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Thriving in Students of Color at a Predominantly White Institution

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THRIVING IN STUDENTS OF COLOR AT A PREDOMINATLY WHITE

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL
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Abstract

Every year, students of color across the United States diversify their university campuses;

in return, many of them fail to engage with their peers or succeed in their class work due

to feelings of neglect or fear that contribute to a lack of engagement and success. To

begin to explore the challenges students of color face when enrolled at a predominantly

white institution, one must look into how their experiences help or hinder their thriving.

Beyond surviving in a college environment, thriving conveys a student's full

engagement in his or her intellectual, social, and emotional experiences. A sense of

psychological well-being contributes to their persistence to graduation and to life

(Schreiner, Pothoven, Nelson, & McIntosh, 2009). To best help students of color thrive

throughout their college experience, this study asked students of color two questions. The

first related to their perceptions of their own thriving, and the second explored the factors

of thriving students of color excel in while enrolled at a predominantly white institution.

Five factors determine students' thriving: academic determination, diverse citizenship,

engaged learning, positive perspective, and social connectedness.

This study used the Thriving Quotient by Laurie Schreiner (2010). Forty-five

students of color completed the survey, and the data was analyzed in two data sets: first-

year students and upperclassmen. The results indicated students of color are indeed

thriving, and most of them are represented in four of the five thriving factors. However,

there are still students of color who are not thriving, and they should not be overlooked.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

A university's campus climate for diversity is influenced by a variety of factors. Each institution has differing approaches to diverse conversations, but the overall experiences for students of color relating to diverse conversations and initiatives prove quite similar and may alter their overall perceptions of thriving. According to Johnson (2015), the term *student of color* refers to any person who views him or herself as non-white. These students can be described as (but are not limited to) the races of Black, African American, Hispanic, Asian, or Native American. The phrase *student of color* is commonly used on many predominantly white college campuses to identify minority students. This phrase has also been commonly used across the United States in many conversations on the topics of race, oppression, equality, and diversity.

According to Bourke (2010), students of color tend to have a harder transition into college, not only because of the expectations put on them to succeed but also because of stereotypes and microaggressions toward them. Campus climates for diversity, however, are not static, and the patterns, beliefs, and behaviors can shift with intentional efforts to change or improve (Hurtado, Carter, & Kardia, 1998). Furthermore, research has concluded that, for the diversity on a campus to thrive, the institution must clearly communicate their support and the necessary steps they hope to take in order to create a more diverse campus. Supporting diversity with a clear and tangible mindset presents

opportunities for growth and deep relationships to form within the institution, but it remains necessary to further explore and understand the challenges and achievements students of color face at predominantly white institutions (Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005; Williams & Clowney, 2007).

Bourke (2010) described predominantly white institutions as institutions at which the majority of enrolled students are white, and the minority are from underrepresented racial groups, including non-white, African American, Hispanic, and Asian students.

To begin to explore the challenges students of color face when enrolled in college, one must look into how their experiences help or hinder their thriving beyond surviving in a college environment. A a sense of psychological well-being contributes not only to their persistence to graduation but also to life (Schreiner, Pothoven, Nelson, & McIntosh, 2009). In addition, students of color can engage with multiple pathways in order to successfully thrive while in college. For Asian and Hispanic students, the pathways of spirituality, faculty interaction, and sense of community are ones they engage with the most (Schreiner, Louis, & Nelson, 2012). This research study therefore examined the thriving of students of color at a small, private, liberal arts predominantly white institution located in the Midwest and how their thriving affects their learning, social life, engagement, and determination on campus.

Explanation of Thriving

Schreiner (2014) described thriving as a new way of exploring the success of college students, specifically through their intellectual, social, and psychological engagement. Factors contributing to students' thriving include positive perspective, engaged learning, academic determination, social connectedness, and diverse citizenship

(Schreiner et al., 2012). The purpose of this research was to engage with students of color in order to understand their self-perceptions of their thriving as well as to bring about awareness and useful outcomes. More research needs to be done to help students of color feel equipped and validated as well as to learn more about their experiences in order to best help them after college in this ever-diversifying world (Bourke, 2010).

As students of color engage college life, many struggle to find their outlet on their campus and feel as though they cannot fully express themselves. With students of color traveling from all over the world and across the United States to predominantly white institutions, many face daily experiences that can be draining and frustrating (Bourke, 2010). A sense of belonging has been identified as one of the main factors students of color perceive as a part of their success in college, ideally with the ability to monitor and navigate a good path for them (Schreiner, Nelson, McIntosh, & Edens, 2011). Therefore, to steward belonging, it would be good to engage with questions and topics that ignite the interests of students of color while also creating spaces for them to express themselves (Delgado Bernal, Alemán, & Garavito, 2009; Museus, 2008).

Research Questions

This study sought to understand the experiences of students of color at a predominantly white institution by examining their self-perceptions of their thriving. The research was guided in particular by the following questions:

- How do students of color at a predominantly white institution perceive themselves as thriving?

- What factors of thriving are students of color excelling in while enrolled at a predominantly white campus?

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Thriving

According to Schreiner (2010), thriving, in relation to students, represents a view of student success that is holistic in nature which incorporates academic performance and engagement, healthy relationships, openness to diverse perspectives, a commitment to making a difference, and having a positive perspective on the present and the future. However, transitioning into college is not always easy, and some students are met with negative experiences and a lack of engagement, hindering their full potential while in college (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006).

Thriving has been linked to many psychological models, including that of Bean and Eaton (2000), which explored the engagement of students during their experiences of college life as well as their ongoing development through college and after graduation. Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon (2004) focused more on the psychological processes and the persistence of growth in students relating to their social adjustment and community potential. All of these psychological models show the relationship between the way students thrive in college and how it enables them with a different experience that shapes who they are.

There are three aspects in which thriving contributes to student success and persistence: academic engagement and performance, interpersonal relationships, and

psychological well-being. Students who thrive not only do so through their academics but also through social engagement, personal goals, and diversifying experiences (Schreiner, McIntosh, Nelson, & Pothoven, 2009). Furthermore, the Thriving Quotient was developed by Laurie Schreiner (2010) to measure the academic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal engagement and well-being of students. Five factors within these three sectors contribute to the final result of students thriving. The five factors are engaged learning, academic determination, positive perspective, diverse citizenship and social connectedness. They all represent different areas of thriving that may fluctuate depending on the results of the student (Schreiner, McIntosh, et al., 2009).

Academic thriving is characterized by the engaged learning and academic determination factors. Students who thrive academically are well engaged with their schoolwork. They are also active learners and meaningfully process their coursework. Furthermore, they make connections between current knowledge they have and the knowledge they constantly are learning. Academically thriving students are focused on learning new ideas and open to new opportunities with an overflow of energy (Schreiner & Louis, 2011).

Intrapersonal thriving relates to the healthy attitude development among students as well as toward their own learning experiences. The positive perspective factor falls under intrapersonal thriving, and these students "have an optimistic way of viewing the world and their future" (Schreiner et al., 2012, p. 7) as well as a healthy attitude toward their own growth. Intrapersonal thriving allows students to understand how to work best, engaging with others once they know themselves. Positive perspective enables students to bring the positive out of negative situations and see the benefits that can arise.

The social connectedness and diverse citizenship factors are found within the interpersonal thriving sector (Schreiner, Pothoven, et al., 2009). Healthy relationships in students are of considerable importance to the social connectedness factor. Students can listen well and enter relationships that reflect their personalities and experiences. Chickering and Reisser (1993) noted that "the ability to form and maintain healthy relationships is an important element in college students' growth" (p. 8). Furthermore, diverse citizenship combines a student's openness and values for differences found in others. The desire allows students to contribute to their communities while gaining new ideas and insights from others. Overall, "they want to make a difference in their community and the larger society" (Schreiner, Pothoven, et al., 2009, p. 8).

Campus Diversity

According to Cuseo, Fecas, and Thompson (2007), diversity is "the variety that exists in humanity" (p. 207). Furthermore, racial diversity is explained as a group of persons sharing distinctive physical traits, such as skin color, or facial characteristics. Diversity of persons exists all around. More than just a physical appearance, diversity includes discussions on rights and social justice as well as conversations on politics and education. Diversity enhances the college experience of students and allows them to have multiple experiences and perspectives in their learning (Cuseo et al., 2007).

As years go by, the enrollment of students at many institutions across the United States show changes to reflect a more diverse student body. A new census has predicted that, by 2045, the United States will become a "minority white" nation, and racial minorities of this country will become the primary and leading demographic (Frey, 2018). Similarly, it has been projected that, by year 2060, one in three Americans will be

a race other than white (Vespa, Armstrong, & Medina, 2018). This number is slimmer than in 1990, when it was one in five Americans.

The changes to a more diverse campus call for more diversity training and educational action to prepare faculty, staff, and student peers for the differences that will occur. The University of Michigan recently implemented a course for their residential student leaders to equip them as safe and supportive leaders toward diversity efforts. Knowing there are various student leadership roles, the main goals of the course are to help students become intentional leaders and to lean into their peers and steward good community. In addition, the course, Social Psychology in Community Settings, serves as an intervention training to enable students to be effective leaders on a team (Petryk, Thompson, & Boynton, 2013). Residence halls at many institutions provide a multicultural environment for students coming from a multitude of cultures and backgrounds and enable them to live alongside one another (Petryk et al., 2013). This new environment calls for students to be stretched and challenged as they not only move into a new space but live together with persons who may bring differing ideas and perceptions to their college experience. This new experience allows student leaders to use the information given in the training course, as they understand how to build a diverse residential community with persons from differing backgrounds (Piper & Buckley, 2004). The program equips student leaders as well as the wider student body to be better stewards of welcoming and living with diversity on their campus.

Diversity on a college campus offers many benefits. Cuseo et al. (2007) believed that a diverse experience increases self-awareness and self-knowledge, deepens learning, stimulates creative thinking, and enhances the career preparation and career success for

students. By becoming more aware about the persons on any college campus, students learn more about themselves and what they have to offer.

As interactions occur among different persons, the brain is challenged to think differently and to see new experiences. Unfamiliar encounters allow for active consideration as the brain thinks deeper and longer on what is being taught (Cuseo et al., 2007). Therefore, the diversity of conversations in which one chooses to engage can and does strengthen one's diverse competencies. On the other hand, if one opts not to engage, this shortens the depth of one's diverse learning (Cuseo et al., 2007).

Students of Color

According to Anderson (2004), students of color are not a uniform group but rather a diverse group of persons from different cultures, races, ethnicities, classes, genders, ages, worldviews, and spiritualties. When speaking about students of color, there should not be an assumption that all come from the same background. If given enough time to interact with even a small group of students of color, each experience will bring different outcomes and stories to the table. Every year, students of color across the United States diversify their university campuses; in return, many of them fail to succeed or engage with their peers or in their class work due to feelings of neglect and fear.

To better support students of color at universities and colleges, institutions' top administrators must actively commit to changing campus culture—every department, association, program, and the overall framework of the campus—to reflect and validate the experiences of the students (Smircich, 1983). The process of creating a campus that validates students is not easy; challenges will arise that may seem impossible. However, making sure to have possible strategies to defuse the challenges certainly helps.

Students of color face many barriers in general as well as when they attend universities and colleges. The barriers students face varies depending on their cultural background, the diversity climate on their campuses, or even how the identify themselves as a student of color in the current environment.

Having an ethnocentric view on life does not leave room for a growth mindset when immersed in a community with other ethnic groups. Cuseo et al. (2007) explained the term *ethnocentrism* as a perspective in which one is so fixated on a culture that they view their life entirely through their own lens and fail to appreciate the diverse groups around themselves. Such a mindset does not allow for everyone to feel welcome or wanted. Instead, it puts up walls and barriers to other students and makes them feel insecure or excluded. The unwelcoming posture of someone with an ethnocentric perspective can also make students feel pushed in a corner as a stereotype threat (Aronson & Steele, 2005).

A pressing barrier that hinders the growth of students of color is stereotyping. Stereotyping overlooks the individuality of persons and characterizes each one in the same way regardless of personal differences (Cuseo et al., 2007). Stereotyping does not allow students of color to strive to their fullest academic potential, and it leaves a negative gap between themselves and the other dominant students (McIntosh, 2012). Stereotyping does not only overgeneralize but also cripples the individual and weakens the self-confidence students of color have (Cuseo et al., 2007). According to Primm (2018), "college students of color face a unique situation in the vortex of transitional age and a racially polarized society where negative stereotypes of people of color are common" (para. 7). The traditional age of college students is 18 to 24, and as they

transition into adulthood, Primm (2018) suggested that mental illness and multiple stressors begin to appear in their lives along with the stereotypes these students face. In a survey by the Steve Fund (2015), results found students of color felt less prepared both emotionally and academically than their white peers for their course load. The findings show students of color are less likely to reach out for assistance due to the stigma of having more emotional issues, a reluctance to seek help with mental health issues, and the "cultural mistrust of mental health professionals"—all of which creates barriers to their growth (Primm, 2018, para. 8).

Another pressing barrier that hinders the growth of students of color is the discrimination they experience. Discrimination is a barrier students of color face not only on their predominantly white campuses, but almost everywhere they go. Discrimination can be defined as the "unequal and unfair treatment of a person or group of people" (Cuseo et al., 2007, p. 223).

In a study by Anderson (2004), a majority of students agreed that students of color had greater sociocultural struggles than the white students on college campuses. Moreover, the main reason for the struggle was most that white students at colleges where their pre-established values dominated campus pressured students of color to acquire the current values and neglect their cultural ones. Another major reason was that, due to the ethnic isolation, many students did not feel represented well on their campuses (Anderson, 2004).

Student-Faculty Interactions

The success of students in college is strongly influenced by the frequency and quality of their interactions with their faculty. Cuseo et al. (2007) explained that positive

outcomes from student-faculty interactions can increase critical thinking and the likelihood of degree completion, improve academic performance, promote greater college satisfaction, and instill a greater drive to pursue graduate education (Cuseo et al., 2007).

Amid the many ways to interact with professors, mentors, or advisors, one way is to seek them out after class. Using this time to ask a clarifying question or express a thought in class about the material allows the professor to get to know a student better, in addition to boosting that student's confidence. Another way to connect with faculty is through the scheduled hours they have set aside. Cuseo et al. (2007) encouraged students to utilize office hours sooner rather than later in order to build a relationship with faculty before they get too busy. Cuseo et al. (2007) then explained that even a student accompanying a classmate is an effective way to receive additional assistance when preparing for final exams and completing assignments. Faculty members are there to assist, teach, and empower students to excel and prosper. Therefore, utilizing their time and as many resources as possible allows students to succeed.

Summary

Thriving represents a view of student success that is holistic in nature, involving five main factors: academic determination, diverse citizenship, engaged learning, positive perspective, and social connectedness. Through the thriving results of students, universities can better assist them to excel in and outside of the classroom. As it relates to diversifying one's campus, the institution must clearly acknowledge and work toward this change. A community that is diverse and offers a variety of programs can prepare students and administration to be more welcoming and understanding of minoritized students.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Through an administered survey, this study examined the ways students of color perceived themselves as thriving while at a predominantly white institution (PWI). A quantitative approach was used to collect the data for the study and allowed for more students to complete the survey in a short span of time.

Design

According to Creswell (2015), quantitative descriptive research is an inquiry approach useful for describing trends and explaining the findings in the literature. A survey was utilized to gather the data.

Context and Participants

For this study, the researcher conducted the research at a small, faith-based, liberal arts institution in the Midwest. The institution enrolls approximately 1,900 students, with 12% being students of color and 88% being white students. Since the institution administered the Thriving Quotient by Schreiner (2010), the researcher gained access to the archival data. The institution has a strong focus on student development, care, and empowering students to be committed to the Christian faith as it relates to their own passions and vocation.

Procedure

The survey was administered by the institution to upperclassmen (sophomores, juniors, and seniors) around late October and early November and then to the first-year students in early December 2018. Students were instructed to sign a consent form prior to completing the survey. All names and personal information were kept confidential. An electronic version of the survey was administered to students through the data collection program Qualtrics. Participants were prompted to read the instructions carefully and to complete the consent form, explaining the intent of the research. There were a series of questions divided into 14 different blocks, and each block contained questions based on different areas of a student's thriving. The survey completion time was approximately 15-20 minutes. Participants who categorized themselves as students of color were pulled from the overall pool for the researcher to analyze. Finally, when the data collection period was completed, the results were analyzed, coded, and presented as findings in Chapter 4 of this document.

Instrument

The Thriving Quotient (see Appendix A) was developed by Dr. Laurie Schreiner (2010), professor of higher education at Azusa Pacific University. Dr. Schreiner and her research team granted permission for the use this tool in the present study. The Thriving Quotient was created to measure the academic, social, and psychological aspects of a student's college experience. This instrument consists of 92 questions and is divided into the 5 scales of thriving: engaged learning, academic determination, positive perspective, social connectedness and diverse citizenship (Schreiner et al., 2012). The Thriving Quotient "contains questions regarding the demographic characteristics, participation in

various campus experiences, student-faculty interaction, and psychological sense of community" (Schreiner et al., 2012, p. 46). Each section of the Thriving Quotient asks questions intended to prompt students to think deeply and answer based on their experiences.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistical analysis was used to evaluate the results of the research. This method identified the level of thriving students reported experiencing at their institution. An additional in-group analysis was performed (i.e., comparing the Thriving Quotient means between the first-year data and the upperclassmen data set). This comparison was done as a result of the way the survey was administered. The first-year students received the survey together, after which the upperclassmen received the survey together. Chapter 4 presents data concerning number of participants and overall responses, and Chapter 5 discusses trends and pressing results that emerged, along with additional observations that enhanced the study. Finally, the results of the analysis were presented through tables and statistical figures to ensure a clear understanding (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of this research study was to investigate thriving in students of color at a predominantly white institution. Using archival data collected by a small, private, faith-based, liberal arts institution in the Midwest, the study was designed to measure if students of color perceived themselves as thriving and which factors of thriving they most connect with at a predominantly white institution.

This chapter outlines the participants and their demographics as well as an analysis of the results from the study. The results (descriptive statistics) are displayed in tables with the participants (*n*), means (*M*), standard deviations (*SD*), and ranges. The findings are explained in two segments for the two data sets: the first-year results and the upperclassmen results. There is a further analysis of the five factors of thriving: academic determination, diverse citizenship, engaged learning, positive perspective, and social connectedness.

Descriptive Results

As previously stated, the Thriving Quotient was administered at a small, private, faith-based, liberal arts institution in the Midwest, and the researcher gained access to the archival data for the students of color. There were 587 students who took the initial survey, and 45 of the participants were students of color. Two different portions of data were collected—one from first-year students and the other from the upperclassmen—at

the institution during the 2018-2019 school year. Of the 45 students of color who took

the survey, 21 (46.7%) were male, 23 (51.1%) were female, and 1 (2.2%) did not specify.

In terms of ethnicity, 35.6% of participants classified themselves as "Asian-

American/Asian/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander," 24.4% as "Latino / Hispanic," 13.3%

as "International students," 6.7% as "African American/Black," 2.2% as "American

Indian / Alaskan Native," and 17.8% as "Other" (see Table 1 for all demographics).

Table 1

Demographics

Variable	n	%
Gender (Sex)		
Male	21	46.7%
Female	23	51.1%
N/A	1	2.2%
Race		
African-American/Black	3	6.7%
American-Indian/Alaska Native	1	2.2%
Asian-American/Asian/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	16	35.6%
Latino/Hispanic	11	24.4%
International Student	6	13.3%
Other	8	17.8%
Prefer not to respond	0	0%
Educational Level		
First-Year	24	53.3%
Upperclassmen	21	46.7%

Perceptions of Thriving

The researcher explained the descriptive statistics—specifically the means, standard deviation, and the range—and showed the results of the students of color and how they perceive themselves in relation to thriving. Located under block 13 of the survey, the question asked participants to identify their perceptions of thriving on a Likert scale: 1 – not even surviving, 2 – barely surviving, 3 – surviving, 4 – somewhat thriving, 5 – thriving most of the time, and 6 – consistently thriving.

For the first-year participants, 15 perceived themselves as thriving (ranging from somewhat thriving to consistently thriving), while 9 of them perceived themselves as not thriving (not even surviving to surviving). From the upperclassmen data set, 13 participants perceived themselves as thriving (ranging from somewhat thriving to consistently thriving), while the remaining 8 perceived themselves as not thriving (ranging from somewhat thriving to consistently thriving). Table 2 shows the mean for the first-year students and the upperclassmen of 4.12 and 3.90, respectively.

Table 2

Students of Color Perceptions of Thriving

Variables	n	M	SD	Range
First-Year	24	4.12	1.36	5.00
Upperclassmen	21	3.90	.995	4.00

Thriving Quotient

The Thriving Quotient is a tool of assessment, comprised of five factors of thriving, that seeks to dive deeper across the factors to reveal overall thriving. This

portion of the survey revealed that 15 first-year students were thriving while 9 students were not thriving; for the upperclassmen data set, 12 students were thriving while 9 students were not thriving. The determining factor to decide if a student was thriving or not thriving was found in the mean score. The mean score varied based on the amount of questions within each factor of thriving. Furthermore, the mean for students' perceptions of thriving and the Thriving Quotient mean also proved different. To give an example, the first-year student mean was 4.44, and the upperclassmen mean was 4.34. Therefore, students who received a score of 4.44 or higher were viewed as thriving (ranging from somewhat thriving to consistently thriving). See Tables 3 and 4 below for the remaining results from the overall calculated Thriving Quotient.

Table 3

Thriving Quotient Results – First-Years

Variables	n	M	SD	Range
TQ results	24	4.44	.492	2.09

Table 4

Thriving Quotient Results – Upperclassmen

Variables	n	M	SD	Range
TQ results	21	4.34	.585	2.37

Factors of Thriving

As mentioned above, five factors make up the Thriving Quotient, and through these 5 factors the researcher identified the areas in which students of color were or were not thriving. Within each factor, the number of questions vary. Academic determination contains 6 questions; diverse citizenship, 6 questions; engaged learning, 4 questions; positive perspective, 2 questions; and social connectedness, 6 questions.

Academic determination. The results showed 12 participants from the First-Year data set as thriving and 12 students as not thriving. For the upperclassmen data set, 14 students were thriving, while 7 of them were not thriving.

Diverse citizenship. The number of First-Year students considered as thriving was 13, while 11 students were not thriving. In the upperclassmen data set, 8 students were thriving, while the remaining 13 students were not.

Engaged learning. Within this factor, the results for the first-year data set showed 13 students thriving and 11 students not thriving. Furthermore, in the upperclassmen data set, 14 students were thriving, while the remaining 7 were not thriving.

Positive perspective. For this factor, the results showed 14 first-year students were thriving, while 10 students were not thriving. In the second data set, 13 upperclassmen students were thriving and 8 of them were not.

Social connectedness. The last factor showed 13 first-year students as thriving while 11 students were not. In the upperclassmen data set, 10 students were thriving while 11 students were not.

To summarize the results of Tables 5 and 6, the first-year data set have more balance between thriving and non-thriving students, while more fluctuation appears between factors within the upperclassmen data set. The highest factor of first-year student thriving is in positive perspective, with 14 students thriving and 10 not thriving. The lowest factor is academic determination (12 students thriving, 12 not). In the upperclassmen data set, the highest factors are academic determination and engaged learning, with 14 students thriving and 7 students not thriving. The lowest factor is diverse citizenship (8 students thriving, 13 students not). It is important to reiterate that the mean score varies based on the number of questions within each factor of thriving.

Table 5

Factors - students of color thriving – First-Year Students

Variables	n	M	SD	Range
Academic Determination	24	4.59	.752	2.67
Diverse Citizenship	24	4.92	.603	2.33
Engaged Learning	24	4.40	8.499	3.50
Positive Perspective	24	4.44	1.035	4.00
Social Connectedness	24	3.82	.754	3.00

Table 6

Factors – students of color thriving – Upperclassmen

Variables	n	M	SD	Range
Academic Determination	21	4.48	1.023	3.83
Diverse Citizenship	21	4.52	.8097	2.75
Engaged Learning	21	4.56	1.219	4.75
Positive Perspective	21	4.33	1.017	3.50
Social Connectedness	21	3.85	.555	2.17

Summary

The first research question of the thesis—How do students of color at a predominantly white institution perceive themselves as thriving?—was explored through SPSS analysis. The results showed the majority of first-year students of color (15 of 24) perceived themselves as thriving while the remaining (9 of 24) did not. For the upperclassmen data set, a majority (13 of 21) of participants also perceived themselves as thriving, while the latter (8 of 21) participants did not.

The Thriving Quotient results were not part of the two questions asked in the thesis but were still calculated as a part of the process. When combined, the final results of the quotient for all participants revealed that 60% of students of color were thriving, while 40% of students were not thriving.

The second research question of the thesis—What factors of thriving are students of color excelling in while enrolled at a predominantly white campus?—was examined,

which included the means, standard deviation and range. See Tables 7, 8, and 9 for these results.

Table 7

Factors – Thriving/Not Thriving – First-Year

Variables	n	Thriving	Not Thriving
Academic Determination	24	12	12
Diverse Citizenship	24	13	11
Engaged Learning	24	13	11
Positive Perspective	24	14	10
Social Connectedness	24	13	11

Table 8

Factors – Thriving/Not Thriving – Upperclassmen

Variables	n	Thriving	Not Thriving
Academic Determination	21	14	7
Diverse Citizenship	21	8	13
Engaged Learning	21	14	7
Positive Perspective	21	13	8
Social Connectedness	21	10	11

Tables 7 and 8 chart the number of students who were considered thriving or not thriving within the five factors of thriving. From Table 7, it can be determined that almost the same number of first-year students were thriving within each factor as those not thriving. Furthermore, three factors presented the same results: diverse citizenship, engaged learning, and social connectedness. For the upperclassmen data set, each factor's results range more widely, with the most students thriving within the academic determination and engaged learning factors, while the diverse citizenship factor shows more students not thriving than thriving.

Table 9

Factors – Students of Color Thriving – Combined Data Set Percentages

Variables	n	Thriving	Not Thriving
Academic Determination	45	57.8%	42.2%
Diverse Citizenship	45	46.7%	53.3%
Engaged Learning	45	60%	40%
Positive Perspective	45	60%	40%
Social Connectedness	45	51.1%	48.9%

Finally, Table 9 shows the combined percentages for both data sets. Here it is revealed that the majority of the students of color who took the survey (n=45) were indeed thriving within the 5 factors. However, the diverse citizenship factor proved the exception, with more students not thriving than thriving. This interesting discovery is discussed in further detail in the next chapter, along with other findings.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to identify the perceptions students of color had of their thriving. Furthermore, the researcher sought to determine what factors of thriving students of color excel in while enrolled at a predominantly white campus. The data indicated that 62.5% of first-year students perceived themselves as thriving, while 37.5% of students did not perceive themselves as thriving. For the upperclassmen, the findings showed 61.9% of students perceived themselves as thriving, and 38.1% did not perceive themselves as thriving. This led to a combined result indicating 62.2% of students of color perceived themselves as thriving and 38.8% did not as. Ultimately, an institution would hope all of their students thrive when enrolled at their institutions. However, it should be noted that thriving looks different for each student, and their perceptions may well change throughout the course of their college experience.

The Thriving Quotient was the tool used to determine participants' thriving across a variety of factors, offering a deeper analysis of the participants thriving. The results of the quotient indicated 15 first-year students and 12 upperclassmen students as thriving and 9 first-year students and 9 upperclassmen students as not thriving.

The second question explored in this study looked at what factors of thriving students of color excel in while enrolled at a predominantly white institution. The researcher focused on the following five factors of thriving: academic determination,

diverse citizenship, engaged learning, positive perspective, and social connectedness. When both data sets were combined, the results showed 57.8% of students as thriving in relation to their academic determination. Within diverse citizenship, 46.7% of students were thriving. For the engaged learning and positive perspective factors, the results showed the same percentage with 60% of students thriving. Finally, the fifth factor of social connectedness showed 51.1% of students were thriving. From the numbers above, it is interesting to highlight that the diverse citizenship factor has the lowest number of students thriving out of the five factors. To explain this finding, it would be best to look at the data before it was combined. For the diverse citizenship factor, the results showed 13 first-year students thriving and 11 students not thriving. Furthermore, the mean for this group of students was 4.92. On the other hand, the upperclassmen data set showed 8 students thriving and 13 not thriving within the diverse citizenship factor, and the mean of this set was 4.52. Evidently, within the upperclassmen data set, more students were not thriving.

Furthermore, when the other four factors are examined, there are steady numbers across the first-year data set for students who are thriving or not thriving, while the upperclassmen data set showed more of a deviation between factors. This intriguing discovery could result from the different experiences first-year students have at college versus upperclassmen students who have experienced college for more than one year. Another takeaway could relate to when the survey was administered. All students received the survey in the fall of the 2018-19 school year; by then, most first year students had only experienced a semester of their college experience, while the upperclassmen students had more college years under their belt. Finally, seeing the vast

differences between the first-year data results and the upperclassmen data results poses the following question: what obstacles or issues do upperclassmen students face that first-year students have yet to face?

Overall, the results reported that students of color were indeed thriving, and majority of these students were represented within four of the five factors of thriving. However, there still remain students of color who are not thriving, and, although some of the margins are close, they should not be overlooked.

Limitations

The results illustrated in Chapter 4 point to several areas for future research and highlight some important implications for professional practice. The results are also limited by various factors. First, the research was conducted at a small, private, faith-based institution in the Midwest that enrolls approximately 1,900 students with 228 (12%) students of color and 1,672 (88%) white students. A significant number of students who completed the survey (n=587) and (n=45) were students of color. This sample size was quite small and therefore limited the applicability of the study. The study would yield better results if a higher number of students of color took the survey.

A second limitation to the study was the lack of representation by some racial groups. For this study, 35.6% of participants identified as Asian-American/Asian/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander participants, while other racial groups only had 2.2% or 6.7% of participants. Having a more diverse and balanced pool of participants would allow for deeper analyses to happen within each racial group.

A third limitation to the research was the lack of comparison of students of color to the white students at the university. If this comparison was done, institutions would be

able to see the ways their students of color are thriving or not thriving in comparison to their white students. Also, researchers could determine if students of color excel in certain factors more than white students

Finally, the researcher faced researcher bias, as he is a student of color at a predominantly white institution and participates in courses and daily activities that align with many of the questions and themes covered in the Thriving Quotient. Therefore, the researcher has had similar experiences to those of the study participants. The researcher had to be careful to ensure the data spoke for the participants and not his own experience.

Implications for Professional Practice

Through research reviewed in the literature, there emerged three overarching areas of thriving: academic thriving, intrapersonal thriving, and interpersonal thriving (Schreiner, McIntosh, et al., 2009). To better assist students of color and increase their ability to thrive, it would beneficial to incorporate the characteristics of these three themes to create efforts to engage students in programming in and outside of the classroom. For example, students within the engaged learning and academic determination factors are eager to learn and do so through making connections from their course work to daily interactions (Schreiner & Louis, 2011). Having service opportunities would allow students to pair their learning from the classroom with the issues they may face from active service in their communities (Gearon, 2015). These service projects can be integrated into different courses across different departments, or students can be encouraged to complete a certain number of service opportunities over the course of their college experience. Having outcomes and goals to present students can foster further discussion and lead to persistent service opportunities and deep

relationships. According to Schreiner (2014), when an important goal needs to be accomplished, people often find ways to overcome their differences and work together in order to achieve it. Through this process of working together and understanding one another, deeper relationships are made and kept.

Secondly, the intrapersonal theme for thriving includes the factor of positive perspective. Within positive perspective, students have an "optimistic way of viewing the world and their future" (Schreiner et al., 2012, p. 7), as well as a healthy attitude toward their own growth. Faculty often shy away or become worried about the ways they offer constructive feedback to minority students since it may be perceived as negative stereotyping. However, avoiding giving feedback does a disservice to that student group (Bangs, 2016). Instead, to better enhance student success, faculty and staff should attend to the ways they offer students feedback in their courses and programing. This can be done by effectively communicating the meaning of constructive feedback and encouraging all students that they too can meet the high standards and succeed in the courses they take. Furthermore, teaching from a growth mindset model causes students to identify their challenges in the classroom, finding ways to improve best on them and finally persisting to success (Bangs, 2016). In addition, Ash and Schreiner (2016) encouraged faculty to validate their students' experiences—"you belong here" or "you are seen and heard, and your experience is valid"— which enables them to feel comfortable and welcomed.

Finally, the interpersonal theme of thriving includes the factors of social connectedness and diverse citizenship. Students who demonstrate healthy relationships toward others while listening well can be described as having a high level of social

connectedness. Overall, these students hope to make an impact and difference in their communities (Schreiner, Pothoven, et al., 2009). A way to engage with students of color would be to offer opportunities to facilitate discussions that challenge people. At Elon University, first-year students can enroll in a "Global Experience" course that asks students to consider questions about individualism and the relationships of humans in the world (Gearon, 2015). Offering courses that discuss racial and other social justice topics can allow all students to be recognized but also give opportunities for growth and understanding. To conclude, the best way to enhance student thriving would be for practitioners to engage on a deeper scale within the factors that make up thriving. Practicing and implementing new ways to broaden the thriving umbrella may not be easy, but it is certainly needed to give all students equal opportunities to succeed.

Implications for Future Research

The findings from this study warrant additional research. It would be beneficial to study students of color longitudinally. Following the progression of an incoming class of students of color throughout their college experience could result in a wide array of data that could then be used to create and make changes to institutional programming.

Secondly, creating a study that compares the thriving in students of color at one PWI faith-based institution to other PWI faith-based institutions could allow for a cross analysis to occur. A cross-analysis would provide results and allow institutions to see where they rank among other institutions, which might lead to thoughtful and powerful collaborations for best practices between schools.

Future research should also involve a study in which each race has better representation; this would produce more confidence in statistical significance.

Furthermore, it would be interesting to compare races to see if any emerges as thriving more than another. For this research to be done well, the Thriving Quotient should be refined or edited to better connect to students of color while asking questions geared toward their experiences and diverse backgrounds. Questions focused on their transition into college or their home or community experience could benefit the Thriving Quotient. These changes will enhance the ways the instrument seeks to explore students thriving from diverse backgrounds. Additionally, focus groups with students can help researchers gain a better understanding of why students of color perceive themselves as thriving or not thriving.

With more research along these lines, student development professionals and faculty and staff will be better equipped to assist their students of color in the classroom, through campus programming, within the residence halls, and through their overall college experience.

Conclusion

This study speaks to students of color thriving at a predominantly white institution and gives further insight to some areas of thriving in which these students excel: academic determination, engaged learning, social connectedness, and positive perspective. However, study limitations arose that can be better examined through future research. In order for students of color to thrive especially at predominantly white institutions, institutions must clearly communicate their support and the steps necessary to help them thrive. This can be done through intentional efforts with programming and curriculum across campus.

The road to students of color thriving is not easy or short, and colleges and universities should continue to research such topics to ensure the highest success of their students. Additionally, researchers should refine and continuously survey students of color to understand and improve on the ways thriving is engaged and supported. Ensuring students of color thrive not only ensures that their needs and aspirations are met, but it also ensures that colleges and institutions do their best to assist when these students attend their campuses.

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Appendix A

Thriving Quotient by Laurie Schreiner © 2010

Default Question Block

Thank you for agreeing to complete this survey on student success as part of a national project to better understand the college student experience. This survey will take about 15-20 minutes to complete. Because we value your time and it is so important that students complete the entire survey, if you provide your Student ID at the end of the survey, we will enter you into a prize drawing!

Possible Risks: It is expected that participation in this study will provide you with no more than minimal risk or discomfort, which means that you should not experience it as any more troubling than your normal daily life. While there are no direct benefits to participating, your response will help us to better understand student success in college.

Confidentiality: All responses to this survey are confidential. Although the survey asks for your email address and/or student ID in order to match your responses at the beginning and end of the semester to your GPA and enrollment status next semester, your identity will be protected at all times and the information will only be used for this research project and for no other purpose. Your name will not be linked in any way to the research data. Concerning your rights or treatment as a research subject, you may contact the Research Integrity Officer at Azusa Pacific University (626) 812-3034.

Consent: I understand that providing data to this research study is entirely voluntary and that I may refuse to do so or may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. I have read this entire form and I understand it completely. By clicking a box at the end of this survey and completing the online assessments I am giving my consent to participate in this study.

By submitting the completed survey electronically, you are granting us permission to use

your results in our study. No individual information will ever be reported or released from this survey; only the researchers will see individual data and only grouped data will be reported. Thanks for helping us better understand your college student experience!

Should you have any questions or concerns regarding this survey, please contact the principal researcher, Dr. Laurie Schreiner, at lschreiner@apu.edu.

Please select one of the following to proceed:

○ I consent to have my responses gathered for research purposes
○ I do not consent

Psychosocial Items Block 1

Please rate your agreement with each of the items by using a 1 to 6 scale, with 1 indicating "strongly disagree" and 6 indicating "strongly agree."

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I feel as though I am learning things in my classes that are worthwhile to me as a person.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I can usually find ways of applying what I'm learning in class to something else	○	○	○	○	○	○

in my life.

I am confident I will reach my educational goals.   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

I find myself thinking about what I'm learning in class even when I'm not in class.   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

Even if assignments are not interesting to me, I find a way to keep working at them until they are done well.   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

I feel energized by the ideas I am learning in most of my classes.   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

I know how to apply my strengths to achieve academic success.   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

I am good at juggling all the demands of college life.   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

Other people would say I'm a hard worker.   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

I feel like I belong here.	○	○	○	○	○	○

Psychosocial Items Block 2

Please rate your agreement with each of the items by using a 1 to 6 scale, with 1 indicating "strongly disagree" and 6 indicating "strongly agree."

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Other people seem to make friends more easily than I do.	○	○	○	○	○	○
Being a student here fills an important need in my life.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I spend time making a difference in other people's lives.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I feel proud of the college or university I have chosen to attend.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I don't have as many close friends as I wish I had.	○	○	○	○	○	○

There is a strong sense of community on this campus.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I value interacting with people whose viewpoints are different from my own.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I feel like my friends really care about me.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I know I can make a difference in my community.	○	○	○	○	○	○
It is important to become aware of the perspectives of individuals from different backgrounds.	○	○	○	○	○	○

Psychosocial Items Block 3

Please rate your agreement with each of the items by using a 1 to 6 scale, with 1 indicating "strongly disagree" and 6 indicating "strongly agree."

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I feel content with the kinds of friendships I	○	○	○	○	○	○

currently have.

My spiritual or religious beliefs provide me with a sense of strength when life is difficult.

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

When I'm faced with a problem in my life, I can usually think of several ways to solve it.

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

My perspective on life is that I tend to see the glass as "half full" rather than "half empty."

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

My spiritual or religious beliefs give meaning and purpose to my life.

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

It's hard to make friends on this campus.

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

It's important for me to make a contribution to my community.

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

I look for the best in situations, even when things seem

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

hopeless.

My knowledge
or opinions
have been
influenced or
changed by
becoming
more aware of   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○
the
perspectives of
individuals
from different
backgrounds.

I often feel
lonely because
I have few
close friends   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○
with whom to
share my
concerns.

Psychosocial Items Block 4

Please rate your agreement with each of the items by using a 1 to 6 scale, with
1 indicating "strongly disagree" and 6 indicating "strongly agree."

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
My spiritual or religious beliefs are the foundation of my approach to life.	○	○	○	○	○	○

I am confident
that the

amount of money I'm paying for college is worth it in the long run.

⭕   ⭕   ⭕   ⭕   ⭕   ⭕

I intend to re-enroll at this institution next year (graduating seniors please leave this blank!).

⭕   ⭕   ⭕   ⭕   ⭕   ⭕

I intend to graduate from this institution.

⭕   ⭕   ⭕   ⭕   ⭕   ⭕

Given my current goals, this institution is a good fit for me.

⭕   ⭕   ⭕   ⭕   ⭕   ⭕

If I had to do it over again, I would choose a different university to attend.

⭕   ⭕   ⭕   ⭕   ⭕   ⭕

I really enjoy being a student here.

⭕   ⭕   ⭕   ⭕   ⭕   ⭕

My experiences on this campus so far have met my expectations.

⭕   ⭕   ⭕   ⭕   ⭕   ⭕

The institution was accurately

	Never	-	-	-	-	Frequently
portrayed during the admissions process.	○	○	○	○	○	○
Overall, the actions of faculty, staff, and administrators on this campus are consistent with the mission of the institution.	○	○	○	○	○	○

Block 5

How often do you participate in:

	Never	-	-	-	-	Frequently
Campus events or activities	○	○	○	○	○	○
Interaction with faculty outside of class	○	○	○	○	○	○
Fraternity/Sorority	○	○	○	○	○	○
Community Service	○	○	○	○	○	○
Religious services or activities	○	○	○	○	○	○
Campus ethnic organizations (such as Black Student	○	○	○	○	○	○

Association)

Block 6

How often this year have you:

	Never	–	–	–	–	Frequently
Met with your academic advisor	○	○	○	○	○	○
Discussed career or grad school plans with faculty	○	○	○	○	○	○
Discussed academic issues with faculty	○	○	○	○	○	○
Met with faculty during office hours	○	○	○	○	○	○
E-mailed, texted, or Facebooked faculty	○	○	○	○	○	○

Block 7

Please indicate the number of hours per week that you devoted to your involvement in a student organization or student leadership role during this semester:

0	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	more than 30
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	

○

Please indicate how many of your hours per week devoted to student organizations or leadership roles are incentivized or mandated (i.e., stipend, hourly pay, scholarship-dependent, etc.).

0	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	more than 30
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Please indicate the number of elected or appointed positions you have held during this semester (e.g., president/chairperson/captain/editor, secretary, treasurer, committee/project chairperson, Resident Assistant (RA), orientation leader, etc.):

0	1	2	3	4	5 or more
○	○	○	○	○	○

Please indicate your frequency with the following:

	N/A	never	occasionally	often	very often
When I attended organization meetings, I expressed my opinion and/or took part in discussion.	○	○	○	○	○
When I was away from members of the group/organization, I talked with others					

about the organization and its activities, or wore a shirt or button to let others know about my involvement.

○   ○   ○   ○   ○

When the group/organization sponsored a program or activity, I made an effort to encourage other students and/or members to attend.

○   ○   ○   ○   ○

I volunteered or was assigned responsibility to work on something that the group or organization needed to have done.

○   ○   ○   ○   ○

I fulfilled assigned duties or responsibilities to the group or organization on time this semester.

○   ○   ○   ○   ○

Block 8

Please rate your satisfaction with each of the following:

	Very dissatisfied	–	–	–	–	Very satisfied

The amount you

are learning in your classes.	○	○	○	○	○	○
Your overall experiences at this university.	○	○	○	○	○	○
The amount of contact you have had with faculty this year.	○	○	○	○	○	○
The academic advising you have received this year.	○	○	○	○	○	○
The kinds of interaction you have had with other students on this campus this year.	○	○	○	○	○	○
The quality of the interaction you have had with faculty on this campus so far this year.	○	○	○	○	○	○
The interactions you have had this year with students of different ethnic backgrounds.	○	○	○	○	○	○
The amount of money you personally have to pay to attend college here.	○	○	○	○	○	○
Faculty sensitivity to the needs of diverse students.	○	○	○	○	○	○

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Faculty encouragement for students to contribute diverse perspectives in class discussions.

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

The degree to which faculty include diverse perspectives in the curriculum.

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Your physical health right now.

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

The amount of financial aid I have received.

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Block 9

Did either of your parents attend college?

Yes

○

No

○

Gender:

Female

○

Male

○

Other

○

Age:

17 or younger	18-20	21-23	24-26	27-30	31-34	35-38	39-42	43-46	47-50	over 50
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Class level:

First-year	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Other (Please Specify)
○	○	○	○	○

Enrollment Status

○ Full-time student
○ Part-time student

Did you transfer into this institution?

○ Yes
○ No

Block 10

How would you describe your grades in high school?

mostly A's	mostly A's and B's	mostly B's	mostly B's and C's	mostly C's	below a C average
○	○	○	○	○	○

What is the HIGHEST degree you intend to pursue in your lifetime?

○ none
○ bachelor's
○ teaching credential
○ master's degree
○ doctorate
○ medical or law degree
○ [_____] other graduate degree (specify)

What is your best guess about your household income level?

○ less than $30,000 a year
○ $30,000 to $59,999
○ $60,000 to $89,999
○ $90,000 to 119,999
○ $120,000 and over

Do you live on campus?

Yes   No
○   ○

Block 11

Do you work for pay?

no	on campus	off campus	both on and off campus
○	○	○	○

Collecting information about race and ethnicity assists colleges to understand the varying needs of students on campus. How do you identify your racial or ethnic family background?

○ African-American / Black
○ American Indian / Alaskan Native
○ Asian-American/Asian/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
○ Caucasian / White
○ Latino / Hispanic
○ [_____]Other (specify)
○ Prefer not to respond

Are you an international student?

Yes	No
○	○

When you chose to enroll in this institution, was it your first choice?

Yes	No
○	○

Block 12

Are you a member of an intercollegiate athletic team on this campus?

Yes	No
◯	◯

How sure are you of your major?

Very Unsure	Unsure	Somewhat Unsure	Somewhat Sure	Sure	Very Sure
◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Considering the financial aid you've received and the money you and your family have, how much difficulty have you had so far in paying for your school expenses?

No difficulty	A little difficulty	Some difficulty	A fair amount of difficulty	Great difficulty
◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

How would you describe your grades in college so far?

mostly A's	mostly A's and B's	mostly B's	mostly B's and C's	mostly C's	below a C average
◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Block 13

We are interested in what helps students thrive in college. Thriving is defined as getting the most out of your college experience, so that you are intellectually, socially, and psychologically engaged and enjoying the college experience. Given that definition, to what extent do you think you are THRIVING as a college student this semester?

○ not even surviving
○ barely surviving
○ surviving
○ somewhat thriving
○ thriving most of the time
○ consistently thriving

What has happened this semester that has led to your perception of whether you are thriving or not?

[text box]

Block 14

If you would like to be entered into a drawing for a prize, please provide your student ID:

** Identifying information is collected for research purposes and prize award only – no

identifying characteristics will be shared or disseminated. **

Thank you for your participation in this survey.

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