

The Blueprint: Creating A Sense of Community Among
African American Faculty & Staff at Western Carolina University

Tacquice Wiggan Davis and Ricardo Nazario-Colón

A disquisition presented to the faculty of the Graduate School of Western Carolina University in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

Edd in Educational Leadership Program

Department of Human Services

College of Education & Allied Professions

Western Carolina University

Disquisition Chair: Dr. Kofi Lomotey

Bardo Distinguished Professor

Committee Members:

Dr. Brandi Hinnant-Crawford

Dr. Dana Patterson

Dr. Charmion Rush

March 17, 2021

Acknowledgements

We would like to extend our appreciation to Dr. Kofi Lomotey, who chaired our disquisition committee, whose expertise and support were crucial during this endeavor. Also, to our disquisition committee members—Dr. Brandi Hinnant Crawford, Dr. Dana Patterson, and Dr. Charmion Rush—for their encouragement, mentorship and thoughtful feedback and design input during this process.

Francisca Colón López, que afortunado soy de tenerte en mi vida. Es mi orgullo representarte. Tacquice Wiggan Davis—Pinky Swear!

To the scholars in my life, I held on to your words and actions— Tracy Bonilla, Shamella Cromartie, Willie Fleming, Tracey Folden, Beth Goldstein, Charles Holloway, Kathy Hughes, Yvette Kell, Ekow King, Joanna Jackson, Stephanie Mayberry, Arthur Salido, Martha Sales, Bianca Spriggs, Frank X Walker, Lihua Xu, Betty Jo Wallace, Dean Paulk, Devin Moss, Holli Stillman, Jessica Gonzalez, Karin Kimenker, Kourtnee Harris, Cassandra Smith, Amy McKenzie, Shauna Morgan and Riley Jelenick and all the past and present WCU Social Justice Warriors.

For Mrs. Rosa and her unspoken wisdom. You gave me my first job as a student library worker over 45 years ago, and planted a seed. To Mr. Medina for sharing *El Sí De las Niñas* and sparking my love of literature. Para la familia de sangre y crianza Colón, deseo que esto sea una inspiración. Para Yvette Carrasquillo Aviles y Carmen Enid Ravelo (Alvarez Carrasquillo) nunca me he olvidado de ustedes y lo importante que fueron en mi vida. Affrilachian Poets friendship is essential. Howard Bailey for giving me a second chance. Creston Lynch, Jackie Pillow, Angie Link, Lloren Foster, Kenneth Johnson, Michelle Jones you have been part of this journey. Ralph Velazquez, Orlando Cedres, Edwin Velazquez, Carmen Velazquez, Jose Velazquez, Jose Pagan,

THE BLUEPRINT

Raquel Velazquez, Edith Rosado, Elvin Rosado, Maritza Colón Figueroa, Jonath Colón, Doris Rodriguez, and Marlene Cancel, where I go we go.

To Solmelissa Colon Figueroa, Roberto Nazario, Wanda Nazario-Ufret, Cory Nazario Ivette Nazario, Oscar Nazario, Diana Sotomayor, Maribel Velazquez, Amparo Colón, for being mami's circle. To ancestry.com for giving us the gift of seven centuries of ancestors.

Tacquice's Acknowledgment

First and foremost, I thank God for his grace, strength, faithfulness, and love throughout this journey. To my mother, Evett Veronica Porter, you are the reason I dare to take on every challenge and succeed. You believe in me, love me, and serve me like no other human being on the face of this earth and for that I am eternally grateful. This one is for you! To my dad, Samuel Wiggan, thank you for the gift of life and for always doing your best to support me. To my partner, DaVaun Jamar Davis, thank you for meeting me with a tender heart and words of encouragement when I needed them the most. To my children: Kinley Davis, Jones Davis and Israel Davis, who waited for this day to come; While I cannot repay the time I "borrowed" from you, I can assure you, you were the number one reason I pushed so hard to complete this disquisition. I love you beyond measure and am blessed to have such wonderful little people. To my mother-n-law, Sharlene Davis, your willingness and sacrifice to always be there for me no matter the hour, gave me wings to soar through this program.

To my best friend, Dr. Erica Nicole Valenzuela, we did it. Thank you for the practical guidance, never ending support, and unconditional love you have provided me with since 2003. Mom #2, Carla Edwards, thank you for letting me be me when I needed it the most during this process. My Tricycle, Coley Valenzuela, thank you for making me smile. To my family that I

THE BLUEPRINT

can ALWAYS count on, Conroy Parchment, Sasha Porter, Krystal Porter, Nicole Parchment, JJ, AJ, Cheryl, I could not have done this without your love and support.

Kourtnee Harris you were such a blessing throughout this process. Thank you for the constant encouragement and making sure I ate. Roslyn Gowens, Janae McKinney, Tamika Quick, Temeshia Lemons, Lakeesha Eure, Renee Grant, Jettana Okoye, Meridia Sanders, and Holli Stillman, thank you for being friends that became family. Thank you for believing in me. The constant reminders and encouraging messages brought me through some of my toughest days. Dr. Dana Patterson, “I am done now.” Thank you for your wisdom and mentorship. To my ICA family, thank you for your endless support and being my biggest cheerleaders. Amy McKenzie, Jane Adams-Dunford, Janina DeHart, Dr. Betsy Aspinwall, Dr. Aril Perry, Dr. Callie Schultz and Dr. Bashaun Smith, thank you for lending an ear, offering advice, hiking and taking walks with me, and sending numerous messages of support. Uncle Justin, since day one you told me I was purposed for something great. Thank you for speaking life into me before I understood what that meant. To the students at WCU, there are not enough words to express my gratitude for all the love and support. You called me Dr. before it even happened. Thank you for manifesting my dream into a reality. Nu Zeta, I love you!

Last but certainly not least, Ricardo Nazario-Colón, you are my partner in crime. Thank you for taking this journey with me. You are the epitome of patience and wisdom. You are the gift I didn’t know I needed, but am grateful I received.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures	IIX
List of Tables	IX
Abstract	X
Introduction and Statement of the Problem	1
A Message from David	1
History and Current State of the Problem	4
Social Justice Implications	8
Literature Review	9
Supervision	11
Salary	12
Professional Development	12
Recognition	13
Community Engagement	13
<i>Importance of Community Within the Black Community</i>	15
Problem of Practice within the Local Context	19
Theory of Improvement	22
Improvement Methodology	25
Literature Review of Improvement Initiative	27
Improvement Initiative Design	29
Disquisitioner Bias	30
Design Team	31
Timeline	33
Evaluation of Improvement Initiative	37
Improvement Initiative Methodology	37
Improvement Science	37
COVID-19 Impact	39
Participants	41
Formative Evaluation of Improvement Methodology	42
Driver Measures	42
Process Measures	43
Balancing Measures	43
Outcome Measures	43
Formative Evaluation Results and Responses	48
Membership	49

THE BLUEPRINT

<i>Emotional Safety</i>	50
<i>Sense of Belonging</i>	52
<i>Personal Investment</i>	54
<i>Sense of Comfortability</i>	55
<i>Emerging Theme - Survival</i>	59
Integration and Fulfillment of Needs	61
<i>Shared Values and Experiences</i>	62
<i>Opportunity to Learn From One Another</i>	63
<i>Sharing of Resources</i>	66
<i>Influence Over One Another</i>	66
<i>Emerging Theme - Desire for Community Specifically During COVID-19</i>	67
Summative Evaluation of Improvement Methodology	69
Summative Evaluation Results and Responses	73
Overall Data Analysis/ SPSS Results	75
Recommendations	79
Lessons for Leadership	79
Lessons for Social Justice	80
Lessons for Implementation	82
Limitations	83
Recommendations from the African American Employees at WCU	83
<i>Community</i>	83
<i>Hiring process</i>	84
<i>Resources</i>	85
<i>Social Opportunities</i>	86
Disquisitioners Recommendations	87
Conclusion	87
Dissemination Plan	89
References	91
Appendix A: Blueprint Recruitment Email	107
Appendix B: Consent Form	110
Appendix C: Sense of Community Index II Survey	119
Appendix D: Detailed Event Timeline	122
Appendix E: Balancing Measure Questionnaire	123
Appendix F: Focus Group Protocol (Script and Questions)	124

THE BLUEPRINT

Appendix G: Sample Email Correspondence #1	128
Appendix H: Sample Email Correspondence #2	129

LIST OF FIGURES

1. Ishikawa Fishbone Diagram	Page 10
2. Workforce Turnover Rate for Western Carolina University	Page 20
3. Summary of Turnover Rate for Faculty and Staff	Page 21
4. Comparison of Faculty and Staff vs Student Racial Demographics	Page 22
5. Driver Diagram	Page 23
6. Improvement Initiative Implementation Timeline	Page 36
7. McMillian and Chavis SCI II Question 1 Scale	Page 44

LIST OF TABLES

1. Membership Coding	Page 46
2. Integration and Fulfillment of Needs Coding	Page 47
3. Overall Pre and Post Descriptive Statistics and Paired Samples T-test	Page 76
4. Membership Descriptive Statistics and Paired Samples T-test	Page 77
5. Integration and Fulfillment Pre and Post Descriptive Statistics and Paired Samples T-test	Page 78
6. SCI II Question One Six Point Pre and Post Descriptive Statistics Paired Samples T-test	Page 79

Abstract

There has been extensive research on employee retention over the past 50 years, including new managerial methodologies around employee retention. Researchers and practitioners must evaluate the lack of focus given to African American faculty and staff retention in higher education. Nationally, African American faculty and staff retention data are not readily available. Few studies discuss the issue, and the approach is one that examines causes and offers remedies. Similarly, the North Carolina University System office has not started to evaluate their data to generate population-specific reports. This lack of analysis poses a problem when one considers that nearly 40,000 African American faculty were employed at colleges and universities across America in 2017. Data are difficult to obtain and disaggregate when examining the number of African Americans professionals in non-faculty roles at colleges and universities. Only 13% of postsecondary non-faculty are African American. For this intervention, we critically reviewed research to offer a firm foundation and clear perspective to provide us with direction. The critical themes that emerged out of the research over the past two decades include: (1) the interrelation between supervisor and employee, (2) motivational factors such as salary and professional development, (3) increased emphasis on recognition and reward programs, and (4) the role of community engagement. We assert these themes inform future areas for intervention and research, and they help us move beyond contemporary stop-gap approaches. With a focus on a sense of community in this proposal, we seek to engage African American faculty and staff with two elements of The McMillan-Chavis Model: Membership and Integration and Fulfillment of Needs. The intervention utilizes the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle model to test a change in the way the University approaches employee retention.

Introduction and Statement of the Problem

A Message from David

On November 15, 2019, I celebrated my first work anniversary at Western Carolina University. Although excited, I could not help thinking about the prior week when I entered the job market searching for my next position. I come to work daily and engage with colleagues and students. Some days are hectic, so I am not focused on what's taking place around me, while other days are more relaxed but regardless, at the end of each day, I am focused on just heading home.

I remember going through my master's program at an institution similar to Western in demographics and location. What got me through was my connection to two other African American gentlemen. We were not in the same master's program, but our relationship and support for one another encouraged us to thrive and succeed. On Thursday nights, a simple wing night tradition created a space for us to develop friendship, accountability, and a safe space to unpack.

In my current professional career, eight years' post master's, that desire to connect has never left. When I head home after work, I find myself reminiscing about wing night and the good old days. I feel I am missing a sense of community. I feel like I don't belong. It does not have to be wing Thursday, but an opportunity to connect with others who look like me and have similar needs would be beneficial. Can I connect with others who understand my need for a barbershop that can cut African American Hair?

Sincerely, David

THE BLUEPRINT

Successful universities need to perform well in all areas, including human relations. The retention of employees is one component of success in universities. A high retention rate means that the university retains employees for more extended periods. High retention contributes to a stable workforce and reduces the number of resources spent on training new staff.

It is essential to recognize the human and material resources expended in the onboarding of new staff. These efforts can range from engaging current employees in the training process to the potential loss in production. Universities must also consider the impact on production, revenue, and reputation when a new employee departs the organization after just a few months. Such a loss requires that a university repeat the hiring and onboarding processes, creating a significant impact on the organization's productivity, efficiency, and morale.

Retaining employees, as long as they are an asset to the university, is vital to organizational success. During the evaluation of the research, we learned that minoritized professors positively impact the education of minoritized and non-minoritized students. As new students transition to college life, African American faculty and staff at Predominately White Institutions can serve as mentors and role models (McClain & Perry, 2017). Campbell and Campbell (2007) stated that mentoring relationships between African American faculty, staff, and African American undergraduate students resulted in higher GPAs, increased graduation rates, and additional enrolled semesters for mentors and mentees. McClain and Perry (2017) also discussed how minoritized students felt about white faculty and staff in comparison to African American faculty or staff. Students stated that African American faculty provided them with extra tutorial services and helped them find additional funding for their education. African American staff served as a medium with the students' families regarding academics and private matters. Students felt white faculty and staff were less empathetic to their situations. This

THE BLUEPRINT

research finding supports the need to increase the retention of African American faculty and staff at Western Carolina University.

Universities must mitigate employee turnover by developing and using a strategic employee retention plan. This plan must focus on keeping employees motivated and focused, so they choose to remain employed and fully productive within the university. A comprehensive retention program needs to be at the forefront of each university's agenda. Institutions invest significant time, money, and other resources to recruit and train new employees only to see many of them gone each year through turnover. Factors such as administration attitude, lack of recognition, a non-competitive salary, and lack of retention strategies are sometimes responsible for faculty and staff turnover (Malvern et al., 2010).

Leaders at institutions should recognize employee retention as a bottom-line priority -- one that has financial, reputational, and productivity implications. Universities need to identify their staff's strengths and challenges (Baker, 2006; Snell & Dean, 1992). Institutions that strategically manage employee retention will likely be successful at retaining employees during challenging periods. As defined by Das and Baruch (2013), retention is the process by which organizations engage employees to remain with the company. This retention process is more efficient than engaging in replacing the same quality employees (Das & Baruah, 2013). Knowing these truisms illustrates the importance of effective human resources departments. A better understanding of employee communities within an organization can provide critical information to enact strategies that can increase retention.

Western Carolina University's (WCU) low African American retention rate is the problem of practice that we have addressed. At WCU, during the period 2014-15 through 2019-20, the African American employee population exhibited a lower retention rate than the national

average. The presence of African American employees impacts student retention, diversity, cultural learning opportunities, and student success – particularly the success of African American students (Stout et al., 2018; Williams-June, 2015).

History and Current State of the Problem

Demographic shifts are being manifested in many aspects of society, including students enrolling in higher education. A high rate of student enrollment from diverse backgrounds presents both an opportunity and a challenge for higher education institutions. African American student enrollment is 14.1% due to a substantial increase from 1.5 million to 2.7 million (73% growth) from 2000 to 2015 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). However, at Title IV US institutions, only 10.2% are African American professionals (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). With such small numbers, colleges and universities must work diligently to retain their black employees.

Zakia et al., (2010) provide various illustrations of why employees are retained. Among these are (1) autonomy and independence, (2) belonging, (3) professional development, (4) rewards and recognition, (5) satisfaction with the working environment, (6) sufficient compensation, (7) opportunities for research, (8) publication facilities, and (9) administrative and technical support. Malvern et al., (2010) identify administration attitude, lack of retention strategy, community involvement, and resources for family members as factors contributing to low employee retention. Farrell (2009) highlights different campus culture elements that impact employee retention: traditions, values, behavioral norms, and employee development programs. The illustrations suggest that universities need to understand what motivates their employees and what they value to retain faculty and staff.

THE BLUEPRINT

Palanski et al., (2014) recognize the strong relationships found between voluntary turnover and the attitudes held by employees about their supervisors. In the Tepper (2007) study, the impact of abusive supervision is noted to affect nearly 13.6 % of the U.S. employment force and to have an economic impact of more than \$23 billion per year to U.S. companies. Zellars et al., (2002) state that abusive supervision behavior includes (1) purposely withholding vital information, (2) employing silent treatment, (3) explosive outbursts, and (4) the use of aggressive eye contact. Harris et al. (2007) list (1) lying, (2) breaking promises, (3) violating privacy, and (4) taking credit for subordinates' work as additional illustrations of abusive supervisor behavior. Other examples of such behavior include the violations of normative standards (Unal et al., 2012) and subordinates' public ridicule (Tepper, 2007).

The "hangover effect" is the term used by Boswell et al., (2005) when referring to what happens when new employees become bored with the routine. This effect often leads to employment unhappiness. Brunges and Foley-Brinze (2014) contend that office culture was the most significant factor employees used to measure their commitment, satisfaction, and engagement. Sadatsafavi et al., (2015) state that employees thought a positive work atmosphere indicated the company valued their work and appreciated them as individuals. According to Robertson and Kee (2017), job applicants consider several characteristics before applying for new jobs. They evaluate their skills and aptitude against the desired qualities and the salary packages, which consist of benefits such as vacation time and retirement options (Ong & Theseira, 2016). These factors contribute to increases in their interest in the position, which often leads to employment.

Job satisfaction is the employee's attitude toward their job. Factors that contribute to job satisfaction include (but are not limited to) organizational support, employee involvement,

THE BLUEPRINT

salary, and benefits (Leider et al., 2016). Leider et al., (2016) also said that if employees have a high level of job satisfaction, they are more likely to perform well and contribute to the company's success. According to Ravid et al. (2017), improvements in job satisfaction lead to (1) increases in productivity, (2) higher retention rates, and (3) diminished criminal or unethical behavior. For these reasons, employers should focus on improving job satisfaction. Frequent communication between leaders and followers yields increased employee commitment to the organization, strengthening organizational performance (Mayfield et al., 2015). Gatling et al. (2017) argue that communication should be frequent and timely. Johnston et al. (2013) maintain that managers should not rely on electronic mediums as the underlying platform to communicate with their remote employees, regardless of the technological support advancements. According to Dansereau et al. (1975), it is essential to be transparent with employees. Transparency builds mutual trust, which is an integral component of the leader-member exchange theory. Albu and Flyverbom (2016) define transparency as the distribution of information throughout the institution. Gatling et al. (2017) argue leaders increase their leader-follower relationships when followers view the leader as credible and engaging when practicing transparency. Vogelgesang and Avolio (2013) spoke to the importance of leadership transparency in higher education and the healthcare industry. Leader transparency is essential because leaders impact their followers' ethical behaviors, reducing the propensity for waste, abuse, theft, forgery, and fraud. Kim and Brymer (2011) stated that the lack of transparency could promote mistrust in employees, leading to undesirable actions.

Critical to organizational success is the expectation of open communication from management to the employees (Raina & Britt-Roebuck, 2016). Mishra et al. (2014) propose that timely and effective communication reflects transparency, fostering trust, and loyalty. According

THE BLUEPRINT

to Turaga (2016), without commitment and belief, the messages leaders send would not be the messages followers receive. Effective communication is an essential component of successful employee retention strategies.

Faculty and staff value institutions that incorporate their various outlooks, knowledge, and opinions as part of how they operate. Institutions often promote the value of diversity and the belief in the importance of recruiting and retaining a racially diverse staff and faculty; yet equitable proportions of diversity within the academy do not exist. (Kelly et al., 2017).

In a campus climate study conducted by Mayhew et al. (2006) that aimed to determine how a positive climate for diversity was achieved, respondents indicated that their racial identity affected their discernment of campus climate and their observation of how much a department or institution valued diversity. As stated by Mayhew et al. (2006), "Staff members of color were less likely than white staff to perceive that the campus community has achieved a positive climate for diversity" (p. 79). The authors stated that staff of color perceived vital institutional problems for increasing diversity and that they had experienced or witnessed offensive behavior directed toward marginalized groups (Mayhew et al., 2006). Employees of color also perceived that their department and institution maintained a low level of interest in improving diversity issues reflected in their negative perception. However, it was suggested that, ultimately, institutional leaders have the power to be change agents for increasing the role and value of diversity on campus (Mayhew et al., 2006). Changes to campus climate can help assist in making a better environment for employees of color.

African Americans' negative experiences at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) are primarily due to being minoritized and isolated (Osajima, 2009). Due to limited representation, the experience of African American employees can be tokenized. Also, African American

THE BLUEPRINT

faculty and staff at higher education institutions have stated they feel unwelcomed by other colleagues (Turner et al., 1999). A study that focused on African American faculty experiences found that isolation arose in terms of marginalization. Allen et al. (2000) stated that marginalization on campuses reduces access to networks, resources, and experiences necessary for success. Both factors caused African American faculty to feel lonely and unsupported in their work environments (Jayakumar et al., 2009). Faculty and staff of color face many hardships not typically encountered by their white counterparts. Some of the respondents to Jayakumar et al. (2009) spoke of the lack of respect received and the lack of access to like-minded mentorship, which can play a role in them leaving. Due to the difficulties experienced by employees of color, many respondents reported having low job satisfaction. African American employees feel that they take on greater responsibilities than their White counterparts and that this creates a burdensome perception, leading to experiences of emotional labor and overexertion (Kelly et al., 2017).

Social Justice Implications

The Blueprint initiative has implications for social justice, the first of which is a greater opportunity to develop intercultural competence among students. King & Baxter-Magolda, (2005) indicated that intercultural competence is an essential learning outcome for college graduates in this century. By retaining African American faculty and staff, all students will benefit from the diverse perspectives and experiences. In particular, African American students have demonstrated higher academic achievement and benefited from same race mentoring relationships (Strayhorn, 2016). The presence, influence, and contributions of African American faculty and staff will help our students achieve intercultural capabilities. Another implication is creating a greater sense of belonging among African American faculty and staff. In establishing

a sense of community for African American faculty and staff at Western Carolina University, we develop an ideal place to achieve the institution's mission. The mission seeks to create learning opportunities that incorporate teaching, research, service, and engagement through on-campus, off-campus, online, and international experiences. By creating a sense of belonging, we promote better health and wellbeing among the institution's employees. African American faculty and staff will contribute to the economic growth and stability of the local economy. These contributions, coupled with the demographic changes taking place across the country, serve as indicators and reminders for universities like WCU that need to retain and recruit more diverse faculty and staff (Phillips, 2002).

Literature Review

A limited Black faculty and staff presence at Predominately White Institutions (PWI's) is concerning (Edwards & Ross, 2018) as retention rates are low, and turnover rates are high. A research study conducted by Edward and Ross (2018) addressed these concerns and suggested that this lack causes stress and dissatisfaction to institutions and leads to a lack of success for Black faculty and staff. The study's main focus highlighted racial inequalities experienced by African American employees that prove to be more systemic and less about traditional racism. The feelings experienced due to the systemic disparities can leave an African American employee feeling isolated and marginalized, affecting their performance (Edwards & Ross, 2018). This is one reason Patitu and Hinton (2003) state African American faculty and staff need to find connections and support at PWI's.

Mentors are essential for faculty and staff members of color to navigate PWIs (Turner et al., 1999). Marcus (2000) observed that mentors helped new staff understand the organizational culture of a university. However, in this study, it was discovered that most staff of color do not

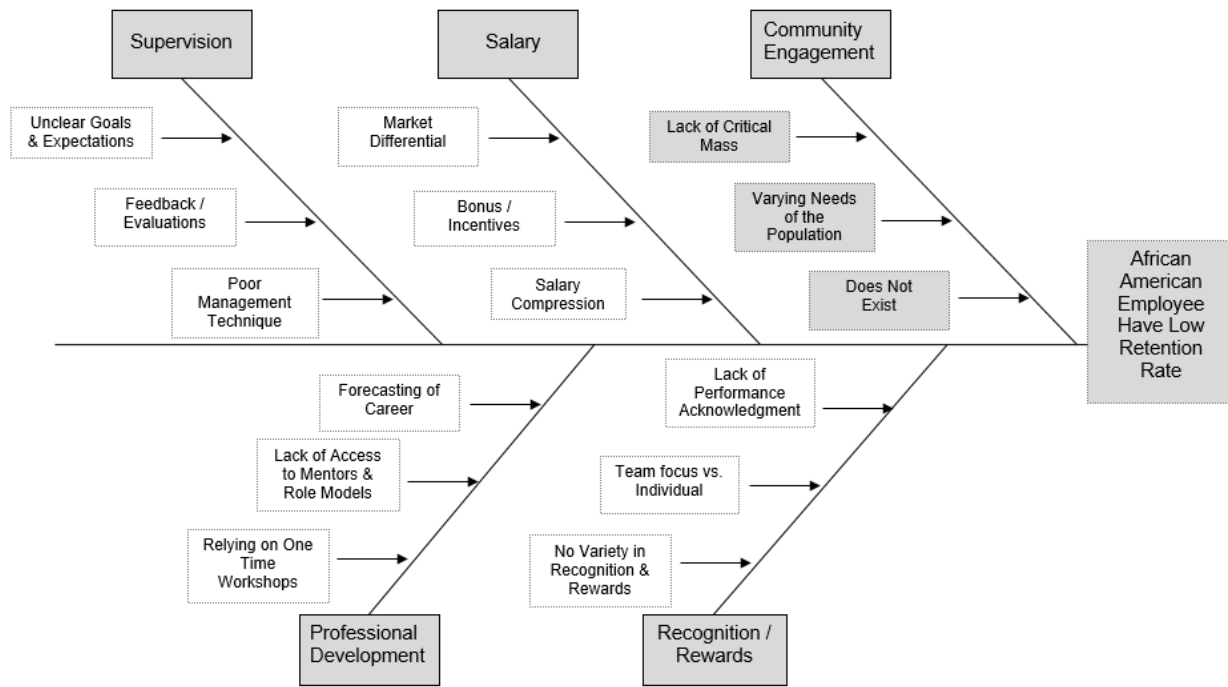
THE BLUEPRINT

experience this type of mentoring relationship or establish solid collegial relationships. Patton and Catching (2009) suggest that African American faculty and staff, specifically, said that the collegial relationships and mentorship they experienced with White counterparts were less valuable because their White colleagues could not relate to their circumstances and provide adequate feedback. Effective work relationships can help retain staff members, primarily when the links focus on personal and professional development (Turner et al. 1999).

Each study reviewed concludes that universities are lacking in their efforts to retain African American employees. The difference in the experiences has led us to study this phenomenon at WCU as the problem persists there today. Research has identified five areas that are noted to have a distinct effect on employee retention: (1) supervision, (2) professional development, (3) salary, (4) recognition/rewards, and (5) community engagement. (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Ishikawa Fishbone Diagram



Note. List of causes of employee turnover.

Based on the research of Farrel (2009); Zakai et al. (2010); Malvern et al. (2010); Palanski et al. (2014); and Leider et al. (2016), we have identified these five areas of focus that play a role in limited African American employee retention. If not addressed, we will continue this cycle of low retention among our African American employees. The differences in employees' experiences from different racial backgrounds are depicted throughout the literature; however, more research is needed to explore the specific experiences of African American employees.

Supervision

Management should be required to participate in ongoing supervisory training (Palanski et al., 2014; Leider et al., 2016). Supervisors must learn how to lead their subordinates, provide regular feedback, and conduct evaluation sessions that ensure that each employee receives adequate professional development opportunities. Supervisors must also be forward thinking by identifying their employees' needs beyond what is written in the supervisor handbook. Maslow (1970) looks at the complete physical, emotional, social, and intellectual needs of an individual and how they impact one's ability to produce. The same is expected from a good supervisor. For an employee to put their best foot forward, they have to have their basic needs met. Choosing to work in an area with limited resources can be difficult for African American employees. A supervisor should identify and connect these employees to available resources, including but not limited to haircare, churches, and cultural enrichment in the surrounding area.

Supervisors must also be ready to advocate for/speak on behalf of employees within their institution. Cardy and Lengnick-Hall (2011) state institutions could establish a networking session during the candidates' on-campus interview or onboarding meeting connecting African

THE BLUEPRINT

American employees. Cardy and Lengnick-Hall (2011) suggest that retention equity "revolves around relationships between an employee and their organization" (p. 214). Third, institutions could focus efforts on professional development. In many cases, offering non-monetary rewards such as recognition, development, and growth opportunities can help maintain a motivated workforce while at the same time keeping down labor costs (Jo, 2008). A supervisor who can provide the above mentioned will offer more robust support to African American employees.

Salary

Ensuring that employees receive an attractive compensation package is crucial to a healthy retention plan (Linz et al., 2013). A competitive salary and benefits package remain reliable indicators of how much a company values its team members, even though today's employees also consider career development and recognition valuable to their morale (Panaccio et al., 2014). With topics, such as universal healthcare discussed at the national level, employers must ensure that their company's benefits package remains competitive. Some employees use the disparities in salary and benefits as a negotiation strategy (Bae & Patterson, 2014). Many institutions offer tuition reimbursement, pet insurance, and volunteer leave as ways to distinguish themselves from other companies; they recognize that these benefits are essential for many of today's employees.

Professional Development

Regardless of why an employee comes to a company, most employees who stay with the company do so because they can envision growth opportunities. Opportunities for training and career development are crucial to employees and have been known to impact retention. Ong and Theseiras (2016) remind us that, long before they are hired, potential employees engage in skills assessment and evaluation. While training and career development are used in tandem, they are

THE BLUEPRINT

different. Training is about developing the skills necessary to discharge your day-to-day duties and should begin immediately upon hiring (Maertz & Griffeth, 2004). Career development is about forecasting your future within the company and preparing for internal advancement. By building the skills of employees, an employer is helping the company. New hires who engage in training are more likely to remain at the job and exhibit strong morale (Walk et al., 2019). An employee who remains with the company for an extended period will enjoy the benefits of their training. Even if an employee's tenure is short, the company stands to benefit from their training experience because former employees tend to share their work experiences in detail; this will likely guarantee that your company's brand is improved.

Recognition

A sense of belonging is a reliable predictor of positive employee retention. One way to cultivate a sense of belonging is for supervisors to invest time in creating a recognition culture. Ravid et al. (2017) talk about the role of recognition and job satisfaction played in improved retention. For a recognition program to succeed, it must consider everyone's contribution. Supervisors can send a group message via email, recognizing a team member's contribution and reinforcing the organization's values. Simple gifts or one's name on a recognition board can go a long way toward conveying appreciation. Compensatory time off also demonstrates gratitude. Leider et al. (2016) contend that an employee's attitude toward their job is supported through engagement, resource provisions, and old-fashioned praise at staff meetings. The latter can boost an employee's morale and inform the group that the work they are doing for the company and the team is appreciated.

Community Engagement

THE BLUEPRINT

Community engagement or sense of community was first conceptualized and defined by Sarason (1974) as “the sense that one was part of a readily available mutually supportive network of relationships upon which one could depend, and as a result of which one did not experience sustained feelings of loneliness...” (p. 1). Several years later, Alderfer and Smith (1982) describe a group as collection of individuals who maintain interdependent relations with one another, who have identified membership status, and group identity as being recognizable and established by nonmembers. A framework that is highly referenced was developed by Chavis et al. (1986), whose definition of a sense of community has four components. First, membership is defined as the feeling of belonging and of being a part of a group. Second, influence is defined as a bi-directional concept. A community can influence an individual, and the individual can impact the community. The third is the integration and fulfillment of needs, defined as reinforcement. Rewards for members help to keep a sense of unification for the individual-group membership. Fourth is shared emotional connection, defined as the ultimate expression of group membership through the member’s quality of interaction.

In the fall of 2018, there were 748,000 full-time faculty in higher education (U.S. Department of Education, 2017), of which 5.3% were African American, but they serve as just one piece of the puzzle. Overall, higher education employs 3.9 million workers (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). African American non-faculty represent 13.7% of office/clerical positions, 25.2% of service/maintenance positions, 7.6% of skilled craft positions, 11.7% of technical/paraprofessional positions, 7.9% of college and university presidents, 8.7% of senior administrators (Espinosa et al., 2019). Very little research exists about staff retention. One reason literature does not exist regarding staff retention is staff are not being asked what encourages them to remain at an institution. When an interview takes place, it is usually an exit interview

THE BLUEPRINT

during the departure process and is too late. Although these exit surveys are conducted, they are not public record, and it is then left up to the HR department to review and analyze. Data surrounding the hiring and turnover of faculty and staff have been more accessible than any data concerning retention. With the low numbers of African American faculty and staff, retention becomes an even more dire issue.

According to Kayes (2006), “Recruitment of diverse faculty and staff is not retention, so any initiatives to diversify faculty and staff that do not address hostile institutional and faculty and staff cultures will end up fueling the revolving door so common for faculty and staff of color” (p.65).

Importance of Community within the Black Community

When we think about a sense of community in the Black community, it is essential to begin with the premise that Black is a cultural identity. W.E.B. DuBois devoted his life to the resurrection of Black heritage and culture. We intentionally use the word resurrection because Black people in the United States are the only group of human beings whose culture and heritage were stripped entirely from their consciousness by the institution of enslavement.

In *The World and Africa*, DuBois says,

in defense of slavery and the slave trade, and for the uplifting of capitalistic industry and imperialistic colonialism, Africa and the Negro have been read almost out of the bounds of humanity. They lost in modern thought, their history, and their cultures. All that was human in Africa was deemed European or Asiatic. Africa was no integral part of the world because the world which raped it had to pretend that it had not harmed a man but a thing (DuBois, 1969, pp. 79-80).

THE BLUEPRINT

As we explore Black people's narrative in the United States, we find that the quest for community is central to Black life. In almost every endeavor of American society, Black people today continue to fight for equity and equality.

In *Blacks and the Quest for Economic Equality: The Political Economy of Employment in Southern Communities in the United States*, Button et al. (2009) examine the barriers that continue to persist even though Black people continue to progress. The elements hindering the quest for equality are not new. They are the foundation of some of the statements we heard from participants in the Blueprint. These include access to adequate education, employer discrimination, competitive job market, lack of support network and resources, a lack of transportation, and job training. To navigate these environments and to mitigate the impact of one or various of these issues, Black people have generationally sought the strength of community. Since Reconstruction, through Jim Crow, and the Modern Civil Right Era—arriving at today, Black people have valued community more than any other group in the United States. A fact well documented in the 2018, *You Get What You Give: The MassMutual 2018 Financial Wellness and Community Involvement Study*. The results highlighted the importance of geographic location, shared values, shared culture, and shared lifestyle in defining community. Also, they emphasize the importance of caring and looking out for one another. While nearly all reported that community involvement improves their social life, almost 50% said it positively impacted their finances. Of those involved in multiple communities, over 85% said that they were very happy with their lives as it was.

The importance of community for African Americans is unquestionable. One can argue that this legacy of building and participating in community is why members of the Blueprint engaged and why a significant number felt that being in community would not only be important

THE BLUEPRINT

to their experience but to their peace of mind. For us, we view the relationship to a sense of community and increased retention of Black faculty & staff not only as important but as symbiotic.

Higher education institutions need to focus on social justice in employment practices: addressing the employment hiring gaps. Turner and Grauerholz (2017) speak to the absence of Black men in higher education, stating the lack of Black male figures pose a severe challenge to social justice and diversity in universities. Institutions must focus on how they treat their current African American employees as there is a profound scarcity of people of color in professional positions in higher education (Turner & Grauerholz, 2017). Universities should add an equity-minded focus to the diversity minded focus because, despite the progress made around diversity, we still find that African American faculty and staff ranks do not mirror the national demographics. What is going to motivate colleges and universities to engage in equity mindedness? The issue, clearly stated, is that no group wants to lose its power and control, so the concept of social justice, equity, and equality is hard to put into practice. In this intervention, we seek to empower African Americans to understand that each time African Americans reenter the labor market through voluntary or involuntary methods, there is potential for a negative impact on their career prospects (White, 2015). We acknowledge our common humanity through social justice and demand the respect that we must show one another as we collaborate through learning, dialogue, and debate in a scholarly space.

African American employees arrive at higher education institutions with the expectation of a welcoming environment and access to the same opportunities as any other employees new to the institution. Although this is a basic expectation, this is not always the case for African American employees; this results in them wanting to leave the institution soon after arriving.

THE BLUEPRINT

Kelly et al. (2017) state that “due to hostile racial climates created by institutions, Black faculty are also placed in positions to prove their worth, or legitimacy...” (p. 307), which creates an internal struggle around competency and value. It can quickly become overwhelming for anyone transitioning into a new role, but African American professionals are consistently burdened with needing to prove they belong. Alongside proving their worth, black employees battle with feelings of being misinformed about the inclusive campus climate that may have been sold during the interview and onboarding process (Kelly et al., 2017). This ongoing battle, coupled with fit, is one reason employees of color, including Blacks, leave institutions.

Farrell (2009) highlighted different campus culture elements such as the onboarding process, employee recognition, campus traditions, behavioral norms, and employee development programs that often play an essential role in the retention of employees. Motivational factors that play critical roles include community involvement, community enrichment opportunities, and resources for family members. Kwenin (2013) states the lack of meaningful experiences and forecasting of career opportunities impact whether faculty and staff decide to stay. Many of these issues impact all employees, but some problems uniquely impact African American employee retention.

The limited African American retention has severe implications for black students who may be experiencing feelings of isolation, impostorship, and racism (Turner & Grauerholz, 2017). Specifically, African American women maintain high aspirations to be successful at work among their supervisors, colleagues, and students as they navigate through their careers.

Researchers have found that emotional tax is the additional responsibility and burden placed upon African Americans in higher education; they are called upon to serve as the representative for students in settings that are culturally unsupportive, unresponsive, and insensitive to their

needs (West, 2017). African American women have endured excruciating circumstances to gain access to education. However, the perception of second-class citizenship remains. Howard-Hamilton (2003) states that African American women had occupied marginal positions in higher education for years, and the “marginality is viewed as the ‘outsider within’ status” (p. 21). Because of the need to belong – to be validated -- Black women are always seeking a connection to the dominant group. Although progress has occurred, Black women continue navigating a space wherein they feel like imposters. All employees must feel a sense of belonging, or institutions will continue to face low retention.

Problem of Practice within the Local Context

WCU is a comprehensive regional university in the Appalachian Mountains, approximately 52 miles from Asheville and 150 miles from Charlotte, North Carolina, and Atlanta, Georgia. WCU is located in Jackson County, home to 43,938 people, according to the 2019, United States Census Bureau Quick Facts Report (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). WCU provides education to the western region of the state of North Carolina. According to the 2019 U.S Census Bureau Quick Facts Report, Jackson County's population is 80% white, 9% American Indian and Alaska Native, 6% Hispanic, 2% African American, 2% Two or More Races, and 1% Asian.

The institution prides itself on core values "committed to excellence in teaching and learning, collaboration with a respect for our communities, free and open interchange of ideas, responsible stewardship, organizational and environmental sustainability, and cultural diversity and equal opportunity" (Western Carolina University, 2020a). With over 12,000 students from 42 states and 58 countries enrolled in undergraduate and graduate programs, WCU seeks diverse employees to work with the student population, ensuring the University's mission, vision, and

THE BLUEPRINT

core values are upheld. In 2019 – 2020, WCU employed over 1603 employees: 89.93% white and 3% African American (Western Carolina University, 2020a). The issue of African American employees’ retention has been noted in an unpublished data report (Figure 2), which highlights the problem of practice that we have addressed.

Figure 2

Workforce Turnover Rate

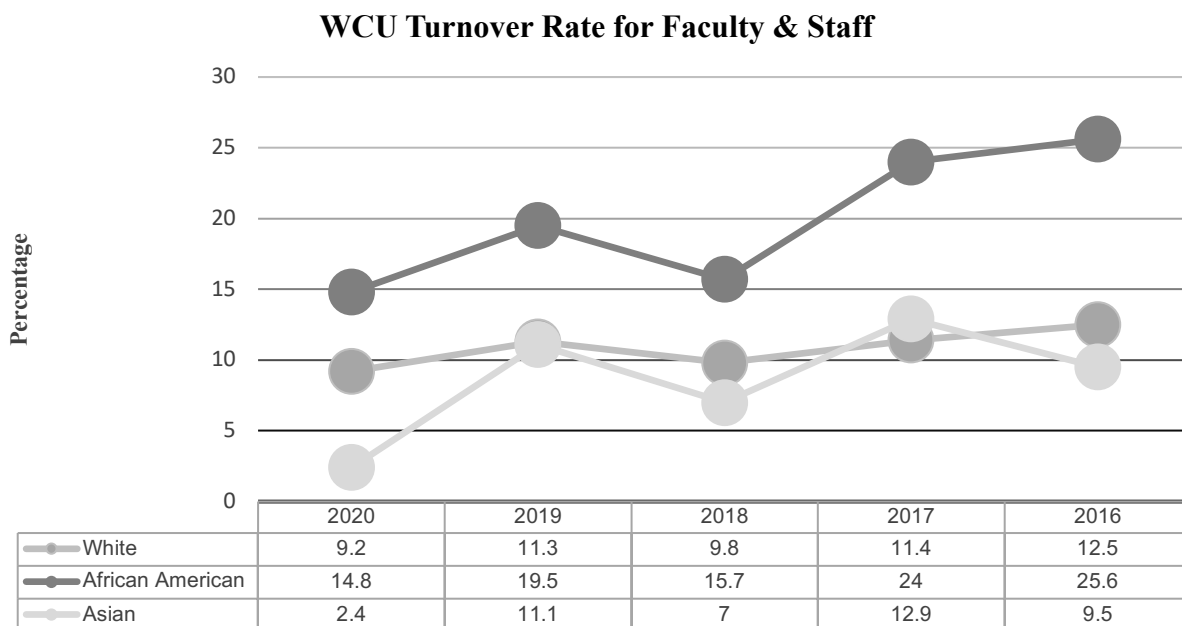
	Total				Retirements/Other				Voluntary (Excluding Retirements)				Involuntary			
	2020	2019	2018	2017	2020	2019	2018	2017	2020	2019	2018	2017	2020	2019	2018	2017
Race/Ethnic	10.0%	15.4%	14.1%	14.1%	1.2%	1.9%	0.6%	4.0%	7.0%	9.0%	9.8%	8.1%	1.8%	4.5%	4.3%	1.3%
Minority Total																
Asian	2.4%	17.7%	11.1%	7.0%	0.0%	5.9%	0.0%	2.3%	0.0%	5.9%	2.2%	4.7%	2.4%	5.9%	8.9%	0.0%
Black	14.8%	19.5%	15.7%	24.0%	3.7%	0.0%	0.0%	2.0%	11.1%	12.2%	13.7%	18.0%	0.0%	7.3%	2.0%	4.0%
Hispanic	10.6%	16.3%	20.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	5.3%	11.6%	13.3%	0.0%	5.3%	4.7%	6.7%	0.0%
American Indian	15.4%	21.4%	5.9%	26.3%	0.0%	7.1%	0.0%	21.0%	15.4%	14.3%	5.9%	5.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
White	9.2%	11.3%	9.8%	11.4%	2.9%	2.5%	3.2%	3.8%	6.0%	6.9%	5.1%	5.5%	1.3%	1.9%	1.5%	2.1%
Two or More	5.7%	0.0%	7.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	5.7%	0.0%	4.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.3%	0.0%
Female	8.2%	12.4%	11.6%	13.8%	2.6%	3.1%	3.2%	4.4%	4.6%	7.0%	6.9%	6.8%	1.0%	2.3%	1.5%	2.6%

Note. Displays the turnover rate at WCU from 2017 - 2020 by race.

A more in-depth chart (Figure 3) demonstrates that the turnover rate for African American faculty and staff at WCU was 25.6 % in 2016, 24% in 2017, 15.7% in 2018, 19.5% in 2019, and 14.8% in 2020 (Western Carolina University, 2020a). A more in-depth observation of the same report reveals that the African American employee departure currently remains among the highest at 14.8% versus 10% of all minorities and 9.2% white employees (Western Carolina University, 2020a). These data serve as a launching pad for us to analyze key factors associated with employee retention.

Figure 3

Summary of Faculty and Staff Turnover



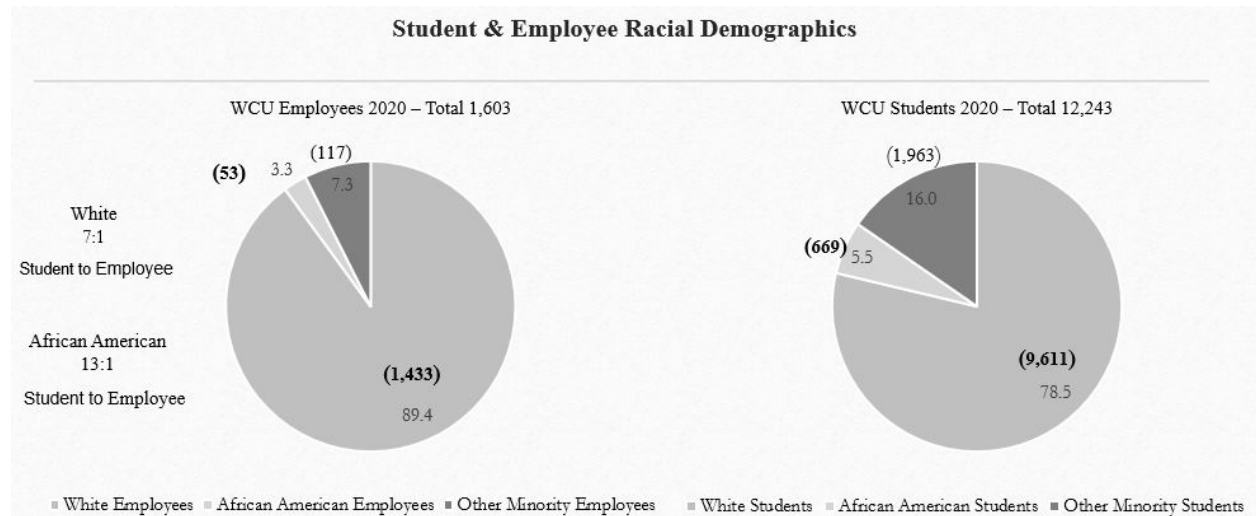
Note. Summary of turnover rate for faculty and staff at WCU from 2016 - 2020.

Between 2018 and 2019, WCU enhanced the 2020 strategic plan to include an initiative celebrating inclusive excellence, which was timely. There is an increase in students of color enrolling in colleges and universities each year. African American student enrollment increased from 1.5 million to 2.7 million from 2000 to 2010 -- a 73% increase (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Students attend colleges and universities searching for educational and development experiences that will help them succeed in today's global society. From the moment, they step foot on campus, they are greeted by new, midlevel, and seasoned professionals who shape their experience. Suppose students are expected to learn in a diverse environment through a variety of perspectives. In that case, institutions must ensure that representation of all racial, religious, and cultural backgrounds is present within the staff and valued.

Figure 4 offers a comparison between employees (faculty and staff) and students at WCU.

Figure 4

Student and Employee Racial Demographics



Note. Comparison of 2020 student to employee racial demographics at WCU.

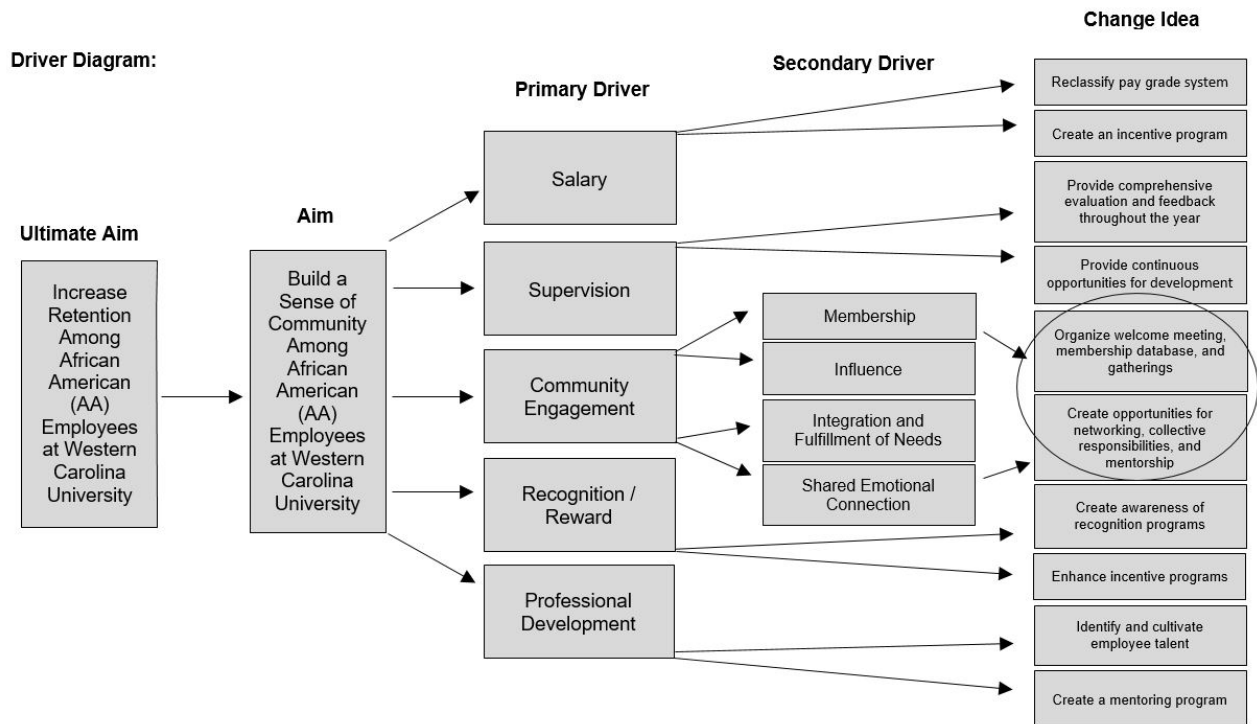
Theory of Improvement

While turnover occurs, and is necessary for any organization's growth and development, WCU's retention rate for African American employees is below the national average. Figure 5, a driver diagram (Byrk et al., 2015), highlights five research areas that we identified as critical to African American employee retention. The areas are supervision, salary, community engagement, professional development, and recognition. For this intervention, we focused on community engagement. Within community engagement, we focused on two areas: (1) membership and (2) integration and fulfillment of needs.

Figure 5

THE BLUEPRINT

Driver Diagram



Note. Displays an illustration of the aim as it relates to drivers and change ideas.

Membership can be geographically demarcated and can also be ascribed to a similar collective interest. According to McMillan and Chavis (1986), membership has five attributes (boundaries, common symbol systems, emotional safety, sense of belonging and identification, and personal investment) that engage with one another, creating a sense of membership. McMillan (1996) expanded on membership, emphasizing the “spirit” of the community, and comfortability that derives from the “spark” of friendship (p. 315). While boundaries can be firm or flexible, they are necessary to distinguish between who is and who is not a member of the community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Membership can be defined with one symbol or many symbols such as letters in fraternities, uniforms worn by sports teams, colors representing gang affiliation, or crosses in Christianity (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Other characteristics of membership include a sense of emotional and/or physical safety. In a community where a

THE BLUEPRINT

relationship is established, a member would feel comfortable to create friendships with those to whom they can speak truthfully. Once a bond is formed, members are more likely to make a personal investment in monetary form, and take emotional risks for the group. These aspects deepen each member's identity as part of the community creating a sense of belonging (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). This component leads members to develop a shared emotional connection that is one of the four major elements McMillan and Chavis (1986) identified as necessary in building a sense of community.

Integration and fulfillment of needs refer to how a community shares similar values and shared community resources. When their needs are met, individuals participate in the community. Members of the community find that by connecting, their needs are met. There is a transparent exchange of resources, skills, and knowledge provided by members. Each potential member has to provide something that the community desires for them to be embraced as members of the community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Integration and fulfillment of needs recognizes the importance of diverse perspectives and the opportunity to learn from one another. By accepting differences and building on the strengths of each person's gifts and talents, the community grows in value. The result of this exchange adds wealth to the entire group in tangible and intangible ways. As members grow to value one another, they develop a sense of trust that leads them to influence each other. Influence is the last element of the four pieces needed to build a sense of belonging (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

Our theory of improvement states that formalized community engagement opportunities, designed to create membership and enhance integration and fulfillment of needs, provided by the University to African American employees, will increase job satisfaction, community engagement, and career forecasting. This, we suggest, will increase African American employee

retention, benefiting students, faculty, staff, and the institution. Campbell and Campbell (2007) stated that mentoring relationships between African American faculty, staff, and African American undergraduate students resulted in higher GPAs, increased graduation rates, and additional enrolled semesters for mentors and mentees.

Chavis et al. (1986) propose building a sense of community utilizing (1) membership, (2) influence, (3) integration and fulfillment of needs, and (4) shared emotional connection. To increase African American employee retention at WCU, employees need to feel connected to their colleagues, institutions, and the surrounding community. We proposed that if formalized community engagement opportunities are afforded to new and current African American employees, this population's retention rate will increase.

Improvement Methodology

After reviewing the various components of a sense of community through Brunswick's lens, a model that provided us with a good way to determine the shared experiences within an African American university community, we decided that for this intervention, we would focus on two principal drivers for change, Membership and Integration, and Fulfillment of Needs (Chavis et al. 1986). For our intervention, Membership and Integration and Fulfillment of Needs lend themselves best to building and sustaining community and belonging. The proposed improvement initiative was implemented in Western North Carolina, engaging WCU's African American employees. It included a sense of belonging and identification, personal investment, boundaries, a sense of comfortability, the spirit of the community, emotional safety, and common symbols – all of which provide a method for social connectivity and community engagement capacity. We believe that giving an intentional opportunity for membership into a

THE BLUEPRINT

supportive African American community of educators, consisting of specific activities, support, and professional development, will establish a sense of community.

McMillian and Chavis (1986) define a sense of community as "a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together" (p.9). We seek to integrate and fulfill the needs of the African American community through further engagement. A member's needs for status, development and growth, friendship, and knowledge will be met through connections with other members (McMillian & Chavis, 1986).

Membership was granted to all individuals who identified as a member of the African American community. As part of membership, individuals participated in activities that were not part of their normal work routine. The short-term goals involved online meetings and social gatherings that took place monthly during the summer. These gatherings consisted of the onboarding meeting, a lunch for the members, a meeting with the Chief Diversity Officer to provide knowledge concerning the African American faculty, staff, and student population, an online social gathering (dinner, game night, karaoke, and any other events) determined through interviews and surveys and an opportunity for collective professional development. The long-term goal for collective professional development happened due to organized community engagement activities that provided members with networking opportunities, which led to professional collaborations amongst African American employees. Membership afforded African American employees continuous access to a community providing integration and leading to the fulfillment of personal and professional needs.

Each member brought skills to the group that allowed the community to grow in value. To this end, we invoked a formalized process that was research-based and deployed strategically

to increase job satisfaction and an individual's career forecasting ability. Our ultimate aim was to increase African American employee retention at WCU.

Literature Review of Improvement Initiative

Sarason (1974) developed the first construct of a sense of community to recognize the value of community life and the power of establishing close relationships with members of the community. Sarason maintained that a sense of community was not an objective experience but instead a subjective experience related to membership's emotions. Townley and Kloos (2009) identified the absence of a sense of community as being correlated to psychological suffering, abandonment, and isolation. The theoretical model with four dimensions: (1) membership, (2) influence, (3) integration and fulfillment of needs, and (4) shared emotional connection was developed by McMillan and Chavis in 1986. In this model, the authors describe a sense of community as a shared emotion that provides a notion of association or belonging -- an idea that members of the group are important to other members (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Colombo et al. (2001) say that authors highlighted a significant level of consistency and similarity concerning the group's values. Fisher and Sonn (2007) describe the membership component of a sense of community as one that argues that communities establish boundaries around the notion of who can be a member and who cannot. According to Mannarini and Fedi (2009), McMillan and Chavis' model on the sense of community has prevailed as the predominant theoretical foundation for work in this field.

The common element in the community's definitions frequently references physical contexts, activities, and social, cultural, and psychological processes that take place between them (Wiesenfeld, 1996). Another definition of community states that it is a place of belonging and orientation with aspects of space, positionality, place, points of view, and action (Chaskin &

Richman, 1992). According to Mannarini and Fedi (2009), community psychologists most often utilize the concept of a sense of community.

References to neighborhoods or geographical spaces were not part of the explicit sense of community ideological construct. Research on the sense of community that has empirically explored neighborhoods or geographic areas as the community has been conducted at various levels from blocks to entire cities (e.g., Brodsky, et al., 1999; Davidson & Cotter, 1989; Perkins et al., 1990; Prezza et al., 2001; Puddifoot, 2003). The broad nature of the sense of community model allows for its application to political, leisure, or employment organizational structures. The work of Bellah et al. (1985) indicates that for some people, neighborhoods, or geographical spaces as a community are not as important. Gustfield (1975) showed that people prefer connecting around liked interests as opposed to physical spaces such as neighborhoods. The work of Prezza and Costantini (1998) highlights that in metropolitan/urban spaces, interactions are valued and interest-based rather than being based upon geographical needs. Safety and similarities are not uncommon to people when they are engaged in common community development. Individuals tend to gravitate to others who are like themselves. For some individuals, locating a safe place with similar people who share the same values and ways of thinking allows for the existence of an individual's authentic self (McMillan, 1996). When we consider that people from similar and different locations engage with one another to attain mutual goals, we are describing how associations function. In doing so, we are identifying associations as forms of community.

Whether they are local or national associations, people become members out of an interest in working with others who share the same interest and are driven by a mutual contributing desire (ASAE, 2015). The associations offer annual opportunities for members to

THE BLUEPRINT

get together and interact. In these spaces, association members can come together and experience a sense of community and belonging. Beauchamp (2014) references trade articles and simple examples of how members of associations come to these meetings with an expectation of reconnecting with a community to which they belong. Godar and O'Connor (2001) provide an example, referencing trade professionals, who participate in these meetings because they need to establish long term relationships and end up developing a personal connection that they miss. In this era where technology plays a big part in our daily lives, and many individuals are virtually connected, the community is central to many individuals' daily interactions.

Improvement Initiative Design

Our improvement initiative is the implementation of a social group called “The Blueprint.” Shawn Carter, also known as Jay-Z, is one of the world’s bestselling hip hop artists. Early in his career, he created a three-series album entitled the Blueprint. It received universal acclaim from music critics. In 2019, the Library of Congress selected the album series for preservation in the National Recording Registry for being culturally, historically, and aesthetically significant. The album was released on September 11, 2001. The impact of this day did not minimize the album sales. He sold half a million albums and went on to break records. This album did not define him as an artist but instead played a role in him becoming a legend. Jay-Z sampled vintage soul music, such as “I Want You Back” by the Jackson 5 and “Free at Last” by Al Green. His innovation in sampling other music allowed many people from different walks of life to connect to his music. He utilized a familiar sound and capitalized on it. Ultimately that was our goal for the Blueprint and why we chose the name. We used community engagement, something we can all identify with, as a catalyst to increase retention at WCU through our series of membership and integration and fulfillment of needs events.

THE BLUEPRINT

This group is being designed to build a sense of community among African American employees at WCU. The Blueprint had two focus areas: (1) membership and (2) integration and fulfillment of needs. Membership consists of five primary attributes: established boundaries, emotional safety, personal investment, and a sense of belonging and identification, and common symbols. Chavis et al. (1986) state that these five work together to identify who is a part of the group and who is not. McMillian (1996) expanded on these five, stating a sense of comfortability and the community's spirit were also very important attributes. Established boundaries set the members apart from nonmembers. These boundaries may be flexible or rigid but clearly define membership. Emotional safety is attributed to the relationship built when security is established to speak the truth and make friends. Personal investment derives from the established boundaries and feelings of emotional safety. A member is loyal to a group because one feels desired by the community. A sense of belonging deepens due to the acceptance felt by other members and the bond to this community. Boyd and Nowell (2018) state that healthy organizations include a sense of community, the ability and willingness to assist others, and a sense of belonging. Integration and fulfillment of needs are related to the members' collective responsibility for one another's needs. Events and activities were organized based on the established needs of the individuals who are a part of the Blueprint. Chavis et al. (1986) state that "a strong community is able to fit people together so that people meet the needs of others while meeting their own" (p. 25).

Disquisitioner Bias

Bias is unavoidable in research, regardless of the method used. From the conception of the improvement idea to the execution of the improvement science initiative, there was bias because we wanted to improve something. As the Chief Diversity Officer at Western Carolina University and a veteran of higher education with over 20 years of work experience in the field,

THE BLUEPRINT

Ricardo Nazario-Colón finds it challenging to set aside his journey when he is engaged in retention and community building. As a young professional, Nazario-Colón never sought for the institution to support his ability to survive and navigate the institution. His cultural context was always anchored in his home life, which he was able to establish in a way that provided all that he needed to be comfortable. Today, Nazario-Colón utilized the same approach to his career. Nazario-Colón's work is separate from his personal life. He is aware of what the surrounding community offers and what it does not offer. There are days when he feels a desire for more, but those days are rare and do not significantly negatively impact his daily life. His ability to adjust to his environment through tempered expectations has allowed him to feel comfortable in his work environment and carved out space in his living environment.

As the Associate Director of Intercultural Affairs Department, Tacquice Wiggan Davis focuses on diversity and inclusion. Her emotional investment in this work leads Davis to feel the same as the participants because she is a community member. Throughout her career, Davis has had to learn to separate her personal and professional feelings, although at times they intersect tremendously. The same was true during the improvement initiative process. Bias in research can promote misrepresentation and distorted results if we are not aware and mindful throughout the process. For that reason, we have put measures in place to help limit bias, such as pseudonyms for each participant, identified specific roles for Nazario-Colón and Davis, and we reviewed the improvement initiative with the design team and committee.

Design Team

With University and Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, our improvement initiative began in summer 2020. Before the implementation of the intervention, we assembled a design team. A design team is an intentionally selected advisory group of stakeholders who help

THE BLUEPRINT

shape the improvement initiative project. This advisory role provided another lens to help identify the gaps or tweak improvement initiatives. The group members for this improvement initiative represented various individuals from a diverse cross-section of campus, i.e., Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, Athletics, and employment longevity. It consisted of the Associate Provost, Director of Intercultural Affairs, Associate Vice Chancellor for Administration, Assistant Director of Student Community Ethics, and the Women's Assistant Basketball Coach.

Dr. Brandon Schwab, Associate Provost, has served the institution for six years. He oversees faculty reappointment, tenure, promotion, post-tenure review processes, faculty credentials, new faculty orientation, faculty development, and coordinates distinguished and endowed professor networking and support. Dr. Dana Patterson, Director of Intercultural Affairs, has been with the institution for three years and has been in higher education for 25 years. Her mission is to promote inclusive social justice values and human dignity while preparing students to thrive in a diverse and interconnected world. Jane Adams-Dunford, Associate Vice Chancellor for Administration, has served the institution for over 25 years. She currently oversees Marketing & Assessment and the Kneedler Child Development Center, in the division of student affairs, and has been a matriarch for African American students, faculty, and staff for decades. Devon Moss, Assistant Director for Student Community Ethics, came to Western one year ago. He strives to make Western Carolina University a positive living and learning environment through outreach and education to the University and surrounding community. Megan Brown, Assistant Women's Basketball Coach, joined the Athletic Department one year ago. She is passionate about her students achieving in the classroom and on the court. The design team provided valuable feedback regarding our improvement initiative. Individual and group interviews were held with each member to gather ideas about the types of social gatherings, professional

THE BLUEPRINT

collaborations, and general support that may be needed at WCU among African American employees to build a sense of community.

Timeline

The data gathered from these interviews assisted with a baseline for the implementation initiatives and the overall intervention known as the Blueprint. The multiphase intervention roughly occurred over a 60-day cycle consisting of two 30-day PDSA cycles. The cycles were conducted in June and July of 2020. Before the first phase, we acquired the contact information for all African American employees at WCU. An individualized email invitation (Appendix A) was sent to participate in the Blueprint to all African American employees. The invitation email also included a description of the program, a consent form (see Appendix B), and a unique pseudonym for each participant.

Once an employee agreed to participate in the Blueprint, they received an official Blueprint membership email providing directions to engage with the Sense of Community Index II (SCI II). The SCI II survey is a 24-item instrument (seen in Appendix C) created by David W. McMillan and David M. Chavis that considers new advances in the field, the sense of community theory, and the subsequent research. Additionally, the email directed participants to gain access to the membership database and logistics to the membership event. Simultaneously an initial focus group was conducted to supplement the pre-SCI-II survey information.

During each PDSA cycle or phase, we held one membership event and one fulfillment of needs event. The membership events involved an initial welcome meeting and an online social gathering. Each membership event was designed to increase the sense of belonging, implement a sense of identification with one another, and create emotional safety for each participant. The first fulfillment of needs event during PDSA cycle one involved a luncheon centered around two

THE BLUEPRINT

different activities. The second fulfillment of needs event during PDSA cycle two was designed to provide community members with information surrounding diversity issues on campus. Each fulfillment of needs event provided participants with an opportunity to collaborate with colleagues to advance their professional and personal growth.

Data were collected directly following phase one utilizing the subscales of the SCI II survey. The subscales helped us gather information on the reinforcement of needs, membership, influence, and shared emotional connections during the improvement initiative. After the second phase, the post-SCI II Index survey was administered right after the 60-day intervention culminated. A post focus group took place at this time.

The PDSA cycle began with the Plan stage, which consisted of the design team meeting to review, provide feedback, and finalize the survey. Also, we assessed the surveys used to gather data from the current African American employees. These data were used to shape the Blueprint activities. Participants were asked to review and sign the consent form and were allowed to ask any questions. When they decided to join, we began with the “Do” stage of the cycle. In this stage, we hosted The Blueprint welcome meeting and collected participant information. Each participant took the pre-survey called the SCI II survey via Qualtrics™, an online software. This survey took approximately 25 minutes. This same survey was administered at the end of the Blueprint improvement initiative 60-day cycle. There was a series of activities (two each month) geared toward establishing membership and integration and fulfillment of needs. Membership activities included the development of the membership database and two planned social gatherings. Integration and fulfillment of needs activities included a luncheon, meeting with WCU’s Chief Diversity Officer, and the opportunity to develop mentorship through a professional networking event. All events took place online and were facilitated by us.

THE BLUEPRINT

A five-minute post-subscale survey was administered using Qualtrics™ to participants during the first 30-day PDSA cycle of each membership and integration and fulfillment of needs event. The post-subscale survey was generated from the SCI II survey. A pre-and post-focus group was also conducted at the beginning and end of the 60-day cycle. At the end of this “Do” phase, we evaluated all the information collected and then moved on to the “Study” phase of the Blueprint improvement initiative. In this stage, we reviewed, compared, and analyzed the information gathered. Participants were not required to take any actions during this stage. Next, the “Act” phase provided us with an opportunity to make changes or adjustments needed to inform the next PDSA cycle. During the remaining 30 days /1-month, we repeated the PDSA cycle. To ensure we gathered the most information, we recorded the sessions. Each participant was notified and asked to sign a recording waiver before phase one. We were able to stop the study or remove participants at any time if it was in the best interest of the improvement initiative. These actions could have been taken without the participants’ consent. A complete schedule for the membership and integration and fulfillment of needs activities are included in the consent form (See Appendix B). The following visualization (Figure 6) demonstrates how each event was arranged in the timeline. We also created a detailed timeline (see Appendix D).

THE BLUEPRINT

Figure 6

Improvement Initiative Implementation Timeline

Improvement Initiative Implementation Timeline	January	February	June	July
Design Team				
Design Team Meetings				
Data Collection				
Pre - Sense of Community Index II (SCI II)				
Pre - Focus Group				
The Blueprint - Membership				
TakeOver - Welcome Meeting				
Membership Album - Database of Membership				
Post - Subscale SCI II				
Breathe Easy Gathering				
The Blueprint - Integration & Fulfillment of Needs				
All I Need - Luncheon				
I Did it My Way - Mentorship Part 1				
Post - Subscale SCI II				
As One - Chief Diversity Officer Meeting				
I Did It My Way - Mentorship Part 2				
Data Collection				
Post - Sense of Community Index II				
Post - Focus Group				
Data Analysis (SPSS; Paired Sample t-test)				
(2) 30 Day PDSA Cycles				

Note. Timeline for implementation of community building strategy.

Benchmarks:

1. The sense of community of the members of the Blueprint will increase by 25% from the pre-survey results in the post-survey results.
2. The sense of job satisfaction of the members of the Blueprint will increase by 25% from the pre-survey results to the post-survey results.
3. The engagement in professional collaboration of the members of the Blueprint will increase by 25% from the pre-survey results to the post-survey results.

Evaluation of Improvement Initiative

The science of improvement states that an organization's success is based on its "will to improve, ideas for improvement, and the skills to execute the changes" (Langley et. al., 2009, p.5). These three factors, coupled with three questions, influence the foundational framework for improvement. Langley et al. (2009) present these three fundamental questions in their model for improvement: "What are we trying to accomplish? How will we know that a change is an improvement? What changes can we make that will result in improvement?" (p. 24). This improvement initiative is designed to increase African American employee retention at WCU. As part of the summative and formative evaluation measures, pre-surveys and post-surveys were administered to collect data during each improvement cycle. Pre- and post-focus groups were also conducted to gather information.

The Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle (Langley et al., 2009) was utilized throughout the Blueprint implementation. Langley et al. (2009) identified three questions, and the PDSA cycle as a framework for the model of improvement was used for an efficient trial, error, and learning methodology. Summative and formative evaluation measures were used to determine what aspects of the improvement initiative remained and what needed to be removed (Langley et al., 2009). After all data were gathered, we analyzed and ran a paired sample t-test.

Improvement Initiative Methodology

Improvement Science

By enhancing organizational capacity, researchers seeking to stave off the wave of research-based intervention failures focus their efforts on the discipline of improvement science (Lewis, 2015). This approach relies on the quick assessment of change to guide the progress, modifications, and continued careful adjustments of new devices, procedures, work-roles, and

THE BLUEPRINT

relationships. Fundamental to this intervention is the work of Byrk et al. (2016), who established the core principles for improvement science:

1. Make the work problem-specific and user-centered. In other words, what specific problem are we trying to solve?
2. Variation in performance is the core problem to address. Here we focus on what works, for whom, and under what set of conditions.
3. See the system that produces the current outcomes. To improve something, you must fully understand it.
4. We cannot improve a scale that we cannot measure. We must be ready to measure expected and unexpected outcomes.
5. Anchor practice improvement in disciplined inquiry. The Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) is an efficient tool to help us learn, fail, and improve quickly.
6. Accelerate improvements through networked communities. By engaging others in the improvement process, we can accomplish more.

The Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) model provides a disciplined approach to research that is essential to improvement. The PDSA cycle is an iterative four-step management method used for systematic inquiry and continuous improvement of processes. In improvement science, an empirical assessment will advise PDSA cycles, rely on theoretical frameworks to guide improvement, and collect data to inform, guide, and analyze changes quickly. Two PDSA cycles were implemented to actuate the designated change ideas. Through data analysis and the engagement of the current and new populations of African American employees, we were able to (1) receive feedback to better understand the needs of the community, (2) improve the second cycle and (3) address unexpected adverse events.

THE BLUEPRINT

The Blueprint was designed as a community engagement group specifically for African American faculty and staff. We did not see a lack of participation from members of the African American community due to their partners, friends, and individuals identified as their support system feeling ostracized. Professionals' tenure status may negatively impact participation if their varying needs are not being fulfilled by the engagement activity. The needs of professionals at universities are based in part, on their longevity at the institution. Professionals will have varying needs, based, in part, on the length of their tenure at the University. Depending on the activity presented, a member may decide not to attend if they do not see the benefits. To determine if an applied change idea results in improvement, we engaged practical measurement principles by way of explaining the driver, process, balancing, and outcome measures.

The results of this intervention could be used to positively impact African American employee retention at WCU. The insight gained from this intervention could help administrators create professional development opportunities for employees to ensure that retention strategies are implemented with fidelity and sustainability. The findings of this intervention may lead to positive social change by helping administrators gain insight into how to better meet all employees' needs through retention strategies, which may enhance the overall work experience of all employees, and in turn, improve employee retention.

COVID-19 Impact

The Blueprint, sense of belonging, was designed as a face-to-face improvement initiative but quickly shifted to an online endeavor due to the Coronavirus outbreak, which eventually turned into the COVID-19 Pandemic. At WCU, we began to pay attention to the evolving crisis from abroad in late February 2020. By early March 2020, the University leadership was fielding inquiries from faculty and staff regarding our action plan. In mid-March, during the spring break

THE BLUEPRINT

period, the University leadership, in consultation with the North Carolina University System Office (The System), decided to extend spring break for one more week. The University mobilized all of its resources to convert face-to-face instruction into an online modality. Faculty and staff had less than seven days to complete this monumental task. Within days of the leadership's decision to extend spring break, we informed students they would not be returning to campus.

The pandemic had officially entrenched itself in the United States, bringing forth daily news of its impact on friends, family, community members, and colleagues. In a courageous effort to save lives, millions quarantined and participated in coordinated isolation for months to slow down the spread of the deadly virus. Social and physical distancing became one of the most imperative measures put in place to protect individuals. Houses of worship, public schools, colleges, universities, and many other establishments canceled face-to-face events, business transactions, and services and began developing alternative and remote endeavors. These mandated actions directly impacted the improvement initiative we outlined for the Blueprint. As these life-saving measures persisted, we questioned how to continue with our initiative, how to improve community building while in social isolation, and how to try to maintain a sense of community while being physically apart.

Instead of delaying the start of our improvement initiative, we saw this as an opportunity to develop a true sense of community during what had become a crisis for current generations. We saw it as appropriate to begin our initiative online and build a sense of belonging when members of the African American community were feeling further marginalized. Given the nature of our improvement initiative, which was centered around group activities, we converted each of our face-to-face activities into online mirrors of each activity. To facilitate our ability to

THE BLUEPRINT

engage and build a sense of community online, we purchased an individual license of Zoom™ online video conferencing and upgraded our personal internet service provider subscriptions to ensure we had a robust connectivity experience and full control of the transcript.

Participants

The size of our research population consisted of 53 African American employees. Of the 28 (over 50%) employees that engaged with our improvement initiative, 18 identified as female, one as cisgender-female, and nine as male. There were 19 staff and 9 faculty members. The average age was 37, and the median was 35. The participants hailed from 14 different states — North Carolina led with six and Alabama had four. Nine other primary residential locations were identified, including three from out of state. Eleven participants identified Cullowhee, NC, as their primary residence and seven claimed Sylva, NC. Nine held doctorates, 11 possessed master's degrees, seven had a bachelor's degree, and one was a high school graduate. The earliest degree was conferred in 1974 and the most recent was in 2020. The majority (22) of the participants have been at the University for five years or less, with just two participants being there 20 or more years. Of the faculty who participated, six were assistant professors, one was an associate professor, one was a full professor, and one was an adjunct professor. Ten out of the 28 participants indicated that they own their current place of residence. Of the 10, eight were married, seven had children, and seven shared the Christian faith. Of the 18 that indicated they were single, 15 rented their current residential place, and three selected “other” as their current place of residence. Only four of the single participants indicated that they had children.

During the Blueprint, we worked diligently to ensure our members felt safe and secure when sharing information. Although we could not guarantee total confidentiality, we took additional measures to protect the rights, welfare, and identity of the Blueprint members. They

THE BLUEPRINT

presented rich, detailed accounts of their feelings and experiences that spoke to membership and integration and fulfillment of needs. Throughout the following sections, specifically the qualitative data analysis, we share direct responses and quotes from the participants. We replaced each participant's name with a pseudonym. We used non-binary pronouns and identifiers, third-person language when appropriate, and changed the department where a participant worked. Also, we changed gender-specific nouns to gender-neutral nouns and changed participants' geographical locations to no descriptive locations to avoid confidentiality dilemmas.

Formative Evaluation of Improvement Methodology

During the Blueprint, community-building initiative, there was a need to formally assess membership and fulfillment of needs to gauge its success amongst the African American faculty and staff at WCU. We utilized a mixed-method approach and employed both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to gather information. We used driver, processing, balancing, and outcome measures throughout the improvement initiative (Langley et al., 2009).

Driver Measures

Driver measures predict the outcome measures and assess the change. Increases in job satisfaction, sense of community, collective responsibility, and professional collaboration among African American employees were expected changes in this intervention. The initial data were collected using the pre-Sense of Community Index II survey and pre-focus group. The Sense of Community Index II has been the most frequently used measure in the social sciences to gauge a sense of community. For this intervention, we conducted one post-sub-scale survey per activity during cycle one. After PDSA cycle two, we completed a final post-SCI II and a post focus group. To compare the pre-and post-test, we used a paired sample t-test to estimate the change in membership and integration and fulfillment of needs among the African American employees.

THE BLUEPRINT

Process Measures

We have strategically outlined events for membership and integration and fulfillment of needs throughout the 60-day improvement initiative. Each PDSA cycle lasted 30 days. At each event within a PDSA cycle, we took attendance, utilized participant observation, and relied on the post subscale SCI II to ensure we followed the improvement initiative protocol.

Balancing Measures

A three-item questionnaire was developed (see Appendix E). It was administered to participants during the post focus group about the possibilities of unintended adverse effects of their blueprint participation. The items spoke to home, work, and mental health. Events and activities were tracked to ensure that growth-developing strategies did not have an unexpected adverse effect on participants.

Outcome Measures

Outcome measurements operationalize what it means to improve by explaining the problem through data analysis and evaluation. The ultimate aim of this intervention was to build community and to increase retention among African American faculty and staff at WCU. By implementing the SCI II, we evaluated the merit of the intervention. We measured their sense of community to demonstrate how the lack of sense of community impacted African Americans' retention. Employing the same measures at the end of the cycle revealed the success or shortfall of the improvement initiative.

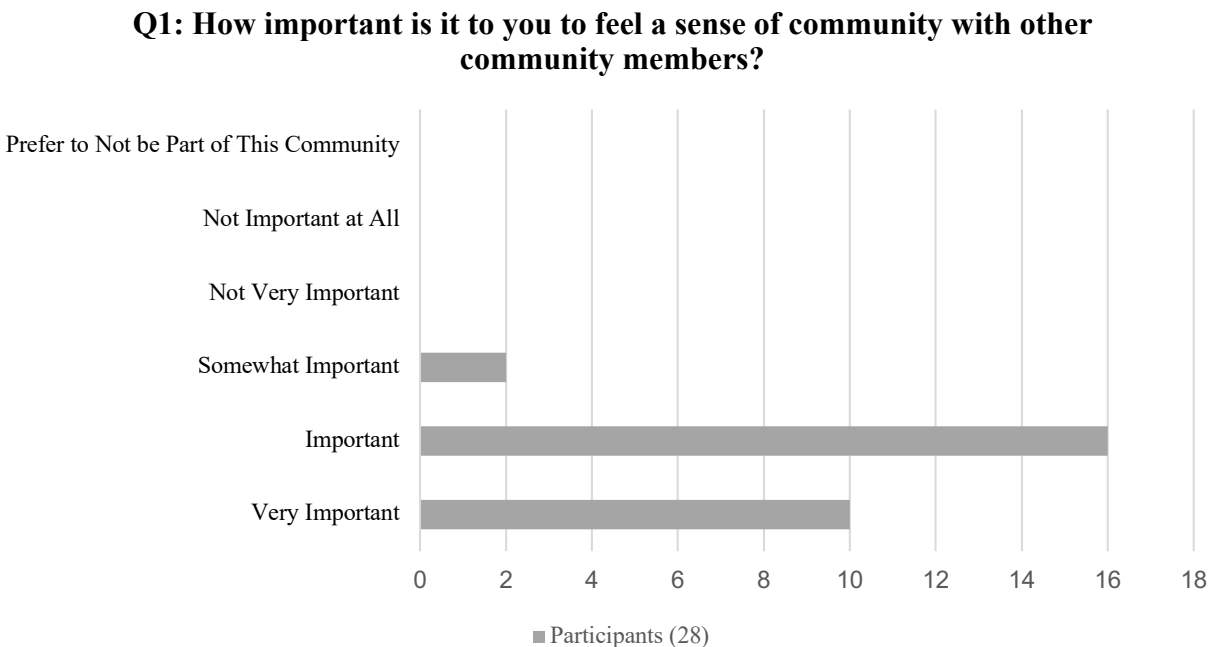
The first process measure used at the beginning and end of the initiative was a pre-and post-focus group. The second process measure used throughout was McMillian and Chavis SCI II survey and subscales of the survey to determine if the improvement was successful and to track participant completion. Data were also derived from observational research. Throughout

THE BLUEPRINT

the membership, integration and fulfillment of needs activities, we observed members in a natural setting, which revealed penetrating insights unavailable through focus group questions and the SCI II survey. DeWALT and DeWALT (2002) believe that "the goal for design of research using participant observation as a method is to develop a holistic understanding of the phenomena under study that is as objective and accurate as possible given the limitations of the method" (p.92). We were fortunate that there were two of us, as this allowed our roles to interchange throughout the improvement initiative. As one disquisitioner facilitated the group activity, the other maintained the role of participant-observer. In the participant-observer stance, we are members of the group being studied, and the group is aware of the research activity (DeWALT & DeWALT, 2002).

Figure 7

McMillian and Chavis SCI II Question 1 Scale



Note. Display of the Blueprint members' answers to the SCI II question one.

THE BLUEPRINT

Research has demonstrated that a sense of community is one of the most critical factors needed for individuals' emotional, physical, and social well-being. This intervention utilized Chavis and McMillan's SCI II, based on their sense of seminal community work (Chavis et al., 1986). As seen in Figure 7, the 28 members who participated in the Blueprint indicated that a sense of community was either somewhat important (2 members), important (16 members, or very important (10 members). Chavis and McMillan employ four elements: membership, influence, integration, fulfillment of needs, and a shared emotional connection (Chavis et al., 1986). This tool is the most widely used measurement of a sense of community instrument by practitioners. The full survey was issued to all members, and the results can be seen in the summative section.

Membership activity one, the “Blueprint Takeover” included a welcome meeting and the creation of the database of participants known as the “Membership Album.” Information such as age, educational status, city of residence, tenure at WCU and more was obtained. Fulfillment of Needs activity one, “All I Need” followed which was a luncheon where each member received a delivered meal from the disquisitioners. They also participated in a ‘get to know you’ icebreaker and had an opportunity to help design part one of a faculty and staff mentoring program known as “I Did It My Way.” The third event was the second membership activity, “Breathe Easy” which was a social gathering consisting of an evening of engaging activities to get to know one another on a deeper level. The final event was the second fulfillment of needs activity, “As One.” This event included an informative meeting with the Chief Diversity officer (CDO) and the second part of the mentoring program, “I Did It My Way.” For this intervention, we utilized a subscale of the SCI II to gather data from these events for the formative evaluation. Once again, the subscale was designed to assess membership and integration and fulfillment of needs. After

THE BLUEPRINT

all data was collected we began review of participant's response through qualitative and quantitative methodology. The first, coding, is a process of recognizing concepts and finding relations between them. The second, paired sample t-test, is a measurement taken from the same individual two different times during the improvement initiative and then compared.

During the coding process, we utilized a manual coding method. Through content analysis, we determined the presence of certain words, themes, and concepts that recurred. Before reviewing the two membership and two integration and fulfillment of needs activities' transcripts, eight different themes were identified. Before coding the data, we utilized a deductive approach honing in on eight codes derived from McMillian and Chavis (1986) work around a sense of belonging specific to membership, integration and fulfillment of needs. Saldana (2013) explained that an a priori code is one that is determined before the start of the coding process. After a review of the transcripts, two additional themes emerged. Saldana (2013) also discussed emergent codes, which are codes that appear as valid concepts through an inductive approach when analyzing qualitative data. The themes identified (as seen in Table 1) are: (1) emotional safety, (2) sense of belonging, (3) personal investment, (4) sense of comfortability and one emerging theme (5) survival. The other themes identified (as seen in Table 2) in regard to integration and fulfillment of needs are: (1) similar values and experiences, (2) sharing of resources, (3) opportunity to learn from one another, (4) influence over one another, and one emerging theme "Desire" (10 members) for community specifically during COVID-19.

Table 1

Membership Coding

Code	Description	Number of Occurrences
Emotional Safety	Willingness to reveal how one really feels	8
Sense of Belonging	Need to be connected to a group, acceptance by the community	10
Personal Investment	When one has to choose between conflicting decisions	10
Sense of Comfortability	The degree to which someone is comfortable or secure	12
<i>Emerging Theme - Survival</i>	Continuing to exist and thrive, in spite of what is perceived to be difficult circumstances	9

Table 2*Integration and Fulfillment of Needs Coding*

Code	Description	Number of Occurrences
Similar Values and Experiences	Having / holding mutual things or experiences in the same regard	8
Opportunity to Learn From One Another	A two-way, reciprocal opportunity to impart knowledge	7
Influence Over One Another	Having an effect on someone in a direct or indirect way	7
Sharing of Resources	The ability to collaborate and share skills and expertise from and by the group	6
<i>Emerging Theme - Desire for Community Specifically During COVID-19</i>	The desire for connectedness during a time when social distancing is imperative	5

The improvement initiative's overall focus and the long-term goal was to improve African American employee retention rate at WCU. The turnover of African American employees is documented annually in the institution's Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO)

Compliance Report published on the first day of October. Available to us is the prior year data (2019-2020) that assisted us in establishing a baseline for comparison purposes.

We measured the Blueprint's impact by utilizing the results of the Sense of Community Index II (SCI II) instrument. Developed by McMillan and Chavis in 1986, this 24-item validated survey is a copyrighted instrument requiring the authors' permission. We received approval from the authors and have utilized the instrument as one of the assessment tools for the Blueprint. The conditions of its use were that the instrument could not be modified, and the results of its implementation are to be shared with McMillan and Chavis (see Appendix C for the full instrument).

Formative Evaluation Results and Responses

The hiring and retention of minoritized employees in higher education is a topic of interest across higher education (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005; Jo, 2008; Du Plooy & Roodt, 2010 and Takawira et al., 2014). For public rural, regional universities, we must ensure institutional narratology representative of the voices that work in these organizations (Rhodes & Brown, 2005). The Blueprint contributes to a comprehensive conversation providing action steps that address the recruitment and retention of African American faculty and staff.

In the opinion section of *The Hechinger Report*, a nonprofit, independent news organization focused on inequality and innovation in education, Professor Marybeth Gasman – then of the University of Pennsylvania -- recounts her talk about Minority Serving Institutions at a higher education forum. There she said, “The reason we don’t have more faculty of color among college faculty is that we don’t want them. We simply don’t want them” (Gasman, 2016, Opinion section, para. 2). A shocking statement to the room and some may ask, is it true?

THE BLUEPRINT

The Blueprint's focus was to develop a sense of community for the African American faculty and staff of WCU. The purpose of the Blueprint was to establish a series of activities that would increase participants and create a greater sense of community for members of the WCU African American community. Hence, the Blueprint focused questions included:

- What is the impact of membership in building a sense of belonging at Western Carolina University?
- Can community building impact retention on African American faculty and staff?

We obtained digital sources of evidence for the Blueprint from literature related to employee retention and a sense of community building found in (ProQuest, WorldCat, EBSCOhost, JSTOR, and SocIndex) databases. Also, we collected and reviewed reports from organizations such as the U.S. Census, National Center for Education Statistics, and Pew Research Center. More evidence sources were gathered relating to information, literature, and data from the North Carolina Institutional Equal Employment Opportunity Reports. These evidence sources were used to help address the focus questions and illustrate the Blueprint's findings.

Participants in the Blueprint completed a digital version of the SCI II that included both pre-and post-questionnaires. The surveys' results were collected and exported in a Microsoft Excel® spreadsheet, which was prepared for analysis. We utilized the SPSS® software to run various analyses to identify any significant outcomes. We also sought to investigate any significant increases from the mean pretest score to the mean post-test score and to determine if the mean scores' statistical difference was greater or less than $p < 0.05$.

Membership

In analyzing the Blueprint data, we focused our work on two out of the four elements of the McMillan & Chavis' Sense of Community theory: Membership and Integration and

THE BLUEPRINT

Fulfillment of Needs. These two elements had sub-elements that speak to the core of the elements. For membership, which we will discuss first, some of the sub-elements that emerge in the Blueprint are emotional safety, sense of belonging, personal investment, and sense of comfortability. Utilizing a deductive and inductive approach to code our data from each activity in the Blueprint, we were able to identify patterns in the responses.

Emotional Safety

We begin with the participants' thoughts around emotional safety and broader notions of security. We discussed the challenges of being in a space where they are not the norm and often adjust who they are to navigate daily routines. Some of the sense of security and safety was emotional, as expressed by participant 1023. The idea that our scholarly contribution is less valued or only validated if someone from the dominant group affirms it or at worst makes it their own.

Participant 1023 introduces the conversation on the additional work that Black faculty and staff do on campus that goes unrewarded and sometimes is counted against them. “So the black tax is real. You do twice the work, and you still have to prove yourself. I have to say things twice in a meeting to be heard. Someone piggybacks on what I say, and now is their idea.”

The black tax, cultural tax, or minority tax (Padilla, 1994; Armstrong & Jovanovic, 2017; Coe et al., 2019) is best described as a collection of additional duties, expectations, and tasks that accompany being the other in a university setting. It is often unconscious yet embedded into the formal and informal structures of organizational departments and disciplines. The tax manifests itself as a burden exacerbated by experiences of racism, implicit bias, and inaccessibility to mentors and colleagues with similar backgrounds. Black and other minoritized faculty are asked — in some cases, mandated — to provide mentorship to minoritized students and colleagues and to engage with institutional or college-wide diversity efforts. While the tenure and promotion

THE BLUEPRINT

process most often requires a level of contribution to the discipline, and across the department, college and institution, these activities are intensive and often not valued the same as time spent on traditional promotion-granting activities such as research and publications.

But this tax is not just limited to faculty—students and staff find that the minority tax also impacts them in the form of committee work, task force participation, marketing, and other organizational activities for which they are deemed the “go-to” person. By conceptualizing the Black student tax as invisible, Givens (2016) spotlights a form of expectation necessary to enhance the student’s institutional quality of experience. In this case, both the institution and the students play a role. Black Staff also play a role as surrogates of the institution, often occupying minority or multicultural affairs positions with little to no authority and coaxing or identifying Black students and colleagues to participate in these organizational cultural taxing norms (Wright et al., 2006).

Another example that spoke to Black faculty and staff’s physical safety experience came from one of the participants sharing one of their early experiences after arriving at the institution. Participant 1015, when they spoke about the bus tour to the region that new employees of the University participate in. “And I was walking a half a step behind the people in my group and the escort came over to me and said, sorry we are not open to the public, yet. We’re closed. As though I wasn’t part of the group.” These belonging encounters start with someone making assumptions about who is in and who is not and centered on today’s Black Lives Matter movement. The reality of Blackness as being outside the U.S. American societal notions of humanity is captured in popular vernacular phrases such as “driving while Black,” “playing while Black,” and “shopping while Black,” among others. The idea that any Black person simply

THE BLUEPRINT

attempting to carry on with the mundane activities of life is not free to do so without threat of death or violence is an actuality that is steeped in the understanding of Black life and livelihood. We heard similar comments from participants in the pre-focus group. A participant had deep concerns about their political activism and what the implications might be for their day-to-day living and working. The reality of being black in these white rural spaces is sobering, especially when you are conscious of being noticed in every space that you inhabit each day. As stated by Anderson (2015), for black people, there is a premium of importance placed on the decision to occupy and navigate historical white spaces.

Participant 1009 revealed their concern about the limits of being a black faculty member. “I certainly feel like there are limits to what you can do as a black faculty member, even what I have been doing in the community. I have to think of the activities I can engage in being black without jeopardizing myself and think of my research and scholar activism.”

The same sentiment was shared by others as the discussion continued about being Black faculty and staff while navigating the campus and local community.

Sense of Belonging

The sense of belonging and identification conversation contributed to our understanding of feelings of belonging and acceptance. Both faculty and staff noted that student diversity was evident in the classroom and across campus but not in the professional ranks. Participant 1030 talks about getting involved and connected with local institutions. This involvement was a way for them to establish a form of community. “I found a church home here. That was one of the things that were helpful for me.” When discussing identification and what it represents, we look for forms of expressions such as “this is my group” and “I belong to this group.”

Participant 1023 shared an example of this claim of community and ownership. “This

THE BLUEPRINT

number—56 of us on campus—I'm still waiting to see that. It's nice to see you guys, and I have seen more than I have ever seen, but I don't know who is, and it still kind of feels like a silo.”

This participant evokes the need for what Kezar, Gehrke, and Bernstein-Sierra (2017) described as a community of practice. For higher education professionals, the community of practice represents the opportunity to share interests and the prospects for learning from colleagues through interactions in and outside their areas of expertise. University leaders and, more importantly, members of these communities of practice employ the role of caretakers. They maintain and ensure the transfer of ownership over time to new generations of scholars at the University.

Boundaries play a role in the development of a sense of belonging. It is pertinent to a neighborhood community as described in Bryk et al. (2010), *In Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago*, the authors analyzed community context to understand the ways schools connect with their local neighborhoods. Boundaries are cultural, physical, and class spaces that members of various communities routinely navigate and interpret to negotiate their community interactions.

Elmore (2020) states that universities' visual efforts to capture racial and cultural equity representation fall short because they do not consistently address equitable and inclusive workspaces that support their community's varied racial identities. In talking about the Blueprint, Participant 1021 spoke to the importance of community and having a space that made them feel like an insider, among other things. In essence, being on the inside of the boundary that is protected by norms, regulations, and in some cases, cultural capital provides a refuge for some of the participants in this initiative. "This is honestly, to be completely real, my support system of black people here at Western." In this example, the participant expresses how they view this

THE BLUEPRINT

community as a refuge from either a real or perceived threat. In furthering the point of the role of boundaries and its impact on individuals who are not the norm, participant 1035 shared the following for the benefit of the new professionals. "Don't allow the culture to devalue yourself. Don't let the color of the climate stress you out." Sonn and Fischer (1998) saw this as boundary determinants of who belongs in the group and who does not, and how it provides emotional safety to the members. Similarly, the earlier work of Berger and Neuhaus (1977) around mediating structures as families, church, and neighborhoods spoke to barriers that separated "us" from "them" and alleviated apprehension by delineating who is trustworthy.

Personal Investment

Personal investment is an essential contributor to the individual's sense of community and group membership feeling. Participant 1033's matter-of-fact delivery of the following statement not only connected across the Zoom conversation, but we were able to notice a physical reaction in the form of facial expressions, emoji thumbs-up, and affirmative words like true, that's right, and me too.

Participant 1033 stated, "I didn't realize there was any hope for any community whatsoever. I thought I would just ride it out. Maybe there is potential for something. So, when I have a meeting in Jackson county, I can maybe catch up with somebody for Lunch or catch up with somebody to talk to. It's hopeful once COVID-19 is over." We noted that the blueprint was beginning to have an impact on the participants after hearing this statement.

We may understand personal investment in the way that we experience cognitive dissonance. McLeod (2018) states that one experiences cognitive dissonance when you have to choose between conflicting decisions. For example, some Black faculty and staff who decided to work at Western Carolina University have agreed to be away from family and friends or a

THE BLUEPRINT

familiar locale where they felt safe and knew how to navigate. This decision, no matter the reason why, McLeod says is a choice that causes dissonance. The theorist Festinger (1957) spoke about reducing the dissonance; the individual has to spread apart the alternatives. This is done by promoting the good of the chosen locale and rejecting what is left behind. Personal investment requires the individual to develop a strong connection with their experience or choice. During the Blueprint, some participants shared details about themselves that they often did not share with everyone, such as not knowing how to swim, having a strong dislike for waiting in line, and having dry eyes from wearing glasses.

There were displays and expressions of membership as described by McMillan (1996) when individuals invest in their membership and actively work to become members; they feel that they have attained a place in the group. Members of the group acknowledged another members' work-anniversary. They extended congratulatory remarks and cheer to a participant who had just become a parent and offered to prepare meals and provide assistance.

The affection for one another was genuine, and as a result of participant investment, membership in the Blueprint became essential and meaningful, as noted by participant 1015. "I've been inspired by this initiative. When I first came to Western, I got together with participant 1002 and started trying to pull faculty together. People wouldn't respond to emails. But I'm very pleased and fortunate. We got a pretty significant black presence that is extremely motivating for me. I hope we can hold on to those folks, participant 1033! Participant 1033: I'm trying."

There was a level of appreciation, awareness, and hope that was displayed that resonated with the participants.

Sense of Comfortability

THE BLUEPRINT

Under membership participants' sense of comfortability was understood as the degree to which they expressed a sense of belonging, trust, comfort, genuineness, safety, acceptance, and sharing resources. While developing personal and meaningful relationships takes time, we understood how vital comfortability was to the participants, as reflected by participant 1025 when discussing their work environment. "I don't have to be someone that's fake or anything like that. I get the opportunity to be myself; there's no pushback on that!" Ramni et al. (2020) identifies the importance of leadership welcoming diverse views, challenging biases and assumptions, celebrating differences, and building community. Other participants shared thoughts on comfortability as well. Participant 1049 talked about safety and trust. "You know I'm up here, and I don't have a whole lot of life resources [car] to get around, and they [family] worry about me a lot." Participant 1030 talked about how they felt when they could find some grooming products at one of the local supermarkets. This simple business gesture made them feel a little more comfortable and increased their sense of belonging in the area: "I went to Publix yesterday, and they had a nice little [grooming] section in Waynesville. They had a nice little selection, not a full section, but they had more than what I expected."

Participant 1040 added the armor's idea, which also speaks to how people survive by putting on an armor each day. "I feel great about the Blueprint...able to find Black people that are here, even though it is a small number. I'm able to find people that look like me. Just being able to be at ease and like, relax and take off all [my] armor. The stuff you have to wear constantly being a minority in a completely white space. It's the means I have to take to stay protected. The connection to safety was an echoed sentiment among many of the Blueprint members.

Participant 1050 agreed with participant 1049 and stated. "Some people look like me. I

THE BLUEPRINT

know I can turn to them for advice. I can make it because I have others around me. There is this opportunity where I can relax and settle in a bit. I am not always, you know, on guard wondering if I'm saying the right things...just having that comfortability with being able to be vulnerable...because I know some people who have some of the shared experiences that I either have or will have." The comfort in the voice of participant 1050 resonated within the spirits of other members as they acknowledged they too felt the same, knowing there was a community of African American employees at the institution.

When participant 1024 shared news about becoming a parent, they received some genuine expressions of acceptance and words of support through the offering of resources. One participant asked if they could bless their home with a meal, understanding that a routine task such as preparing meals can be wearisome during the early days after a child's birth. Another participant shared the importance of community traditions and lore. Ramani et al. (2020) state that group identity and practices are essential to the group's sustainability. Participant 1030 said, "You know you got to get your [partner] a [gem] now. This is what comes when you have a [child]." The same participant also expressed how many years after their children's birth, they still remember and proceeded to share what we perceived as a very personal experience. "My [partner] did not know about that. But now you got to do it." In that same moment, participant 1030 continued to share more personal moments like their desire to be a grandparent. "Oh, Oh my god. I want to be a [grandparent] so badly, and none of my children are interested, not one."

Participant 1015 shared their experience about the time they were hired and how noticeable was the lack of Black people during their first campus visit. But the surprise to see Black students in the late summer provided some refuge. "And when I got back in August, I saw black people all over the place. The football team, the basketball team, and the cheerleaders." We

THE BLUEPRINT

can imagine that being on college campuses with low Black employment can present a form of isolation. We are living through a pandemic that has quarantined us and socially distanced us from one another. One could argue that African Americans in the academy might be poised to navigate the demands of the pandemic, but as Usher et al. (2020) states, all humans are at risk of psychological harm when kept in isolation.

In the takeover meeting, participants shared some experiences about their encounters with emotional safety and comfortability as they discussed COVID-19. Participant 1015: “People in this country are not taking this seriously. There are like 25 states where the rates of infection are going up, and yet the governor just went to the second level of opening up the state... These people are out of their minds. We are the ones bearing the brunt of this. The point is you are endangering other people by not wearing a mask, but they’re not worried about getting it. It’s an insult and disrespectful.” Members on the Zoom confirmed similar feelings through expression of head nods and statements of agreement.

Participant 1002: "I've been coming into the office two to three days a week due to COVID and only saw one person wearing a mask. I felt like I was the bandit because I wore my mask consistently. Everyone was still meeting in each other's offices, and I felt like the lone ranger.” Members of the Blueprint took this as an opportunity to express how they were feeling about their office climate, their surrounding communities, and the safety protocols in place regarding COVID-19. Participant 1014, “I just don’t feel comfortable going out to a social event in Asheville and just being here by myself, as the only African American. Lately, I have been afraid based on what is happening in society.” Participant 1025, “My biggest fear is that I will be stereotyped as a big black [person] and my anxiety kicks in.” The overwhelming concerns and uncertainty surrounding the pandemic were shared feelings amongst all the Blueprint members.

Emerging Theme - Survival

Throughout each activity of the Blueprint, we began to notice an emerging theme that centered around survival. It was clear to us that elements of dissonance were at play as evidenced in participant 1025's statement, "I teeter back and forth because to be very honest I miss being around African American people, not being negative, but my culture is a little different. I try to make strides to learn, so I fit in and keep things comfortable for you all [white folxs]. We have to take the time to explain things that are a part of each other's culture to maintain respect and understanding, so we are all comfortable."

The same participant shared how it feels to be the only African American in a very large department. "I'm a cocoa puff in a bowl of white milk right now, just trying to make it, and that's new for me. "In observing the participants' reaction, we could see the visceral impact of this statement on the group. There were nods of affirmation and Emojis. Additionally, there was a clear concern around what Galupo and Resnick (2016) considered the negative impact on employees from a toxic environment. Participant 1040 shared how they have adjusted their appearance to present in what is deemed an acceptable manner. "I had to wear a lot of protective hairstyles to survive when I first moved here." Suppose we understand that like-minded people tend to aggregate. In that case, we must acknowledge that the presence of an entrenched toxic colleague or environment may suggest that there may be other toxic colleagues and environments on campus. Anjum et al. (2018) noted the high turnover, deteriorating health, absenteeism, low morale, and poor productivity are among the cost institutions and employees pay for operating in toxic environments.

The issue of dissonance and the limited ability of African Americans to spread apart the alternatives is tied to what Blinder (2007) refers to as the process of two-tracked socialization.

THE BLUEPRINT

Blinder explains that younger cohorts of White Americans are no different from their older counterparts regarding their policy preferences on racial matters and beliefs about race, politics, and inequality. On the other hand, problematic mindsets like stereotypes continue to sway policy priorities for the younger generations. This two-track socialization allows younger generation Whites to choose still policy preferences influenced by conscious and subconscious stereotypes, even though they have been brought up in an era of anti-racism. This dissonance within the White community on college campuses can lead to policies and work environments that are unsafe and professionally hostile toward Black and other others.

Participant 1009 affirmed that “Any person of color coming to work here should be warned. Inform others about what this area is really like, in terms of the lack of representation. Atlanta and Knoxville are bigger cities just a few hours away if you need to get out. It’s like you know, this place can be escaped.” Similarly, participant 1030 talked about the responsibility that everyone has to the community. Participant 1030 stated, “If you serve on a search committee, make sure you let people of color know what it is like to live here on a daily basis such as there are not a lot of people of color. This place is a hard place for people of color to live as there are not many resources for us, and although you will meet some people, you will have to stand on your own.”

The idea that one has to escape the place of work and residence to negotiate living suggests a toxic environment. As discussed earlier in the Blueprint, it may also harm the African American college community’s ability to address their dissonance in the overwhelmingly predominantly white institutional, professional environment.

When asked during the focus group to share what they did during their free time, participant 1023 stated the conditions under which they were operating. "I'm in survival mode. I don't have free time or downtime." Additionally, when asked about their university opinion,

THE BLUEPRINT

participant 1023 stated they remain in survival mode. "I'm going to be speaking—survival mode again. I need my check to come, to pay my [child's] tuition."

Participant 1030 tied the idea of survival to not just a responsibility but a shared experience with the students. Participant 1030 said "The students are the first draw because they survive here, I call them roses that bloom in the concrete jungle. They are able to develop and turn into whole people who are dedicated despite their circumstances of being here. It can be very easy to make the decision to not adapt and just leave, but for some reason many of them persist, they stay. So, with that they are my inspiration. If they can make it and do well here and survive, then I need to be here to be a part of their journey."

Participant 1009 agreed with being around and surviving for the students. "Yeah, I share the same sentiments."

Integration and Fulfillment of Needs

In the third element, "Integration, and Fulfillment of Needs", McMillan and Chavis use the word "needs" to explain a member's attitude toward being desired and valued by the community to which they belong. This element extends beyond the status of membership and includes the benefits gained because of membership. Membership can be found in our families, friends, neighborhoods, and employment. The subcategories of integration and fulfillment of needs that emerged in the Blueprint were feeling that members' needs will be met by resources of the group and through membership, sharing of similar values and experiences, an opportunity to learn from one another, and participants having influence over each other. Sarason (1974), who originally conceived this concept, describes it as "an acknowledged interdependence with others, a willingness to maintain this interdependence by giving to or doing for others what one expects from them." (p. 157).

THE BLUEPRINT

During the Blueprint, we provided two events focused on integration and fulfillment of needs. The first was called the "All I Need Luncheon," where we explored participants' higher education journey. We discussed relationship development issues, access to decision making, sacrifices made, career development, choices, and the regrets that sometimes follow them, and transitions. The second was called "As One," which consisted of a presentation about the black community's state of affairs at WCU. We explored current demographic data, historical data, the need for a formal group, and other aspects of Black life at WCU.

The four major themes that emerged from the analysis of the integration and fulfillment of needs analysis were: shared values and experiences, shared resources, opportunity to learn from one another, and influence over one another. The emerging theme was the desire for a community during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Shared Values and Experiences

During the Blueprint, the members acknowledged various shared values and experiences that allowed for engagement and connection within the group. During the pre-focus group, we asked members to share the factors contributing to doing their best work. A few members referenced the need to be recognized and appreciated as an African American person. As an employee at WCU, members of the Blueprint spoke to specific instances where they felt being a part of this salient group.

In the United States, Black people's -- but more so Black women's -- hair choices have been informed by European normative pressures that posit straight hair as the norm (Lester, 2000). Participant 1030 was emphatic about the pressures to wear their hair in a particular style that was not viewed as agentic or dominant.

Participant 1030 stated, "I felt really pressured to fit in, to have a persona, as well as a look

THE BLUEPRINT

that was palatable for White people and so what that meant was the traditional straight hair (...) but there are no resources for black [people] to get their hair done close to the area. This is how my hair grows out of my head, and there are no other resources here to straighten it the way “y’all like, so I’m going to rock it.”

Others quickly affirmed the experience. Participant 1040 noted that they had adjusted their hair appearance multiple times to survive in this space. Participant 1025 reminisced on their first few months working at WCU and becoming comfortable with dress-down Fridays. “When I first started working here, on Fridays, I still wore a shirt and tie even though it was dressed down because of the stereotype of I’m a black [person]. It was always a self-conscious thing for me because when you are a black [person] with stature and bear arms from playing sports, I felt I would be viewed as a typical stereotype black [person], and that made me uncomfortable.” Members discussed the importance of having and being a part of a community that made them feel secure in their skin. In *Faculty Diversity* by Joan Moody (2004), the author alludes to understanding African Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Native Americans as colonized people. As such, they are perennially viewed as others. Participant 1021's desire for a sense of safety and security reminds us that navigating the college campuses as Black professionals does not mean we are always safe. "A strong community should provide an environment that feels safe and secure." Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1961, explores his theory of violence. He asserts that culture is not merely isolated to an instance, but that culture is fashioned through the progression of national consciousness. We suggest that our presence as African Americans is not enough to change a culture predicated on the safety of those who are not viewed as the others in higher education.

Opportunity to Learn From One Another

THE BLUEPRINT

One of the most significant takeaways from the Blueprint was the opportunity for members to learn from one another. On numerous occasions, senior members took the opportunity to offer advice to younger members in the group. During the post-focus group, members were asked to advise new African American employees specifically.

Participant 1015 offered advice centered around developing a good work ethic. “I think that goes back to an earlier question about what motivates you to do your best. I would say, do your best in your job, whatever it is, to maximize the number of opportunities you have, not just at Western, but moving on to another position someplace else.” Participant 1023 followed with a similar affirmation. “Yeah, I was going to say be true to yourself and your purpose, your cause.” Participant 1030 focused their advice around maximizing all the opportunities for professional and personal growth. “And I would say diversify your portfolio”, sort of similar to what participant 1015 and 1023 said.

Participant 1030 stated, "I think it's going to be important for you to take this opportunity where maybe you have a little bit more flexibility (...) to gain skills that perhaps your job specifically doesn't require you to have. But those skills will allow you to branch out. When the next opportunity comes your way, you will have done some things outside of your job description. [Something] that this environment has afforded you an opportunity to do, and you'll be able to use that to help sell yourself. Not everyone can say that they have survived in a mountain area, you know. Working [at a] Predominately White Institution and maybe you got [to] get your hands dirty in a project” with Participant 1025 working on something for [their department]. (...) Participant 1014 (...) diversify your portfolio. “If it's an opportunity to get on a committee, if there's an opportunity to work with someone, even if you're a little intimidated by the situation and think [you] don't know if this is something that [you] can do, especially if it's a committee, because there

THE BLUEPRINT

are other people on that committee, do it. (...) They've asked you because they believe that you have the talent and that you bring a fresh set of perspectives and a new view to whatever is happening, (...) so believe in yourself and believe that you have what it takes, not just to survive here, but to thrive here and to make everybody stand up and take a look like wow look at that person.”

The newer employees were receptive to the advice given by participant 1030 and offered expressions of gratitude. Participant 1025 spoke about the importance of being in control of your situation. In particular, they offered a focus on self. They spoke to the notion of self-efficacy when it comes to your job and the setting that you may find yourself in.

Participant 1025 stated, "Evaluate yourself because of the location. Sometimes with the area, it can make us feel like we're not good enough, or we may not think well enough with things like that. Don't ever devalue yourself because of the location. But most importantly, don't allow the color of the climate to stress you out. (...) When people talk about the recruitment process and things like, why aren't more diverse students coming? I say you have to realize when they're coming [past] Waynesville, and they see that big Confederate flag. That's one of the first images they see, not saying that—that is what Western Carolina is but literally, don't allow the culture to devalue yourself. It will make you question yourself and stress yourself out.”

Participants also took time to share the importance of personal wellness, which fundamentally has a dimension of self-care, that is essential to many aspects of an individual's professional and personal life. Many human resources departments at colleges and universities offer programs that target health and wellness. Participant 1025 stated, "Take those self-care days (...) You can go to a hair salon; we can get the proper blowout and things like that. So, don't let the color, the climate discourages you; take care of yourself, and be open-minded to new

things." Burke et al. (2016) talk about the importance of practicing mindfulness to become in tune with the body, ensuring that you are free of distractions while you seek a path of wellness and self-care.

Sharing of Resources

Being a member of a community can significantly benefit each participant in a variety of ways. Whether socially or professionally, we witness members who were willing to share information, time, and their personal property to help others within the group. The strength of the Blueprint came from the member's unanimity toward embracing the new employees and extending a helping hand to show them the ropes. When participant 1045 shared that they did not have transportation, someone offered to provide them with a ride to Walmart to do some shopping. Other gestures of additional resources immediately followed.

Influence Over One Another

Universities represent opportunities for lifestyle changes. The office acts as a social conduit where various interactions occur among faculty, staff, students, government representatives, and other community stakeholders who potentially influence the beliefs and behavior of the university's professionals. Socializing, holding meetings around lunch or a coffee bar can lead to communal eating habits. Pachucki and colleagues found that some eating patterns (such as food preference) are socially transmissible in different social relationships (Pachucki et al., 2011). Similarly, having colleagues endorse the university may influence the decision for individuals to accept employment opportunities.

Participant 1033 shared how a colleague influenced their decision to work at WCU. "I chose to come to WCU because they gave me a great opportunity but also when Participant 1015 called me one day and said, look, this is a great opportunity for you to start out, I knew I would

THE BLUEPRINT

get the support from them, and with their grace, I figured the other folks in the program were solid people. When they called, I felt like I needed to go.”

Similarly, Participant 1019 confided that a colleagues' endorsement influenced their decision to apply for work at the University. "My friend, who is a mentee of Participant 1015, called me and said, there's a job in North Carolina at WCU, so I applied and went." Participant 1002 shared how having a mentor influenced their decision to apply for a job at the University. "I am originally from North Carolina and was looking to get back closer to home, so when a position opened, my mentor was at a conference and encouraged me to apply, and I did." Sometimes the relationships are so powerful that we reconsider existing decisions. Participant 1015 shared how their decision to return to academia was made. "I had actually retired and got a call about the position that I'm in, and it sounded interesting, so I decided to come to WCU." The relationships we develop with colleagues play a role in some of our decision making as evidence by Participant 1037. "My second reason for coming here is definitely Participant 1024. I just knew they were invested in my career goals and in me as a person.”

Emerging Theme - Desire for Community Specifically During COVID-19

In times of adversity, doubt, and distress, being in a community becomes very important. We depend on those around us for unity, encouragement, support, communication, and compassion. The challenge with the COVID-19 pandemic is to eradicate if not minimize its spread. Our most prominent strategy was not rooted in medical advances or scientific discoveries but social norms. The biggest weapon against the spread was to practice social distancing and sacrifice face-to-face community interaction. Although the internet provided a way to sustain and develop a form of community, we saw through the Blueprint that participants clamored for what being in a community provides, a sense of belonging.

THE BLUEPRINT

During the discussions around COVID-19 and its impact on the participants, most agreed that it was important to wear a mask and practice social distancing during the moment. Some members expressed disdain for individuals in their community and even on campus who were not taking the pandemic seriously. On different occasions, participant 1002 shared how they felt alone and uncomfortable with their work environment due to the way others were handling safety measures". Participant 1015 followed with, "They are not wearing a mask because they are not worried about getting it. They are endangering people. That's an insult, and it's disrespectful."

Following the statements about not fitting in, participant 1021 related how campus security officers followed them while they were just taking an evening drive to take a break from staring at the computer screen. "The campus was dead because everyone has been working remotely due to the pandemic," and at that moment participant 1021 stated they felt alone and anxious. I just wanted some time to myself, but I have to worry and be on alert instead. It's just tiring to keep fighting and our voices not being heard." It is worth noting that when you live and work in a rural environment such as Cullowhee, NC, the university is your front yard. These are not isolated experiences for members of the Blueprint community; they are also experiences that students, faculty, and staff shared across the higher education landscape. Some evidence of these experiences is detailed in the study by Smith et al. (2016) titled "YOU make me want to holler and throw up both my hands!" Campus culture, Black misandric microaggressions, and racial battle fatigue. A theme in this study was the hyper-surveillance and control directed at Black men by Whites. Participants in the study talked about being labeled as out of place and feelings of illegitimacy. As a result, participants experienced frustration, anger, disappointment, resentment, anxiety, a sense of helplessness and hopelessness, and a well of fear. The outpour of

support was tremendous.

Other participants expressed a desire to be with the community. “I want to hang out with black people in my free time”, stated participant 1014. Similarly, participant 1033 acknowledged how important was the role, albeit unintended, that the Blueprint was playing during the quarantine and pandemic.

Participant 1033 complimented the Blueprint stating, "I want to applaud the efforts behind the Blueprint. I think this is probably overdue and much needed for sure. You starve for this kind of energy and connection. There is something about when we get together in a physical space that you can't get from Zoom, and that's what I want. I don't have an answer as I know there are people at varying degrees and varying levels of fear due to this very serious pandemic. I'm not discounting that, but I'm just wondering can we find a way to make more of a physical event occur?"

We received multiple comments in the chat area sharing the same sentiments as participant 1033.

Summative Evaluation of Improvement Methodology

For the summative evaluation, the intervention focused on a process that is goal-oriented, determining if the intended goals of the intervention were achieved. The summative evaluation was used to investigate if the intervention had a demonstrable impact on specifically defined target outcomes. The intended and unintended effects of evaluating the University’s African American employee status were captured through the summative assessment.

In addition to the formative evaluation completed throughout the Blueprint's implementation, we employed qualitative methods—focus groups, Zoom® transcripts, and the SCI II—to achieve a summative assessment of the intervention. Focus groups allowed us to gather qualitative data from participants that cannot be retrieved from the SCI II survey. A review of the Zoom® audio and video transcripts from the four activities held allowed us to

THE BLUEPRINT

identify themes and emerging themes when analyzing the data. Summative evaluation measures enabled an overall comparison before and after the implementation of the improvement initiative that determined what effects the improvement initiative had on the participants.

The pre-and post-focus group conducted at the beginning and end of the improvement initiative consisted of 19 questions (see Appendix F). These questions were asked of all members who participated, and anyone could answer. We began by introducing the focus group's purpose and outlined the format for the allotted time we were scheduled to meet. All members were asked to respect the group's confidentiality and not share any other participant's responses outside of the group. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant when consent forms were issued. Members were reminded of this and assured that they would only be referred to by their pseudonym throughout the interview, and in all notes, they were free to share their real and authentic feelings.

There are various definitions and debates in the literature about what constitutes participation and whether it is a means or an end (Picciotto 1992; Cornwall 2008; Imms et al. 2016). For this intervention, participation is defined as a deliberate way by which the participants control the choices that affect them. The crux of participation is employing voice and choice.

The notion of people agreeing to participate and, alternatively, people opting to not participate in the intervention leads us to explore the underlying benefits and pitfalls of this dichotomous statement. We acknowledge that there are various reasons for engaging in an intervention, such as the Blueprint. Among these are the need for community, notions of contributing, influencing, sharing, redistributing power, institutional positionality, benefits, knowledge, and skills to be gained through beneficiary involvement in decision making. Conversely, some professionals who did not engage may have considerations that involved time

THE BLUEPRINT

commitment, do not value the work or potential implications, and could be experiencing a hostile work environment. They may perceive the intervention as an extension of the organization, may have various support communities outside of work, and may feel vulnerable in their organizational positionality.

For some who chose not to participate, it was apparent that their reasons for not participating were due to their negative experience at the University, as stated in their decline response to us. For others, we are not sure at this time. While we cannot share a direct statement, we interpreted the responses given as valid reasons for not participating and engaging with the Blueprint improvement initiative.

We used the SCI II survey as our quantitative methods for the evaluation of the improvement initiative. The summative evaluation allowed us to look at the outcome to establish if the initiative achieved our designated goals. Utilizing the SCI II subscales in conjunction with the PDSA cycle method, we collected data and performed analyses twice during the two 30-day PDSA cycles we implemented. The data gathering and subsequent analysis allowed us to adjust our scheduled activities. For example, after the first membership subscale survey administration, we learned that most participants did not know each other or recognized one another only by name. As an adjustment, we changed our icebreaker activity for the second activity to facilitate the participants' needs to know other community members. The icebreaker "Would You Rather" consisted of questions that allowed each participant to think quickly on their feet while giving insight into their priorities. The integration and fulfillment of needs subscale survey revealed that one of the participants, 1009, had a problem in the local community. As part of our adjustment, we allowed participant 1009 and others to stay connected online after the activities ended. While this information and time are not counted as part of the improvement initiative, we feel it was an

THE BLUEPRINT

essential part of building the community process, and it was worth noting. After the completion of the second subscale survey, we did not make any adjustments.

Lastly, to culminate the Blueprint program, we conducted a new PDSA cycle making necessary adjustments based on the data collection and analysis from the first cycle. The improvement initiative's main goal was to build a sense of community for African American faculty and staff at WCU. After the participants completed the Blueprint sessions, we used the Sense of Community Index II (SCI II) as the principal quantitative instrument to evaluate the improvement initiative. We administered an electronic version of the SCI II survey using the Qualtrics™ platform before starting the Blueprint and at the culmination of the Blueprint. The SCI II is the 2005 revised version, which is most frequently used in social sciences to gauge a sense of community. Based on a theory presented by McMillan and Chavis (1986) that a sense of community is a perception with an affective component, it includes 24 items that cover all the attributes of a sense of community, based on the original theory elements: membership, influence, meeting needs, and a shared emotional connection. The SCI II survey asked the participants questions such as if they felt like they were part of the community, or identify with the community, did the community meet their needs, and did they feel hopeful about the future of the community.

A principal reason for selecting this instrument for our improvement initiative was that it is a validated instrument. The SCI II is used in numerous studies within different cultures in North and South America, Asia, the Middle East, and many contexts (e.g., urban, suburban, rural, tribal, workplaces, schools, universities, recreational clubs, Internet communities). Another reason was that using a validated instrument ensured that the questions were reliable and consistent, eliminating concerns about our results' validity (Kalayci & Cimen, 2012). We

compared the pre-SCI II data results to the post-SCI II data results to see if there was a significant difference.

The implementation of the SCI II in electronic format was intentional and necessary. In the COVID-19 Impact section of this disquisition, we talked about why we decided to implement our initiative as an online activity. We did not know much about the Coronavirus at the time of the decision, but we followed the health experts' guidance and our institution's protocols. The safest and most sensible way to administer the assessment was online. This eliminated mail distribution allayed quarantine concerns. We did not have to coordinate the collection of paper versions and ensure that everyone's documents arrived on time to follow our initiative's timeline. We established a 25% improvement goal for the sense of community between the pre-and-post SCI II survey administration. We collected data from the beginning of late May 2020 through early August 2020. Our survey communication reminders included multiple messages that comprised our strategic communication strategy to the participants (seen in Appendices G and H).

Summative Evaluation Results and Responses

Our theory of improvement states that “formalized community engagement opportunities, designed to create membership and enhance integration and fulfillment of needs, provided by the University to African American employees, will increase job satisfaction, community engagement, and career forecasting”. Based on our findings at this time, we have determined our improvement to be successful; however, more time and a face-to-face approach would be a recommendation as discussed in our recommendation section. The Blueprints previously stated goals were:

Benchmark goals for the Blueprint:

THE BLUEPRINT

1. Members of the Blueprint sense of community will increase by 25% from the pre-survey results in the post-survey results.
2. Members of the Blueprint sense of job satisfaction will increase by 25% from the pre-survey results to the post-survey results.
3. Members of the Blueprint engagement in professional collaboration will increase by 25% from the pre-survey to the post-survey results.

The three benchmark goals identified were not achieved throughout the Blueprint. We did not see a 25% increase in the sense of community, job satisfaction, and professional collaboration. Our benchmark goals were set before COVID-19 took effect in spring 2020 and were not adjusted before the improvement initiative took place during the summer of 2020. The unexpected pandemic curtailed our improvement initiative's nature from a face-to-face approach with minimal online components to a 100% online approach. This one, but major change had a great impact on the goals not being met. In May 2020, a staff feedback task force was formed at WCU to gather information regarding how staff members felt about job security, social gatherings, staff mental health, and more due to the pandemic.

The overwhelming response to job security was, “WCU’s staff are aware of the impact reduced campus activity has on operating budgets and are uncertain how this affects their employment. Lack of communication regarding this issue results in additional stress and anxiety, which hinders effective and positive interactions with colleagues and students.” (Western Carolina University, 2020b, p. 2).

The summary report indicated that when asked about mental health, staff responded:

“Our mental health and burnout will significantly impact the university productivity and service to students and colleagues. It is imperative for the university to have consistent and

THE BLUEPRINT

direct messages of support to staff. There are high anxiety levels regarding safety of returning to work, having enough time to navigate the new “work - life” balance, juggling work with other family needs as other community services have been limited, and concern for long-term job security.” (Western Carolina University, 2020b, p. 3)

These are just a few examples of how COVID-19 affected the engagement level of staff enduring operational challenges, implementing a range of newly designed instructional changes and a phased approach to regular work schedules while navigating families, community involvement and responsibilities, and a world never experienced before. Thus, providing an additional explanation for why our benchmark goals were not achieved.

Overall Data Analysis / SPSS Results

When approaching the quantitative data analysis from the SCI II survey, we utilized software that compared the information. First, we identified the impact of the post SCI II to the pre-SCI II; we conducted a paired samples correlation. When we looked at the relationship between participants, pre-sense of community index and post sense of community index, we found a correlation of ($r = .799, p = .000$), justifying the need to use a paired sample t-test.

As seen in Table 3, we conducted a paired sample t-test to compare The SCI II Index highlighting how participants felt about a sense of community before (pre-survey) the Blueprint improvement initiative and (post-survey) after the Blueprint improvement initiative. There was a significant difference in the overall pre-survey ($M= 1.5, SD= 0.56$) and the post-survey ($M= 1.9, SD= 0.57$) conditions; $t(14) = 3.38, p = 0.004$. The results suggest that the Blueprint had a positive impact on the participants. Specifically, our results suggest that African American employees who participate in community building activities, developed a sense of belonging.

Table 3

Overall Pre and Post Descriptive Statistics and Paired Samples T-test

Overall Pre and Post Descriptive Statistics and Paired Samples T-test									
	<u>Pre Intervention</u>		<u>Post Intervention</u>		Difference	t	df	p	Cohen's d
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD					
SCI II	1.58	0.56	1.9	0.57	0.32	3.38	14	0.004	0.55

Another comparison conducted was the pre-membership six-point subscale to the first membership activity post subscale and the pre-integration and fulfillment of needs to the post integration and fulfillment of needs to show the growth over time. We utilized the six-point pre-membership subscale via the pre-SCI II index and compared it to the post six-point subscale administered following the first membership activity “Take Over Meeting.” We then utilized the six-point pre-integration and fulfillment of needs subscale via the pre-SCI II index and compared it to the post subscale administered following the first fulfillment of needs activity “All I Need Luncheon.” As seen in Table 4, there was not a significant difference in the SCI II pre membership six-point subscale (M=1.52, SD=0.42) and the post-membership six-point subscale (M=1.66, SD=0.55) conditions; $t(11)=0.91$, $p = 0.380$. The results suggest that there was not enough time between the pre-SCI II Index survey and post-membership subscale survey following the first event to warrant a positive impact on the way participants felt about membership within the African American community. Specifically, since we saw a significant difference from the overall pre- and post-survey, a feeling of membership can be obtained if given adequate time. McMillian and Chavis (1986), speak to personal investment as one of the key components when building a sense of community via their definition surrounding membership. Additionally, a personal investment is necessary to address issues of trust, institutional legacies and persisting narratives within and without the University as illustrated by

Flores, and Olcott (2020) in their recent publication, *The Academic's Handbook, Fourth Edition: Revised and Expanded*, where they discuss another colonized group in higher education, Native Americans.

Table 4

Membership Descriptive Statistics and Paired Samples T-test

Membership Descriptive Statistics and Paired Samples T-test Pre/Mid/And Post								
	Pre Mean	Pre SD	Mid-point M	Mid-point SD	Difference	t	df	p
Time 1 and Time 2	1.53	0.43	1.67	0.055	0.14	0.91	11	0.38
	Mid-point M	Mid-point SD	Post M	Post SD	Difference	t	df	p
Time 2 and Time 3	1.73	0.56	1.88	0.39	0.15	0.9	7	0.39

We utilized the same approach when conducting a comparison for integration and fulfillment of needs. As seen in Table 5, there was not a significant difference in the SCI II pre-integration and fulfillment of needs six-point subscale (M=1.56, SD=0.59) and the post-integration and fulfillment of needs six-point subscale (M=1.83, SD=0.55) conditions; $t(10)=1.74, p = 0.111$. The results suggest once again that there was not enough time between the pre-SCI II Index survey and post integration and fulfillment of needs subscale survey to support the definition provided by McMillan and Chavis (1986). The allotted time from the pre-subscale survey to the first post-subscale survey for integration and fulfillment of needs was 15 days in length. Based on the overall pre- and post-SCI II index's significant result, we have surmised that future disquisitioners must run more than two PDSA cycles. These cycles are a prerequisite for an individual to feel what McMillan and Chavis described as a feeling that members' needs will be met by the resources of and through the group's membership. This element provides for

investment in the group’s success and allows members to be able and willing to help one another while providing the opportunity to receive help (McMillian & Chavis, 1986).

Table 5

Integration and Fulfillment Pre and Post Descriptive Statistics and Paired Samples T-test

Integration and Fulfillment Pre and Post Descriptive Statistics and Paired Samples T-test								
	Pre Mean	Pre SD	Mid-point M	Mid-point SD	Difference	t	df	p
Time 1 and Time 2	1.56	0.59	1.83	0.67	0.27	1.75	10	0.11
	Mid-point M	Mid-point SD	Post M	Post SD	Difference	t	df	p
Time 2 and Time 3	1.93	0.5	1.96	0.92	0.04	0.145	8	0.88

There was one question asked only on the pre-SCI II survey and the post-SCI II survey. The question was “How important is it to you to feel a sense of community with other community members?” As seen in Table 6, there was not a significant difference in the pre-SCI II Index survey (M=5.57, SD=0.516) and the post-SCI-II Index survey (M=5.53, SD=0.516) conditions; $t(14) = -1.00, p = 0.334$ (as seen in Table 11); however this indicated that the African American employees at WCU answered this question similarly before and after the improvement. The survey answers for this specific question were administered using a Likert scale ranging from (1) prefer not to be a part of this community to (6) very important. A close review of the responses showed amongst the 14 participants who answered the pre-survey, 100% stated it is (5) important or (6) very important to feel a sense of community with other community members. Amongst the post-survey, the same 14 participants answered and 100% still stated it was (5) important or (6) very important to feel a sense of community with others. We were unable to provide data for all 28 participants as 14 members did not answer the post-survey.

Table 6*SCI II Question One Six Point Pre and Post Descriptive Statistics and Paired Samples T-test*

Six Point Pre and Post Descriptive Statistics and Paired Samples T-test								
	Pre Mean	Pre SD	Post Mean	Post SD	Difference	t	df	p
SCI II Question 1	5.47	0.516	5.53	0.516	-0.06	-1	14	0.33

Analyzing the data, we determined that although there was not a significant difference during the subscale surveys, there was a constant gradual incline throughout the course of the 60-day improvement initiative. Although a significant difference was not seen from one membership event to the next and from one integration and fulfillment of needs event to the next, a significant difference was seen from the beginning of the improvement to the end of the improvement.

This significant difference prompted us to calculate the Blueprint's effect size utilizing Cohen's *d* calculator. The Blueprints pre- and post-group had similar standard deviations pre-survey (M= 1.5, SD= 0.56) and the post-survey (M= 1.9, SD= 0.57) and were the same size. Grissom and Kim (2005) state that reporting our effect size allows us to communicate the practical significance of our improvement initiative and can be used in upcoming improvement initiatives as an indication of the average sample size needed to observe a statistically significant result. The Blueprints Cohen's *d* was successful with an effect size of Cohen's $d = (1.9 - 1.5833) / 0.571609 = 0.55405$.

Recommendations

Lessons for Leadership

Bonilla-Silva (2006) asserts that in higher education organizations addressing prejudice, discrimination, and microaggressions is a difficult task due to color-blind racism that denotes

many of these institutions. If leaders are serious about diversity, equity, and inclusion work, they must assert the existence of these persistent cultural factors to enact meaningful change. For this reason, the work of diversity officers, in partnership with campus leaders, must focus on recognizing and eradicating organizational and color-blind racism and the entitlement culture.

Leaders must recognize that the Black tax is an unpaid debt from which the institution benefits but does not reward their faculty. To address this gap, institutions need to review their Tenure and Promotion Process (TPR) and formalize the value of these activities. Additionally, leaders should intentionally develop a strategic employee retention plan. They should consider developing formal compensation programs that grant release time, provide research funding, and recognize the contribution being made to the organization.

Leadership can learn from the benefits of community by reimagining macro-organizational efforts and developing micro-community measures where support is provided to each micro-community. There has been great success in the private sector since Xerox® first introduced the first Employee Resource Group (Welbourne, et al., 2016). We know that individuals are complex and desire to engage with people who share similar group identities that provide value and a sense of belonging. Leaders can explore how those multiple affinities can drive productivity, engender belonging, and impact retention.

Lessons for Social Justice

We began this journey as solutionists. We thought fixing the problem was as easy as making Kool-Aid. Our proposed solution would have been the equivalent of adding water. We do not see ourselves in that light anymore. This program has taught us the meaning of a more profound question. Through introspection, discussion, trial and error, and keen research, we have learned

THE BLUEPRINT

how to approach what is perceived as a problem within the organization and arrive at its root. We have also learned how to identify the issue at the system level.

We explored the notion of belonging through McMillan and Chavis' Sense of Belonging theory and implemented an improvement initiative to understand what is needed to build a healthy and vibrant community of African American scholars on our campus. This required a new generational conversation. This conversation recognized the current 21st-century hostile social climate that has brought full-color live images of lynching's to the palm of our hands. History tells us that we are not experiencing anything new. Those of us born in the last century, before and during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, are very familiar with our community's inhumane treatment at the hands of the white community.

In our improvement initiative, we listened, captured, and observed the silence that this pain causes. A multigenerational group of professionals in various disciplines discussed the difficulty of breathing in spaces with air so clean it is a sanctuary for those who fret industrialized segments of civilization. Yet, in this sacred space, we are denied our way of being. Our way of being as Black people is vital to our survival. African Americans are the only colonized people to have completely lost their cultural heritage. We have a hybrid experience-an adopted consciousness to a place that is so much a part of us yet so anti-us. The Blueprint participants expressed a desire for community, for a social space that supports us in our totality. A workplace that values our experience acknowledges that we are representatives of symbols that have over generations become part of the fabric of the identity in the United States, such as amber waves of grain and hot apple pie. In this space, we declare that new symbols like 'Arroz con Gandules, Ackee & Salt-Fish, and Deep Fry' are as American as previously mentioned.

THE BLUEPRINT

Building a sense of community is everyone's responsibility. The institution should leverage its influence to create a welcoming extended community beyond the campus grounds. It should be deliberate in its quest for equity, inclusion, and diversity and not leave it to chance. Leaders inspire through words but, most importantly, through actions. Mayhew et al. (2006) suggest that the power lies in leadership and their capacity to increase the value placed on diversity and inclusion. The African American employees' negative experience of feeling minoritized and isolated (Osajima, 2009) can be somewhat mitigated by our leaders' actions. A community like WCU needs to imagine itself into the 22nd century. It is a place and a time so far from our consciousness that we can construct it without today's biases and prejudices.

Lessons for Implementation

Setting aside the pandemic's impact, it helped that we had established personal and professional relationships with at least half of the targeted group. Still, that did not prevent participation attrition during the lifespan of the Blueprint. Another lesson learned was the importance of having a support team to assist with the blueprint aspects. Given the nature of our design and the adjustments, we deployed a group of friends to deliver lunches to participants during the "All I Need Luncheon." Having an organized schedule and a communications strategy was beneficial.

One of the most important lessons learned from the Blueprint was the importance of the initiative. David's message addressed the significance of having a simple wing night tradition, which created a space to develop friendship, accountability, and a safe space to unpack. The African American community expressed continuous gratitude for the space created during June and July that allowed for this development and unpacking. Unfortunately, David left the institution before the Blueprint execution, but during a one-on-one conversation, David

expressed how hopeful he was for the initiative because it is something he longed for from the moment he became an employee at the institution.

Limitations

The Blueprint took place online, as noted earlier during the COVID-19 pandemic. It involved faculty and staff activities within two months. A face-to-face longitudinal approach may provide the right opportunity for the necessary conditions to manifest themselves to achieve the desired results. While the Zoom® video conferencing platform provided a way to capture some nonverbal cues, the technology's lack of familiarization proved challenging for some participants. Among the issues encountered were lack of robust connectivity, divided attention, etiquette in communications, and fear of expression. A limitation of the Blueprint was that it was not a research project, and thus we could not discern an actual cause and effect, nor could we assume one. Another limitation was the limited amount of data available at the state and national levels that focused on African American administrators. Similarly, the literature available discussing African American professionals' retention in higher education was limited. Further, participants lived in two states; 98% of them resided in North Carolina, limiting the application of these results to other U.S. regions.

Recommendations from the African American Employees at WCU

There were several recommendations from the participants of the Blueprint. They can be categorized into three areas. Community, Hiring Process, Resources, and Social Engagement.

Community

During the Blueprint process, we learned that more than half of all the Black faculty and staff wanted to be part of the larger community and develop community amongst their people. One recommendation was to receive proper and timely communication from the leaders within

THE BLUEPRINT

the community. This allows for members to feel regarded for and valued. Another suggestion was to establish a formal Black Faculty and Staff group. To form such a group, we need to formalize a vision. Wenger et al. (2002) tell us that shared visions can develop at the moment or come from a thoughtful development process. In *Leading Change: Why Transformation Efforts Fail*, Kotter (1995) talks about the importance of having a vision. They say the vision transcends the strategic plans. A vision clarifies, directs, and helps move in the right direction. While in the beginning, a vision maybe the thought of a single person, once the community embraces it, they can shape it into all that it needs to be.

Hiring Process

Our research informed us of the importance of establishing network sessions during the candidate's interview process (Cardy & Lengnick-Hall, 2011). Participant 1040 shared how to grow the Black community with the following suggestions, "I think to better support black people and people of color, WCU should look at their hiring practice and be a bit more intentional about bringing black people and people of color to campus. I don't see a lot of us on campus. It's one thing to talk about all the changes you're making, but to apply the change is different."

Members shared a similar sentiment and displayed signs of agreement. Participant 1030 added, "It would be interesting to really do something in our HR department. I mean, not that little dry speech that they come and say, you know, try to think about diversity when you're hiring. I can almost recite it because I have been on so many search committees. The idea of really seeing diversity as an added value of someone from a diverse background contributes to this community. They can contribute to building a community for people of color and help the retention of this group of people."

THE BLUEPRINT

Other participants, such as participant 1024, shared ideas based on their experience when going through the interview process. They inquired if "during the interview process for new candidates before they get to campus, is there a possibility where this group of black faculty and staff can talk about their experiences at WCU."

Participant 1048 responded immediately with, "being brand new here, the Zoom® calls help, but it would also help to know where people live so when I do arrive, I just won't feel so lost and just dropped in one place. Maybe a simple social distance walk in the area." The suggestions from multiple participants identified a strong desire to include specific changes and additions throughout the HR process to enhance their experience as African American employees.

Resources

It was evident to us how much the participants want to be part of a community, but also, they want to feel like they belong to the broader institutional community. Their recommendation for streamline training and anti-racism and the other things suggested for faculty and staff is evidence of their belief that with more information, the majority will abandon their racist ideas and behaviors. We know from experience and some literature evidence that there is a majority pushback when educating them about racism (Bombaro, 2020). This approach reminds us of the words of the activist and revolutionary socialist Fred Hampton. Who imparted the Black Panther Party for Self Defense philosophy that racism distracted the people from recognizing their common plight?

...and when I talk about the masses, I'm talking about the white masses, I'm talking about the black masses, and the brown masses, and the yellow masses, too. We've got to face the fact that some people say you fight fire best with fire, but we say you put fire out best with water. We say you don't fight racism with racism. We're gonna fight racism with solidarity.

THE BLUEPRINT

We say you don't fight capitalism with no black capitalism; you fight capitalism with socialism. (Speakfaithfully, 2014)

We find ourselves offering solutions to the broader community around diversity, equity, and inclusion issues in higher education. We have developed this skill out of necessity and one that the general masses have not fully embraced as necessary to develop.

Living in rural spaces requires that African American professionals adapt, sacrifice, and establish new routines to accomplish day to day tasks. For this, one of the participants recommended that a directory of different hair salons, restaurants, doctors, schools, etc.... be created for faculty and staff of color.

Social Opportunities

In these recommendations, we see more evidence for the desire to live and work in a community that we have been exploring throughout this disquisition. The institution's locality and most of the Black community's central location is not within easy distance of the spaces that the community engages with for entertainment, nightlife, and other personal activities. Significant cities like Charlotte, NC, and Atlanta, GA, are between two and three hours away. What follows are four statements that call for and describe the significance of a sense of community. Participants recommended more activities that build on prior initiatives, such as more opportunities to interact within the Dubois family reunion, a previously established social group with African American employees.

One participant said, "I really want to interact with that group more because we don't get to see each other enough. I think if there were more planned opportunities to interact with those folks that I would be more on board for building community." Another participant responded by affirming the suggestion and sharing that they were looking forward to more...hanging out

together. Others suggested monthly gatherings and activities during homecoming weekend. The consensus was a desire for more social engagement and time spent together as a group.

Disquisitioners Recommendations

We recommend that future initiatives include another literature review and engage with agencies and other organizations to learn about new data. We also recommend future improvement science scholars engage with this topic to contribute to the body of knowledge relating to building a sense of community for African American professionals in higher education. In addition to replicating our basic improvement initiative, other matters may be addressed in future initiatives. First, it may be noteworthy to test how the distinctive participants related to one another and the impact on change-related performance over time. Universities may consider employing community-building activities, hoping that these will lead to employee organizational engagement over time. Ravid et al. (2017) discussed the importance of employers continuously making improvements to increase employees' job satisfaction. These improvements will lead to (1) increases in productivity, (2) higher retention rates, and (3) diminished criminal or unethical behavior. We recommend that University leaders review the nature of exit interviews and ensure that they capture employee experiences on what needs were not met that would have impacted their decision to remain at the institution.

Conclusion

If predominantly white institutions of higher education in the US are to stay true to their professed values of inclusive excellence, they need to address African American faculty and staff retention. Improving our systems is imperative to the growth and development of our society. Students, faculty, and staff notice a lack of representation within the institution and desire to see others who look like them (Kelly et al., 2017). The constant shift in faculty and staff

THE BLUEPRINT

demographics does not benefit the institution but instead hurts its image (Das & Baruah, 2013). This intervention is of significance for a couple of reasons. First, in a 2000 study entitled "Does Diversity Make a Difference? Three Research Studies on Diversity in College Classrooms," The American Council on Education and the American Association of University Professors found that minority professors had a positive impact on the education of nearly 85% of non-minority students and over 95% of minority students. Kelly et al. (2017) state that "Black students at predominantly white institutions (PWI's) are making it known that the recruitment of Black faculty and staff is important to their college experience" (p. 305). Second, the continuous disenfranchisement of African Americans throughout higher education affects agency and access to resources, in particular, at WCU.

A closer look at WCU institutional data reveals that African American faculty and staff turnover is among the worst of all ethnic groups. The absence of a critical mass of African American employees on the campus impacts the presence and viability of Black culture, which has been determined to impact African American student success positively. From a pragmatic point of view, we should care about African American retention because higher education is experiencing an era of restricted budgets, decreasing funding, and heading into a flat and or low enrollment (Grawe, 2018). Retention of faculty and staff should be viewed as an investment as it is more affordable to retain than to recruit repeatedly (The JBHE Foundation, Inc., 2010). Our short-term goals will focus on increasing a sense of community and increasing engagement in professional collaboration. Our long-term goal is to increase African American faculty and retention.

We have noted the national employment landscape and identified the key factors that impact employee retention. Utilizing the Ishikawa diagram, we further focused on the

THE BLUEPRINT

intervention. Using a driver diagram, we identified two critical factors in the McMillan and Chavis Sense of Community theory addressed through the intervention. In the timeline, we highlighted the key activities during the implementation of the PDSA cycles. Following the implementation, we evaluated the results against our anticipated outcomes. Our recommendations are the first step in altering the retention narrative for Black faculty and staff at WCU. The change was significant, but we are also aware that more work needs to be done. It will not be fixed overnight, but we are confident that this is essential work that merits attention.

Dissemination Plan

We will share the takeaways from the Blueprint improvement initiative with the Black Faculty and Staff Assembly members, which emerged as a direct result of the Blueprint improvement initiative. The dissemination plans related to this doctoral improvement initiative included a 30-minute power-point presentation for the University's various stakeholders. The stakeholders include human resources, hiring officials, senior leaders, faculty and staff senate, community partners, alumni, staff, and others interested in the topic (Oermann & Hays, 2016). The internal stakeholders will have the opportunity to ask questions and offer discussions during the question and answer period (Zaccagnini & White, 2014).

This dissemination plan also provides an opportunity for the internal stakeholders to understand the initiative; the discussions about the initiative can contribute to suggestions and feedback for further dissemination of the doctoral improvement initiative for a poster presentation at a conference or a journal publication. The disquisition will be available via ProQuest and on the Hunter Library database for anyone to see, review, and build upon our work. We believe that our findings can provide a Blueprint for higher education institutions'

THE BLUEPRINT

leaders to develop strategies centered around belonging and community building that will have a positive impact on the recruitment and retention of African Americans.

References

- Albu, O., & Flyverbom, M. (2016). Organizational transparency: Conceptualizations, conditions, and consequences. *Business & Society*, 58(2) 268-297.
- Aldefer, C. P., & Smith, K. K. (1982). Studying intergroup relations embedded in organizations. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 27(1), 35-65.
- Allen, W. R., Epps, E. G., Guillory, E. A., Suh, S. A., & Bonous-Hammarth, M. (2000). The Black academic: Faculty status among African Americans in US higher education. *Journal of Negro Education*, 69(1-2), 112-127.
- American Society of Association Executives (ASAE). (2015). *Associations FAQ*. Retrieved from <http://www.asaecenter.org/AboutUs/content.cfm?ItemNumber1/416341>.
- Anderson, E. (2015). The white space. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*. California, 1(1), 10-21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2332649214561306>
- Anjum, A., Ming, X., Siddiqi, A., & Rasool, S. (2018). An empirical study analyzing job productivity in toxic workplace environments. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 15(5), 1035. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph15051035>
- Armstrong, M. A., & Jovanovic, J. (2017). The intersectional matrix: Rethinking institutional change for URM women in STEM. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 10(3), 216–231. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000021>
- Bae, S-O., & Patterson, L. (2014). Comparison and implications of human capital theory at the individual, organizational, and country levels. *Journal of Organizational Culture, Communications & Conflict*, 18(1), 11-28.
- Baker, E. (2006). The human factor. *CIO Insight*, 73, 40-50. Retrieved from <https://www.cioinsight.com/print/c/a/Trends/Attracting-IT-Talent-The-Human-Factor>

- Beauchamp, S. (2014, January 1). How location-based technology can take your event to the next level. Convene.
<http://www.pcmacconvene.org/features/how-location-based-technology-can-take-your-event-to-the-next-level/>
- Bellah, R. N., Madsen, R., Sullivan, W. M., Swindler, A., & Tipton, S. M. (1985). *Habits of the heart: Individualism and commitment in American life*. University of California Press.
- Berger, P. L., Neuhaus, R. J., & American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research. (1977). *To empower people: The role of mediating structures in public policy*. American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research.
- Blinder, S. B. (2007). Dissonance persists: Reproduction of racial attitudes among post-civil rights cohorts of white Americans. *American Politics Research*, 35(3), 299-335.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X07300234>
- Bombaro, C. (Ed.). (2020). *Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Action: Planning, Leadership, and Programming*. American Library Association.
- Boswell, W. R., Boudreau, J. W., & Tichy, J. (2005). The relationship between employee job change and job satisfaction: The honeymoon hangover effect. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 90(5), 882-892. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.90.5.882>
- Boyd, N. M., & Nowell, B. (2018). Community at work: Sensing community through needs fulfillment and responsibility. In R. A. Cnaan, & C. Milofsky (Eds.), *Handbook of community movements and local organizations in the 21st century* (pp. 25-39). Springer.
- Brodsky, A. E., O'Campo, J., & Aronson, R. E. (1999). PSOC in community context: multi-level correlates of a measure of psychological sense of community in low-income, urban neighborhoods. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 27(6), 659-680.

- Brunges, M., & Foley-Brinza, C. (2014). Projects for increasing job satisfaction and creating a healthy work environment. *AORN Journal*, *100*(6), 670-681.
- Burke, M. G., Dye, L., & Hughey, A. W. (2016). Teaching Mindfulness for The Self-Care and Well-Being of Student Affairs Professionals. *College Student Affairs Journal*, *34*(3), 93-107. <http://proxy195.nclive.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/teaching-mindfulness-self-care-well-being-student/docview/1837173552/se-2?accountid=14968>
- Button, J., Rienzo, B., & Croucher, S. (2009). *Blacks and the Quest for Economic Equality: The Political Economy of Employment in Southern Communities in the United States*. Penn State University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/j.ctt7v1xb>
- Byrk, A.S., Gomez, L.M., Grunow, A., LeMahieu, P.G., (2016). Harvard Education Press.
- Campbell, T. A., & Campbell, D. E. (2007). Outcomes of mentoring at-risk college students: Gender and ethnic matching effects, *Mentoring & Tutoring* *15*(2), 135-148. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13611260601086287>
- Cardy, R. L., & Lengnick-Hall, M. L. (2011). Will they stay or will they go. Exploring a customer-oriented approach to employee retention. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, *26*(2), 213-217.
- Chaskin, R. J., & Richman, H. A. (1992). Concerns about school-linked services: institution-based versus community-based models. *Future of Children*, *2*(1), 104-117.
- Chavis, D.M., Hogge, J.H., McMillan, D.W., & Wandersman, A. (1986). Sense of community through Brunswick's lens: A first look. *Journal of Community Psychology*, *14*(1), 24-40.
- Coe, I.R., Wiley, R., & Bekker, L. G. (2019). Organizational best practices towards gender equality in science and medicine. *Lancet*,*393*(10171):587–93.72.

THE BLUEPRINT

Colombo, M., Mosso, C., & DePiccoli, N. (2001). Sense of community and participation in urban contexts. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology, 11*(6), 457-464.

Cornwall, A. (2008). Unpacking 'participation': Models, meanings and practices. *Community Development Journal, 43*(3), 269-283. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bsn010>

Dansereau, F., Graen, G., & Haga, W. (1975). A vertical dyad linkage approach to leadership in formal organizations. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance, 13*(1), 46-78.

Das, B. L., & Baruah, M. (2013). Employee retention: A review of literature. *Journal of Business and Management, 14*(2), 8-16.

Davidson, W. B., & Cotter, P. R. (1989). Sense of community and political participation. *Journal of Community Psychology, 17*(2), 119-125.

DeWalt, Kathleen M. & DeWalt, Billie R. (2002). Participant observation: a guide for fieldworkers. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.

Dubois, W. E. B. (1987). *The World and Africa: An Inquiry into the part which Africa has played in world history*. International Publishers.

Education Statistics. (2017). *Iped's Data Explorer*. Number of staff at Title IV institutions and administrative offices, by control and level of institution or administrative office, medical school staff status, occupational category, and employment status: United States, fall 2018.

<https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/search/ViewTable?tableId=26397&returnUrl=%2Fipeds%2Fsearch%2FView%3FresultType%3Dtable%26page%3D1%26sortBy%3Drelevance%26surveyComponents%3DFall%2520Enrollment%2520%28EF%29%26surveyComponents%3DFinance%2520%28F%29%26surveyComponents%3DAcademic%2520Libraries%2520>

- %28AL%29%26surveyComponents%3DHuman%2520Resources%2520%28HR%29%26collectionYears%3D2018-19%26sources%3DTables%2BLibrary%26sc-source%3Dspring
- Edwards, W.J., & Ross H.H. (2018) What are they saying? Black faculty at predominantly white institutions of higher education, *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 28:2, 142-161
- Elmore, B. D. (2020). Identity Negotiation Among Black Administrators at Predominantly White Institutions [Doctoral dissertation, Pennsylvania State University]. PennState Electronic Theses and Dissertations for Graduate School.
- Espinosa, L. L., Turk, J. M., Taylor, M., & Chessman, H. M. (2019). *Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education: A Status Report*. American Council on Education.
- Fanon, F. (1968). *The wretched of the earth*. Grove Press.
- Farrell, P. L. (2009). Investing in Staff for Student Retention, *Almanac of Higher Education* 85(1), 85-90.
- Festinger, L. (1957). *A theory of cognitive dissonance*. Row, Peterson.
- Fisher, A., & Sonn, C. C. (2007). Sense of community and dynamics of inclusion- exclusion by receiving communities. *The Australian Community Psychologist*, 19(2), 26-34.
- Flores, L.A., & Olcott, J. H. (2020). *The Academic's Handbook*. (4th Ed.). Duke University Press.
- Galupo, M. P., & Resnick, C. A. (2016). Experiences of LGBT microaggressions in the workplace: Implications for policy. (pp. 271-287). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-29623-4_16
- Gasman, M. (2016, September 20). The five things no one will tell you about why colleges

- don't hire more faculty of color. *The Hechinger Report*. <https://hechingerreport.org>
- Gatling, A., Shum, C., Book, L., & Bai, B. (2017). The influence of hospitality leaders' relational transparency on followers' trust and deviance behaviors: Mediating role of behavior integrity. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 62, 11- 12.
- Givens, J. R. (2016). The invisible tax: exploring Black student engagement at historically white institutions. *Berkeley Review of Education*, 6(1), 55-78.
- Godar, S. H., & O'Connor, P. J. (2001). Same time next Year—Buyer trade show motives. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 30(1), 77-86.
[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0019-8501\(99\)00100-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0019-8501(99)00100-5)
- Grawe, N. D. (2018). *Demographics and the Demand for Higher Education*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Grissom, R. J., and Kim, J. J. (2005). *Effect Sizes for Research: A Broad Practical Approach*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates
- Gusfield, J. R. (1975). *The community: A critical response*. Harper Colophon.
- Harris, K. J., Kacmar, K. M., & Zivnuska, S. (2007). An investigation of abusive supervision as a predictor of performance and the meaning of work as a moderator of the relationship. *Leadership Quarterly*, 18, 252-263.
- Howard-Hamilton (Ed.), *New directions for student services. Meeting the needs of African American women* (Vol. 104, pp. 19-28). Jossey-Bass.
- Imms, C., Granlund, M., Wilson, P. H., Steenbergen, B., Rosenbaum, P. L., & Gordon, A. M. (2017). Participation, both a means and an end: A conceptual analysis of processes and outcomes in childhood disability. *Developmental Medicine and Child Neurology*, 59(1), 16-25. [10.1111/dmcn.13237](https://doi.org/10.1111/dmcn.13237)

- Jayakumar, U. M., Howard, T. C., Allen, W. R., & Han, J. C. (2009). Racial privilege in the professoriate: An exploration of campus climate, retention, and satisfaction. *Journal of Higher Education, 80*(5), 538-557.
- Jo, V. H. (2008). Voluntary turnover and women administrators in higher education. *Higher Education, 56*(5), 565-582. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-008-9111-y>
- Johnston, A., Wech, B., & Jack, E. (2013). Engaging remote employees: The moderating role of remote status in determining employee information security policy awareness. *Journal of Organizational and End User Computing, 25*(1), 1-23.
- Kalayci, N., & Çimen, O. (2012). Analysis of questionnaires applied in the evaluation process of academicians in higher education institutes. *Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice, 12*(2), 838.
- Kayes, P. E. (2006). New paradigms for diversifying faculty and staff in higher education: Uncovering cultural biases in the search and hiring process. *Multicultural Education, 14*(2), 65-69.
- Kelly, B. T., Gayles, J. G., & Williams, C. D. (2017). Recruitment without retention: A critical case of black faculty unrest. *The Journal of Negro Education, 86*(3), 305-317.
<http://proxy195.nclive.org/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/1979466775?accountid=14968>
- Kezar, A., Gehrke, S., & Bernstein-Sierra, S. (2017). Designing for success in STEM communities of practice: Philosophy and personal interactions. *Review of Higher Education, 40*(2), 217-244. <https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2017.0002>
- Kim, W., & Brymer, R. (2011). The effects of ethical leadership on manager job satisfaction, commitment, behavior outcomes, and firm performance. *International Journal of*

- Hospitality Management*, 30(4), 1020-1026.
- Kotter, J. P. (2009). Leading Change: Why transformation efforts fail. *Long Range Planning*, 28(3), 121. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0024-6301\(95\)91633-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/0024-6301(95)91633-4)
- Kwenin, D.O., Muathe, S., Nzulwa, R. (2013). The influence of employee rewards, human resource policies and job satisfaction on the retention of employees in Vodafone Ghana Limited, *European Journal of Business and Management*, 5(12), 13-20.
- Langley, G. J., Moen, R. D., Nolan, K. M., Nolan, T. W., Norman, C. L., & Provost, L. P. (2009). The improvement guide: A practical approach to enhancing organizational performance. Jossey-Bass.
- Leider, J., Harper, E., Shon, J., Sellers, K., & Castrucci, B. (2016). Job satisfaction and expected turnover among federal, state, and local public health practitioners. *American Journal of Public Health*, 106(10), 1782-1788.
- Lester N. (2000). Nappy edges and goldy locks: black daughters and the politics of hair. *Lion Unicorn* 24 201–224. <https://doi.org/10.1353/uni.2000.0018>
- Linz, S., Good, L., & Busch, M. (2013). Does worker loyalty pay? Evidence from transition economies. Evidence-Based HRM. *A Global Forum for Empirical Scholarship*, 1(1), 16-40.
- Maertz, C. P., & Griffeth, R. W. (2004). Eight Motivational Forces and Voluntary Turnover: A Theoretical Synthesis with Implications for Research. *Journal of Management*, 30(5), 667-683. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jm.2004.04.001>
- Malvern, W.C., Michael, O.S., & Crispin, C. (2010), An examination of employee retention strategy in a private organization in Zimbabwe. *African Journal of Business Management*, 4(10), 2103-2109.

- Mannarini, T., & Fedi, A. (2009). Multiple senses of community: the experience and meaning of community. *Journal of Community Psychology, 37*(2), 211-227.
- Marcus, L.R. (2000). Staff diversity and the leadership challenge. *Equity & Excellence In Education, 33*(2), 61-67.
- Maruyama, G., Moreno, J. F., Gudeman, R. H., & Marin, P. (2000). *Does diversity make a difference? Three research studies on diversity in college classrooms*. American Council on Education.
- Mayfield, J., Mayfield, M., & Sharbrough, W. (2015). Strategic vision and values in top leaders' communications: Motivating language at a higher level. *International Journal of Business Communication, 52*(1), 97-121.
- Mayhew, M.J., Grunwald, H.E., & Dey, E.L. (2006). *Research in Higher Education, 47*(63), 63-88. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-004-8152-z>
- McClain, K. S., & Perry, A. (2017) "Where Did They Go: Retention Rates for Students of Color at Predominantly White Institutions," *College Student Affairs Leadership: Vol. 4 : Iss. 1, Article 3*. <http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/csal/vol4/iss1/3>
- McLeod, S. A. (2018, February 5). Cognitive dissonance. *Simply Psychology*. <https://www.simplypsychology.org/cognitive-dissonance.html>
- McMillan, D. (1996). Sense of community. *Journal of Community Psychology, 24*(4), 315-325.
- McMillan, D., & Chavis, D. (1986). Sense of community: a definition and theory. *Journal of Community Psychology, 14*(1), 6-23.
- Mishra, K., Boynton, L., & Mishra, A. (2014). Driving employee engagement: The expanded role of internal communications. *International Journal of Business Communication, 51*(2), 183-202.

THE BLUEPRINT

Moody, J. (2004). Faculty diversity: Problems and solutions. *Black Issues in Higher Education*, 21(10), 33-33.

National Center for Education Statistics (2019). Undergraduate enrollment table update. Institute of Education Sciences. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cha.asp

National Center for Education Statistics. (2016). Race/ethnicity of college faculty. Institute of Education Sciences.

https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d16/tables/dt16_315.20.asp?current=yes

Oermann, M. H., Christenbery, T., & Turner, K. M. (2018). Writing publishable review, research, quality improvement, and evidence-based practice manuscripts. *Nursing Economics*, 36(6), 268.

Ong, Q., & Theseira, W. (2016). Does choosing jobs based on income risk lead to higher job satisfaction in the long run? Evidence from the natural experiment of German reunification. *Journal of Behavior and Experimental Economics*, 65, 95-108.

Osajima, K. (2009). Telling our stories to one another. *Academe*, 95(3), 28-29.

Pachucki, M. A., Jacques, P. F., & Christaki, N. A. (2011). Social network concordance in food choice among spouses, friends, and siblings. *American Journal of Public Health (1971)*, 101(11), 2170-2177. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2011.300282>

Padilla, A.M. (1994). Ethnic minority scholars, research, and mentoring: Current and future issues. *Educational Researcher*, 23(4), 24-27.

Palanski, M., Avey, J. B., & Jiraporn, N. (2014). The effects of ethical leadership and abusive supervision on job search behaviors in the turnover process. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 121(1), 135-146. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-013-1690-6>

Panaccio, A., Vandenberghe, C., & Ben Ayed, A. K. (2014). The role of negative affectivity in

- the relationships between pay satisfaction, affective and continuance commitment and voluntary turnover: A moderated mediation model. *Human Relations*, 67(7), 821-848.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726713516377>
- Patitu, C. L., & Hinton, K. G. (2003). The experiences of African American women faculty and administrators in higher education: Has anything changed? *New Directions for Student Services*, 104, 79–93. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ss.109>
- Patton, L. D., & Catching, C. (2009). ‘Teaching while Black’: Narratives of African American student affairs faculty. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 22(6), 713-728.
- Perkins, D. D., Florin, P., Rich, R. C., Wandersman, A., & Chavis, D. M. (1990). Participation and the social and physical environment of residential blocks: crime and community context. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 18(1), 83-115.
- Picciotto, R. (1992). Participatory development: Myths and dilemmas (Vol. 930). World Bank Publications.
https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=YTrEBa5r-DcC&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&dq=Picciotto+1992+participation&ots=sN7cgJgqWm&sig=a_GK8MX-aOxfk3K_ZQNOJEQ8F_Q#v=onepage&q=Picciotto%201992%20participation&f=false
- Prezza, M., Amici, M., Roberti, T., & Tedeschi, G. (2001). Sense of community referred to the whole town: its relations with neighboring, loneliness, life satisfaction, and area of residence. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 29(1), 29-52.
- Prezza, M., & Costantini, S. (1998). Sense of community and life satisfaction: investigation in three different territorial contexts. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, 8(3), 181-194.

- Puddifoot, J. E. (2003). Exploring personal and shared sense of community identity in Durham City, England. *Journal of Community Psychology, 31*(1), 87-106.
- Raina, R., & Britt-Roebuck, D. (2016). Exploring cultural influence on managerial communication in relationship to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and the employees' propensity to leave in the insurance sector of India. *International Journal of Business Communication, 53*(1), 97-130.
- Ramani, S., McKimm, J., Findyartini, A., Nadarajah, V. D., Hays, R., Chisolm, M. S., Filipe, H. P., Fornari, A., Kachur, E.K., Kusurkar, R.A., Thampy, H., & Wilson, K. W. (2020). Twelve tips for developing a global community of scholars in health professions education, *Medical Teacher*,
<https://www.tandfonline.com/action/showCitFormats?doi=10.1080%2F0142159X.2020.1839034&area=0000000000000001>: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159X.2020.1839034>
- Ravid, O., Malul, M., & Zultan, R. (2017). The effect of economic cycles on job satisfaction in a two-sector economy. *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization, 138*, 1-9.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jebo.2017.03.028>
- Rhodes, C., & Brown, A. D. (2005). Narrative, organizations and research. *International Journal of Management Reviews : IJMR, 7*(3), 167-188.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2370.2005.00112.x>
- Robertson, B., & Kee, K. (2017). Social media at work: The roles of job satisfaction, employment status, and Facebook use with co-workers. *Computers in Human Behavior, 70*, 191-196.
- Sadatsafavi, H., Walewski, J., & Shepley, M. (2015). Physical work environment as a

- managerial tool for decreasing job-related anxiety and improving employee- employer relations. *Journal of Healthcare Management*, 60(2), 114-131.
- Saldaña, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Sage.
- Sarason, S. B. (1974). *The psychological sense of community: Prospects for a community psychology*. Jossey-Bass.
- Smith, W. A., Mustaffa, J. B., Jones, C.M., Curry, T. J. & Allen, W.R. (2016) ‘You make me wanna holler and throw up both my hands!’: campus culture, Black misandric microaggressions, and racial battle fatigue, *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 29:9, 1189-1209, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2016.1214296>
- Snell, S., & Dean, J. (1992). Integrated Manufacturing and Human Resource Management: A Human Capital Perspective. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 35(3), 467-504. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/256484>
- Sonn, C. C., & Fisher, A. T. (1998). Sense of community: Community resilient responses to oppression and change. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 26(5), 457-472. [https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1520-6629\(199809\)26:5<457::AID-JCOP5>3.0.CO;2-O](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1520-6629(199809)26:5<457::AID-JCOP5>3.0.CO;2-O)
- Speakfaithfully. (2014, April 23). Fred Hampton on solidarity and why the Black Panther Party was targeted [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sGyZSXAHD0M&feature=youtu.be>
- Stout, R., Archie, C., Cross, D., & Carman, C. A. (2018). The relationship between faculty diversity and graduation rates in higher education. *Intercultural Education*, 29(3), 399.
- Strayhorn, T. L. (2016). Factors that influence the persistence and success of Black men in urban public universities. *Urban Education*. Advance online publication. doi:[10.1177/0042085915623347](https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085915623347)

The JBHE Foundation, Inc. (2009). MIT gets serious about the racial diversity of its faculty. *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, (66), 36-37.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20722170>

Townley, G., & Kloos, B. (2009). Development of a measure of sense of community for individuals with serious mental illness residing in community settings. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 37(3), 362-80.

Turaga, R. (2016). Organizational models of effective communication. *IUP Journal of Soft Skills*, 10(2), 56-65.

Turner, C., & Grauerholz, L. (2017). Introducing the invisible man: Black male professionals in higher education. *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations*, 39, 212-227.

Turner, C. S. V., Myers, S. L., Jr., & Creswell, J. W. (1999). Exploring underrepresentation: The case of faculty of color in the Midwest. *Journal of Higher Education*, 70(1), 27-59.

Unal, A. F., Warren, D. E., & Chen, C. C. (2012). The normative foundations of unethical supervision in organizations. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 107, 5-19.

U. S. Census Bureau. (2018). *Community facts: Jackson County, North Carolina*. (Report No. P5, P8, PCT4, PCT5, PCT8, and PCT11)
https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml

Usher, K., Bhullar, N., & Jackson, D. (2020). Life in the pandemic: Social isolation and mental health. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*.

Vogelgesang, G., Leroy, H., & Avolio, B. (2013). The mediating effects of leader integrity with transparency in communication and work engagement/performance. *Leadership Quarterly*, 24(3), 405-413.

Welbourne, T. M., Rolf, S., & Schlachter, S. (2017). The case for employee resource groups: A

- review and social identity theory-based research agenda. *Personnel Review*, 46(8), 1816-1834. <https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-01-2016-0004>
- Wenger, E., McDermott, R.A., & Snyder, W. (2002). *Cultivating Communities of Practice*. Harvard Business School Press.
- West, N. M. (2017). Withstanding our status as outsiders-within: Professional counter spaces for African American women student affairs administrators. *NASPA Journal about Women in Higher Education*, 10(3), 281. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19407882.2017.1363785>
- Western Carolina University. (2018). *Reconstructed data on minority and women hiring at Western Carolina University 2000-2017*. Unpublished raw data.
- Western Carolina University. (2020a). Equal Employment Opportunity Report. <https://secure.my.wcu.edu/division/AdminFinance/HRandPayroll/Documents/EEO-Affirmative%20Action%20Plan.pdf>
- Western Carolina University. (2020b). *Staff Feedback Task Force Report at Western Carolina University*. Unpublished data.
- White, G. (2015, October 7). Black Workers Really Do Need to Be Twice as Good. *The Atlantic* <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/10/why-black-workers-really-do-need-to-be-twice-as-good/409276/>
- Wiesenfeld, E. (1996). The concept of “we”: A community social psychology myth? *Journal of Community Psychology*, 24(4), 337-345.
- Williams June, A. (2015, November 8). The Invisible Labor of Minority Professors. *Chronicle of Higher Education*. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/The-Invisible-Labor-of/234098>
- Wright, D., Taylor, J. D., Burrell, C., & Stewart, G. (2006). African American administrators and staff. *Metropolitan Universities*, 17(2), 58–68.

THE BLUEPRINT

Zaccagnini, M. E., & White, K. W. (2014). *The doctor of nursing practice essentials: A new model for advanced practice nursing* (Second ed.). Jones & Bartlett Learning.

Zakia, K., Jashim, U. A., & Shah, A. S. (2010). Faculty mobility in the private universities: developing country context. *KASBIT Business Journal*, 3(1), 7-24.

Zellars, K. L., Tepper, B. J., & Duffy, M. K. (2002). Abusive supervision and subordinates' organizational citizenship behavior. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 87(6), 1068-1076.

Appendix A

Blueprint Recruitment Email

Re: Subject

Invitation to participate in an improvement initiative on African American employee retention.

Dear WCU Colleague:

My name is Tacquice Davis. My colleague, Ricardo Nazario-Colón and I are Doctoral students in the Ed.D. Program in Education Leadership at Western Carolina University. We are working on an improvement initiative under the supervision of Dr. Kofi Lomotey.

As the recruiter for this improvement initiative, I am writing today to invite you to participate in our improvement initiative “The Blueprint: Building African American Sense of Community at Western Carolina University”. This 60-day improvement initiative aims to build a sense of community ultimately impacting the retention of African American employees at Western Carolina University. Through a series of targeted activities, our goal is to build a greater sense of belonging and address participants' needs.

This improvement initiative involves taking a:

- 25 minute pre-and post-Sense of Community Index II survey that will take place at the beginning and end of the 60-day improvement initiative.
- A five-minute post subscale survey regarding membership and fulfillment of needs at the end of Phase I activities.
- Participation in a pre- and post-focus group at the beginning and end of the 60-day improvement initiative.

THE BLUEPRINT

· Lastly, you will be invited to participate in two monthly activities geared toward membership and fulfillment of needs during the period of participation.

While this improvement initiative does not involve professional and emotional risks, care will be taken to protect your identity. This will be done by keeping all responses from surveys and focus groups anonymous. You will have the right to end your participation in the improvement initiative at any time, for any reason.

All data, including audio-recordings and any notes will be encrypted. Any hard copies of data (including any handwritten notes or USB keys) will be kept in a locked cabinet at Western Carolina University. Collected data will only be accessible by Tacquice Davis, Ricardo Nazario-Colón and Dr. Kofi Lomotey.

The ethics protocol for this improvement initiative was reviewed by the Western Carolina University Research Ethics Board, which provided clearance to carry out the improvement initiative. (Clearance expires on: May 15, 2021)

As part of our effort to protect your privacy and identity, a private Identification number has been assigned to you. Please use this Identification number throughout your participation in The Blueprint.

Identification Number: 1001

Important Note: Each person will receive a separate letter containing their own personal identification number.

Action Items: Please complete the following three things by June 10, 2020.

The Blueprint Membership Database

Pre-SCI II Index Survey

THE BLUEPRINT

The Consent Form (attached) to participate in this initiative. Fill it out electronically and email it back to tawiggan@wcu.edu by **(June 10, 2020)**.

If you have any ethical concerns with the study, please contact WCU IRB at irb@wcu.edu or 828-227-7212. If you have any questions, please contact me at 828-227-2615- or tawiggan@email.wcu.edu

Sincerely,

Tacquice Davis

Blueprint facilitator

Appendix B

Western Carolina University

Consent Form to Participate in a Research Study

You are invited to take part in an improvement initiative called the Blueprint. You were chosen to participate because you are employees who identify as African Americans at Western Carolina University. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand the Blueprint improvement initiative before deciding whether or not you will participate.

Project Title: African American Faculty and Staff Retention: Building a Sense of Community at Western Carolina University.

This study is being conducted by Mrs. Tacquice Davis, M.A.; Mr. Ricardo Nazario-Colón, M.S.T., who are doctoral students at Western Carolina University and Dr. Kofi Lomotey, principal investigator and faculty advisor. This study is being performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Education.

Description and Purpose of the Research: You are invited to participate in a project about African American retention. By doing this project we hope to learn that a sense of membership and fulfillment of needs can have a positive impact on the retention of African American employees at Western Carolina University. During this process, Mrs. Tacquice Davis will lead the recruitment and consent efforts. Mrs. Davis and Mr. Ricardo Nazario-Colón will lead the interview, focus groups, networking, and mentoring sessions.

What you will be asked to do: If you decide to participate, this is a basic outline of what will happen over the course of your participation.

Each participant will take a pre-survey called the Sense of Community Index version 2 (SCI-2) via Qualtrics, an online software. This survey should take approximately 25 minutes.

Take Over Meeting

(Membership Event)

This meeting will take place on June 16, 2020 via Zoom at 6:00 PM. The check-in process will involve (1) introductions and a roll call where participants will state preferred names (if applicable) and pronouns, (2) an overview of the meeting agenda, and (3) opportunities to socialize with one another.

6:00 – 6:10 P.M. Check-In and Socialization

6:10 – 6:15 P.M. Welcome from Mrs. Tacquice Davis and Mr. Ricardo Nazario y Colón
We will provide a general welcome and express appreciation for your participation. We will also review the meeting agenda.

6:15 – 6:35 P.M. Icebreaker Activity lead by Mrs. Tacquice Davis
The activity chosen will allow participants to get to know each other and become familiar with who is on the zoom.

6:35 – 6:50 P.M. Introduction and overview of the Blueprint
We will discuss our Ed.D. program, our problem of practice, and what we hope to be able to accomplish.

6:50 – 7:10 P.M. Lay out events
We will provide the entire calendar of activities and explain them in detail.
We will announce the next event and explain the lunch survey.

7:10 – 7:30 P.M. Respond to Questions
We will answer questions about the entire Blueprint (i.e., timeline, research, gathering of data, confidentiality, purpose).
Administer Post sub-scale survey within 24 Hrs. utilizing Qualtrics

All I Need Luncheon

(Fulfillment of Needs Event)

This luncheon will take place on June 29, 2020 via Zoom at 12:00 PM. This luncheon will provide an opportunity for participants to share knowledge, discuss interests and hobbies, and discuss professional and personal aspirations. We will also give an overview of the mentorship portion of the blueprint.

12:00 – 12:15 P.M. Check-In and Grab / Receive Lunch

12:15 – 12:20 P.M. Welcome from Mrs. Tacquice Davis and Mr. Ricardo Nazario y Colón

12:20 – 12:35 P.M. Icebreaker Activity lead by Mrs. Tacquice Davis

Would you Rather: An icebreaker activity that allows participants to start a conversation in a fun and interesting way.

12:35 – 1:15 P.M. Too many questions, not enough time

We will dedicate 40 minutes to this discussion

- When did you decide to go into higher education?
- Describe the time in your career transition when you knew you were moving from one status to the next?
- Are there any regrets that have impacted your status?
- Share your higher education journey with the group?
- If not higher education, what other career would you have taken on?
- When was that moment you knew you were good at your job
- When did you realize, you had a seat around the table?
- How do you continue to refine your craft?

THE BLUEPRINT

- How do you manage being the only black person in the room?
- How do you build relationships?
- What sacrifices have you made to get where you are?

Note: everyone must contribute

1:15 – 1:25 P.M.

Mentorship Part 1 Discussion

What is mentorship and what does it look like for this group. Review the mentorship vision and goals for the Blueprint. Identify the areas in which mentorship will be provided.

Assignment – Ask each participant to brainstorm areas in which they would like to be mentored in: (examples)

- Exercise
- Healthy Eating
- Career Planning and Mentorship

1:25 – 1:30 P.M.

- Announcement of next event
- Post sub-scale survey within 24 hrs. – Qualtrics

Breathe Easy (Social Gathering)

(Membership Event)

This virtual social gathering will take place on July 10, 2020 via Zoom at 8:00 PM. This gathering will be a time for participants to engage in games, fun, and be given an opportunity to fellowship with one another. Through this event participants will create a sense of identity, develop friendships and build connections.

THE BLUEPRINT

- 8:00 – 8:10 P.M. Check-In and Socialization
- 8:10 – 8:20 P.M. Welcome from Mrs. Tacquice Davis and Mr. Ricardo Nazario y Colón
We will provide a general welcome and an overview of the games that will be played.
- 8:20 – 8:40 P.M. Icebreaker Activity lead by Mrs. Tacquice Davis
The activity chosen will allow participants to get to know each other and become familiar with who is on the zoom.
- 8:40 – 9:40 P.M. Power Hour
We will engage in interactive activities such as Cards against humanity, Charades, Hot seat, Karaoke and more.
- 9:40 – 9:45 P.M. Lay out next event
We will announce the next event and explain the lunch survey.
- 9:45 – 10:00 P.M. Respond to Questions
We will answer questions about the entire Blueprint (i.e., timeline, research, gathering of data, confidentiality, purpose, etc.)

As One Meeting

(Fulfillment of Needs Event)

This meeting will take place on July 20, 2020 via Zoom at 12:00 PM. This meeting will be facilitated by the Chief Diversity Officer (CDO). Participants will be given an overview of the state of the black community at WCU and opportunities for collaboration. We will also conduct the self-selection process of mentors.

12:00 – 12:10 P.M. Check-In and socialization

THE BLUEPRINT

12:10 – 12:15 P.M. Welcome from Mrs. Tacquice Davis and Mr. Ricardo Nazario y Colón

12:15 – 12:40 P.M. State of WCU & the Black Community

The CDO will provide an overview of where we are as a community.

12:40 – 12:55 P.M. Collective Responsibility Opportunities

- Grant Proposals
- Conference Presentation
- Workshop Development
- Online Structures

12:55 – 1:25 P.M. Mentorship Part 2

Participants will self-select their mentors. Each pair will break off into a

One- on- one session where three key elements must be completed:

- Set an upcoming meeting day and time
- Set one goal for the mentorship experience
- Set a timeline for your mentor/mentee relationship for the next six months

1:25 – 1:30 P.M.

- Announcement of the Blueprint conclusion
- Post SCI II Index Survey 24 hrs. - Qualtrics

Risks and Discomforts:

There are no anticipated risks from participating in the Blueprint improvement initiative. We anticipate that your participation in the surveys presents no greater risk than everyday use of the Internet. You may refuse to answer any of the questions, take a break or stop your participation at any time.

THE BLUEPRINT

Benefits: It is reasonable to expect the following benefits from participation in the Blueprint improvement initiative – a heightened sense of belonging in the WCU community and a sense of fulfillment of needs as a member of this community. However, we can't guarantee that you will personally experience these benefits from participating.

Privacy/Confidentiality/Data Security: We cannot guarantee total confidentiality, but we will take the following steps to protect your information from unauthorized disclosure, tampering, or damage: Every participant will be assigned a pseudonym. Only Mrs. Davis, Mr. Nazario-Colón and their principal investigator and faculty advisor, Dr. Kofi Lomotey, will have access to the data collected. In some rare cases, it may be necessary, for your safety or for the integrity of the Blueprint Intervention Program, for individuals from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) -- an administrative body established to protect the rights and welfare of human research subjects -- to have access to the data collected. Your personal information may also be given out if required by law, such as pursuant to a court order.

All data gathered will be used in the aggregate. We will not publish any data collected and associate it with any pseudonym or any individual participant. If we decide to present the results of the Blueprint improvement initiative publicly your name and other personal information will not be revealed. Data will be stored for three years under an encrypted cloud-based system that will require both Mrs. Davis and Mr. Nazario-Colón to input a component of the password to access the data.

Focus group:

A pre-and post-focus group will be conducted at the beginning and end of the improvement initiative. We will request that all participants respect the confidentiality of the group and do not share any other participant's responses outside of the group. However, we cannot guarantee your

THE BLUEPRINT

privacy or confidentiality because there is always the possibility that another member of the group could share what was said. Pseudonyms will be assigned to each participant, and during the course of the interview and in all notes, you will only be referred to by your pseudonym.

Audio recordings:

Audio recordings will be collected during this study and used to ensure the accuracy of the data being gathered. The recordings will be kept confidential. The transcript will be kept with other research data and will be stored for three years under an encrypted cloud-based system that will require both Mrs. Davis and Mr. Nazario-Colón to input a component of the password to access the data. After three years, all data will be permanently deleted.

You do not have to agree to be recorded to participate in the main part of this intervention.

Voluntary Participation: Participation is voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If you choose not to participate or decide to withdraw, there will be no impact on your employment.

Compensation for Participation: None.

Contact Information: For questions about this study, please contact Mrs. Tacquice Davis at tawiggan@email.wcu.edu and Mr. Ricardo Nazario-Colón at rnazariocolon@wcu.edu. You may also contact Dr. Kofi Lomotey, the principal investigator, and faculty advisor for this project, at klomotey@email.wcu.edu.

If you have questions or concerns about your treatment as a participant in this study, you may contact the Western Carolina University Institutional Review Board through the Office of Research Administration by calling 828-227-7212 or emailing irb@wcu.edu. All reports or correspondence will be kept confidential to the extent possible.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

THE BLUEPRINT

I understand what is expected of me if I participate in this research study. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and understand that participation is voluntary. My signature shows that I agree to participate and am at least 18 years old.

Participant Name (printed): _____

Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name of Researcher Obtaining Consent: _____

Researcher Signature: _____ Date: _____

If you would like to receive a summary of the results, once the study has been completed, please write your email address (as legibly as possible) here:

I do or do not give my permission to the investigators to quote me directly in their research

The investigators may or may not digitally record this interview.

Participant Name (printed): _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C

Sense of Community Index II

Sense of Community Index

		Not at All	Somewhat	Mostly	Completely
8.	I can recognize most of the members of this community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9.	Most community members know me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10.	This community has symbols and expressions of membership such as clothes, signs, art, architecture, logos, landmarks, and flags that people can recognize.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11.	I put a lot of time and effort into being part of this community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12.	Being a member of this community is a part of my identity.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13.	Fitting into this community is important to me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14.	This community can influence other communities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15.	I care about what other community members think of me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
16.	I have influence over what this community is like.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
17.	If there is a problem in this community, members can get it solved.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
18.	This community has good leaders.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
19.	It is very important to me to be a part of this community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
20.	I am with other community members a lot and enjoy being with them.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
21.	I expect to be a part of this community for a long time.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
22.	Members of this community have shared important events together, such as holidays, celebrations, or disasters.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
23.	I feel hopeful about the future of this community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
24.	Members of this community care about each other.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

SENSE OF COMMUNITY INDEX II

The following questions about community refer to: _____

How important is it to you to feel a sense of community with other community members?

1	2	3	4	5	6
Prefer Not to be Part of This Community	Not Important at All	Not Very Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important

How well do each of the following statements represent how you *feel* about this community?

		Not at All	Somewhat	Mostly	Completely
1.	I get important needs of mine met because I am part of this community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2.	Community members and I value the same things.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3.	This community has been successful in getting the needs of its members met.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4.	Being a member of this community makes me feel good.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5.	When I have a problem, I can talk about it with members of this community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6.	People in this community have similar needs, priorities, and goals.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7.	I can trust people in this community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Instructions for Scoring the Revised Sense of Community Index

1. Identifying the Community Referent

The attached scale was developed to be used in many different types of communities. Be sure to specify the type of community the scale is referring to before administering the scale. Do not use “your community” as the referent.

2. Interpreting the Initial Question

The initial question “How important is it to you to feel a sense of community with other community members?” is a validating question that can be used to help you interpret the results. We have found that total sense of community is correlated with this question – but keep in mind this may not be true in every community.

3. Scoring the Scale

For the 24 questions that comprise the revised Sense of Community Index participants:

Not at All = 0, Somewhat = 1, Mostly = 2, Completely = 3

Total Sense of Community Index = Sum of Q1 to Q24

Subscales

Reinforcement of Needs = Q1 + Q2 + Q3 + Q4 + Q5 + Q6

Membership = Q7 + Q8 + Q9 + Q10 + Q11 + Q12

Influence = Q13 + Q14 + Q15 + Q16 + Q17 + Q18

Shared Emotional Connection = Q19 + Q20 + Q21 + Q22 + Q23 + Q24

Appendix D

Detailed Event Timeline

- Ricardo and Tacquice Mapping Meeting October - December 2019
- Meet with Design Team January 2020
- Submit Final Proposal
- Defend Proposal February 13, 2020
- IRB Application Submission February 27, 2020
 - IRB Addendum Submitted due to COVID-19 April 27, 2020
- IRB Approval May 29, 2020
- Request African American employee database May 29, 2020
- Email African American Employees. Invitation to Participate in Blueprint. June 1, 2020
 - Recruitment email
 - Consent Form
 - Pseudonym
- Focus Group June 2-12, 2020
- Official Blueprint Membership Email June 1- 10, 2020
 - Pre-SCI II Index Survey Link
 - Membership Database link
 - Takeover Meeting Logistics, Date, Time, Location
- Reminder email to Participate in the Blueprint – Send on June 5, 2020
- Reminder email to attend the Takeover Meeting – Send on June 10, 2020
- Second reminder email to attend the Takeover Meeting – Send on June 15, 2020

Appendix E

Balancing Measure Questionnaire

1. Reflecting on your participation in the Blueprint, how has your participation impacted your:
 - a. Home life
 - b. Work productivity
 - c. Mental health

Appendix F

Focus Group Protocol

Script

Welcome, and thank you for being here today. The purpose of this gathering is to learn about experiences, thoughts, and emotions regarding your time at WCU. Specifically, we want to understand what brought you here, what has kept you here, and what might drive you to leave WCU. Once we learn about these experiences, we will be able to develop an intervention that might offer better support. That is the goal of this improvement initiative.

Let me introduce myself. I am _____ and I will be the moderator in today's discussion. The format we are using is a focus group. A focus group is a conversation that focuses on specific questions in a safe and confidential environment. I will guide the conversation by asking questions for you to respond. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. Just be honest. If you wish, you can also respond to each other's comments, like you would in an ordinary conversation. It is my job to make sure that everyone here gets to participate and stay on track. _____ is here to record and summarize your comments.

Before we get started, I want to let you know two things. First, the information we learn today will be part of the information we will synthesize while preparing our disquisition. Not everything will be included in our disquisition but some of what is said today will be. Upon completion, our Disquisition will be published. Secondly, you do not have to answer any questions with which you do not feel comfortable. This focus group today is anonymous and confidential. "Anonymous" means that we will not be using your names, and you will not be identified as an individual in our notes or our disquisition. "Confidential" means that what we say in this room should not be repeated outside of this room. I cannot control what you do when

THE BLUEPRINT

you leave, but I ask each of you to respect each other's privacy and not tell anyone what was said by others here today.

Please be aware that we will record this zoom session of the focus group. I will use the recording to make sure our notes are correct and will not be heard by anyone outside of Mrs. Tacquice Davis, Mr. Ricardo Nazario-Colón, and our Chair, Dr. Kofi Lomotey.

Focus Group Questions

1. Opening question: Please share with us your name and something you love to do in your free time.
2. Transition Question: When you think of WCU what comes to mind?
3. Transition Question: Think back to when you first started working at WCU. What was your first impression?
4. Key Question: What do you like most about working at WCU?
5. Follow up: Do you feel that you belong at Western Carolina University?
 - a. Why or why not?
6. Probing Question (if necessary): Do you feel that you are a valued and an essential part of your workgroup?
 - a. Why or why not?
 - b. Probing Question: Do you feel professionally, emotionally and socially supported at work?
 - c. Probing Question: What could WCU do to better support you?
7. Key Question: What characteristics, traits, contributions, and behaviors are most valued and rewarded at WCU?
8. Follow up: Do you ever feel left out at work – either when engaging in work activities or socially?
 - a. Probing Question (if necessary): Does anyone else have a similar experience?
9. Key Question: Do you feel comfortable being yourself at work?
10. Follow up: Do you interact informally or formally with colleagues across the WCU?

THE BLUEPRINT

11. Probing Question (if necessary): How frequently do you interact with colleagues outside of your workgroup/department?
12. Key Question: To what extent do you feel that you can disclose your whole identity to your colleagues?
13. Follow up: Are there aspects of your social identity that you feel you need to keep separate from the workplace?
14. Follow up: Have you faced or witnessed prejudice or discrimination in your work setting? Describe what happened.
15. Probing Question (if necessary): Do you mask or downplay any aspect of your physical, cultural, spiritual or emotional self at WCU?
16. Ending Question: Can you list for us the factors that could contribute to you doing the best work of your life?
17. Ending Question: How confident are you in the leadership of this organization?
18. Ending Question: How would you feel about leaving WCU?
19. Ending Question: What advice would you give to new African American employees?

I see our time is up. Thank you so much for sharing this useful information with us.

Appendix G

Sample Email Correspondence #1

Hello Member (insert pseudonym),

Thank you for taking the time to complete the:

- Membership Database
- Pre-SCI II Survey
- Consent Form

We are excited to begin our improvement initiative. The first Blueprint event will be held:

- Tuesday, June 16, 2020 at 6:00pm via Zoom

This meeting will include (1) introductions and a roll call where participants will state preferred names (if applicable) and pronouns, (2) an overview of the meeting agenda, and (3) opportunities to socialize with one another. A calendar invite will be sent the week of June 8th – 12th with the zoom link.

Thank you for your participation,

Tacquice

Appendix H

Sample Email Correspondence #2

Hello Blueprint Participants,

THANK YOU for attending the luncheon today. We hope you had a good time getting to know each other, enjoyed lunch, and are looking forward to engaging with the community again.

Ricardo and I cannot express how grateful we are for each one of you.

Friendly reminder - Homework assignment: Take some time to think about in what area you would be interested in receiving mentorship (personal or professional) and what area you would be willing to provide mentorship (personal and professional).

It is important that we gather data as we progress throughout the improvement initiative. Please complete the short survey below:

Fulfillment of Needs Event 1 - All I Need Luncheon

“Alone, we can do so little; together, we can do so much” – Helen Keller

Thank you for your participation,

Tacquice