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The Sustained Impact of an Engaging Diversity Program on College  
Seniors' Color-Blind Racial Attitudes

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# The Sustained Impact of an Engaging Diversity Program on College Seniors' Color-Blind Racial Attitudes

## ABSTRACT

This study utilizes a mixed-methods (quantitative and qualitative) approach to evaluate the long-term impact of Illinois Wesleyan University's Engaging Diversity Program on white students' color-blind racial attitudes. Survey data reveals that white students who participated in the program not only endorse fewer color-blind racial attitudes than they did immediately after completing the program, but that they also have a more critical awareness of race than the control sample of non-Engaging Diversity students. Individual interviews with Engaging Diversity participants also reveal a link between these students' learned racial consciousness and their involvement as social justice leaders and advocates on campus. These findings are particularly significant given that IWU is dedicated to cultivating a socially aware and active campus climate. This program assessment, which is also grounded in scholarly research on racial attitudes and the role diversity interventions play in their maintenance, demonstrates how the Engaging Diversity program can serve as a model for other campus initiatives dedicated to meeting diversity and social justice goals.

Keywords: Color-Blind Ideologies and Attitudes, Diversity Interventions, Social Action

The United States population is growing at a rapid rate. As the country's population increases, the racial and ethnic portrait of the country will become more diverse with whites no longer representing the majority. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census (2010), 72.4% of the U.S.'s total population was white, 12.6% identified as Black, 4.8% was Asian, and 16.3% identified as Hispanic. These racial demographic trends are spreading to various institutions in society—one such establishment being academic institutions—and by the year 2035 it is likely people of color will represent 50% of the U.S.'s school population, with Latinas/os occupying the majority of seats occupied by students of color (National Center for Education Statistics 2010). The steady increase of people of color and the declining percentage of white Americans, often referred to as “The Browning of America,” underscores the reality that whites will continue to face higher probabilities of encountering and interacting with people outside of their race.

It is therefore imperative for researchers to understand the ways in which white individuals understand race as a construct and the race-related events and phenomena as our society becomes more diverse. The racial attitudes of whites have historically set mainstream views of race and consequently shape the social interactions whites have with other whites and people of color in a variety of contexts. As a result, the racial attitudes whites hold and the behaviors and events that accompany these attitudes within these contexts cultivate a specific type of racial climate that is either racially aware or racially color-blind.

## CONTEMPORARY RACISM: COLOR-BLIND RACIAL ATTITUDES

America's racial caste system, as created by *de jure* discrimination, began to dismantle in the 1950s, which led to subsequent civil rights victories in the 1960s such as the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Higher Education Acts throughout the 1960s. These civil rights triumphs resulted in an unprecedented increase of students of color in postsecondary institutions, and this trend is continuing well into the 21st century (National Center for Education Statistics 2010).

Because the normative political and racial climate of the U.S. has shifted since the Civil Rights era, whites' racial attitudes have conformed to political expectations and social mores that deem explicit expressions of racial bias unacceptable (Bonilla-Silva 2003). Following suggestions made by prominent civil rights leaders, such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., U.S. Americans adopted the belief that, in order to improve race relations, we needed to judge people by the content of their character and not by the color of their skin. This attitudinal framework of "not seeing race," formally known as color-blind racism, allowed whites to cling to and protect any racially-based stereotypes, prejudices, or attitudes by claiming their attitudes were anything but racial. This form of racism grants whites with more unexamined racial bias the ability to rationalize racial minorities' status in society as a product of individual choice, "natural" social dynamics, and inherent cultural characteristics, while minimizing the significance race may play in the lives of people of color (Bonilla-Silva 2003).

The flexible, contradictory, and convoluted nature of color-blind racial attitudes allow this framework to thrive and be legitimated across diverse settings. Depending on the type of environment an individual is in and the type people within the context, the content and expression of attitudes can change (Bonilla-Silva 2003). The plasticity of attitude expression as well as society's larger emphasis of ignoring race allow whites to hold drastically different racial attitudes in the presence of other whites versus among people of color. It is this pairing of attitude flexibility along with society's color-blind approach to racial affairs that make it difficult to interpret the attitudes and behaviors of white individuals as racially biased or not.

From a moral standpoint, arguments that propose people should overlook an individual's race and instead, as King proposed, judge him or her by the content of one's character seem admirable. Concerned with addressing whether Americans should accept societal encouragements to ignore race to improve U.S. race relations, the American Psychological Association released a pamphlet in 1997 that cited social psychological research on the topic (American Psychological Association 1997). The APA's manifesto concluded that "despite society's best attempts to ignore race, the research indicates that race does matter" (pg. 7), and advised researchers to confront questions on race and discrimination in their work.

Contrary to what color-blind approaches to addressing race relations propose, disregarding race ignores the prevalence and significance the construct

still plays in people's lives, both white and of color, today. Racialized gaps and disparities in education, housing, employment, and health continue to broaden in the contemporary U.S. (U.S. Bureau of the Census. Income, Expenditures, Poverty, and Wealth of the United States: 2012), and if attempts to understand these racial disparities are to be taken seriously, individuals must acknowledge race and work towards reducing color-blind attitudes.

#### ILLINOIS WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY'S CHANGING RACIAL STRUCTURE AND CAMPUS RACIAL CLIMATE

The campus racial climate of post-secondary institutions is fostered by the racial attitudes all members a part of the institution hold. Specifically, this climate is facilitated by how the administration frames the institution's commitment to diversity, emphasizes desired student developmental outcomes, enforces policy that brings racial issues to light, encourages cross-racial interactions, and translates these institutional values into action (Chavous 2005). The campus racial climate is largely shaped by mainstream racial attitudes and, because no one environment is exempt from inheriting mainstream attitudes in general, color-blind attitudes are likely to be prevalent on college campuses, particularly on racially heterogeneous campuses (Lewis, Neville, and Spanierman 2012).

Illinois Wesleyan University is slowly becoming a more racially representative college campus. Between 2000 and 2010, the total white student population decreased by 6.13%, and the campus saw an increase in the total enrollment of Multiracial, African, Latino, Asian, and Native American students (MALANA students): the black student population rose .06%, while the latina/o

student population underwent the greatest increase, rising a total of 5.55% (Illinois Wesleyan University Admissions 2013). Therefore, it is crucial to understand the racial attitudes whites hold towards racial affairs in society and on our diversifying campus to better understand how these attitudes shape and maintain the campus racial climate.

A large body of research on campus life experiences suggests that white students and students of color at the same institution perceive and interpret the campus racial climate much differently (Ancis, Sedlacek, and Mohr 2000; Chavous 2005). The extant literature on the differential campus experiences and perceptions between students of color and whites suggests that the methods institutions employ (such as diversity programs) to enact diversity-related missions help white students, in particular, develop a more critical understanding of race. After participating in diversity awareness workshops, interventions, or programs, whites are better able to explain how race may play a role in their own lives and in the lives of students of color, thereby fostering a more positive campus climate for all students (Gurin et al. 2002; Engberg 2004; Worthington et al 2008; Denson 2009).

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which diverse members in our community perceive and experience IWU's demographically evolving campus and the resulting campus climate, the University Council for Diversity conducted a university-wide assessment of the campus climate from the



perspectives of students and faculty members (IWU Campus Climate Study 2010)<sup>1</sup>.

The survey was administered in Spring 2010, and was released publicly to the campus community in Fall 2010 in a document brief that presented only statistically significant differences between groups. There was notable variation in how all students perceived and interpreted a variety of social activities and practices on campus; however, students of color consistently reported opposing views and experiences on campus from whites, and the attitudes these groups held towards diversity were markedly different. Of the total student population who responded to the survey (20%), MALANA students felt less connected to the IWU community than white students, were less likely than whites to feel IWU's campus culture supported their values and backgrounds, were more likely than whites to view the classroom as unwelcoming to diverse backgrounds and values, and were more likely to believe staff were unsupportive of the university's diversity values. 16% of respondents of color also reported personally experiencing discrimination; 8% were race-based, while 21% indicated witnessing discrimination. It is also important to note that approximately 53% of students indicated that they participated in an activity that heightened their awareness of diversity; however, their close friendship group still consisted of mostly people from their own racial group.

The information retrieved from the 2010 campus climate survey is illustrative of how students on the same campus can view and experience the

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<sup>1</sup> The present study will only review students' responses.

campus climate in vastly different ways. The assessment informed members invested in student development and relations that attention must be spent on how students, particularly majority students, make sense of diversity on both a societal level as well as on campus. Aware that most students will establish their perceptions of the campus racial climate and identify their role within this environment as early as their first year of college (Pascarella et al. 1996; Gurin et al. 2002), educators invested in improving race relations and increasing meaningful intergroup contact on campuses have implemented programs to educate students on their role in diversity. The Engaging Diversity program on IWU's campus is an example of an institutionally-supported initiative designed to increase white students' awareness of diversity, challenge and inform students' notions of race, and mobilize students to interact authentically with people from diverse backgrounds on campus.

#### THE ENGAGING DIVERSITY PROGRAM AS AN INSTITUTIONAL TOOL FOR IMPROVING THE CAMPUS RACIAL CLIMATE

Informed by IWU's Campus Climate study (2010), two IWU faculty members spearheaded a pre-orientation diversity program that provides first-year white students with an opportunity to learn about the importance of diversity and develop the tools to engage genuinely with students from diverse backgrounds during their IWU careers. The Engaging Diversity program is a three-day pre-orientation program co-taught by an IWU assistant professor of sociology and a former assistant professor of psychology (now an assistant professor of psychology at Saint Louis University). The program was first initiated in the summer of 2010,

and members in this cohort are now seniors. All incoming first-year students who self-identify as white are emailed to apply for the program. Those who are selected come to campus early, before the traditional first-year orientation, at the same time as MALANA and international students, and interact with these student groups during shared programming activities.

The core goal of the program is to help students abandon a color-blind framework in understandings and explanations of race and racism in society and adopt a lens through which they recognize how white privilege maintains racial oppression. With this change in perspective, the program intends to motivate students to become social justice leaders on campus, helping to promote a racial consciousness that improves race relations, which will ultimately help create a more positive campus racial climate. To reach this outcome, the program helps students gain insight into how their lives have been and are shaped by historical privileges for whites and how these cumulative advantages and disadvantages afforded to them have real implications for their lives today. The program does not exclusively focus on race, rather taking an intersectional framework that highlights the interrelatedness of social identities and how the interplay of these identities plays a role in lived experiences. Instead, race is used to explore concepts such as prejudice, privilege, and oppression, as the program is specifically oriented to decrease students' color-blind racial attitudes; using race as the foreground of discussion makes it easier for students to potentially relate to other students' social experiences, as they all identify as white.

Today, the program continues to be divided into three days of intensive activities and lessons that share the overarching goal of moving students from explaining racial affairs in a non-critical, color-blind fashion to one that is racially aware. This end is reached through a variety of self-reflective exercises, group activities both in and out of the classroom with peer-mentors, intergroup contact with diverse groups, and formal lectures. Participants in the 2010 program, the current study's cohort of interest, spent their first day on IWU's campus discussing conceptions of prejudice, stereotyping, diversity, racism, color-blindness. Students watched a video on the realities of bias and how it is misused in cross-cultural and cross-racial interactions, and spent the evening with the MALANA students for dinner and social down-time.

On day two, the day considered to be the most intensive, students sat through formal lessons on the history of affirmative action and its role in the college admission process, the role race plays in housing opportunities and income, and the daily manifestations of white privilege. The traditional lecture was followed by a discussion on how the information they had just learned differed from the stories they were told about race and social issues throughout their lives. That afternoon, students began to conceptualize the meaning of whiteness by identifying and deconstructing the implicit and explicit messages they received growing up about what it means to be white. After dinner with the MALANA students, both groups participated in the privilege walk, an activity where students physically embody their privileges and disadvantages by taking steps forward or

backward as statements are read. The activity was followed by a large group discussion of students' reactions.

Day three focused on communication styles and how they might deter cross-racial dialogue. A brief video was shown on cultural differences in communication, which spurred students to think about their own communication style and how it may impact their ability to connect with others on campus. The students had lunch with white faculty and staff whose curricula or service activities are supportive of social justice and diversity, and together the faculty and staff helped students devise action plans on how they can put what they learned throughout the program into action. The program concluded with a dinner and social time with international students.

#### PRELIMINARY RESEARCH ON THE ENGAGING DIVERSITY PROGRAM

In an effort to examine the effects the Engaging Diversity program had on the first cohort of students to complete the program in 2010, Burke and Banks (2012) devised a mixed-methods study to measure changes in student thinking about race, diversity, and inequality. The findings were revealing and promising. Participants' color-blind racial attitudes significantly decreased from Time 1 (pre-Engaging Diversity) to Time 2 (Post-Engaging Diversity), and their racial identities became significantly more salient between Time 1 and Time 2. The reduction in students' color-blind racial attitudes was also apparent in qualitative data; students relied less on color-blind racism frames in explanations on the significance of race in their lives and in the lives of people of color in contemporary

society. It was concluded that the Engaging Diversity program achieved its central goal: moving students from viewing race relations in a color-blind fashion to acknowledging how race plays a role in the lives of individuals and in the functioning of modern institutions. The researchers recommended continual evaluation of the program, specifically on the 2010 cohort, to determine its long-term impact on students' color-blind racial attitudes. The current study responds to this call.

#### CURRENT RESEARCH ON DIVERSITY INTERVENTIONS AND COLOR-BLIND RACIAL ATTITUDE REDUCTION

Research on interventions specifically designed to target students' color-blind racial attitudes, let alone studies that examine how these attitudes fare over time, is scarce (see exceptions below). Therefore, an assessment of the Engaging Diversity is particularly needed, from both an institutional and a larger research standpoint, to expand the current literature on intervention effects and color-blind racial attitudes.

Spanierman et al.'s (2008) examination of the relationship between students' involvement in formal and informal diversity activities and color-blind attitudes is one of few attempts taken to assess the effects of an intervention on students' color-blind attitudes. The researchers assessed the extent of first-year white students' color-blindness at the beginning of their first semester in college and was reassessed at the end of their second semester. Participants also supplied the number of diversity-focused activities they participated in throughout the year. Students' involvement in formal campus diversity experiences, such as

attending a lecture on multiculturalism, was significantly associated with greater awareness of race such that students had lower color-blind racial attitudes, and openness to diversity.

While Spanierman et al.'s (2008) work informed researchers of how diversity-related activities may shape white students' color-blind racial attitudes, multiple questions still remain. Students' level of engagement in diversity-related activities was assessed via a 4-point, Likert type questionnaire that asked students to report how often they participated in a variety of diversity-related experiences (e.g., cultural programming and extracurricular workshops). Failure to parse specific diversity experiences makes examining their differential effects on color-blindness reduction difficult. Diversity activities have varied structures, include different content, and have unique bias reduction goals (Engberg 2004; Denson 2009); using a global score to capture students' diversity-related experiences and attempting to draw conclusions on how these activities influence color-blind attitudes is difficult.

A unique experiment assessing the effects a video intervention had on white students' color-blind racial attitudes was implemented by Soble, Spanierman, and Liao (2011). The researchers showed one group of participants a brief video that highlighted the prevalence of racism and white privilege and administered a color-blind racial attitude measure before and after the video. A control group did not see the video and was only given the measure. The findings suggested that white students' exposure to a video intervention that informed

them of racial bias and privilege significantly decreased the amount of color-blind attitudes they held.

The aforementioned study provides researchers with a more focused understanding of how a specific intervention may shape students' color-blind racial attitudes. Assessment of changes in students' color-blind racial attitudes, however, was only completed at one point in time, immediately after the video intervention. This one-time assessment makes it difficult to determine if the intervention had a long-term impact on students' newfound racial awareness.

Social justice attitudes have also been used as an index for judging the success campus diversity programs have in reducing color-blind racial attitudes. Lewis, Neville, and Spanierman (2012) investigated how students' participation in campus diversity programs influenced their social justice attitudes and hypothesized color-blind racial attitudes would mediate the relationship between these variables. The researchers discovered that students who are more active in campus diversity experiences were more likely to endorse social justice attitudes, but this relationship was only apparent when students' color-blind racial attitudes were lower. Students with a more nuanced understanding of the role race plays in institutional privilege and oppression (i.e. had lower color-blind racial attitudes) were more likely to support affirmative action policy and had a greater interest in social issues (i.e. had higher social justice attitudes).

The work of Lewis, Neville, and Spanierman (2012) broadened understandings of how campus diversity programs can have a significant role in



minimizing students' color-blind racial attitudes. The researchers, however, conceptualized campus diversity experiences as an amalgam rather than as individual campus diversity experiences, as was the case in Soble, Spanierman, and Laio (2011), and examined how these activities, as a whole, influenced color-blind racial attitudes. The strong mediational role color-blind racial attitudes had between campus diversity experiences and social justice attitudes reaffirms the need to understand how color-blind racial attitudes, as an isolated construct of interest, are impacted by campus diversity experiences. In order to best understand how interventions shape students on various social outcomes, researchers must first understand how color-blind racial attitudes are directly influenced by diversity programs.

#### THE NEED TO ASSESS THE ENGAGING DIVERSITY PROGRAM AND ADDRESS COLOR-BLIND RACIAL ATTITUDES

Illinois Wesleyan University is currently in the process of redrafting its Student Development and Diversity Strategic Plans, the documents that define campus climate goals by the year 2020. The plans identify where students should be by the time they graduate in the amount of experiences they had with out-groups, level of diversity awareness, and general student developmental growth outcomes (IWU Student Development Plan (In Progress) 2013; IWU Diversity Strategic Plan (In Progress) 2013). The documents ideally serve as the guiding principles for students, faculty, and staff during their time at the institution, and these documents help campus members hold one another accountable in

behaving in accordance with the university's student development and diversity goals.

The strategies and initiatives comprising the Student Development and Diversity Strategic plans are instrumental in crafting IWU's campus racial climate. A number of IWU's priorities outline a commitment to educating students around social justice concepts and providing them with opportunities to apply these concepts to other academic, leadership, and service experiences. The Diversity Strategic Plan specifically identifies the orientation process as a critical time to clearly articulate the institution's commitment to diversity. Moreover, by the time students graduate IWU, they are expected to have had both classroom and out-of-class discussions about diversity and social justice, have a grounded understanding of their own privileges and systematic oppression, and feel confident in communicating these understandings to others (IWU Diversity Strategic Plan (In Progress 2013)). Both plans also identify a need to create and sustain structures for the assessment of diversity initiatives such as campus research studies to monitor the pulse of the campus racial climate.

It is clear that IWU is concerned with and committed to creating a positive racial climate for students. To create this climate, the university wants to ensure programs intended to cultivate a positive, welcoming, and inclusive campus environment are truly accomplishing what they are claiming to achieve. Therefore, an intensive assessment of the Engaging Diversity Program is required to assist the institution in accomplishing its goals for creating a positive racial climate, address

students' differential perceptions and experiences of this climate, and to clarify whether the program is effective and where it may need strengthening.

#### THE CURRENT STUDY: SUSTAINED RACIAL AWARENESS OR REGRESSION BACK TO RACIAL BLINDNESS?

The findings of Burke and Banks's (2012) preliminary analysis on the Engaging Diversity program's role in directly reducing 2010 participants' color-blind racial attitudes raises the question whether this attitudinal shift has remained throughout their college careers. Do participants, now seniors on the ascent to graduation, still understand and explain racial phenomena and social issues with a critical racial awareness, or did they revert back to relying on color-blind explanations to make sense of such issues?

The current study addresses gaps in the diversity intervention literature on the role these programs play in color-blind attitude reduction as well as responds to the recommendations made by Burke and Banks (2012) for further assessment of the Engaging Diversity program. A single campus diversity experience—in this case, the Engaging Diversity program—will be reviewed, rather than multiple campus diversity experiences, to ascertain direct sustained effects the program itself has had on changes in color-blind racial attitudes. Color-blind racial attitudes will be the only dependent variable directly measured in order to gain a more focused understanding of the relationship between the Engaging Diversity program and this construct. The nature of students' color-blind racial attitudes through participants' understanding of race and race relations on both a macro-level (society) and a micro-level (IWU's campus) will also be explored in depth. In

addition, students' color-blind racial attitudes will be compared across two time-points (scores at the end of the program in 2010 and scores retrieved in Fall-2013) to ascertain the long-term impact the program had color-blind racial attitudes.

I expect the senior Engaging Diversity students' color-blind racial attitudes to be lower than they were immediately post-Engaging Diversity. However, as for the specific color-blind frames participants may adhere to or refrain from using in explanations of race in contemporary U.S. society and on IWU's campus, it is difficult to hypothesize a detailed description of participants' usage, as this question has yet to be explored. Nevertheless, it can be inferred from previous research on the cohort that participants will rely less on color-blind explanations (Burke and Banks 2012). Finally, I speculate that senior Engaging Diversity students' low color-blind racial attitudes are due to their participation in the Engaging Diversity program and not to the general college experience. Burke and Banks (2012) assessed the color-blind racial attitudes of non-Engaging Diversity students and compared their scores to the 2010 cohort's level of color-blindness post-Engaging Diversity. Engaging Diversity students had significantly lower color-blind racial attitudes than non-Engaging Diversity students, and it is anticipated between-group differences on color-blind racial attitudes still exist, and perhaps even widened, throughout the college experience.

The scope of the current study is not limited to simply understanding if the Engaging Diversity accomplished its goal of reducing students' color-blind racial attitudes over time, but includes an effort to understand the potential link

between racial attitudes and social actions. That is, did the 2010 cohort's color-blind racial attitudes have any sway in their ability to promote and support a racial consciousness on campus throughout their college careers? Understanding how the racial conceptualization students developed potentially from the program influenced their daily lives as white students on campus is also of interest. Therefore, the current study also seeks to elucidate whether the Engaging Diversity program helped instill confidence in participants to serve as social justice advocates on campus. There is currently no research on these types of inquiries to inform hypotheses for the aforementioned research questions.

## METHOD

The current study utilized a combined quantitative and qualitative approach to best understand the dynamic, fluid, and contradictory nature of color-blind racial ideologies. Because the U.S.'s current political and social climate forbids any overt expression of racial bias, multiple innovative research approaches needed to be taken to accurately assess students' color-blind racial attitudes (Neville et al. 2013; Bonilla-Silva 2003). To assess students' color-blind racial ideologies, a survey consisting of a series of open-ended questions and a traditional Likert-type measure was e-mailed to Engaging Diversity students and every self-identified white senior who did not complete the Engaging Diversity program. The sampling frame of non-Engaging Diversity students' e-mails was retrieved from the registrar's office. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with Engaging Diversity students to determine the link between racial

attitudes and students' potential engagement as social justice advocates on campus. Interview approaches and specifics behind student participation will be explored below.

Participants were anonymously surveyed but were asked to provide their gender, if and when they completed Engaging Diversity, and their age. 2 of the 3 Engaging Diversity student respondents (30% response rate) identified as female and their ages ranged from 21- to 22-years old. The 54 Non-Engaging Diversity respondents (13% response rate) were between 20- to 23- years-of-age, and 29 of the 57 students identified as female. Members in both student groups have diverse demographic characteristics, but all participants identify racially as white and by and large come from middle-class to upper-class households in the Chicago suburbs. The survey was housed and managed in Qualtrix by a research assistant at Saint Louis University, and the data was sent to the primary investigator of the current study on a routine basis.

#### *CoBRAS*

Quantitative assessment of color-blind attitudes was assessed using the Color-Blind Racial Attitudes Scale, or the CoBRAS (Neville et al. 2000). The CoBRAS is a 20-item, self-report scale that measures color-blind racial attitudes that deny, distort, and/or minimize the existence of race and the effects of racism in the U.S. The scale uses a Likert-type response format ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). Higher scores reflect higher racial unawareness and a stronger

endorsement of color-blind racial attitudes.<sup>2</sup> Coefficient alphas for the total scale have ranged from .84 to .91 (Neville et al. 2000), which illustrates the high internal reliability of the measure. This quantitative measure was incorporated in addition to a qualitative assessment of color-blind racial attitudes because all previous measurement of Engaging Diversity participants' color-blind racial attitudes has been done vis-à-vis the CoBRAS; continuing to use this established mode of measurement makes tracking changes in color-blind attitudes more reliable and consistent. An additional measure of color-blind racial attitudes also buttresses claims made from qualitative data that participants' color-blind racial attitudes are truly what they are claimed to be.

### *Vignettes*

The first qualitative component of the survey consisted of five short open-ended questions that highlight true racial gaps and racial phenomena seen in contemporary society; examples of race's prominence on IWU's campus were also provided.<sup>3</sup> I presented contemporary race-focused scenarios that participants were likely to be familiar with, such as the murder of Trayvon Martin, in order to stimulate more detailed and thorough responses. Participants were requested to share the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that the social phenomena or affairs presented to them were racial, as an attempt to capture how participants themselves conceptualize and explain racial affairs around them, rather than restricting their responses to "agree" or "disagree" most survey questionnaires

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<sup>2</sup> See appendix to review the CoBRAS

<sup>3</sup> See appendix for a full review of vignettes

require. As mentioned previously, the contradictory and loose nature of color-blind ideologies allow these attitudes to maneuver around rigid survey questions, thus including a qualitative measure to assess color-blind racial ideologies allowed for a more full expression of participants' racial attitudes.

#### *Coding Approaches: Color-Blind Racism Frames and Inductive Reasoning*

Participants' responses to the open-ended questions were coded using the grounded theory of Bonilla-Silva's widely established color-blind racial ideology frames (Bonilla Silva 2003). In addition, because racial discourse constantly changes to adjust to an actor's current social environment, measurement of color-blindness was not confined to these four frames. I allowed myself the freedom to interpret any other trends or themes in the data that revealed students' racial thinking or attitudes.

#### *Abstract liberalism*

The most important frame of the color-blind racism framework is Abstract Liberalism, as it seen to help suspend the other color-blind racism frames (Bonilla-Silva 2003). Users of this frame tend to display politically liberal beliefs (for example, all people do have an equal opportunity to succeed) and have accompanying economically liberal values, such as individuals have the freedom to choose their economic status. An actor explaining racial affairs abstractly attempts to view a person as a non-racial being who has been untouched by institutional forces and has the freedom to take advantage of all opportunities in life. Explaining racial affairs in this manner fails to acknowledge how historical



influences, such as forced racial segregation, impose on an individual's current life circumstances. An example of how the frame is used is provided below:

*Ex., All students can succeed academically in school if they are held to high standards.*

### *Naturalization*

The Naturalization frame allows whites to explain racial phenomenon as natural occurrences (Bonilla-Silva 2003). Preferences in dating, living arrangements, the composition of friend groups and so forth are seen as nonracial phenomenon, because, as it is argued, both whites and people of color engage in these behaviors. Similar social behaviors across racial groups are described as "just happening" and justified because "similarity breeds liking." An example of the frame is as follows:

*Ex., Latinos/as prefer living in predominately Latino neighborhoods because it is more culturally comforting.*

### *Cultural racism*

Cultural Racism relies on culturally-based arguments to explain the status of people of color in society (Bonilla-Silva 2003). This frame, which attempts to explain the causes of racial phenomenon as internally driven, once explained racialized phenomenon as biologically driven by claiming people of color were genetically predisposed to be second-class citizens to whites. The current use of the frame allows whites to explain the origins of these same racial affairs as the

result of inherent, fixed cultural characteristics. An example of the frame is provided:

*Ex., Black culture does not place much emphasis on education.*

#### *Minimization of race*

Actors using the Minimization of Race frame acknowledge the existence of race but significantly deemphasize the construct's role in the lives of people of color today. The frame allows whites to acknowledge the existence of incidents that may be interpreted as racist, but do not consider them as such, such as the murder of Vincent Chin. Users of this frame also define racist behavior as strictly overt acts of bigotry rather than subtle behaviors or verbal slights. The use of the frame is provided:

*Ex., There's discrimination, but there are plenty of jobs available.*

#### *Interviews*

Eight of 10 (80% response rate) possible semi-structured interviews were also conducted with students who completed Engaging Diversity in 2010. An e-mail was sent to participants expressing my interest in understanding their experiences as Engaging Diversity alumni on IWU's campus. Interviews lasted approximately one hour each, occurred in a location of the participant's choosing, and were audio recorded. Interviews attempted to explore how students' lives as white students were shaped by their racial understandings, to determine if students felt the Engaging Diversity program directly influenced their understanding of race and race relations, and to understand if the program helped

instill confidence in students to serve as social justice advocates on IWU’s campus. The interviews’ overarching goal—to investigate the relationship between the cohort’s color-blind racial attitudes, and their ability to promote and support a racial consciousness on campus throughout their college careers—was not directly assessed through interview questions. I was interested in understanding how well students racial attitudes and overall understanding of race matched the activities they dedicated their time to throughout college without making them feel a need to justify their campus participation as motivated by a racial or social justice agenda. Participants’ specific mentioning of race, and thus their understanding of the construct, and their level color-blind racial attitudes retrieved from the survey made analysis for understanding the link between students’ color-blind racial attitudes and their ability to promote a racial consciousness on campus possible.

## FINDINGS

### *CoBRAS*

Table 1. Comparison of Participants’ Means on CoBRAS

Participants	Year	CoBRAS	n	t / p values
ED Students	2010	39.5	13	
ED Students	2014	26.0	3	t= 3.37, p < .005
Non-ED Students	2014	59.3	54	
ED Students	2014	26.0	3	t= 3.22, p < .002

Note: 10 of the original 13 Engaging Diversity students remain at the institution in 2014

An independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to compare senior Engaging Diversity students’ color-blind racial attitudes with the racial attitudes they endorsed immediately post-program. Engaging Diversity students had significantly

lower color-blind racial attitudes as seniors than when they were first-year students after completing the Engaging Diversity as measured by the CoBRAS. Because only 3 of the original 13 Engaging Diversity participants responded to the survey in 2014, it is unclear whether the total scores available for students at time 2 (students' scores as seniors) are potential outliers skewing the data or are snapshots of scores that are reflective of the entire cohort racial attitudes. If the scores provided by the 3 senior participants are accurately depicting a trend in this group's color-blind racial attitudes, the group's mean score might be a subtle expression of a real change in students' color-blind racial attitudes over their college careers.

An independent-samples *t*-test was performed to compare the color-blind racial attitudes of students who completed the Engaging Diversity program in 2010 with white senior students who did not complete the program<sup>4</sup>. Engaging Diversity students had significantly lower color-blind racial attitudes than students of the same demographic background who did not complete the program. Because of the non-Engaging Diversity student's larger sample size, the mean color-blind racial attitude score for this group is far more representative of the total white student population whom did not participate in Engaging Diversity. Non-Engaging Diversity students understand contemporary racial affairs differently from one another as indicated by the wide spread of scores around the mean. Similar to before, the low response rate for the Engaging Diversity students makes the comparative analysis

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<sup>4</sup> Students from the original control sample were included in the sample frame

between these two groups suspect; however, students who participated in the 2010 Engaging Diversity program still understand current racial realities in a less color-blind fashion than seniors who did not complete the program. This is evidence that the racial consciousness Engaging Diversity students possess is more likely the result of their exposure to the Engaging Diversity program than to the general college experience.

### *Vignettes and Interviews*

Analysis of students' survey responses and interview data was combined in order to decipher how students' qualitative understanding of contemporary race relations complimented their lived experiences as white students and as potential social justice leaders on campus. Students' survey responses were downloaded from Qualtrix and organized in Microsoft Word, and were analyzed for color-blind racism themes and other racially informed frames. Interview data was downloaded onto my computer from an audio recorder, were transcribed, and coded for themes related to students' engagement as white social justice advocates and other racialized experiences on campus. As evidenced by students' survey data and interviews with Engaging Diversity students, the 2010 Engaging Diversity cohort were far less likely than non-Engaging diversity students to explain racial affairs in color-blind terms; instead, students explained these issues with an awareness of systemic racialized trends in society. Participants also displayed a sophisticated understanding of how history shapes the dynamics of modern institutions and the lives of the actors within them. While the total number of

Engaging Diversity participants who responded to the survey was low, these students not only made critical observations on the nature of race and race-related events, but drew racially conscious conclusions explaining why these racialized occurrences develop and persist.

Interviews with these students revealed that they considered the Engaging Diversity program to be the college experience that challenged any racial biases or misunderstandings they held before college and saw the program as the motivational force behind their decisions to become engaged on campus. Students held a variety of leadership positions and participated in a multitude of activities on campus, but their high level of campus engagement had a specific emphasis on participation in social-justice oriented groups, clubs, and courses. Students also attributed most of their academic and professional career decisions to their participation in the Engaging Diversity program.

### *Engaging Diversity Students*

#### *Awareness of systemic trends*

Students who participated in the Engaging Diversity program often referenced general patterns of opportunity, behavior, and life outcomes—or “big picture” racial phenomena—in explanations for why certain racial trends and phenomena exist. Rather than focusing on an individual case of disadvantage, Engaging Diversity students considered the overall presence and impact of multiple cases of disadvantage that make up a systemic trend. This abstract awareness of general racialized patterns allowed these students to understand

racial issues and events as shared occurrences that stem from a common cause.

For example, in her response to affirmative action, a 21-year-old female named

Kayla expressed the following:

There will always be an exception to the rule: the white student who lived in a poor neighborhood, came from a single parent household, and underperformed in school... However, when we examine an issue like this, it is important to look at overall trends and try to provide some processes and policies that level the playing field a bit.

Her use of the phrase “exception to the rule” indicates she is aware of where the majority of whites fall on the economic spectrum, how this group’s household typically is structured, and the achievement outcomes of whites in school. If a white student who is underachieving in school is an estrangement from the norm, then it can be inferred that this respondent would label students of color as the underachieving academic group. There are many complicated reasons as to why students of color tend to lag behind whites in education, and that is not to say all students of color are a part of this trend; however, the Kayla’s belief that the college admissions process should consider an applicant’s race to “level the playing field a bit” shows she considers achievement an issue affecting all students of color because they are a part of a disadvantaged group and thus that intervention through policy is required. It is also important to note that she used the exact language—“level the playing field”—outlined in the affirmative action executive order. It can be inferred that Kayla either retained knowledge of this phrase from the Engaging Diversity program or engaged in discussion on affirmative action either in a formal or informal setting that reinforced the term. No matter the case,

she understands that the choice to use an applicant's race in the college admissions process is an attempt to create an equal opportunity rather than an unfair advantage for students of color.

The critical racial consciousness Engaging Diversity students possessed in understanding how race sustains systems of privilege and oppression, which allowed them to support admission committee's consideration of the demographic was not a trait students brought with them to college. During interviews, most, if not all, students specifically mentioned how the program's focus on debunking the myths of affirmative action as well as the information it provided on the goals of these initiatives were pivotal in the attitudinal transformation they underwent towards race. For example, a white female by the name of Jen mentioned the following on her previous beliefs on affirmative action:

Since I was fresh out of high school and went through the application process, I definitely had the opinion that people of color get into college easier. This was the rhetoric that was passed down on the daily in my high school and I definitely bought into it....admitting that not getting into colleges was based on merit and not being able to use someone else as a scapegoat...was just difficult.

Her past understanding of whiteness as a disadvantaging factor in her college application process failed to acknowledge how her racial group membership historically favored and advanced whites in the academic system. As she learned about affirmative action and the reasons for their creation, Jen began to understand that it was not her white race; instead, it was her academic qualifications that had more say in to her acceptance into certain academic



institutions. A white male named Greg also reported learning about affirmative action was the lesson that helped him understand how vastly different his life is from the lives of people of color. He said:

I believed some of the affirmative action myths like if I was Black I probably would have gotten into other colleges, without realizing how being Black would change my and my parents' lives.

After learning about the ways in which black people in particular have been marginalized and excluded from society, Greg reached the conclusion that affirmative action is necessary because, as a white person, his academic opportunities are more immense than those available for black individuals.

Engaging Diversity students displayed an ability to bridge their knowledge of the existence of racialized patterns opportunity and power with how they interpreted campus affairs and practices. During an interview with a white woman named Andrea, when asked to explain the ways in which she believed students of color experience racism on campus, she commented that:

People of color are definitely underrepresented in positions of power; I mean look at all my professors. They are all white people. Also if you drive through the neighborhoods of Chicago you'll see they are still segregated... If you look more at the suburbs of Chicago you'll see all white people with big houses, trimmed grass; they have everything. You rarely see a person of color. Even here on campus. All the people of color are in the food industry or other low-paying jobs, and the majority of professors are white. There's a clear divide between who makes the money and who don't.

Students like Andrea interpreted the racial divide between more prestigious occupations and lower-ranking ones as ripple effects stemming from the larger imbalance of power between people of color and whites. The application of

systems-level knowledge can be difficult for students because such large-scale information can feel far removed from their everyday realities (Haddad and Lieberman 2002), yet this student possess this ability, which illustrates Engaging Diversity students are prone to thinking about the functioning of the world as a whole, rather than as a sphere of dissected parts.

Even though Engaging Diversity students were more aware of societal racial trends and the dynamics that allow these patterns to persist, remaining aware and critical of these trends seem to be a constant effort. Both Melissa and Andrea expressed difficulty with not automatically assuming stereotypes to be true in spite of their knowledge of the inaccuracy of these images. Melissa expressed that:

A Black male had his pants super low and I assumed he wasn't a student, but then I was like no, that's stupid.

Reflecting on her encounter with a black male on her floor, Andrea expressed a similar fear and distrust of black men and said:

When I met a resident's boyfriend who is tall and dark-skinned. I remember feeling uncomfortable because I was raised with the beliefs that Black men are dangerous, and when I met him I was taken aback. I had to tell myself what are you doing you don't even know him! I felt uncomfortable at first but I caught myself. I tried to process my discomfort by asking myself why I felt this way.

As we can see, the power of controlling images society maintains for black men as vicious perpetrators constantly invades people's perceptions, even the most education and informed students who underwent a diversity program aimed to dispel these inaccurate depictions. Students, however, still display an ability to

acknowledge their susceptibility to relying on pervasive stereotypes deeply embedded in our society and go on to correct this bias.

### *Acknowledgement of white privilege*

A sub-theme that specifically mentions the advantages whites receive in their daily lives was interpreted from the larger awareness of systemic trends frame. The three Engaging Diversity participants spoke about racial practices and racialized phenomena in society with a centered reference to white privilege as opposed to minority oppression. It has been well documented that individuals holding a privileged status are more likely to acknowledge inequalities at the level of the minority group (Haddad and Lieberman 2002). Rather than attributing racialized gaps to the ways in which whites have been historically advantaged for their racial group membership, most will focus on how these people (i.e., people of color) are oppressed or disadvantaged. Such explanations remove an individual from acknowledging their privilege, which eliminates any responsibility he or she may hold to overturn disadvantages that lay on the flipside of those advantages. There are many reasons why a white individual may find difficulty recognizing his or her privilege; for example, the extent an individual identifies as white as well as the amount of exposure one has had with people of color has been seen to make a difference (Todd, Spanieerman, and Poteat 2011). Engaging Diversity students, however, were less likely to ignore or remove their racial identities from discussions of racial issues and assumed a sense of responsibility to resolve racial

inequalities. For example, Kayla provided the following argument on college admissions use of race in selection:

Though it may seem unfair to assign someone extra points for a trait they were serendipitously borne into, I think it is necessary to examine the points that white students are awarded for aspects of their lives that are a result of their being white.

Instead of focusing on the disadvantages racial minorities face that qualify them as eligible for affirmative action, Kayla focuses on the privileges whites receive that make them suitable for admission. Her awareness that whites receive inheritances, such as family legacy at a college, that advantage them in the selection process suggests she considers race a significant factor that shapes the academic opportunities available to whites and people of color.

This change in perspective from minority disadvantage to white advantage was also seen in Kayla's explanation on why she believes the student of color-white achievement gap exists:

In schools, we teach to white culture. This means when we call something "standardized" it isn't truly standardized across all students and cultures, it is standardized to white students. This happens because of the language and concepts used.

This explanation is revealing for its emphasis on the role school environments play in white achievement through its tailoring of academics to whites' understanding of the world. Focusing on an institution—in this case, the education system—that fosters the success of whites complicates traditional notions that blame the environments students of color live in for their academic performance. This less

conventional way of explaining student achievement allows her to apply this understanding to her personal life:

I took a class during which a student of color shared a story about an experience she had with a standardized test. The question asked was something along the lines of which of these words means the same as wrinkled. "Creased" was the correct answer, but to this student, having a pair of pants that was creased meant that they had been nicely pressed and were ready to wear, the opposite of wrinkled. This minor example is a window into a much larger problem. Curriculums are written by primarily white people, so that is what is taught in schools.

Kayla's ability to connect a personal account of disadvantage to a "much larger problem" illustrates the student's abstract awareness of how the wide representation of whites crafting academic lessons trickles down to effect the success of students of color.

Students also applied the concept of white privilege to their lives as white students during their IWU careers. This awareness helped students navigate academic and social situations with a careful consideration of the how their racial privilege could potentially impact the outcomes of these situations. As she reflected on her experiences as a social justice advocate on campus, Jen stated that:

People don't want to listen, which is actually twofold because they don't wanna listen but they are probably more willing to listen to me, a white student, talk than a person of color.

Jen acknowledges that talking with other whites about racial oppression is difficult, but her ability to relate racially in both a superficial sense and in true shared experiences with other whites during these conversations makes navigating these

potentially explosive situations less threatening. Even though white students are likely to resist learning about white privilege and oppression for the first time (Todd, Spanieerman, and Poteat 2011), Jen realizes she is more likely to be viewed as credible because her of positive intellectual attributes her white race offers her.

An awareness of systemic white privilege and racial minority oppression was influential in their academic and professional decisions Engaging Diversity students made throughout their time at IWU. After learning about the unearned privileges their white racial status afforded them, students felt responsible to raise awareness on campus about white privilege and reverse this trend in their spheres of influence. Immediately after completing an activity during the program, Greg felt the following way:

The major takeaway I got from the [privilege walk] was that, yea, I have a lot of advantages, but I need to make myself useful and not let them go to waste.

Andrea felt a similar sense of responsibility after reflecting on what she had learned about white privilege from Engaging Diversity and a sociology class she took on race. She stated:

I always thought, what can I do? We were reading about all the different ways people of color are oppressed and seeing it happen right in front of me... I remember reading a passage from the book Privilege, Power, and Difference, and he said that people have a choice of taking the path of least resistance or go completely against what everyone is doing. I remember this specifically.

Both students not only recognized the social power their white racial status offered them, they felt the need to utilize these advantages to undo inequality. Greg's awareness of his white privilege and desire to use it for justice echoed the

previous participants' comments. He, however, used his racial privilege as a platform to learn about other injustices and help close those gaps. He stated:

I have a lot of advantages, but I need to make myself useful and not let them go to waste... The first paper I wrote in gateway was actually on affirmative action; I used ED as the nudge to write the paper. I also try to show up to feminist meetings which is also eye opening. I don't have to think about all the things women are thinking of on a daily basis.

Greg constantly thought about his privilege in many settings. He used a writing assignment as an opportunity to process information he learned during Engaging Diversity, and sought out novel opportunities to expand his knowledge on how his male identity influences the experiences of women, a less socially powerful group than men. Greg is active and involved in his exploration of privilege, and uses this passion to broaden his understanding of how other social identities he holds shape experiences around him.

After learning about the ways in which white privilege can be used to address racial disparities, Jen, Melissa, Danielle, and Andrea felt a charge to influence those surrounding them and thus changed their majors, joined multicultural registered student organizations, wrote articles on race for the institution's newspaper, and choose socially justice-oriented career paths. Melissa mentioned that immediately after the program ended, she wanted to continue learning about social issues and said:

I have just tried to learn more by taking classes. I am minoring in sociology and Engaging Diversity is one of the reasons....Engaging Diversity sparked my interest in various social justice issues... as a freshman I went to a lot of campus events. I went to SAVVIS poetry slam, for example. I also went to the white privilege

conference at Augustana my freshman year. The program also helped me talk to my friends that may not be as opened minded.

Melissa spoke passionately about how the program motivated her to continue learning about white privilege and make changes in her life that reflected her newfound interest in social justice. Danielle expressed a similar sense of urgency to broaden her understanding of privilege and other social issues and stated the following:

What ED did was put me on a path to changing my major to a soc major, becoming more interested in these issues, wanting to be a mentor the next year. I think the program was a good kick start into future activities I participated in.

Learning about racial inequality inspired Danielle to change her planned academic trajectory and explore other opportunities that would allow her to continue having conversations on privilege and oppression. She also felt a need to communicate her experiences as a white person to other incoming white students participating in the program as a way to help other incoming white students learning about privilege and oppression for the first time. All in all, the exposure Engaging Diversity students gained on white privilege encouraged them to use their identities of power to initiate change across campus, whether in the form of mentorship through the program or attending the meetings of other socially oppressed groups.

#### *Connection between history and current realities*

Interpreting current racial dynamics and race-related events in a historical context was common among the 2010 Engaging Diversity cohort. References to



the effects of major historical events and time-specific practices had on the social, economic, and political standings of whites and people of color were used to explain the structure of society today and the race-related dynamics that occur within in. This frame of thought reveals this group's ability to think critically about the resemblances current realities may share with past events. If similarities exist, comparisons are drawn between historical processes and/or events and contemporary phenomena and analysis of the effects of history on the present occur. The degree of specificity students described historical influences on current racial affairs varied with some responses mentioning the importance of history in general, while some supplied specific historical events. For example, Kayla was vague in her explanation on why she believed Chicago neighborhoods are racially segregated:

Historically, whites had a lot of say in where minorities (Blacks, Asians, Irish, etc.) could or could not live. This forced individuals and families belonging to these groups to live in low quality housing in less than desirable areas.

In spite of her nonspecific explanation for the reasons why whites had much influence in the residential freedom people of color had, Kayla's ability to connect how the decisions of whites in the past are reflected in the current racial compositions of Chicago neighborhoods gives insight into her developed sociological imagination, a skill that is exercised through dialogue on the functioning of society and is associated with other higher-order thinking skills (Haddad and Lieberman 2002). Other responses for why Chicago neighborhoods are racially segregated were more descriptive and supplied a particular time

period or event that contributed to neighborhoods' racial demographics. One such explanation by a 22-year-old male named Jason is as follows:

Housing in the more desirable neighborhoods was only made available to whites after WWII. Institutionalized racism kept blacks from getting loans and buying houses in white neighborhoods. Even if they were allowed to live among whites, there was often panic among white residents that mixed-race neighborhoods would lead to conflict and make their property value decline. Mono-racial neighborhoods today are a direct result of racism in the past, institutionalized prejudice, and white flight.

The complexity of racial segregation is apparent through the multiple examples this participant provides on why this phenomena exists. He is aware of the many factors—from the role banks had in blacks' access to loans to the mass movement of whites from the city to the suburbs—that contributed to mono-racial neighborhoods and is also able to directly apply the effects of these processes to neighborhoods' racial demographics today. It is evident Jason has thought critically about this topic before and is aware of the multiplicative effects race informed policies and behaviors during a certain period can have on future racial structures and life outcomes. Jason also displays an awareness of how the racist founding of the U.S. continues to influence the academic performance of students of color today. He said:

This also has its roots in the past. White America built the most prosperous society in all of history, but at a tremendous cost to non-whites, who were exploited. Even though people are treated equally by law today, you can't just free someone who has no education, money, house, or job, and expect them to catch up.

His response directly challenges the myth of meritocracy our country relies on as an explanation for success. Connecting the unjust treatment people of color received from whites at the outset of our country's foundation with the difficulty these groups currently have with attaining an education, acquiring income, owning a house, or seeking a job suggests that Jason considers inequality as a time persisting force. He also relates the current political climate of society with the status of people of color who have been disadvantaged throughout history by claiming that even if "people are treated equally by law" one cannot "expect them to catch up." Jason is aware that racism has roots in the past, persists over time, and is always impinging on the lives of people of color.

#### *Other racially informed frames*

Engaging Diversity students responded to the vignettes in other racially conscious and critical ways; however, due to participants' low response rate, the following explanations were rarely featured and were not shared among the three students. In spite of the scarcity of these racially conscious explanations, the following responses give insight into these students' ability to think critically about the ways in which race shapes the outcomes of societal phenomena and the behavior of people.

#### *The importance of race and campus experiences*

When asked to share her thoughts on IWU's MALANA program, one 21-year-old female named Monica stated her support for the program, but also

offered critiques on how the program could be improved. Her suggestions are as follows:

it would be more beneficial if the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs to also include an intense focus on the racial climate on campus and in society in general so students of color are aware that their race influences their experiences and so that they can better understand what could possibly happen to them on campus. In addition, resources (whether its counselors or other faculty/staff) should be provided specially for students of color because their experiences on Wesleyan's campus will differ from those of a white student, whether or not they are conscious of it.

Monica's choice to share suggestions for improving the MALANA program, even when not requested to in the directions, implies she is familiar with the program's format, has thought about its structure, and believes incorporating more focused activities that highlight how race may shape the experiences of incoming students of color is important. She is aware of the importance race may play in the lives of students of color on campus; however, her critiques present some limitations (discussed below) regarding the extent students' of color racial identity shapes their perceptions of and experiences on campus.

Engaging Diversity students recounted many instances in which white and students of color experience campus differently because of their race. Jen recalled the following:

In my French class we are reading a short story about French immigrants coming to America and our professor had asked us where our families are from and why they immigrated to the states. There's also one Black woman in the class, and all the White kids have relatives from this European country, or this European country. The students said their families came to the states to have a better life, to become rich, all of these aspirations and, mostly, it was their own choice to have freedom or to flee

from religious persecution. And then the professor asks the Black student “where is your family from?” and she said “well mostly the Caribbean and Africa and then he kinda left it at that and then as a closing he said “so everyone’s ancestors came to the states looking for a better life” and I was immediately like uh...no...some people were forced to be here, but in my head, I was so uncomfortable and I was also in French class and was like I don’t know how to express this in French and this is my professor...in front of others...calling out a professor...I don’t know...I just let it pass and it was very uncomfortable. And I think, based on visual cues, that student also felt uncomfortable... I definitely looked at her for the rest of the class and she did not seem engaged like she normally is.

Jen noticed how a seemingly harmless comment made by her professor could be interpreted differently because of a student’s racial identity. It is likely the professor was well-intentioned and truly was interested in stimulating a conversation on immigration that pulled from the diverse perspectives within his or her classroom. However, to Jen, the professor’s blasé comment—“so everyone’s ancestors came to the states looking for a better life”—is insensitive to the realities of forced immigration and slavery that was common among African populations and equating the African American woman’s ancestral immigration history with the white students’ familial history ignores the unique pressures and reasons behind African immigration. Jen also was vigilant enough to notice the students’ discomfort from the professor’s comment and was caught in a mental struggle with herself on whether she should address the uncritical comment or not. Jen continued to walk me through this contemplation:

Yea. I definitely heavily considered approaching the professor after class, but then thought is that an overstepping of boundaries like I haven’t talked to the student, I don’t really know how she felt about the situation, I could be making this up, I don’t want to

Speak for her and I don't know her; I'm not even on a first name basis with her and I ended up not doing anything about it and I'm not sure if that was the right thing to do but I don't even think I would have even been aware of that situation if it wasn't for Engaging Diversity or would have even thought about it really. That's a part of white privilege, not having to be uncomfortable in class.

She is highly aware of how a student's race can alter their classroom experiences and wants to inform her professor of this reality because he or she is not necessarily cognizant of the effects their comments may have on diverse student groups. In spite of Jen's knowledge on this racial dynamic in the classroom, she finds it difficult to approach her professor because of his or her status and is unsure how the woman of color may be impacted by her response. There is a great deal of mental work that goes into navigating instances where inequality and insensitivity is detected and Jen finds herself unable to approach her professor. Jen, however, does make it clear she has confronted incidents of bias on campus and said:

I am definitely comfortable approaching any peers. With the professor it was different. I don't know what I would do in a similar situation. I know I've approached people my age or younger, or an older student on campus... but I can't say I've really done it with adults on campus...I think I do have the skills though.

Jen described multiple cases where she questioned individuals on campus that said racially unaware or insensitive comments; she spoke up at a sorority meeting on the inappropriateness of the group's wearing of a t-shirt that depicted a stereotypical Mexican man and credited the Engaging Diversity program for providing her the support she needed to develop these communication skills.

Students' confidence in responding to racial insensitivity and unawareness on campus depended mostly on the type and amount of people present during these acts. Andrea and Danielle both stated that they were confident talking about race among their close friends, but experienced difficulty explaining their stance on social justice issues to white individuals—particularly white men. Danielle said:

Anyone who's older and anyone who's a man. An older, white man. I think if I express my feelings to an older, white man it will be looked at as though you're too caring because you're a woman, you're not thinking about what's fair.

Reflecting on the power difference between a person withholding two socially dominant identities during a potentially charged conversation is personally threatening and challenging to Danielle. Even though she “knows [her] stance” and, most of the time, feels competent discussing social issues, this confidence vanishes when white males are a part of the conversation. Andrea reported a similar lack of confidence when discussing issues of race, but, in her case, she expressed difficulty with conveying information to white people in general, rather than just to white men. Andrea said:

I don't have the language to explain all this info to them because I'm still learning. I don't know exactly how to meet them where they are in their racial identity development...I struggle. I have a hard time trying to convince people that these issues are real. It's hard to talk to people about stuff they hold strong beliefs about...If things come up in conversations with white people I will try to address it but it usually doesn't work. Talking about privilege with whites is hard for me...I think whites don't always want to acknowledge their privilege. They are likely to think what I'm saying is made up and won't want to let go of their privilege. They may feel upset and not want to give up their privilege.

Andrea's insecurities with discussing race and social issues are multiplicative. She has had difficulties in the past with conversing about race with resistant whites, which negatively impacted her confidence to further these conversations with this group in the future. She also acknowledged her limitations in having these sensitive conversations with whites, because she is still developing the language to explain social issues and wants to learn how to effectively communicate with whites at various stages in their racial identity development. Andrea's consideration of how her conversations with whites may be affected by their racial identities illustrates her knowledge on how the less-visible aspects of social identities can greatly influence how people receive and interpret information. In spite of Andrea's developing knowledge on the importance identity and resistance plays in conversations with whites on social justice, she still considers herself a work in progress.

*Engaging Diversity Students' Use of Color-Blind Frames and other Uncritical Explanations*

The Engaging Diversity student sample, more often than not, refrained from utilizing color-blind explanations for why race related phenomena exist in society. Despite this, students were not fully exempt from the contradictions, generalizations, and uncritical explanations that make up color-blind ideologies. Students were found minimizing race in explanations on affirmative action, displayed inaccurate understandings of affirmative action, and over-generalized



the extent to which one's racial identity is a significant shaper of one's perceptions and experiences.

*Minimization of Race and Affirmative Action Confusion*

On whether he would support an affirmative action effort that considers an applicant's race in the admission's process, Jason stated he:

Would not support this process. I think the better way is to evaluate candidates holistically, but with larger schools this is difficult. I believe in affirmative action, that colleges should make a good faith effort not to discriminate against applicants of color.

Jason was the only Engaging Diversity participant to not support this affirmative action initiative and was also an outlier for his use of the minimization of race frame. It is possible he may be confused about the goals of affirmative action considering he stated that candidates should be evaluated holistically. If Jason was fully knowledgeable on affirmative action, he would know that considering the race of an applicant whose ancestors have been historically disadvantaged is an attempt to view a candidate holistically. Without a solid understanding of affirmative action, he misses how the consideration an applicant's race is an attempt to correct for the years people of color were denied the social, political, and economic opportunities that allow them to increase their social capital, which ultimately prepares them for college. It is difficult, however, to come to a clear conclusion on whether a lack of knowledge of affirmative action is the culprit that leads this individual to believe race should not be considered in admissions, because he later provides actual terminology from the executive order on affirmative action in his reasoning to not discriminate against students of color.

Perhaps Jason genuinely does not want students of color to be disadvantaged in the college admissions process and wants a good faith effort to be taken to provide students of color with opportunities for academic success. Despite this concern, the contradictions of color-blind ideologies are present in his attempt to make sense of affirmative action and the equal opportunity he believes students of color deserve.

### *Overextension of the Role of Racial Identity*

As mentioned previously, Monica offered suggestions on how the MALANA program could be improved. She made a sophisticated observation on the role race has on the experiences of people of color and said the MALANA program would be more effective if race-focused activities were included to help students of color navigate the predominately white campus. She said:

Students of color [need to] understand what could possibly happen to them on campus. In addition, resources (whether its counselors or other faculty/staff) should be provided specially for students of color because their experiences on Wesleyan's campus will differ from those of a white student, whether or not they are conscious of it.

Students of color are all a part of historically oppressed groups that have been denied basic civil rights and liberties. These inequalities are passed down generationally and affect all people of color to varying degrees. While the lives of all people of color are infringed upon by these unseen forces of inequality, whether or not a student of color recognizes them and considers them as racial depends on where they are in their racial identity development (Hartmann, Gerteis, and Croll 2009). Monica makes the claim that the race of a student of

color will influence their campus life experiences, and thus they need to understand what will happen to them on IWU's campus. The many components of racial identity all interact to shape how an individual views and interprets the world and the endorsement of certain dimensions over others dictates how much a student of color identifies with his or her race (Hartmann, Gerteis and Croll 2009). For example, an Asian woman that does not identify with being Asian may not interpret the world through a racial lens, and, as a result, will not give her race much credence in the outplay of her experiences. Therefore, the Monica's assumption that all students of color will experience campus in ways that is structured around their race is not necessarily true considering that racial identity is personally defined and shapes how one interprets their daily experiences and the outcomes of those experiences. Moreover, there is not a one-sized fits all approach to working with students of color and claiming that the experiences of all students of color will differ from those of white students is not necessarily true with the established understanding of the dynamic role racial identity plays perception.

#### *Non-Engaging Diversity Students*

There were stark differences between how the two student samples comprehended race-related phenomena in society; the non-Engaging Diversity students relied on all four frames of color-blindness to make sense of racialized occurrences. Other sub-themes within these frames were interpreted with all

color-blind frames interacting and bonding together, depicting the complicated and contradictory nature of racial conceptualization.

Non-Engaging Diversity students were more likely to make a race-related observation without any justification for why they believed the racial phenomena to be the way they are. The students' brief explanations offered insight into the lack of mental engagement students dedicated to the topics presented in the vignettes. The range of emotion that filled students' responses also varied; some responses consisted of minimal levels of anger, fear, resistance and apprehension while certain vignettes elicited higher intensities of emotion.

#### *Minimization of race*

The most widely used frame of color-blindness was the minimization of race line of thought. The majority of self-identified white students deemphasized the importance race plays in shaping both the experiences of whites and people of color across all the vignettes, but this frame was most relied on in participants' thoughts on the use of race in admissions decisions. There was an overwhelming relationship between the use of this frame and misunderstandings of the goals of affirmative action and how they relate to correcting the marks racism had and continues to have on the academic careers of students of color. The more individuals misunderstood the goals of affirmative action and how they are instituted, the more likely they were to belittle the impact race has on students' academic outcomes. The affirmative action vignette also triggered a certain apprehension, in conjunction with the minimization of race frame, on how the

process would affect the academic success of whites, which is illustrated by the following comment:

I know it is done for a good reason, but I also think this kind of supports reverse racism, where students who are the majority race (generally Caucasian) get penalized for being in the minority. However, there are some instances where if this were not done, there would not be as much diversity on campus.

This 20-year-old female's remark clearly shows the complexity of people's thoughts on race-related topics by her weighing of the impact affirmative action has on students of color and whites—especially whites. She immediately makes known that she is aware this form of affirmative action is well intended, but is genuinely concerned with how the racial group she identifies with will be affected. There is an internal struggle, whether moral or logical, with how to manage the academic interests of students of color and whites, however; in the end, she lands on the conclusion that whites will be subjected to reverse racism under affirmative action and is less supportive of the initiative. Her concern that whites will experience reverse racism clearly illustrates she has little awareness of the powerful forces race has in shaping the academic opportunities of students of color. It may be that this participant has had little to no formal conversations on race and racism, as most white students graduating college are limited in these experiences (Pascarella et al. 1996), and is unaware that affirmative action is a tactic used to help historically disadvantaged populations “catch up” to the groups involved in their oppression. This lack of knowledge may explain why she is cautious of affirmative action. On the other hand, it is unclear whether this

participant's dissent of affirmative action is more correlated with a desire to maintain white privilege and the status quo. It is probable this participant's apprehension is more associated with a lack of knowledge of affirmative action, race, and racism because she concluded that affirmative action is important for racial diversity on college campuses. However, regardless of the reason why she does not support the use of an applicant's race in admission's decisions, her inability to acknowledge the impact race has had on all students' success helps to maintain the structural oppression of students of color and the privilege of whites.

More evident misunderstandings of affirmative action and how they made non-Engaging Diversity students more susceptible to minimizing race were seen in the following comments by two 21-year-old students, one female and one male.

The female respondent said:

Is this like affirmative action? Nonetheless, I feel like they are just trying to hit a certain quota to make their school more diverse, rather than value each student as a unique individual.

The consideration of an applicant's race in school and workplace decisions is a core tenet of affirmative action goals, and this participant's questioning of whether the use of race in admission's decisions is a form of affirmative action implies she is unfamiliar with all affirmative action goals. Her confusion on affirmative action is further illustrated by her understanding that affirmative action is a disingenuous attempt for academic institutions to meet some numerical standard for the representation of students of color on campus. Considering the participant is likely to have little background on the goals and guidelines of affirmative action, it is not

surprising she is unaware that quotas are in fact illegal and are not used in admission's decisions (Hicklin 2007). The student does display a genuine concern for individual applicants to be considered for all their worth during the selection process, but she fails to recognize that while we are all—regardless of race—unique individuals, all people have been racialized, categorized based on those conceptualizations, and afforded unequal life opportunities because of those racial labels. As a result, the participant's unawareness of racial group marginalization at the societal level and overall haziness on affirmative goals prevents her from seeing the importance race has on the academic opportunities afforded to all racial groups.

Similar concerns over preserving individual value and worth in admissions decisions were shared by many and is clearly illustrated in one male's response:

Personally, I would be insulted if performance standards were lowered for me based on my race. Even for people whose lack of academic ability is somewhat influenced by being in a crappy inner-city public school, standards should not be lowered. Instead effort should go to improving the quality of the early educational environment these people come from so that they can properly develop the ability to meet academic performance standards in college admissions.

While this participant is not explicitly concerned with the use of quotas, he sees affirmative action as a method of stripping individual hard work by lowering the academic standards for students of color to be admitted into college. Similar to the participant above, he is unaware that affirmative action intends to ensure that the very best applicants with the highest credentials are considered and lowering academic standards for a student of color to enter a college or university is not a

form of affirmative action. His skewed perception of affirmative action is coupled with an inability to draw a link between the primary students affected by underfunded schools—students of color—all the while minimizing the impact these environments have on this group of students. The participant's use of the racialized terms such as "these people" when discussing the school environments of people of color highlights that an individual need not specifically mention the importance race plays in the lives of individuals; this phenomena can be demonstrated through people's use of language that "otherizes" racial out-groups.

#### *Income over race*

Attributing racial disparities and other racial occurrences to socioeconomic correlates over racial ones was overwhelmingly common in the non-Engaging Diversity student sample. One's level of income was not only considered to be the prime culprit of disadvantage in society, but racial explanations for societal disparities and behavioral patterns were commonly bypassed. Socioeconomic status was seen as the initiator in the chain of oppression, resulting in groups of people of the same race with a shared economic status. Placing socioeconomic status at the start of this equation allows for the interpretation of the formation of racial groups as a by-product of income rather than race. This conceptual outgrowth of minimizing race vis-à-vis income allows whites to simultaneously recognize inequality and ignore how socioeconomic status functions differently in the lives of people of color and whites. The income over race frame is a partially successful method used to address societal gaps, but fails to recognize the



intersectionality of race and income and how this relationships plays out differently across racial groups. A 21-year-old male attributed Chicago's racially homogenous neighborhoods to the vicious cycle of poverty without drawing any attention to the race-poverty link. He said:

A cycle of poverty: lack of education restricts careers, forcing children to grow up impoverished, go to lower-ranking secondary schools, not reach the levels of education needed to get a well-paying job, and ultimately live in a lower income neighborhood - completing the cycle with the next generation.

He is correct in his observation that one's level of income plays a significant role in education outcomes and, consequently, one's future job prospects and income. All these factors do indeed combine and eventually contribute to the neighborhoods one can afford to reside in and lead to life circumstances and inequalities that are passed down to future generations, thus perpetuating a cycle of disadvantaged that prevents people of varying incomes from intermixing. While these observations are all correct, this student ignores the strong correlation that exists between race and socioeconomic status; it is more likely people of color will fall below the poverty line than whites (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2010). He makes an observation regarding the "how" component for why Chicago neighborhoods are racially segregated—poor schooling in impoverished communities makes attaining a competitive job difficult, thus restricting low-income people's residential options, but does not question why these patterns occur. Questions such as, "Where are these impoverished communities"? "Who are the children most affected by them"? "Why is it that people of color with advanced levels of education still

receive lower wages than whites with the same amount of education and find difficulty moving into non-communities of color”? Therefore, the participant finds difficulty in realizing the inextricable relationship between income and race and, as a result, how race greatly dictates one’s economic opportunities and success.

### *Abstract liberalism*

The emphasis on individual choice, motivation, and persistence that compose the abstract liberalism frame was most often seen in response to the affirmative action and achievement gap vignettes. This is not surprising considering these scenarios focus on academic achievement and opportunity, two topics most U.S. Americans attribute to people’s individual personal will and determination. Students utilizing this frame, an example is provided by a female below, considered American society as a leveled-plain field without any bias in shaping the performance and life outcomes of racial groups. In response to why she believed the student of color-white achievement gap persists, she states:

I think a strong support system and strong standards are necessary for children to excel. Parents' education and financial success do not determine children's success and achievement. Accountability for one's own actions is one such standard.

This individual minimizes the impact income and parents’ educational levels—two factors known to significantly predict the academic success and persistence of students—have on students’ success and, in doing so, places all responsibility in the hands of the students and their support systems. Again, students of color and their systems of support, or lack thereof, are to blame for their academic performance instead of the racialized institutions that maintain the privilege of

whites and the oppression of people of color. Some recognition must be paid to this participant's use of phrases such as "strong standards" and "accountability for one's own actions is such a standard," rhetoric directly pulled from the "No Child Left Behind Act"—a controversial bill that places the responsibility of students' standardized test performance on students and their teachers. This bill has been criticized for its ignorance in addressing how a school's income, resources, the bias of standardized tests, and other student-level psychological impediments influence the achievement gap between whites and students of color (Walten and Spencer 2009). Similar to the criticism the No Child Left Behind Act has received, this student commits the same errors of thought by failing to recognize that achievement is more than an individual's exertion of effort. A student's academic outcomes are shaped by their racial group membership, the amount of value assigned to this membership by others, and the opportunities offered to them as being a part of this racial group—all of which greatly contribute to students' academic performance.

#### *Naturalization and cultural racism*

Explaining the racial patterns of society in ways that are culturally natural were commonplace among the non-Engaging Diversity student sample. The term "racial groups" was conflated with "cultural groups," which allowed for racial phenomena to be explained as inevitable because culture is considered to be immutable with groups possessing distinct customs and approaches to life that lead to specific life outcomes. A significant portion of participants utilized the

naturalization-cultural racism combination frame to explain the racial segregation of Chicago neighborhoods. An example of the use of this frame is provided below:

Part of it is economic; whites tend to be able to afford housing in nicer areas while minorities can only afford to live in poorer areas. But a significant part of it is that whites, hispanics, and blacks tend to belong to different subcultures which don't mix as people are generally more comfortable among their own kind.

This twenty-one-year old male's idle acceptance of racially segregated neighborhoods prevents any possibility for the examination of how social identities interact with people's access to housing. Furthermore, his use of the words "subculture" and one's "own kind" illustrates he considers racial groups as unique types of people bounded by shared characteristics, and it is these natural traits that prevent the intermixing of racial groups. His focus on income rather than race—the essence of the income over race frame—raises the question whether he also considers the financial status of whites and people of color as natural phenomena, perhaps stemming from their unique cultural differences. Therefore, this participant has little awareness of how race has dictated racial groups' economic outcomes and choice in their residential selection process instead conceptualizing residential patterns as unavoidable trends rooted in fixed cultural traits.

Participants also explained the student of color-white achievement gap as a result of students' cultural predisposition for certain academic success. For example, a twenty-one-year old male stated:

It is a cultural difference. Many low-income blacks just don't value education much, attributing high academic achievement to being

too "white." This is a significant problem when students don't develop basic skills (reading, writing, critical thinking) at a young age when their brains are most plastic. Since many things taught in school build upon what is previously learned or developed, having a weak foundation in these skills hinders higher-level learning greatly. Language skills are also particularly difficult for many blacks to develop since many black families don't speak with proper grammar.

There is no reference to how institutional racism has shaped students' opportunity for academic success and how this type of racism continues to manifest in the academic lives of students today. To this individual, black students are incompetent—naturally inferior for that matter—because they belong to groups that inherently do not value education and are at fault for their academic status as opposed to a racialized social system that disadvantages them. There were fewer explanations that explicitly labeled students of color as naturally less intelligent than whites, but such responses existed and make known that this type of racial bias exists among white seniors on IWU's campus who did not participate in the Engaging Diversity program.

#### *Thoughts on the MALANA student orientation program*

Students' reactions towards the MALANA program fell into four categories: supportive, non-supportive, confused, and ambivalent of the MALANA program. Separate space is provided for analysis of students' thoughts on this vignette, because it is important to understand how white seniors make sense of a program initiated on our campus and also reflects the social justice goals of our institution. The majority of students were supportive of the program—but did not articulate why they held this stance—while students not in favor of the program fell just a

few responses shy of the in-favor MALANA majority. Regardless of students' support of the program, non-Engaging Diversity students tended to rely on color-blind frames in their thoughts on the program, thus illustrating the complexity of racial conceptualization. For example, in expressing his support for the program, a twenty-one-year-old male stated:

Anything that gives college students preparation for success in college is a highly beneficial thing. Instead of limiting this by race, why not enable it to be open to all students?

This individual considers MALANA to be a positive attempt to prepare students for the academic rigor of IWU. His suggestion, however, to extend the program to all racial groups suggests he does not understand why the program is racially focused. This de-emphasis of race illustrates how individuals can appear to be liberal and supportive of affirmative action initiatives yet may still lack an understanding of the goals and structure of affirmative action programs. His support of the program is likely morally motivated; this is an honorable drive but is not critical of why the MALANA program is intended to provide students of color—a historically disadvantaged group—a safe space to begin the college process. Other responses varied in their level of support for the program, but most shared a lens of color-blindness or specific color-blind rhetoric.

Most students who were not in support of the program either resented the program's focus on students of color or longed to be a part of the program. An example of the latter perspective is provided:

I wish I was in it, since I come from a background that is similarly disadvantaged in terms of information, networking, and finances;

but I perceive myself as being excluded based on the fact that I am white. I prefer race-blind institutions over counter-racist ones.

This twenty-one-year-old male is only unsupportive of MALANA because of the program's requirement that participants be of color. In other words, he sees the value of the program. He considers himself a member of a disadvantaged group—he is of a low socioeconomic status and believes this membership qualifies him for such a program like MALANA. He is correct that people from low socioeconomic backgrounds have been marginalized in higher education and continue to face a multitude of adversities because of their lack of access to income. However, this individual does not recognize the privileges he receives on the basis of his white racial group membership; for example, most people are not as likely to assume whites belong to a lower social class as they are to assume this for people of color, which influences the treatment white individuals receive. In addition to his unawareness of white privilege, he specifically suggests the institution be color-blind in its approach to student opportunities. In other words, he does not see the significant role race has played in students' access to academic resources and guidance before college and, as a result, believes the institution should not consider race, as race has not disadvantaged students of color in a way that should be addressed through a racially focused pre-orientation program.

## DISCUSSION

The current research offers a longitudinal analysis of the Engaging Diversity program's impact on the 2010 cohort's color-blind racial attitudes over the course of their college careers. As seen through responses on the CoBRAS, a sub-sample

of Engaging Diversity alumni continue to be critical of race and have a more developed racial consciousness as seniors than when they were first-year students immediately after completing the program. This study also extends previous cross-sectional research comparing the intervention's effects on participants' racial attitudes with the racial attitudes of students who did not complete the program. Students exposed to the Engaging Diversity program as first-year students held significantly fewer color-blind racial attitudes than white seniors of similar demographic backgrounds who were not participants of the Engaging Diversity program. This datum reveals that it was students' participation in the Engaging Diversity program—and not only the general college experience—that helped them develop a less mainstream approach to understanding race relations at the societal level and on IWU's campus.

The current research not only adds to knowledge on the program's effectiveness but also broadens diversity intervention literature. By studying the Engaging Diversity program's effects on color-blind racial attitudes, in isolation, researchers gain an understanding of how a specific type of diversity intervention influences one unique outcome, as opposed to multiple diversity experiences on a variety of outcome variables. Available research on college students' participation in diversity-related programs also has yet to address the factors that might have influenced students' motivation to seek out similar educational opportunities throughout their college careers. During interviews, multiple students mentioned that participating in the Engaging Diversity program before their first-year began



inspired them to participate in activities that allowed them to further the conversations they had during the program. Students' responses on the casual role the Engaging Diversity program had in dictating their successive diversity-related experiences offers researchers insight into the precipitates that lead students to engage in diversity programs throughout college.

The specific nature of Engaging Diversity students' color-blind racial attitudes was sketched through a qualitative assessment of color-blind attitudes via a free-response survey aimed to tap into students' racial conceptualizations. Engaging Diversity students understood current racial realities and disparities with an awareness of systemic racialized trends—racial realities were often considered outcomes of white privilege—connected events of the past with current racial structures and phenomena, and considered race to be an important factor in IWU campus affairs and in the lives of students, both white and of color.

Interviews with Engaging Diversity students offered rich insight into the distinct ways students exposed to a diversity program at the beginning of their college careers remembered and interpreted the information they learned and applied it to their lives as white students over the course of their college education. The program was instrumental in shaping students' academic and extracurricular paths; most students reported that the program motivated them to continue learning about social injustices and raise awareness of these topics in their formal and informal experiences. Students held high standards for themselves to remain critical of how social identities, especially their own white

racial identity, and social contexts influence interactions on campus. During these interactions, students were confident, for the most part, in conveying their perspectives to people who were less knowledgeable or resistant to information on social issues.

The Engaging Diversity program was effective in the sense that the majority of students retained a critical racial consciousness, which made them more likely to be active as agents of change throughout college, but the program did not affect students equally. Students' engagement with and understanding of the material was apparent through the depth of survey responses, length of interviews, and the level of confidence students had in discussing social issues with others. Students with a deeper understanding of the ways race shapes current societal realities supplied longer and more detailed survey responses that wove historical examples of inequality into observations on contemporary social imbalances. Students' extended engagement with the material learned from the program was illustrated in the length of interviews. Most interviews lasted one hour; multiple interviews neared two hours, with only one interview lasting six minutes. The number and clarity of examples students supplied in response to interview questions distinguished students who actively engaged with the program's content and applied the information to their lives from those students who were less invested in spreading awareness on social issues.

As discussed previously, the racial attitudes held by all members on a college campus combine to set the racial campus climate (Chavous 2005).

Mainstream racial attitudes dominate over minority racial frameworks and have more power in dictating the type of culture students learn and develop in. Based on a control sample of 54 white students, the dominant racial attitudes on IWU's campus are ones that are color-blind in nature and are uncritical of the ways social forces shape the functioning of society and reverberate into campus affairs. Color-blind racial are associated with racial insensitivity, less multicultural education, and fewer interracial friendships (Todd, Spanieerman, and Poteat 2001), student and campus characteristics our institution does not support. Students who participated in the Engaging Diversity program hold the racial attitudes typically found on college campuses considered to be positive and inclusive (Chavous 2005) and meet the student developmental outcomes IWU students are expected to have come graduation (IWU Diversity Strategic Plan (In Progress) 2013). There were some students from the non-Engaging Diversity student sample who were more critical than others of the ways race continues to shape society, but these student attitudes were scarce.

### *Limitations*

The low number of Engaging Diversity students who responded to the survey (n=3) makes drawing conclusions of the color-blind racial attitudes of the entire cohort difficult. With that said, the mixed-methods nature of the study, i.e., combining students' survey responses with interview data from 8 participants, substantiates the current study and any claims made. Interviews offered rich insight into the impact the Engaging Program had in the everyday lives of

participants. Most participants considered the program to be the college experience that “opened [their] eyes” to the world around them and helped them to be critical of this world.

There is also a possibility that the white students who participated in the interviews might have been uncomfortable sharing their opinions on race and diversity because of my racial identification as a woman of color. Some questions I asked were more sensitive than others, for example, students were asked how they think students of color face racism on campus, and may have made participants uncomfortable to answer truthfully. While the cultural weight and power dynamics that structured my and participants’ racial identities might have shaped the course and content of interviewees’ responses, I made it a priority to address our social identities at the beginning of the interviews to potentially ease participants of any fears or concerns they might have had from this social experience. The majority of participants shared stories of high social-risk; one student admitted to still attributing any negative qualities people may have to their race, which makes it unlikely that students did not feel at least some form of comfort to share their true thoughts on charged social topics during interviews.

Students’ responses during interviews might have also been affected by their concern to avoid offending or disappointing the program’s creators or other invested partners. A large portion of the students have maintained close relationships with the faculty who run the program, which might have made them hesitant to reveal that they did not retain certain information, suggest ways on

how the program could be improved, or that they were still confused about the content covered during the program. In addition to addressing the social dynamics in the interviewing room before interviews began, I also made sure to emphasize that there were no right or wrong answers to questions and that the program's creators are truly concerned with improving the program and only seek the honest opinions of students. Nonetheless, students did not shy away from critiquing the program and admitted to having gaps in their knowledge of certain topics, particularly on how the intersectionality of identities influences life outcomes, which indicates that they were not likely to be significantly impacted by the social desirability responding or fear of social repercussions confounds.

Selection bias also might have played a role in students' initial participation in the Engaging Diversity program and involvement with the current study. Perhaps students who completed the program in 2010 were more interested in learning about diversity and already had significantly lower color-blind racial attitudes than the general incoming white student population. This potential self-selection bias makes it difficult to decipher whether changes in students' racial attitudes are a product of the Engaging Diversity program or their predisposition to having more of an open-mind to diversity. While self-selection bias is a reasonable concern in understanding how students' personality characteristics interact with their outcomes post the Engaging Diversity program, anecdotal data reveal that the most popular reason students apply to the program is to move onto campus early (Burke and Banks 2012). Most students admit to having

minimal to no conversations about diversity or race before participating in the program, and, throughout discussions on difference, students' reveal endorsement of similar biases and stereotypes non-Engaging Diversity students display (Burke and Banks 2012).

Furthermore, self-selection bias might have had a role in the low response rate to the survey. The 3 students that responded to the survey might have been the most affected by the program and were more inclined to share their thoughts, as opposed to the 7 that did not respond and could potentially be deemed as unaffected. This interpretation is likely to be incorrect once students' participation in the interviews are considered. 80% of students agreed to be interviewed, and all but one participant mentioned the program as an experience that significantly impacted their college trajectories. Students' low response rate to the survey is likely the result of the structure of the survey itself. The open-ended questions were placed at the beginning of the survey, which might have swayed participants away from completing the survey because open-ended questions require more effort through typing and thinking answers through. Perhaps more students would have completed the survey if the Likert-type questions were presented first, because they are shorter in length and only require a click of a button to be answered.

#### *Future Directions*

The successes of the Engaging Diversity program are evident: students participating in this program developed a more complicated understanding of race

and race relations and used this awareness in their lives as white social justice advocates on IWU's campus. These students, however, were not entirely exempt from relying on color-blind frames in explanations of racial phenomena and requested more opportunities for further processing information learned during the program. Concrete efforts need to be taken to provide students with spaces to voice any confusion they may have with topics after the program, debrief new experiences students are having as their college careers continue, and unpack the accompanying emotions they are experiencing as they begin to learn more about their identities and the identities of those around them.

Students also indicated that the program's combination of self-exploration activities with the traditional lecture component on the history of race and other social issues was key to helping them situate themselves into the larger context of racial justice. It was easier for students to "believe" racial injustice is still a predictor in shaping life opportunities after they underwent the lecture portion of the program and watched documentaries on these realities. Groups and individuals invested in students' developmental outcomes related to diversity should consider this balanced student-centered and information approach to teaching.

Further assessment of the program is also needed to gain a more detailed understanding of students' racial attitude development. It is unclear whether significant changes in racial attitudes occurred during a specific year or time throughout students' college careers; one Engaging Diversity participant

mentioned that her “switch was flipped during [her] junior year of college.”

Understanding how student specific variables, (e.g., racial identity) and institutional experiences (e.g., the academic requirements outlined for students across the years) shape this development has already been reported as something important to consider in attitude development (Todd, Poteat and Spanieerman 2001).



## APPENDIX

### *Open-Ended Survey Questions*

**Directions.** The following scenarios present actual racial issues and phenomena in the United States (U.S.) today. Please be as open and honest as you can; there are no right or wrong answers.

Many colleges and universities such as the University of Texas-Austin and the University of Michigan consider an applicant's race during the admission process. Specifically, among other considerations, such schools may assign applicants of color (Latinas/os, African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, Bi-racial Americans) points for their racial identity. What are your thoughts on this selection process?

The majority of Chicago neighborhoods today are primarily mono-racial, i.e., Whites live alongside Whites, Latinas live amongst Latinas. Why do you think these racialized residential patterns exist?

There tend to be disparities in educational preparedness between students of color and White students such that students of color are more likely to underperform on standardized tests, have lower GPAs, and are less likely to attend elite colleges. This complex phenomenon, known as the student of color-White achievement gap, is influenced by multiple factors. Why do you think the student of color-White achievement gap persists?

In 2012, a young African American male named Trayvon Martin was shot and killed by a White, bi-racial man—George Zimmerman. Zimmerman, an off-duty neighborhood watch coordinator, claimed Trayvon looked suspicious walking through the gated community he patrolled. Zimmerman approached Trayvon and a physical altercation ensued, which resulted in Zimmerman fatally shooting and killing Martin. Martin was unarmed. Some claim Zimmerman was motivated by racist beliefs or attitudes when he identified Trayvon as “suspicious”, which led him to follow Martin. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this argument and why?

The MALANA (Multi-racial, African, Latina/o, Asian, and Native American) student orientation is a program designed to help historically disadvantaged groups who have been affected by racism and discrimination to have an equal opportunity for success on IWU's campus. The program allows students to gain a “head start” into college by providing students with study skill workshops, networking events and, ultimately, an “insider's manual” on how to best succeed in college. What are your thoughts on this program?

*Color-Blind Racial Attitude Scale (CoBRAS)*

**Directions.** Below is a set of questions that deal with social issues in the United States (U.S.). Using the 6-point scale, please give your honest rating about the degree to which you personally agree or disagree with each statement. Please be as open and honest as you can; there are no right or wrong answers. Record your response to the left of each item.

1=Strongly Disagree – 6=Strongly Agree

1. Everyone who works hard, no matter what race they are, has an equal chance to become rich.
2. Race plays a major role in the type of social services (such as type of health care or day care) that people receive in the U.S.
3. It is important that people begin to think of themselves as American and not African American, Mexican American or Italian American.
4. Due to racial discrimination, programs such as affirmative action are necessary to help create equality.
5. Racism is a major problem in the U.S
6. Race is very important in determining who is successful and who is not.
7. Racism may have been a problem in the past, but it is not an important problem today.
8. Racial and ethnic minorities do not have the same opportunities as White people in the U.S.
9. White people in the U.S. are discriminated against because of the color their skin
10. Talking about racial issues causes unnecessary tension.
11. It is important for political leaders to talk about racism to help work through or solve society's problems.
12. White people in the U.S. have certain advantages because of the color of their skin.
13. Immigrants should try to fit into the culture and adopt the values of the U.S.
14. English should be the only official language in the U.S.
15. White people are more to blame for racial discrimination in the U.S. than racial and ethnic minorities.
16. Social policies, such as affirmative action, discriminate unfairly against White people.

17. It is important for public schools to teach about the history and contributions of racial and ethnic minorities.
18. Racial and ethnic minorities in the U.S. have certain advantages because of the color of their skin.
19. Racial problems in the U.S. are rare, isolated situations.
20. Race plays an important role in who gets sent to prison.

### *Interview Questions*

1. Looking back on the program, what do you remember most?
2. To what extent did you apply these concepts to your life on campus? How did they influence your social interactions in the classroom? The residence halls? At your job? In registered student organizations?
3. Can you imagine a time you reflected on or were aware of your whiteness?
4. How did the program influence your perception of people of color on campus and in society? Can you name a time this was vivid for you?
5. How did the topics / concepts discussed in the program influence the classes you enrolled in? Your major? Minor? Research and professional interests? Internship positions? Job pursuits on campus and after graduation? Leadership positions on campus and within the community? Class papers? Interest in attending certain speakers or events on campus? (i.e., what did you do as a result of the program?)
6. What questions arise for you now? E.g., what is systematic White privilege, the definition of racism, race as a social construct, affirmative action goals and restrictions?
7. How confident are you with discussing race and race relations with your peers on campus? Family and peers at home? Professors and staff? Bosses and other supervisors? Mention a specific incident in which you experienced difficulty or ease with discussing topics related to race and racial inequality.
8. To what extent do you have trouble vocalizing questions or concerns about racial injustice? Mention any individuals, support groups, or resources on campus you turn to for support.

9. How often did you discuss the topics from the program with other Whites on campus? How were these experiences? Was there acceptance, resistance, anger, or guilt? How did you handle these reactions?
10. To what extent were you ever uncomfortable interacting with people of color on campus and in the community? How did you manage this discomfort?
11. In what ways do you think people of color experience racism on campus?
12. What are some challenges in being a social justice advocate on campus?
13. How would you change the program? Did the program meet your expectations? Exceed them?

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