TRINITY IN COLOR:

A Commentary on Minority Retention
Research Question

- Are low retention rates for students of color linked solely to the student’s lack of ability to perform at the college level or are there issues of social dissatisfaction with the atmosphere of Trinity College that effect retention rates as well?
Many students of color feel that they have the right to be at Trinity College and have been prepared for the academic rigors of college life by their high schools, whether they were public or private, but socially and mentally many of these same students feel isolated and unwelcome by the environment of the college. These feelings about the college can have a negative effect on the retention rates of students of color because they can lead to academic problems or cause students to feel isolated to the point that they leave the school.
Significance

- As a student of color, I have a lot of personal investment in the issues of retention and how comfortable students of color feel at Trinity College.

- The issue of students, whether Black, White, Asian, Hispanic or Native American, feeling comfortable at their college can have a profound affect on learning leaving “students suffering academically because of the way they experience their college environment” (Valverde and Castenell, p. 99).
In 1999, the Retention Task Force, a group of administrators, put out a report on success and satisfaction at Trinity College, which stated that they were trying “to meet the challenge presented by our graduation statistics [of raising retention rates for students of color] and to ensure that each Trinity student not only achieves success academically, but is joyful about being a member of our community” (pg 1).
Methodology
Sources

- Primary Source:
  - Surveys given to students of color on the campus of Trinity College
    - Surveys consist of 9 questions:
      1. Before coming to Trinity did you attend a public or private high school? 
      2. Do you feel that your school prepared you for college? 
      3. Would you say your grades here at Trinity have reflected how hard you have worked? Why or why not? 
      4. What race or ethnicity would you classify yourself to be? 
      5. Do you feel like you belong here? Why or why not? 
      6. Did you enter Trinity College as a first year student (freshmen year)? 
      7. How did you feel about Trinity College when you first arrived here? 
      8. What reasons would you give for the fact that you are still at Trinity College? 
      9. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your Trinity experience?
Sources (con.)

- Secondary Sources:
  - Excel spreadsheets on the retention rates of minority students given to me by Kent Smith, Director of Institutional Research
  - Several book sources, which concentrate on issues of diversity and multicultural retention in higher education including:
    - *Battling Bias* by Ruth Sidel
My Data Set

- 20 students
  - 10 public
  - 9 private
  - 1 parochial
- African-American, Asian-American and Hispanic (Latino/a) background
  - 8 African-American
  - 6 Hispanic
  - 6 Asian-American
- Sophomores, Juniors and Seniors
- Both female and male
Some questions to consider

- Do the students of color that were surveyed feel as if they belong on Trinity College’s campus?
- Do these same students feel as if their high schools prepared them for college and are there any difference in preparedness depending on the type of high school a student attended?
Graphs
So what do these graphs mean?

- By themselves the graphs only show that Trinity College has had problems in retaining students of color for sometime now with an increase in that retention over the last 3 years.
- What the graphs don’t show and what my study concentrates on is:
  - How the information provided by these and other graphs can be expanded upon to delve into the issue of social atmosphere and how that may play into these retention rates?
Findings
When asked “Do you feel like you belong here? Why or why not?”

- 9 students said that they do feel welcome here at Trinity
  - “…I went to elementary and middle and high schools that were majority White so Trinity isn’t any different.” – Black Female1
- 5 students said no
  - “…I’m not the “typical” Trinity student. I don’t feel the majority of the campus has tried to reach out to me even after I have tried to reach out to them.” – Black Female4
- 6 students said that they feel they have the right to be here because of academics, but they don’t feel welcome here.
  - “I feel as if I have the right to be here. In terms of belonging, as being someone who is in a welcome environment, no. Feeling, [like] someone who is accustom to the environment and comfortable, no.” – Asian Female17
Points of Interest

- Asian Female 17 was suppose to graduate in 2001, but was put on academic probation after a combination of harassment from White students on campus and situations happening within her family.

- Asian Male 12 left Trinity College shortly after completing the survey for reasons unknown to me, but in his interview he said “sometimes I feel like I am very different than some of the people I have been in contact with [at Trinity].”
  - As a senior this student said to me that the only reason he is still at Trinity is because its “too late to do anything about it.”
When asked “Do you feel that your school prepared you for college?"
Black male 8, a senior, said he felt somewhat prepared because his private school “did not prepare [him] for the level of racism that [he has] experienced here at Trinity.”

Latino male 9, a sophomore, said that he felt that his private school prepared him for college [Trinity] very well [and] “more than academically. [He had] dealt with the racism for a while [in high school].”
Conclusion

Trinity College has taken notice of the issue of retention and has notably made steps to raise the retention rates for students of color on campus, but the institution has neglected to take into consideration fully the social dissatisfaction that many students of color feel on campus. The data I collected is only a smaller sample of the small number of students of color on campus, but their issues are real. Numerically, there was no conclusive evidence shown in any of the surveys conducted that would allow me to say that all students of color feel unwelcome or uncomfortable here, but the fact that there are students who do is something that should be recognized. When one student "feels like there are people [or] groups of people who don't feel that [they] belong here [at Trinity], then there is an issue and you can be sure that student isn't the only one that feels that way."
Conclusion (con.)

The issue reaches far beyond strengthening the programs of the cultural houses or developing “supportive relationships with Hartford-area professionals of color” (August 1999). The issue comes down to social interactions with other students. Some students of color feel like “second class citizens on campus,” as one Black Female stated at the town hall meeting on safety on November 5th, not only because the administration and faculty haven’t done enough to make students of color feel like a part of the campus, but because some students in the majority on campus have alienated their peers of color. Myrtis Powell states that “for students of color, a welcoming, nurturing, and caring climate is crucial for retention” and can influence whether a student decides to stay or leave. (Valverde and Castenell, p. 102). In order for Trinity College to truly understand the reasons for the retention rates as they stand at the college, the climate must be really analyzed and changed.