“How Did We Get Here?: Exploring the Journeys of Students of Color at Trinity College”

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How Did I Get Here?

• Spring 2011–students reported racist, homophobic, and sexist incidents on campus.

• Trinity responded with an addition to the Harassment Policy

• President Jones’ White Paper calls on the College Community to work on “academic and social helices” of our Institutional DNA
Research Questions

- What are the most prominent pathways to College for students of color at Trinity? How do students of color perceive the reputation of scholarships and other admissions programs at Trinity?

- How do students of color perceive their own belonging at Trinity?

- What is their perception of campus climate, and what is their role in creating a supportive environment for all students?
Students of color at Trinity report a heightened sense of self-awareness about their ethnic and socioeconomic background. They feel pressured to perform academically, act as leaders, and serve as ambassadors between social groups. They also feel that their paths to Trinity may not be as validated as the paths of White peers, therefore leadership roles are rewarding experiences.
Context

Trinity enrolls 2,200 students, 23% are of color

Trinity is the #4 ranked school for little class/race interactions

President Jones’ White Paper has incited a discussion across campus about transformation

There is a national movement to include students of color in higher education, but a growing criticism of affirmative action

Posse Program seeks to recruit and train public high school seniors, and sends them to top colleges across the country in groups, called “Posses”

In 2012-2013, there will be 8 Posse Cohorts on campus
Literature


Methods

- 2 Focus Groups with an entire Posse of 10-12 students, one with four members
- Three individual meetings with one sophomore, junior, and senior Posse scholar
- One interview with an Admissions Associate
- One interview with a Multicultural Affairs Office Associate
“Blending in” in Hartford, Standing out at Trinity

- Microaggressions:

- Students of Color feel that they stand out at Trinity, but have an ability to “blend in” the greater Hartford community

- “Hartford local” discourse
“Do I Look like a ‘Hartford Local?’”

“They [the community in Hartford and White students] can have a perception that Trinity is overly White, so when they see a person of color, they could think ‘this is someone walking down in the hood’...I stand up to go [into Stowe] and the White people look at me like ‘oh, where are you trying to go?’, ‘I’m trying to party’, ‘oh yea, you’re a local, what’s the name of the president?’ ‘it’s Jim Jones’ ‘You’re a liar, you just googled that’. The assumption was that I was a local, because of the way I look” Arthur, Focus Group 1
Living Under the Microscope

- Students of color feel that their moves are being observed.
- “Mather debate”
- Will I, or do I, fulfill a stereotype?
“Blanco o Negro”

“I actually really thought about it [my race] walking into Mather... My friends made it into a joke and say like "Blanco o negro" which means what side did you want to sit in for the day? Did you want to sit on the Black side or did you want to sit on the White side? And they would feel kind of weird to walk to the right side of Mather and find a table and sit there because it was like, I felt like it was all eyes on you for a second” Reina, Focus Group 1
Using What You’ve Got to Get What You Want

- “stepping stone”, “take it with a grain of salt”, “I’m here for a reason”
- Leadership roles
- Preparation for the perceived “real world”
It’s not Candyland...

- “At first I was going to say it [my experience thus far] was negative but then I changed my mind because I think that here my experience has been how ever I have created it... It's not Candyland here. But you have to make do. I wouldn't say it's negative or positive, I'd just say that Trinity is overwhelming in that Trinity is everything that the world would offer you. [It] is magnified within these four gates, so you have to deal with it... Part of my journey is to understand how to be within all of this stuff and maintain myself socially, it's not really good or bad, it's a challenge” Quentin, Focus Group 2
Recommendations

- A multicultural course requirement
- Heavier recruitment of minority students *in addition* to Posse
- More support for programs like PRIDE and multicultural organizations
Thank You

Fellow senior presenters (my peer reviewer Harry), Professor Dyrness, Professor Marcano, Posse mentors and scholars, Admissions Office, Office of Multicultural Affairs, Office of Institutional Planning.