The Power of Words: Student Perception of Multi-Cultural Centers within Institutions of Higher Education
Nancy Huante
Faculty Mentor: Dr. Julie Figueroa

Abstract
This mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative) study explores the significance of the Multi-Cultural Center (MCC) located on the California State University, Sacramento (CSUS) campus. This research will deconstruct the revitalization process the MCC is undergoing. Utilizing a survey, 40 undergraduate students from the four grade levels (freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior) and various disciplines from CSUS were surveyed to better: a) identify the instances that lead students to access Multi-Cultural centers in higher education; b) to discuss similarities and differences among student perceptions and experiences related to using the culture center; and c) to identify the motivating forces that lead administrative bodies to situate a Multi-Cultural Center on campus, and to what extent the center corresponds well with the students.

As of 2005 ethnic groups represent a small number of the students at California State University of Sacramento (CSUS); the low enrollment of ethnic minority students is not representative of the concept of diversity that institutions of higher education attempts to enhance. It is important to question the ideas the university’s administration has in developing a diverse educational setting.

Looking closely at some contemporary numbers on minority student representation, one realizes that minority student representation has not increased dramatically. Table 1 from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) illustrates that of a total of 27,932 CSUS students, only 14.5% is of a Hispanic background (IPED College Data, 2006-2007). Tables 1 suggest that students are still not

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enrollment</th>
<th>Total enrollment: 27,932</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate enrollment: 23,256</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percent of Undergraduate enrollment by gender
- Men: 42.9%
- Women: 57.1%

Percent of Undergraduate enrollment by race/ethnicity
- Non-resident alien: 1.3%
- Black non-Hispanic: 6.5%
- American Indian or Alaskan Native: 1.0%
- Asian or Pacific Islander: 19.3%
- Hispanic: 14.5%
- White non-Hispanic: 42.7%
- Race ethnicity unknown: 14.3%
receiving the adequate support necessary to improve their representation rates.

The educational gap shown here developed a strong solidarity between community members interested in social justice and students of all levels, which include city college students and those who are considered marginalized. This whole community was in search of equal opportunity in education.

In order to support the progress of such students, faculty, staff, and community members demanded the educational system house programs and centers that would facilitate and expand the experience of ethnic minority students within higher education. Some programs included the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) that counteracted the traditional and often exclusionary practices in higher education and Multi-Cultural Centers (MCC). These types of programs challenged the traditional operations within institutions of higher education and began the “difficult task of remaking our institutions” giving opportunity to a larger diverse population (Knowles & Prewitt, 1969). Programs like these are important for those students classified as low-income and who come from underrepresented ethnic groups and need assistance getting through the college application process and college itself. Overall, the creations of multicultural services on campus are an effort to improve race relations and a way to diversify campus (Young, 2002).

Development of the Multi-Cultural Center

The MCC was developed as a centralized place on campus that engaged ethnic minority students, served the needs of underrepresented groups (such as African American, Chicana/o, Latina/o, Native American and Asian Pacific American), and discussed the major effects and solutions for retention rates on a college campus (Kirwan, 2004). This physical space symbolized the importance of being included in an institution that is informed and operated by white power structures (Young, 2002; Patton, 2006). In addition, one of the MCCs goals was to expand cultural awareness and heighten the appreciation of diversity within higher education (Kirwan, 2004). Ethnic minority students were a growing population and the MCC represented a “home” operated by people who had interest in the progress of these particular students. As the MCC developed, the center transformed into “safe havens for ethnic minority student groups,” which have been traditionally ignored and denied access to education (Jones, Castellanos, & Cole, 2002). For many students, the MCC is not only an academic support but it has become more like a family support; the director, staff member, and student assistants become a family for those who maybe far from their own families and excluded from the general campus community (Jones, Castellanos, & Cole, 2002). What MCCs were intended to be and what they have become is an important point to analyze because within this analysis one can discuss different learning styles of students and the different lifestyles that mediate how students learn and how professors teach. From this place,
history and culture was cultivated and available for the general public; MCCs facilitated students through college and helped them develop a strong identity within a White agenda (Jones, Castellanos, & Cole, 2002).

This research will explore MCCs through literature analysis and student perception and create an understanding of how these centers can potentially assist student learning, and serve as a safe place where students can ask for academic support. Through this research, this researcher will: a) identify the instances that lead students to access MCCs in higher education; b) discuss similarities and differences among student perceptions and experiences related to using the MCC; and c) identify the motivating forces that lead administrative bodies to situate a MCC on campus, and to what extent the center corresponds well with the students. This research is also designed to add to the body of research that supports the importance of MCCs on college campuses.

The purpose of this study is to critically analyze the undergraduate experience of students of color within higher education. Part of these study voices student perspectives about campus climate and the effectiveness of MCCs in regards to race issues and student learning. Lastly, the study’s main goal is to identify specific recommendations on how policies and practices can change to improve campus climate and the MCC at CSUS.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

Educational institutions are primarily inclusive of the ideas and experience of the majority population, which in many cases is the experience of a white student. Brown, Carnoy, Currie, Duster, Oppenheimer, Shultz, and Wellman (2003) concluded that education was constructed for some and not readily available for underrepresented groups of people. The education system was framed through a White power structure, ignoring the barriers and problems that minorities face today (Altbach & Lomotey, 1991). The White power structure in higher education refers to education controlled by the predominantly White middle class (Verdugo, 1995). Verdugo explains that the development of the White power structures is supported by the stratification system; which is primarily used to maintain social order within complex social structures (1995). The ideologies that the stratification system uses are rooted in groups’ interest and forms of control; racial stratification supports the idea of exclusion on the basis of norms, values, and theories, therefore, perpetuating the separation of ethnic minorities in campus decisions. Educational committees controlled and made decisions on curriculum and strategically excluded some students from obtaining full access to education. The educational system has been challenged by many educators and social activist. Most educators have analyze existing paradigms in education through the context social location and critical race theory. It is important to analyze and diversify such paradigms.
Critical Race Theory and Education
Scholars have looked at education through a critical race theory (CRT) perspective in order to fully contest and give suggestions on how education can be an inclusive system for all students. According to Ladson (1999) critical race theory was developed in the mid-1970 by Bell and Freeman who were concerned with the slow progress of equality in the U.S. CRT was influenced by critical legal studies (CLS) that challenged policy and praxis of the U.S. government through a social and cultural context. CRT and CLS is then an attempt to demand the “social transformation,” of social institutions, including education (Ladson, 1999). In addition, applying CRT to the analysis of diversity, higher education, and MCCs, is about applying one’s standpoint in order to diversify paradigms. The diversification of paradigms provides a new view on diversity and higher education for others to explore and apply (Ladson, 1999). In support of Ladson, Tate (1997) states that, “in order to express discontent and begins to dismantle the educational system; one must take on a critical race theory perspective.” Through CRT, one can understand the legal discourse within the historical and contemporary debates of offering equal education access to all people. The problem then was the idea that almost all society looked to create a homogenous society where ethnic minorities did not fit (Knowles & Prewitt, 1969). Part of the problem is the systemic structure in which educational institutions function. Pincus (1994), Knowles and Prewitt (1969), and Cuadraz (1992) all explored the structure of an oppressive educational institution.

Meritocracy and Diversity
Deconstructing the belief of meritocracy diversifies higher education paradigms that many times decide for whom education was constructed. Specifically, raising awareness that higher education, although thought to be neutral and objective is bias and not equally accessible to all students (Knowles & Prewitt, 1969). Operating from the perspective of a meritocracy filters out the ethnic minority students by not recognizing their lifestyles and struggles in relation to student learning (Cuadraz, 1992). In Counseling the Culturally Different, Derald Wing Sue and David Sue (1994) introduce the book by talking about instances where minority students were humiliated and attacked. For example, a “Vietnamese graduate of UCLA was murdered while rollerblading…Two White men were later arrested and confessed to the murder…In the home of the two assailants were found White supremacist paraphernalia…one of the assailants was sentenced to death for the racially motivated murder” (1999, p. 3). This and other similar stories are proof that most campus communities do not know the history of many of the ethnic minority students on campus. In addition, higher education institutions were not serving underrepresented groups equally in the past and currently. There are some services that are offered to some and not readily available for others.
The idea behind meritocracy is “…the belief that American society, and mobility in particular, functions on the basis of individual merit…” (Cuadraz, 1992). Meritocracy was said to stand for equal opportunity and individual mobility, but the Civil Rights Movement contested the notion of equal opportunity in meritocracy. Meritocracy proved to only filter those of working class that included ethnic minority students; it created race and class division among educational institutions not recognizing the importance of racial struggle within educational settings (Pincus, 1994). Traditional educational settings utilize meritocracy to blind others to the racism and class issues within higher education (Yosso, 2002). Within the ideology of meritocracy, histories, experiences, culture and language of every ethnic group get devalued, and as a result such groups are underserved within the educational system (Delgado Bernal, 2002). Higher education continues to blind the campus community about the importance of diversity as part of institutionalized racism, which, in turn, affects the retention of students of color. Institutional racism gives the University’s administration the power to control curriculum, history, and the ethnic minority population (Knowles & Prewitt, 1969). Currently, institutions continue to foster racism and inequality covertly, which impacts institutions’ racial climate and academic success rates.

Racial Climate and Academic Success
Research on campus climate enables educational institutions to better understand the lives of minority students and how climate issues affect faculty and students of diverse backgrounds (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, & Walter, 1998). Retention and graduation rates show that ethnic minorities have a difficult time in college in regards to racial identity and their place in society. The graduation rates at California State University, Sacramento show that over a five-year span, 22% of Hispanics graduated out of 252 students who enter and stay at the university (Office of Institutional Research, Sacramento State, 1986-2005). Both national and local statistics report the way campus issues are affecting minority students; specifically retention and graduation rates are low and have not shown dramatic improvement over the last 10 years.

Eimer and Pike (1997) claim that the integration of the student is pivotal in securing a college degree, however, many educational institutions fail to integrate students into academics and the social sphere. Like Eimer and Pike, Erickson (1987) supports the notion of integration and diversification related to the culture of higher education. His focal point was to help educational institutions understand the importance of having strong communication between the student and the institution, because learning involves going past the level of being culturally competent (Erickson, 1987). The education structure has not changed over 80 years and diversity is not as inclusive in the image of most university campuses (Eimer & Pike, 1997).

Understanding the institutional perspective is critical, however, Hurtado (1994) reminds the reader of the individual perspective within the
institutional context. Hurtado (1994) conducted research articulating the development of self-concept among ethnic minority students at graduate level. Findings showed students’ discontent with the racial climate of their campus and the low interaction among diverse groups. His research also found that student self-concept has direct effect in communicating with other people from different backgrounds. The school settings and structure proves to be one of the leading forces of negative campus climate affecting student learning and self-concept (Hurtado, 1994). Once again, the idea of integration and an understanding about race is important in that it is a mechanism that educational institutions are not utilizing to retain students. Instead, minority students are struggling to find a space where they can belong and develop. Hurtado and Ponjuan (2005) suggest that the Latino population has a difficult time adjusting academically as well as socially. The experience and perception of a hostile environment negatively impacts and mediates the degree to which students find a sense of belonging that is required when adjusting academically to the context of higher education. One has to understand that a hostile environment may develop in a diverse and homogenous environment. Hurtado and Ponjuan (2005) suggest that the university needs to develop a diverse setting that understands and embraces cultural ties among students to produce a welcoming campus. Research has indicated the importance of enhancing the understanding of diversity on campus in order to fully represent students of color (Hurtado, Milem, Pederson-Clayton, & Walter, 1998). Central to recognizing the role the ethnic minority, one needs to critically analyze the policy, practice, and the use of diversity on a college campus in order to create change that reflects students of color.

Diversity and Higher Education

Most educational institutions that establish MCC student services do so to engage and meaningfully integrate their ethnic minority population into campus life overall. Having programs and people who are dedicated and experienced in multicultural education facilitates student learning on campus. Kirwan (2004) explores philosophies, policies, and programs directly influencing students of color in higher education. The researcher recognized the work of Lee Jones who studied the structure and function of multicultural services and MCCs (Kirwan, 2004). Jones frames an understanding of why multicultural services and centers is a pivotal space in maintaining culture and tradition of ethnic minority students (Kirwan, 2004). Although there is published research on the importance of multiculturalism within higher education, institutions continue to lack direct connections and means to servicing students of color (Pincus & Ehrlich, 1994). Issues of race and class are alive in educational institutions, and examples of racism and poor race relations among students, staff, and faculty are a reason enough to make sure that institutions explore the concept of multiculturalism (Sue, Sue, & Wing, 1999).
To help the structure and function of the university enhance race relations and improve retention of ethnic minorities a university must engage in dialogue and seek understanding of ethnic minority students (Sue, Sue, & Wing, 1999). Pittman (1994) concludes and supports the findings of other scholars who found that race relations within higher education institutions can be improved using dialogue and lectures in connection with the MCCs.

**Multi-Cultural Centers: Their Purpose and History**

Patton (2004) completed extensive research that deconstructed individual cultural centers and emphasized the importance to the greater community. In support of this research, Hefner (2002) speaks specifically about Black Cultural Centers (BCCs), stating that they continue to hold their ground, even as college campuses become more diverse, because BCCs continue to be crucial in the identity development of people of color. The history of BCCs in the United States is well documented; however there is a lack of literature about MCCs in general. MCCs are more recent establishments, whose development dates back to 1980s. The development of multicultural and awareness programs eliminates some problems of race relations and increases academic success, yet studies continue to show the unequal representation of multicultural issues on campus (Young, 2002).

Jones, Castellanos, and Cole (2002) examined college student experiences of ethnic minorities in higher education and analyzed student interaction with MCCs. Findings indicate that institutions of higher education have placed students of color into a “minority status” condition where they are socially constructed to be at the bottom (p. 24). Many studies have shown that the establishment of MCCs on college campuses keeps minimizing this condition and educates students about their history and roots. These centers are designed to assist students with academic and social support that the university does not necessarily provide for ethnic minority students (Kirwan, 2004). MCCs and their staffs’ relationships with students are questioned by critics on a regular basis; because many institutions have yet to understand the undergraduate experience of students of color.

For the most part, institutions of higher education continue to exclude ethnic minorities from the benefit of multicultural programs, and continue to make decisions that hurt their student learning outcomes (Levine & Cureton, 1992). Many of the efforts to maintain MCCs come from students, who share their experiences within an institution that do not reflect their stories and struggles. The focus of this study The MCC at CSUS is an example of a student initiated center (Lewis, 1993).

**Methods**

Data collection involved a total of 40 students: 10 freshman, 10 sophomores, 10 juniors, and 10 seniors who either frequently visited the Sacramento State MCC or who were never informed of the MCC’s existence. Of the
40 participants, 60% came from a Chicana/o, Latino/a, and Hispana/o background; the rest of the participants identified themselves as Native-American, Asian American or Pacific Islander, Caucasian, and African American. All participants are undergraduates from majors, including: Sociology, Government, History, Criminal Justice, Mathematics, and Kinesiology. The students who took the open-ended survey helped the researcher gather attitudes and demographic information about students at Sacramento State. At the same time, the survey responses identified the trends and students’ knowledge of multicultural services on campus. In addition, four students participated in an hour-long interview. The interviewees were given pseudonyms in order to keep their identities confidential. The interview included open-ended questions regarding their connection to the Sacramento State MCC; undergraduate education experience; and experience with multicultural campus services. The interviews contributed to the research’s goal of establishing a student voice by analyzing student perceptions about higher education and the effectiveness of the MCC.

Research Design
This study is a qualitative study that analyzes the experience of undergraduate minority students at institutions of higher education. Moreover, the study focuses on understanding the connection and effectiveness of MCCs in relation to ethnic minority student learning. The research begins by exploring the culture of education from the perspective of a meritocracy; the literature presented raises awareness of the bias in and inaccessibility to higher education for ethnic minorities’ contemporarily. Second, this researcher delineates between the importance of deconstructing campus climate issues and their effects on underrepresented students’ learning. Third, the literature explains the link between diversity, higher education, and MCCs. Lastly, as a transition to the research findings, this researcher gives a brief history and purpose of MCCs. Finally, data was collected using an open-ended survey of 40 participants. Four other students were asked to participate in a separate hour-long interview expanding on the questions of the survey, as well as others whose purpose was to explore the motivating forces that lead students to use the services of the MCC.

Given the literature on education, diversity, campus climate reports, and MCCs this study begins to ultimately frame or position the reader to consider the student experience in college. The researcher’s goal is to study a particular experience.

University Site
The institution selected for this study was California State University, Sacramento (Sacramento State) located in northern California. The selected university is a public, four-year institution with a diverse student population of 23,615 undergraduate students. Within the University there are eight colleges: College of Arts of Letters, College of Business Administration,
College of Continuing Education, College of Education, College of Engineering and Computer Science, College of Health and Human Services, College of Natural Sciences & Mathematics, and College of Social Sciences & Interdisciplinary Studies. The University offers over 50 majors and minors, many of which have been added or updated in the past three years to meet educational standards. Sacramento State was chosen to highlight that even in a diverse higher education setting, the issues of racial tension are not subdued and issues regarding the MCC are relevant.

The MCC at the Sacramento State, the focal point of this study, was established on December 5, 1990, and developed rapidly as a result of student, faculty, staff, and community interest. In 1989, the Multi-Cultural Task Force made the MCC part of a list of demands that included a diversification of faculty and the need for the University to meet the needs and requests of ethnic minority students; many of these demands where on-going issues of race and ethnicity. Students took action and demanded that administration stay accountable for dealing with these issues for current and future students. The University gave the task force the MCC as an appeasement from the list of demands they proposed. Students, upset that their demands were not analyzed critically, decided to make the MCC a working center for student and community activism. The center was operated by a director and supported by students who were directly involved with the task force. Over 35 student organizations were housed in the MCC and over 10 were involved in the MCC advisor board. The center organized and developed events that acknowledged the history, culture, and identity of ethnic minority students. In addition, according to this study’s interviewees, the MCC became the “home away from home” on the Sacramento State commuter campus. The MCC was a centralized place to deal with issues of race and ethnicity, as well as provide social and academic support.

The initiation of the MCC was supported by the task force and those who understood the struggles and experiences of ethnic minority students within higher education. However, Sacramento State’s administration did not see the MCC as a priority, in fact, the center operated on its own with no budgetary support. The MCC struggled to be recognized and included based on the academic and student affairs goals and objectives. In order to reach out to students and meet the expectations of students and the community they needed the support of the institution. In 1992 the archives showed the MCC negotiated with administration creating a proposed five-year goal planning; to hold the administration accountable to meeting the needs of the ethnic minority community. This researcher is focus is on racial tensions and its effects on ethnic minority students in a diverse educational setting.

**Procedures**

This research study was designed to capture the particular experiences of students who have experienced frustration, discrimination, and who have been oppressed by the educational system. The researcher recruited the pool
of participants through class and organizational presentations. Most class presentations occurred in sociology, history, math, and ethnic studies courses. Organization presentations were made mostly in cultural organizations, including: Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan (MEChA), Campus Progressive Alliance (CPA), Coalition for Cultural Opportunities in Leadership and Overall Retention of Students (CCOLORS), and Africans for Re-Education, Innovation, Consciousness and Achievement (AFRICA). Researcher noted that most participants were involved either in a student organization or were frequent visitors to the MCC.

To ensure full participation, participants were informed about the purpose of the study and how it would benefit the Sacramento State campus community. The survey and interview were designed to explore topics such as: student involvement, campus climate, campus, services, and recommendation toward undergraduate education, and the students’ connection to the MCC. The quantitative survey asked participants how much they agreed with the way their institution dealt with racism and discrimination. The interview questions were composed of three sections: self-concept, campus climate, and the MCC.

There were no inducements offered for the voluntary participation of students in this study. The interviews were audio recorded and included open-ended questions regarding the participants’ connection to the MCC, undergraduate education experience, and campus services. Participants were informed that their identities would remain confidential. The subjects were asked to sign a consent form and were reminded that they could withdraw at anytime without penalty. After the completion of the survey or interview, participants were encouraged to share questions and concerns related to the study. The researcher transcribed the interviews and tallied the results to identify any trends or experiences that support the literature already.

RESULTS

After the analysis of the data, the following three major themes were identified: a) Self-concept within their college experience; b) a climate of exclusion, racism, and lack of trust between minority students and the administration; and c) student perception of the MCC and the reasons why students need a place like the center. Through these key themes, the researcher is able to highlight the stories of ethnic minority students within higher education as well as their experiences with the Sacramento State MCC.

The data collected critically analyzed the undergraduate experience of students of color within higher education. The voices of these students raise the student perspective in order to share campus climate issues and the effectiveness of the Multi-Cultural Center regarding race and ethnicity. In addition, data will identify specific recommendations on how educational practices can change to improve campus climate and the Multi-Cultural Center at California State University, Sacramento.
Self-concept within Their College Experience

Before discussing the MCC in both the survey and the interview, students were asked to share about themselves in regard to college experience. In addition, the students were asked to connect their cultural backgrounds to campus life. The reality of discrimination within the educational settings frames the way these students perceived themselves currently. For example, when the four students who were interviewed were asked how they identified themselves in terms of ethnicity. All four answered firmly that the way they identified themselves had to do with their experience in education and life overall. Joseph stated:

*That fact that I identify as Filipino…has to do with us getting marginalized in this*

*country. I feel as though I have to set myself apart not individually but collectively to be recognized as my own ethnicity to not be marginalized into other categories.*

In the interview, Joseph explains that building a strong identity and having a strong positive perception helped confront situations of discrimination and racism on his campus. When the students were asked if they felt intimidated on campus, all participants shared that, although they had built a strong self, the administration intimidated them because of the power held in administrative positions. Janet, a graduating senior reported the following after being asked if she was intimidated on campus:

*I do and I don’t, I don’t because I am a strong individual and so I don’t get intimidated at all. But I do or did because people like in high power were trying to discriminate against me. And it is very hard because my opinion like now is not as important on this campus as theirs; they kind of have the last say.*

Being discriminated against and marginalized by an educational institution can affect the development of one’s identity. Under such circumstances, educational institutions can position students to feel that they are different from those in administrative positions, placing them in the minority status category (Jones, Castellanos, & Cole, 2002). Prior to the discussion about intimidation, the interview participants were asked if they feel that they are part of an underrepresented group; all participants reported feeling that they are part of an underrepresented group, however they all had different reasons as to why. Joseph shared why he believes he is part of an underrepresented group, and also explained to the researcher how his history is not well represented in history books:

*Yes, because there is a lack of exposure of our culture within the media within the history books, a lot of history books lie about the things that occurred and occur in our country. Overall, a lack of information to the American public.*
During the interviews, Janet and Jose stated that those educators who supported them on campus were concentrated in two disciplines: Ethnic Studies and Sociology. Janet, a graduating senior, explained:

_There is a selective few and literally I can name them on my hand those who have been supportive but as far as the whole campus no support. If I was not emotionally strong and would have not met those people who showed support than I would have dropped a long time ago. But no, the campus as a whole did not do anything for me._

Dolores, another student participant, shared that “...in other disciplines one is not always lucky to identify with a professor because they show no interest and there is a lack of cultural competency.” All interview participants mentioned that the limited support they received has had an impact on the way they view themselves and the way they approach their education.

**A Climate of Exclusion, Racism, and a Lack of Trust between Minority Students and Administration**

Before discussing the students’ perception of the MCC, the students were engaged in a discussion about the campus climate at CSUS. Many students described their realities of race on campus. Within the survey it was difficult to obtain in depth reasons about why the campus failed to critically assist minority students with issues of race and discrimination. The results of the student survey indicated that over 50% of the students are not satisfied and do not understand the way their campus handles issues of race. In fact, when students were asked if they understood how their campus dealt with issues of racism and discrimination, 55% of the participants surveyed strongly disagreed about understanding how their campus responded to issues of race. The interpretation of the limited survey indicates that the campus is not accessible for these individuals and is not giving adequate support to students that experience racism on campus. Janet, a graduating senior, shared one specific incident where she felt she was discriminated against for being an active student on campus. Janet had worked for a center on campus that will remain anonymous in this study because it is under investigation. During her employment at the center, the student was accused of forging a signature. However, the signature was notarized by the supervisor. Despite the clarifications made by the student, the student still remained in danger of expulsion from school. Janet stated that: “…it is definitely discrimination because of [my] involvement in C-COLORS and then also because I am a Black female.” The interviewee explained that C-COLORS is a coalition of student groups, staff, and faculty who have dedicated themselves to developing research about multicultural centers in order to contribute to the refocusing of the multicultural center at CSUS. During her involvement, there were meetings and peaceful sit-ins in which she spoke out against the administration’s approach in changing the center. The survey results show that thirty-five of the forty students reported feeling somewhat comfortable setting a meeting with administrative bodies to give recommendations. In
addition, almost all students interviewed commented on being able to speak to the administration about their experiences on campus in terms of race and academics. However, during the interview the students explained that, although they felt some comfortable in giving recommendations, one was not able to hold the administration accountable on working together for a solution. The concept of praxis when sharing their student standpoint proves to be important to ethnic minority students. Interviewees were asked if they felt integrated on campus decisions over student services. Janet shared the following:

No, I do not feel integrated. Because it seems as though administration holds their head up high and they think that they know everything so they feel that they can make decisions for us without necessarily consulting students.

The student expressed that recently he had made attempts to give input to the revitalization of the MCC but the administration has long ignored and put aside his recommendations. Later in the interview students were asked if they believed racism still exists and were asked give reasons as to why or why not. Dolores stated that “…racism does exist because it is something that never dies…” Joseph explained:

People still have these preconceived notions of about what different ethnicities act like and look like. They get treated differently based on those preconceived notions and that in itself is racism.

Student number two reports that society develops stereotypes of specific ethnic groups that undermine the rich history of each ethnic group. Interviewee Janet stated that society has moved away from its civil rights history and want to show “sympathy” to those that have made racially motivated comments or acts. The student used Don Imus, a radio talk host who made a racially insensitive comment about the women’s basketball team at the Rutgers University, as an example. After this incident, the interviewee reported that punishment was minimal and the discussion that what was framed around this incident ignored the real message of racism in the U.S.

Student Perception of the MCC
The interviewees mentioned that in 2006 the MCC began to be deconstructed and revitalized without the input of students. The interviewees spoke specifically of those students who have been active students of change and have been denied the opportunity to sit on the advisory board and events committee. The MCC is currently struggling and is being operated by Student Affairs, without a director. During the interview, students were asked about their connection the MCC, all students have a strong connection and stated that, if the administration wants to change the MCC, it need to include students in the process in order for the changes to be effective. Janet stated:
...That the MCC should be a centralized place to aware others of racism and share experiences of racism. People who are being discriminated against should know where to go because anything can happen. They could get really scared, not come back (to school) or drop out... and even those who are closed-minded can use this place to learn about the different cultures.

The researcher decided to use the survey to identify student demographics on the involvement, satisfaction, and knowledge of the MCC. Twenty-four of the forty students surveyed are involved on campus. The students surveyed were affiliated with the student government or a student organization. In general, all the students involved in the research highlighted the importance of being active on campus in order to be agents of change. The MCC is a place that facilitated leadership and organizing skills to students who showed interest in questioning and challenging educational settings.

One student interviewee stated that he “…liked the way the MCC collaborated with other departments on campus like the Ethnic Studies department or EOP to coordinate events that help many students from different background.” Janet then shared:

*What I am trying to do... what I can make it function the way that it should for other students, because when I leave here I want more people like me graduating... more African American women graduating because they don’t and it is really hard. Education is important.*

Students showed a comfort in, a sense of identity, and a feeling of belonging at the MCC, in an environment that claimed to be objective in terms of the needs of ethnic minorities. Until recently, students felt scared to lose the MCC to an administration that is not being inclusive of minority students and their experience. Overall, the students interviewed spoke about the MCC with a lot of passion. They spoke of the role the MCC holds in their undergraduate experience and they gave the researcher insight in the experiences that help them believe an MCC should continue to function and develop for future generations.

**Student Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the researcher was able to identify recommendations for policies and practices that can improve the campus climate as well as the direction of the MCC at Sacramento State. The contemporary experiences of these students are crucial in understating the struggles and barriers they have to overcome in order to be part of the educational system. These agents of change are those who facilitate other minority students the opportunity to have access to higher education. Although students have been denied the opportunity to participate in educational committees and department advisory boards, 35 out of the 40 students surveyed stated that they do feel comfortable and believe it is important to give recommendations on how to better their undergraduate experience. Moreover, the interviewees
were asked to give recommendations to the MCC and to administration. The first question was: What can the center do to become more visible? Dolores, a freshman, explains that the center needs to become “more welcoming to different people and make people a little more comfortable.” Dolores expressed that, due to the student movement of C-COLORS and the demands to be integrated in the revitalization of the center, the administration has made the center a hostile space pushing away students from being active visitors of the MCC. Joseph adds that the “MCC should actively support other clubs like in the past and take on a role on co-sponsoring events that are of substance not just face value.” Each student identifies the MCC as a central place to address issues of race and ethnicity, not only with presenting the problem but finding a possible solution. The interviewees suggested developing monthly forums and events that deal with issues of race and the educational struggles of students of color. The students mentioned that the current interim director of the MCC had moved away from critically examining and sharing the experiences of students and community members, to a more corporate and closed-door policy for students. Moreover, Janet explains that the center has moved from being slightly visible on campus to being erased for those who have been there and for future students. Janet, as well as the other interviewees stated that the center needs to be separate from the Women’s Resource Center in order for both centers to be visible. The space that the MCC currently holds has not expanded since 1990, and has only decreased in size by adding a Java City coffee shop, computer center, and the Women’s Resource Center. These new additions were added by the administration without reflecting on the way it would impact the MCC. Although these places hold value for the university, Janet stated:

I think the Center needs to build a building where everyone goes, a big building and have rooms for different clubs...computers people can use and a conference room. A big building where it is more visible and people can say I’m going to the Multi-Cultural Center and have a lot of staff not just a director. You need student assistants, you need event coordinators, and you need interns; I mean like everything. It needs to be something, not just a hole in the wall like what it has become.

The center needs to expand physically and academically to position students as well as the community in a family circle. Within this family circle students shared that it would help their confidence in an environment that is often hostile. The researcher identified that the family circle that the students refer to gives them power to speak out and gives them a sense of belonging in an educational system where the numbers of ethnic minority students are low. Interviewees gave recommendations to the administration at Sacramento State about campus climate, ideas of how to enhance a positive experience on campus, and how the MCC can continue to be revitalized without losing its original charge. All the interviewee expanded on common key points that they thought the administration needed to re-evaluate. In addition, it is
important to highlight that the voice of these students showed their passion and dedication to bringing all communities together in order to have equal access to higher education.

LIMITATIONS

There are a number of limitations in this study due to the way the research was designed. First, there was not sufficient time for this study to capture the voices of all student perspectives of MCCs nationwide. The study needed to be conducted in a longer time frame in order to critically analyze every theme that was raised by the small number of participants. Second, the number of students interviewed is not reflective of minority students on all college campuses. This is a major constraint for the researcher because the researcher wanted to work with a larger population in order to have an extended discussion in terms of the interviews. Most of data collected came from students who were active in the Sacramento State MCC; therefore data does not reflect the general population of CSUS. In addition, this study focused on a single campus, and no comparisons were made with similar campuses.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the study contributed to the body of knowledge about MCCs and presented the importance of integrating student voices within institutions of higher education. This research was then an exploratory study of Multi-Cultural Centers in search of the expanding knowledge over MCCs across the nation. Utilizing a survey of 40 undergraduate students as well as the interview of four students, the researcher was able to address: a) the instances that lead students to access Multi-Cultural centers in higher education; b) discuss similarities and differences among student perceptions and experiences related to using the culture center; and c) note the motivating forces that lead administrative bodies to situate a Multi-Cultural Center on campus, and to what extent the center corresponds well with the students. The researcher found students connected in many ways to the Sacramento State MCC; the students felt a sense of belonging through the services that the MCC offered. However, the students interviewed expressed their discontent with the revitalization process the MCC is undergoing; students that are a large part of the centers activities are being excluded from the process. After the analysis of the data, the following three major themes were identified: a) Self-concept within their college experience; b) a climate of exclusion, racism, and lack of trust between minority students and the administration; and c) student perception of the MCC and the reasons why students need a place like the center. According to these findings, students at Sacramento State do not feel included in the campus’ decisions over the multicultural resources they actively use.

The researcher reviewed the work of several other researchers who have deconstructed the culture of higher education, campus climate, and purpose
as well as history of the MCC. Most researchers supported the notion of integration and a commitment by the university’s administration to enhance the concept of diversity. It is critical that universities commit and integrate the importance of MCCs into the higher education infrastructure (Jones, Castellanos, & Cole, 2002). When multicultural resources began to expand, minority students began developing their presence on a college campus. The findings of Patton (2006) support some of the findings at Sacramento State; Patton states that the BCCs and MCCs serve not only an educational purpose, but serves as a home away from home that helps develop a strong identity.

The research suggests the need to keep students in mind when making decisions over resources that shape a positive experience of the minority student. In addition, one can consider the importance of the Sacramento State MCC as well as the thoughts and feelings of some students toward the MCC. Following are some policy considerations from a student perspective or what the role of the student can be in an educational scenario:

- Symposium/lectures/programs that expose the campus community to diverse paradigms in education.
- An advisory board composed of student organizations that will appreciate the values and the concept of diversity.
- Building bridges among the community and campus for academic as well as social support.
- Student voice being included within Student Affairs administration.
- The university’s investment in expanding the MCCs physical space to create visibility and a family circle atmosphere among campus community.

Future studies can focus on the specific policies institution of higher education can modify in order to extend the integration of students and welcome a larger group to the culture of higher education as well as increase the retention of students of color.
REFERENCES


Sue, D., Constantine, G. M. *Strategies for Building Multicultural Competence*. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.


