L. Weissman. (2003). Different by Design: An Examination of Student Outcomes Among Participants in Three Types of Living-Learning Program. Journal of College Student Development 44, 355-67. Nathan, Rebekah. "Community and Diversity, My Freshmen Year. New York, NY: Penguin Globe, 2005. 41-66. Spanierman, Lisa B., Helen A. Neville, Ying-Fen Wang, Matthew Lee, Hsin-Ya Liao, and Vetisha McClair. Document the Difference that Diversity Makes 2004-2006 Project Report Template September 2006. (2006) University Of Illinois at Urbana Champaign Freshmen Diversity Project, 1-22. Spindler, George, and Lorje Hammond. Innovations in Educational Ethnography. 2006. Theory, Methods, and Result, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 65-82, 103-106.

EUI Links:

I. Is there an invisible boundary between the Races at UIUC (specifically FAR)?

- I looked at her research project because it addressed diversity in the university dorms. Her research questions addressed the comfort levels of different interactions; and how living in the dorm impacted student’s perspective on diversity. Ashanti methodologies that she used are very similar too the measure (interviewing and observation) that I want to use to answer my research questions. Looking at her measures give me a foundation and standard on how thorough my data (field notes and transcribing of interviews) should be. I also like how she organized her paper so that the reader could identify her concise argument and main ideas through out the entire paper.

II. Diversity at home: the question of racialized lived spaces on the University of Illinois campus

- Quianna research project also focused on diversity on in the dorms. Her research topic focusing on understanding the connection between diversity and the university dorms. A major strength in her research (I will try to include this technique in my study by making it a open ended question form y interview) is how she tried to find out how students defined diversity. An individual’s perception of what diversity is, shapes how they interact with people and take advantage of being involved in diverse functions on campus.

III. In which university spaces are students more likely to interact across racial/ethnic lines?

- This research project was a continuation of another student’ ethnography. I chose to read this research paper because indirectly the skeleton of my research is very similar to the research of other students. Even though this topic did not directly focus on the university dorms it focuses on racial and ethnic interactions. Her research highlighted some off the issues that peak my interest in looking and researching issues pertaining to diversity. One quote in her paper that stood out to me was “If any unsuspecting person stumbled upon the quad area of the University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign), one may discover that certain physical spaces have been “hijacked” by certain racial/ethnic groups.” My research question is looking at the efforts (such as living and learning communities) made by the university to encourage diversity and students to become involved in multicultural events on campus and through out life.

Reflect:

Overall, I enjoyed my research project. By being a student in this EUI course, I learned about the importance of an ethnography and how this research methodology can be used as a tool to explore different setting. This course also taught me how to become more internet savvy, improve my skills in finding sources, and it taught me how to become more comfortable with using different software such as moodle. I am most excited about archiving my project. My main goal with this ethnography is to improve the dynamic of the racial climate of the University of Illinois.

Recommendations:

The University of Illinois has done a tremendous job in creating different resources to assist students of all backgrounds; and help them become more acclimated with the campus. With those efforts being commended by all, there are always different methods to improve and promote diversity. With Intersections’, in particular, I believe that this program is very beneficial and continues to improve as time progresses. Some suggestions that I would make includes: encouraging more involvement of the multi-cultural advocates, have the internships available to students pertain to multicultural related programs, create more incentives for the students to participate in cross campus events, and combine Intersection’s goals with the university campus initiatives. Intersection’s have many different resources that can create and foster an environment that upholds diversity. The multicultural advocates can network with the cultural centers, OMSA, ethnic studies department, division of rehabilitation education, etc. By the multicultural advocates being more knowledgeable about the resources available to the campus, they can encourage the residence to become more involve and use all of the resources that the university has to offer. Intersection also provides the opportunity for their residence to participate in internships. The internship opportunities listed on the website pertain to research (catalyst for change); but the residence can also take a hands on approach and volunteer with university and community organizations that support diversity. By creating more opportunities for the residence to become involved in, this can encourage them to participate more. Everyone needs encouragement, by providing incentives (Intersection’s internship availability, gift cards donated by businesses in Champaign-Urbana area) to those who acquire points (attending different multicultural related programs); residence of Intersection will find themselves taking the role of being the brilliant leaders on University of Illinois campus. Another procedure that may be helpful is getting student’s feedback on specific programs. By having plus (positive comments) and delta (negative) cards, the administrators and students playing leadership role can modify or create events that are of interest to the residents of Intersection’s floor. That activity will allow the students to give feedback and see how their role as resident is important. Another suggestion is to really focus on building rapport with students after the orientation period. Different activities can be organized to create a safe place for discussion. Some ideas that I have seen work in other cohorts groups, is to have a symposium and reflection cards. By having a committee and or a conference, students can discuss multicultural issues that are relevant to their university and globally as well. A conference with diversity being the focal point can be the place feasible solutions proposed by students can be implemented into university procedures. At the end of the conference to get feedback, students can write warm and fuzzies. This is a time for the facilitators and students to reflect and express how participant’s responses impacted them; and the objective is to write responses of post it notes that will make the recipient feel warm and fuzzy inside. As a university, their main goal is to be an agent of change. One major approach that can be done is to expand the ideals and major concepts of Intersection’s. This community consist of only two floor in one hall, only one residence hall; yet the fundamentals that the community is build on are such that every University of Illinois student should encompass. If the immediate, intermediate, and long term goals of Intersection were incorporated into a...
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