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## STRUCTURING DIVERSITY: CHIEF DIVERSITY OFFICES AS STRUCTURAL RESPONSES TO A CULTURAL ISSUE

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### ABSTRACT

|                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
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| Aim/Purpose                       | Higher education has faced increasing perceptions, mainly by students, of unwelcoming campus racial and diversity climates. As a result, during the past decade, there has been a peak in the inaugurations of chief diversity officers. Yet, little is known about how these offices are established. |
| Background                        | This study explores and describes the emergence of the chief diversity office at two research-intensive universities.                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Methodology                       | This study utilizes a qualitative case study to answer the research questions.                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Contribution                      | The study provides new knowledge about the impetuses that prompt the formation of chief diversity officers. Further, the findings inform the higher education community about the establishment of chief diversity offices at two universities that might help institutions inaugurate new offices.    |
| Findings                          | Findings illustrated that the formation of the chief diversity office at these research universities represented structural responses to cultural issues on campus.                                                                                                                                    |
| Recommendations for Practitioners | A recommendation for practitioners is to consider a thorough assessment of the campus climate as a means to prompt the formation of a chief diversity office. The structural attributes of the realized unit should be directly associated with the specific context of the respective campus.         |
| Recommendations for Researchers   | Recommendations for researchers are to empirically address social identity when examining chief diversity officers and to further investigate job and work attitudes, such as organizational commitment or burnout, in these leaders.                                                                  |
| Impact on Society                 | Present day colleges and universities are the most diverse in history. Considering changing demographics, it is important to understand how institutions are structurally responding to diversity on campus.                                                                                           |

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**Future Research** Future research might investigate the nuanced ways in which institutions of higher education are inaugurating new offices and appointing new diversity leaders. Considering the distinct aspects of diversity, scholars might explore the salient skills or relevant background experiences that colleges and universities are seeking in these new leaders.

**Keywords** diversity, campus climate, race, CDO, leadership, higher education, equity, inclusion

## INTRODUCTION

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Creating and maintaining a welcoming campus climate for racial diversity continues to be a challenge for the higher education community. Students at colleges and universities continue to encounter culturally insensitive and discriminatory campus incidents. For example, at Kansas State University, students voiced concerns about racist graffiti that was sprawled on campus facilities (Associated Press, 2017). In the same year, posters promoting white supremacy were displayed at Boston College (Eppolito, 2017).

These acts of cultural insensitivity have seemingly prompted increased negative perceptions in students about the campus climate for diversity. The growing negative sentiments have been represented by numerous demonstrations, protests and submissions of student demands to the institutional leaders (Everett, 2016; Jaschik, 2016). These occurrences symbolize the current state of college environments that epitomize uninhibited cultural insensitivity toward students and unwelcoming college environments.

Central to discourse about welcoming and inclusive campus environments is the question of who should oversee and direct diversity-related initiatives and programs that promote constructive college environments. Should diversity-centered institutional change be centralized and charged to a sole administrative actor or should it be the responsibility of many institutional members? While there is limited scholarship that has investigated this question, D. A. Williams and Wade-Golden (2013) emphatically assert that diversity minded institutional change is a shared responsibility for all institutional members and stakeholders. They also contend “The [chief diversity officer] CDO is an integrative role that coordinates, leads, enhances, and in some instances supervises formal diversity capabilities of the institution to create an environment that is inclusive and excellent for all...” (p. 32). Whether the institutional culture embodies diversity accountability that is dispersed among the organization or centrally delegated to an administrative leader, establishing a chief diversity office has become a noteworthy matter in higher education.

Confounding our understanding of job function or role, little is known about how chief diversity offices emerge at institutions, or why. Based on D. A. Williams and Wade-Golden’s (2013) definition of the CDO, this examination terms chief diversity office as any diversity unit with a sole person who represents the unit or a diversity leader with multiple staff. While chief diversity offices attend to various conceptions and considerations of diversity, race continues to one of the most critical facets of campus diversity (Hurtado, Clayton-Pedersen, Allen & Milem, 1998; D. A. Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013).

The purpose of this study was to explore the establishment of the chief diversity office. Thus, this examination solely focuses on the CDO’s role in institutional change regarding racial diversity at colleges and universities. This study aimed to augment the limited body of existing research that focuses on chief diversity offices and inform our understanding of the motivations that prompt the formation of chief diversity offices at research universities. The following research question guided the study: how did the chief diversity offices emerge and what were the impetuses that influenced the formation of the chief diversity officer at two research-intensive universities?

## BACKGROUND

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Approximately “72% of the CDOs are newly created positions (i.e. less than 5 years)” (Leon, 2014, p. 2). The title of *chief diversity officer* has progressively become the prototypical position of senior-level diversity administrators at colleges and universities. Institutions have created or adopted similar constructions of the chief diversity officer position on their respective campuses using the model of universities that had previously established chief diversity offices, such as the University of Michigan, University of Missouri and the University of Connecticut (D. A. Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007; M. R. Williams, 2016). With this growing trend of establishing chief diversity offices, scholars maintain that “developing a CDO role can help an institution meet its diversity imperatives and provide more proactive leadership in the context of diversity offices, units, committees, and plans” (D. A. Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013, p. 33).

### *CHIEF AND SENIOR DIVERSITY ADMINISTRATORS*

Entry and mid-level diversity leaders have existed on college campuses for decades, such as directors of cultural centers, multicultural offices, or equal opportunity offices (D. A. Williams, 2007; D. A. Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013). Very few studies have examined the formation of the administratively elevated (i.e. chief) diversity office and particularly the specific impetuses that prompt institutions to appoint a chief diversity officer. In one study, Wilson (2013) studied seven currently appointed chief diversity officers. One of the findings of that study illustrated that the hiring of a CDO may have been associated with perceptions of the campus climate and the need for institutions to respond to campus change. There remains little scholarly evidence that informs our understanding of why institutions undertake the act of establishing a chief diversity office.

The chief diversity office is a relatively recent adoption at colleges and universities and very little is known about antecedents of the formation of the office. D. A. Williams and Clowney’s (2007) *Phases of Diversity Planning and Implementation in Higher Education* provides a framework for understanding the planning and implementation of a chief diversity office. Their framework highlights the existence of several steps in the implementation process. The course of action begins with an impetus that is normally a diversity-related campus incident. The incident then triggers ensuing institutional member responses, such as student and faculty protests and demands and administrative leaders’ responses and declaration of support for diversity. The planning phases of implementation progress commence with the creation and convening of diversity committees and the formation of a diversity plan (D. A. Williams & Clowney, 2007; D. A. Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013). Of the diversity offices that do exist, the diversity plan is the outcome that normally prompts the formation of the chief diversity office.

There exists limited knowledge about how chief diversity office is defined. At many institutions, the chief diversity officer is merely the highest-ranking administrator who oversees the diversity plan and initiatives (D. A. Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013). Many institutional descriptions of the chief diversity officer as the most senior administrator who is charged with furthering diversity initiatives and programs. That leader manages and oversees the formal goals and objectives of the institution to establish and maintain inclusive environments for its institutional members (D. A. Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013). The CDO has the dominant responsibility, and is held accountable, for the institution’s wide-spread diversity initiatives. For instance, the diversity officer might help to develop the diversity centered strategic planning goals or may oversee Title IX compliance (Harvey, 2014; Worthington, Stanley, & Lewis, 2014)

An important question regarding the conception of diversity (and diversity leaders) across institutions of higher education is the degree of standardization or normalization of the role. When examining diversity and diversity leaders, research suggests that these concepts are institution-specific. For example, Hurtado et al. (1998) theoretical perspectives underscore an institution's particular historical legacy of inclusion or exclusion. Institutional culture may shape the job role of chief diversity offices

at respective institutions (Hales & Tammangami, 1996). This, this notion suggests that CDOs may, and should, have varying roles and configurations across higher education.

Contrasting the notion of differing administrative roles of the CDO, other research has demonstrated the need for a standard conception of the CDO across the field. Though limited, a review of the literature reveals that it has primarily centered to organizational structure (i.e. division of labor) and the particular experiences of the individuals who are appointed to the position (Banerji, 2005; Gose 2006; 2013; Leon, 2014; Pittard, 2010; D. A. Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013). Scholars have asserted that there needs to be a central diversity champion and have offered potential models of institutional structure for the administrative position (D. A. Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013). For example, Worthington, Stanley, and Lewis (2014) helped to develop the professionalization of the CDO with standards of professional practice. These scholars, along with the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education, provided guidelines that help institutions better link the CDO to professional standards.

### *THE CDO AND THE CAMPUS DIVERSITY CLIMATE*

Arguably, one directive for the chief diversity officer is to positively impact the campus diversity climate, or specifically, perceptions of the climate. There has been increased scholarly attention to the campus climate during the last decade (See Griffin, Cunningham, Mwangi & Crystal, 2016; Garvey, Rankin, Beemym & Windmeyer, 2017 etc.). Researchers have maintained that climate is “the current attitudes, behaviors, and standards and practices of employees and students of an institution” (Rankin & Reason, 2008, p. 264). Campus climate represents the attitudes and perceptions that exist about the institutional environment (Hurtado, 1992; Kuh, 1990). Verraco (2014) asserted that it is essential for the higher education community to study the campus climate to understand student, faculty, and staff beliefs about the institutional environment.

The prior research on diversity climate has primarily centered on students’ perceptions of the college environment. Research has shown that students hold positive and negative perceptions of the campus climate (Reason, Terenzini, & Domingo, 2006). There are positive effects regarding favorable perceptions of the campus climate. Research has demonstrated links between academic achievement and students who deem their institutional environment to be supporting and affirming (Hurtado, 1992; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Reason et al., 2006). Chang (1999) also noted that positive perceptions of the campus climate promote persistence among students. Favorable perceptions of the campus diversity climate provide academic benefits for students.

Positive, or negative, experiences with the campus climate are also associated with nonacademic and psychosocial outcomes. Chang (2007) maintained that diverse educational environments promote the potential opportunity to have meaningful interactions with diverse peers. Studies have also revealed negative associations between students’ perceptions of the campus racial climate and college success, such as persistence (Museus, Nichols, & Lambert, 2008; Museus & Troung, 2009). Negative perceptions of the campus climate are correlated with lower levels of sense of belonging (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Museus et al., 2008). These studies suggest that favorable perceptions of the campus racial and diversity climate are important for colleges and universities. As the chief diversity officer, promoting positive perceptions of the climate would seemingly be a vital element of their role.

### *THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES*

The theoretical framing for this study is grounded in notions of institutionalization, normalization and legitimacy. Adaptation theories, such as institutional or contingency theories, help to explain the influence of the environment on organizational fields, which are organizations whose systems, members and stakeholders interact more purposely with each other than with entities outside of the field (Bastedo, 2012; Wooten & Hoffman, 2008). Institutional theorists assert that examinations of organizations must attend to the study of organizational fields (Gonzales, 2012; Scott, 1991). Institutions

within the same organization field strive for legitimacy. Institutional isomorphism illuminates our understanding of legitimacy and homogeneity in organizations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Isomorphic tendencies, including normative or mimetic activities, drive social processes that support homogeneity among colleges and universities (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). In higher education, exogenous forces induce homogenous processes, practices, and structures at colleges and universities. The need for diversity may be associated with normative, coercive and mimetic forces. External environmental pressures (e.g. affirmative action, social and political issues etc.), grounded in the organizational field, may influence why institutions ultimately hire a chief diversity officer.

In higher education, exogenous forces induce homogenous processes, practices, and structures at colleges and universities. Institutions within the same organizational field generally experience similar constraints from the environment (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Heugens & Lander, 2009). Institutions of higher education experience external environmental pressures that further greater levels of homogeneity within the same organizational field, such as compliance, professional standards or financial resources. Institutional decisions related to isomorphic pressures will then drive decision-making and strategy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 1991). Organizational and institutional theory help to explain the proliferation and institutionalization of chief diversity offices in spite of modest evidence regarding the purpose, functions, and meaning of the role.

Organizations employ structural modifications in response to social and political issues in the environment. Greening and Gray (1994) offered a theoretical framework grounded in institutional, contingency and resource dependency theories that capture this view. Specific issues and resulting issues management can be linked to structural adjustments. Organizations attempt to make rational decisions to organize based on social and political issues (Greening & Gray, 1994). Institutional factors (i.e. crises, media influence and pressure from interest groups) and organizational factors (i.e. organizational size and executive/leadership commitment) promote how the organization manages social and political issues. Ultimately, the issues management is a structural outcome that represents several institutional actions: formalization of activities, committee utilization, attention to resource commitment, strategic planning and integration with line items (Greening & Gray, 1994). It is important to note that all organizations do not employ every facet of issues management.

This framework is a useful guide to understanding how organizations respond to external social and political-related pressures. These theoretical perspectives informed the ensuing data collection and analysis, and particularly how conceptual tenets about systems and environmental pressures shape institutional structure, division of labor and institutional response.

## METHODS

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This study characterizes the chief diversity officer as the foremost administrative or executive leader who is charged with directing diversity strategy and initiatives. This study primarily examined the chief diversity office at the unit, or institutional level, but also offered an examination through the lens of the chief diversity officer and their unique experiences. The term “chief diversity officer” was utilized in this study because it is similarly used in the profession and by the primary professional association, i.e. National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education (NADOHE). Further, many senior diversity leaders have chief diversity office as their official job title, therefore, to maintain consistency and integrity of the study I utilized this term. However, I recognize that “chief” might be a problematic reference for some readers of this article.

This study utilized an interpretive multisite case study (see Creswell, 2012) as an approach to explore the organizational structure of the chief diversity office. The case study is a research design that is frequently employed in fields such as psychology and education research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Yin, 2017). I sought to understand the meaning of CDO experiences and structural practices as a method of inquiry (Merriam, 1998; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Considering qualitative design perspectives from Creswell, Hanson, Plano, and Morales (2007), Merriam and Tisdell (2015), and Yin (2009);

2007), a case study was appropriate for this study because of my identified boundaries on interest and the inquiry that I desired to obtain from the narratives, archival documents etc.

The unit of analysis, or bounded system, is the research university. The selected cases were two research-intensive universities, Gamma University (GU) and Mu University (MU), both pseudonyms. In 2015, I utilized purposeful and network sampling to identify the two institutions of similar size and characteristics that were suitable for the study. The Carnegie classification for each institution is *Research Universities - Very High Research Activity* (NCES, 2019). This institutional type was chosen because scholars have contended that these universities may have compulsory financial resources to appoint a senior executive level diversity administrator, when compared to other institutional types, such as baccalaureate institutions (D. A. Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013).

I selected institutions located in different geographic regions of the United States, Midwest and South. The purpose of this decision was to consider social, cultural and historical differences by region. The total enrollments for both the institutions were 25,000 and larger. Additionally, the universities have similar demographic and institutional characteristics, e.g. compositional diversity, percentage of racial minority students, staff and faculty, Pell grant recipients and first-generation students. Considering the relatively few CDOs that exist and participants may be easily identified, to maintain anonymity, I concealed much of the information regarding the institution's profile, e.g. location, size, reporting lines etc.

The study included multiple sources of data, including interviews, document and website analysis. Social actors are vital to understanding institutional level phenomena (Thorton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012). This notion guided the data protocol and, specifically, the selection of participants for the study. Multiple primary interviews, utilizing a semi-structured method, were conducted with the chief diversity officer at both institutions. Through a snowball sampling technique, additional participants were selected for the study. Secondary interviews were conducted with administrators or faculty who knew the formation of the chief diversity office. The secondary participants comprised an advisor to the president (GU), a former senior administrator (MU), a dean (GU) and a faculty member (GU). These particular individuals were chosen as the most influential institutional members based on preliminary searches.

Notably, students were not included in the sample. I argue that students are a transient group. The issues that prompted the formation of a senior diversity administrator existed over many years and therefore generally outlived particular students. Additionally, the tenets of the theoretical framing of the study (i.e. institutionalism, decision making and legitimizing forces) did not represent a compelling rationale for including students in this particular exploration. Therefore, students were excluded from the sample but might be a valuable addition to a future study with relevant research questions and foci.

The interview protocol comprised questions designed to elicit narratives from the participants about the strategy, hiring and appointment of the CDO at each respective university. Per the theoretical framework, questions also aligned with the tenets of institutionalism. I conducted searches of each university's archives for significant documents about the formation of the chief diversity office at both institutions. Noteworthy documents included memos, presidential letters, brochures, committee documents and meeting notes. Additionally, I conducted a review of each institution's website, including the web pages for the chief diversity office, institutional research, admissions/enrollment and other diversity-related websites. All of the initial primary and secondary interviews were audio-recorded (except one) and conducted face to face at each respective campus and ranged between 60-90 minutes. Follow up interviews were conducted by telephone with the two CDOs and two of the other administrators for clarification purposes.

I employed an analytic method informed by case study design that centered on cross-case synthesis, utilizing an examination of words and themes according to the theoretical tenets (Eishenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2017). The analysis comprised two phases. The first step represented a within-case analysis that

performed an in-depth examination of all data at each site. The latter phase focused on a cross-site analysis to explore related themes and patterns. The themes were then coded, interpreted and analyzed.

Since the researcher is the primary instrument in qualitative research, it is vital to reveal and disclose information that might influence the interpretation of the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). My current and prior experiences, as a former administrator and current scholar who engages with diversity centered topics, afforded me a unique position regarding the data because of my expertise and knowledge of the issues that relate to campus diversity. I was cognizant of many of the issues that were presented in the data. I had the competency to understand terms, definitions and underlying diversity issues. Being knowledgeable about contemporary diversity issues allowed me to make appropriate inferences and interpretations of the data. These experiences, along with my identity and personal background, supplemented the interpretation of the data and allowed me to uncover the nuanced meanings that lie within the participant narratives.

Through my lens, I approached the interpretation of data from a perspective of a diversity specialist with the skills to uncover the salient themes from the data, as well as extrapolate the rich and robust descriptions of the participants. Accordingly, some of these elements of my positionality could have potentially been a bias by influencing the analysis of data. To minimize bias, I performed member checking procedures and participants reviewed all relevant transcripts, memos and notes.

## **FINDINGS**

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The purpose of this study was to explore the emergence of chief diversity office at two research-intensive universities. Analysis of the primary interviews (and supplemental document and website analysis) revealed three prominent themes regarding the research question: a structural response to a cultural issue, the influence of the campus and local climates and importance of prior campus events and stakeholders.

### **THE CHIEF DIVERSITY OFFICE AS A STRUCTURAL RESPONSE**

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While the intent to inaugurate a chief diversity office represented common themes across cases, the findings revealed inconsistencies regarding the structure and organization of the office. Common to the cases was the need for an office, but there was little standardization or consistency regarding how that task was achieved. Yet, the outcome, in both cases, inferred that the establishment of the office was minimally a symbolic response to cultural issues.

The core intentions regarding structure and organization of the office varied across cases. Institutionalism helped to identify this finding. For Mu University, an important factor for structuring the office stemmed from coercive, or regulatory, environmental constraints. These factors represented the historical institutional context of diversity and racism and the federal policies that faced the university, such as affirmative action. Kathy (Mu CDO) asserted,

...that's the kind of sense of how diversity was viewed. So, it's a long evolutionary process with various junctures involving people and internal and external events to sort of push things forward. The '60s was a key period in the Civil Rights revolution, Vietnam, and so on.

The equal opportunity officer (i.e. affirmative action or compliance officer) was, structurally, the precursor to the CDO. Eric (Mu administrator) offered a similar sentiment,

And that is a major push in terms of institutional response. And you get an affirmative action officer, and you get a person that has an interest and a commitment to the academic human resources side. Somewhat later than that...there was a kind of institutional commitment, which is really the first foreboding if that's the right term for a chief diversity officer.

Referring to the early compliance officers, Kathy contended,

...in those days they weren't called Chief Diversity Officers, but for the most part, if you were to take that portfolio today and say what would be the title of that person, it would be Chief Diversity Officer.

The affirmative action and compliance officer were precursors to how the institution formed and structured the chief diversity office. Participants indicated that the new leader had similar responsibilities as every prior iteration of the diversity leader on campus. As a response to faculty and students' perceptions of the climate for diversity, the CDO was formed as a symbolic response. To attend to diversity concerns of campus members, the CDO was established as a means to address diversity, despite being a similar construction as the existing administrative leaders, such as the equity officers.

Similar environmental factors conformed Mu University. Regulatory and coercive matters were growing challenges regarding the state of campus racial diversity. An archived diversity plan from 1999 epitomized this notion,

Challenges to the constitutionality of affirmative action policies, both in the state and on a national level, have called into question and in some cases simply brought to an end various efforts by the University to recruit students, staff and faculty of color.

Growing attention at the local, state and national levels urged the university to assess its diversity climate.

When constructing the respective diversity offices, institutional leaders had little knowledge about the optimal structure of the office. Findings revealed that the resulting structure of the offices was primarily modeled after existing, albeit few, diversity executive positions. Participants illuminated that the former president and diversity committees primarily emulated similar constructions of diversity offices of peer institutions.

### *THE CAMPUS (AND LOCAL) CLIMATE FOR DIVERSITY*

A significant influence on the establishment of the chief diversity office at these institutions was students, faculty, and staffs' unfavorable perceptions of the campus climate. Institutionalism tenets, i.e. coercive and regulatory forces, again helped to identify the influence of environmental pressures. Much of the discontent was associated with compositional diversity and the absence of a diverse student body and faculty.

In both cases, participants asserted a primary factor in the establishment of the chief diversity office was the key roles that faculty and staff played in the preliminary discourse and action steps. Students mobilized and articulated their discontent or protest.

Kathy, at Mu, illustrated this notion "and then we had a little breakdown, we had a little student unhappiness..." Eric (Mu administrator) echoed the sentiment,

There were a set of student issues that arose. And there were campaigns, demonstrations, there was the occupation of the administration building. And they had a long list of concerns, and they engaged some community folks from [Mu's city] and more locally to help them articulate views and perspectives.

Additionally, faculty mobilized around faculty issues, as well as provided assistance and support to students during the times of contention. Alex (Gamma faculty) noted,

So there was some dissatisfaction on campus with the diversity numbers and just diversity efforts on campus and the black faculty and staff organization had meetings with the President and convinced the President there was a need for a diversity office on campus.

Negative perceptions of the campus climate were a primary factor that prompted the formation of the office.



Unfavorable perceptions of the campus climate for diversity is a foreseeable antecedent to the inauguration of a chief diversity office, however, adverse events and negative perceptions of the local climate was also a major factor in the formation of the chief diversity offices. Findings illuminated that institutional members perceived the local and community to be hostile environments. Kathy (Mu CDO) recounted the views the faculty and staff about life in the community,

We need to integrate [MU's city] because we were being denied housing for black folks in [Mu's city], and we need more black students here. And it was at that time, during the early '60s, that [Mu.] worked particularly hard to get more folks here.

Eric (Mu administrator) provided an additional example,

And the other instance in terms of context...involves [former faculty] who was one of Dr. King's associates, was a professor, he came as a professor here in the [Mu academic college], he couldn't get a house in [Mu's city] because they had redlined him...the internal context and the broader community context was very unresponsive in a broad sense of the needs issues and concerns.

Perceptions of an unwelcoming environment were not limited to the campus. Faculty and students were exceptionally discontent with the state of the local community. The findings revealed that the perceptions of the climate, campus and local, significant and influential events, and key stakeholders were vital contributors to the establishment of the chief diversity office at both institutions.

### ***SALIENT INSTITUTIONAL EVENTS, STAKEHOLDERS AND DIVERSITY COMMITTEES***

Each campus had contentious events that preceded the formation of chief diversity office, however, the formation of the chief diversity office at these research universities was not the result of a single momentous event or crisis on campus. The establishment of the offices was a result of multiple happenings over several years and the advocacy of institutional stakeholders (i.e. faculty and students). These events comprised institutional and culturally specific occurrences, such as diversity committees, that were pivotal in the inaugurating of each office.

Institutionalism, including isomorphic tendencies such as regulatory matters, helped to reveal this theme that represented the significance of particular events and stakeholders, such as the diversity proposals that were developed at each institution. Eric (Mu administrator) referenced the institution's response to regulatory pressures, and particularly audits, as significant factors in establishing the diversity office,

And that [audits] is a major push in terms of an institutional response. And you get an affirmative action officer, and you get a person that has an interest and a commitment to the academic human resources side. Somewhat later than that...there was a kind of institutional commitment, which is really the first foreboding if that's the right term for a chief diversity officer.

Both CDOs, Jennifer and Kathy highlighted the influence of state and federal government policies and subject matters as being primary factors that prompted the discussions for appointing a diversity leader.

Findings suggested that institutional diversity committees and task forces were another major impetus that triggered the discourse supporting the creation of a chief diversity office. Both cases had active coalitions of faculty, staff, and students who participated in some form of a diversity committee. It was the actions of these committees that were the center of the discourse about diversity leadership. These diversity committees provided outcomes, such as reports and diversity plans that served as the strategic plans for diversity at the institutions.

In both cases, institutional stakeholders began to mobilize and promote the discourse regarding the need for a diversity officer. William (Gamma Administrator) asserted,

...Part of the discussion that took place began really...Really, some of that discussion, from my understanding had been going on for years...maybe another eight to ten years before I even came here about the need or the desire to create a chief diversity officer position. (William, administrator)

The sentiments that were growing were manifested in a diversity proposal. The archive's proposal stated,

On Friday, April 7, the black students of the [Gamma University] represented by the [black faculty & staff council] will gather on the steps of the President's House to unveil our proposed diversity plan. After nearly four decades of minorities on this campus early anticipating change in the cultural climate of the [Gamma University], there is increasing concern among these minorities that the administration has grown apathetic towards their needs and concerns as college students.

In an effort to aid the University in upholding its commitment to diversity, the [black faculty & staff council] proposes six initiatives that will further enhance diversity: First, Recruitment - "High School [state] Days, Second, Retention - Conferences, speakers, mentor programs, Third, Diversity evaluations and surveys, Fourth, Visuals - Images of diversity on campus, Fifth, - Orientation sessions on diversity and Sixth, *Vice President for Institutional Equity*.

MU's diversity committee developed a plan resulting from federal compliance policies regarding affirmative action. Mu University's task force developed two sequential diversity plans, Diversity Plan 1 (DP1) and Plan 2 (DP2). The first report, DP1, stated,

[DPI] is a plan for achieving a new level of diversity and excellence at [Mu University] to meet the needs of a changing America. It calls for renewed sensitivity to issues of race, handicap, and gender...Together these efforts will provide a cooperative and comprehensive new assault on inequality and social injustice. (Mu University DP1, 1988, p. 1)

Kathy asserted that this first report was fundamentally the first diversity plan at the institution. One tenet of this plan included a call to appoint a chief diversity officer. The subsequent report, DP2, attended to the campus climate and social justice issues. Kathy noted, "and so shortly after that, there was [DP2] that looked at issues impacting students, it looked at how we were organized." Combined, both reports served as antecedents to the establishment of the diversity office. Both cases represented the emergence of diversity proposals or plans that served as the trigger to urge the appointment of a diversity administrator.

## DISCUSSION

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This study explored how chief diversity offices emerged at two research-intensive universities. It investigated the distinct impetuses that influenced the formation of the chief diversity officer at those institutions. Based on the findings, several salient points are of importance to the higher education community. The main finding illustrated that the formation of the chief diversity office at these research universities represented structural responses to cultural issues on campus. The inauguration of the office and/or appointment of a diversity officer were symbolic activities to attend to the campus climate for diversity.

When faced with diversity centered crises, institutions of higher education are generally reactive, rather than proactive (D. A. Williams & Clowney, 2007; D. A. Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013). Scholars asserted that often a campus crisis is a primary impetus that prompts the discourse to create a centralized diversity officer and hire a diversity chief (D. A. Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013). The inauguration of a chief diversity office at these research universities was not a result of a single mo-

mentous event at these research universities but rather a result of a persistent and heightened awareness of campus climate for diversity.

The findings of this study do not refute prior scholar's claims but supplement our understanding of the creation of diversity offices. Hurtado et al. (1998) framework for understanding the campus climate for diversity highlights an institution's historical legacy of inclusion or exclusions as an important tenet for understanding campus diversity. Notably, the chief diversity offices at these research universities were formed during the 80s-90s. The impetus to form these diversity offices differ from contemporary formations that have been created in response to highly publicized events on campus. The campus climate, structural diversity and advanced technology represent contextual differences between formations of the chief diversity officer at these research institutions and offices that have recently been inaugurated in the United States. The primary reason for this difference is likely due to social media, increased student activism and heightened awareness of the campus climate for diversity at schools across the nation. Additional research is needed to examine the unique formations of chief diversity offices during recent times of student unrest.

A salient theme regarding this topic may be the role of institutional members' advocacy and agency. Consistent with previous research about the relationship between psychological and behavioral factors and the campus climate for diversity (Hurtado et al., 1998), faculty and students' unrelenting perceptions of an unwelcoming campus environment coupled with several incidents of insensitivity over time were the catalyst to form a chief diversity office. Faculty and students' mobilization and collective action serve as a fundamental element of the inauguration of the chief diversity office.

The findings also illustrate the significant roles of student and faculty in the formation of chief diversity offices, particularly through committees and coalitions. This point is not unexpected but perhaps the process by which students and faculty contributed to the discourse informs our understanding of chief diversity offices. Students and faculty at these institutions provided support for each group's respective objectives. Students supported faculty with tackling discrimination in the local community, promotion and tenure and compositional diversity of faculty and staff. Faculty supported students with their attempts to address the disparities in the student body and campus incidents of racial insensitivity.

### ***INSTITUTIONALIZING DIVERSITY AS A LEGITIMIZING (BUT SYMBOLIC) PROCESS***

The tenets of the theoretical framework, intuitionism (i.e. normative, coercive etc.) guided the interpretation and discussion of the findings and help to inform our understanding of the emergence of the CDO. Scholars who examined the role of the senior diversity leaders have traditionally studied this construct through the lens of institutionalism. D. A. Williams and Wade-Golden (2013) argued that there exists a paradigm in higher education that represents a movement for strategic diversity leadership. Organizational theoretical underpinnings, such as institutional theory, help us to understand these current movements. Borrowing from DiMaggio and Powell (1983), D. A. Williams and Wade-Golden (2013) asserted that institutions "adopt similar structure and strategy, not only because of competitive dynamics and the desire to maximize their performance but also as a way of legitimizing themselves in the eyes of their peers" (p. 207). The findings of this study provide support for those assertions.

Arguably, for some institutions, the chief diversity office epitomizes the legitimizing objectives, per institutional theory, of the organizations. The research universities in this study provided a structural response to attend to the issue of diversity and inclusion. This response represented isomorphic tendencies, i.e. mimetic, normative and coercive, as a reaction to a cultural issue. At the core of the structuring of a chief diversity office was the institutional objective for legitimacy among the organization field, i.e. peer institutions of higher education. The inauguration of a chief diversity office serves as a strategic, and symbolic, undertaking to attend to diversity on campus.

Institutionalism centers on homogeneity in organizations and explains how normative, coercive and mimetic pressures compel organizations to adapt to the principles of the profession and organizational field (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 1991). These forces align with the observed undertaking of enacting structural changes for a cultural institutional issue. Isomorphic pressures typically are driving forces that trigger the discourse to inaugurate a chief diversity office (D. A. Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013). These research universities in this study experienced external environment forces from federal and state policies, professional norms and institutional peer groups that influenced the formation of their respective diversity offices.

The formation of the chief diversity office may represent a symbolic and legitimizing undertaking of institutional leaders. The establishment of the chief diversity office is a symbol that diversity is valued at the institution. Chief diversity officers arguably are considered to be the “face” of diversity at institutions of higher education (D. A. Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013). The institution of a chief diversity office signifies to federal and state policymakers, prospective students and parents, state residents, employees, and alumni that individuals of diverse backgrounds are welcome at the institution. It also indicates to peer institutions and professional organizations that the institution is at the forefront of equity and inclusion.

Beyond the symbolism, there remains uncertainty about the authentic agency and power that is bestowed to the subsequent diversity leaders. D. A. Williams and Wade-Golden (2013) argued that to be effectual leaders, chief diversity officers ought to be empowered with the necessary spans of control and vertical and horizontal authority to be successful leaders. Inaugurating chief diversity offices without intentional and strategic attention to spans of control and power does little to affect institutional change for diversity and the resulting diversity office. Further research should attend to the work outcomes and attitudes among these diversity leaders, such as efficacy, organizational commitment, attrition and satisfaction.

## CONCLUSION

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The inauguration of a chief diversity office serves as a strategic, and symbolic, undertaking to attend to diversity on campus. Rather than confront organizational change, institutions may also consider the inauguration of the chief diversity office as a completed task on a checklist of what do when faced with diversity issues. Findings illustrated that the forces that promoted the establishment of the chief diversity office were grounded in isomorphic environmental pressures, rather than meaningful attention to the cultural and systemic foundations that promote unwelcoming environments for marginalized institutional members.

College environments often embody the traditions, practices, processes and artifacts that marginalize persons from diverse backgrounds (Hurtado et al., 1998). To attend to matters of diversity, institutions may consider the formation of a chief diversity office as a means to resolve diversity issues without sincerely attending to the inherent and underlying issues that exist in the institutional environments. Further, the optimal timing for the inauguration of the office is important for institutional leaders. Rather than being a response to campus crises, there ought to be strategic thinking about organizational change when considering institutional structure.

Colleges and universities are continuing to face issues regarding the campus climate for diversity that includes students' increasing perceptions of an unwelcoming campus environment. To attend to these issues, institutions of higher education have increasingly formed chief diversity offices (D. A. Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013). However, the need for a high-ranking diversity officer does not suddenly appear after a contentious campus incident. Leaders must assess and recognize the recurring and persisting perceptions of the campus climate that necessitates a leader to advance diversity initiatives and goals. Administrators ought to form strategic partnerships with student and faculty leaders to promote critical discourse about campus diversity and how a diversity officer might be needed to assist in developing diversity goals. Last, colleges and universities must also be intentional

in the formation of the chief diversity office, articulation of responsibilities, the division of labor and allocation of resources.

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