DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN TECHNICAL AND PROFESSIONAL
COMMUNICATION ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

by

Chris Dayley

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Technical Communication and Rhetoric

Approved:

Rebecca Walton, Ph.D. Ryan M. Moeller, Ph.D.
Major Professor Committee Member

Avery Edenfield, Ph.D. Jessica Rivera-Mueller, Ph.D.
Committee Member Committee Member

Christy Glass, Ph.D. Richard S. Inouye, Ph.D.
Committee Member Vice Provost for Graduate Studies

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, Utah

2020
ABSTRACT

Diversity and inclusion in technical and professional communication academic programs

by

Chris Dayley, Doctor of Philosophy
Utah State University, 2020

Major Professor: Dr. Rebecca Walton
Department: English

With the recent social justice turn in technical and professional communication (TPC) scholarship, researchers have begun to focus their attention on issues of diversity and inclusion. Increasing diversity and inclusion in the field of technical and professional communication starts with TPC academic programs. This dissertation reports the results of qualitative interviews conducted with five undergraduate students, six graduate students, and five pre-tenure faculty who study TPC and identify as persons of color as well as six influencers identified by research participants. Interview participants discuss reasons why they chose TPC as a major, obstacles to discovering TPC academic programs, the importance of mentorship, embedded racist practices in TPC academic programs, and barriers to inclusion. Recommendations are given for increasing diversity and inclusion in TPC academic programs including the need to designate a staff member in charge of recruitment, the importance of creating a student advisory council comprised of students from diverse backgrounds, specific ideas for community outreach, and how
departments can be more proactive in recruitment and inclusion efforts.
Diversity and inclusion in technical and professional communication academic programs

Chris Dayley

With the recent social justice turn in technical and professional communication (TPC) scholarship, researchers have begun to focus their attention on issues of diversity and inclusion. Increasing diversity and inclusion in the field of technical and professional communication starts with TPC academic programs. This dissertation reports the results of qualitative interviews conducted with five undergraduate students, six graduate students, and five pre-tenure faculty who study TPC and identify as persons of color as well as six influencers identified by research participants. Interview participants discuss reasons why they chose TPC as a major, obstacles to discovering TPC academic programs, the importance of mentorship, embedded racist practices in TPC academic programs, and barriers to inclusion. Recommendations are given for increasing diversity and inclusion in TPC academic programs including the need to designate a staff member in charge of recruitment, the importance of creating a student advisory council comprised of students from diverse backgrounds, specific ideas for community outreach, and how departments can be more proactive in recruitment efforts.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This challenging, enlightening, life-changing, and overall wonderful experience in writing a dissertation could not have been completed without the support of the many selfless people who surround me in my academic and personal life.

To all of the interview participants who freely shared their time and insights with me, thank you. This dissertation would not have been possible without your stories.

To Dr. Rebecca Walton, thank you for being willing to take on a non-traditional PhD student who knew nothing about what it means to be a scholar. Thank you for sticking with me through all of the extra years and all of the extra trials that came with them. You have been a strong and compassionate mentor. I owe my academic life to you.

To Dr. Keith Grant-Davie, thank you for having an open door. You always made me feel like my academic pursuits were within reach.

To Dr. Ryan Moeller, thank you for teaching me that academics can be happy, kind, and thoughtful even in the face of great hardships.

To Dr. Christy Glass, I don’t think you will never know what an inspiration you are to me. That class I took with you changed my life.

To Dr. Avery Edenfield, thank you for your willingness to listen and offer calming advice to a new and nervous scholar.

To Dr. Jessica Rivera-Mueller, thank you for taking up a committee position at the last minute and for your kind and encouraging words.

To all of the PhD students at Utah State University who I have gotten to know over the years: Dr. Adam Bair, Andrew Hillen, Dr. Beth Shirley, Cana Uluak Itchuaqiyaq, Jamal-Jared Alexander, Jennifer Scucchi, Ryan Cheek, and Dr. Sherena
Huntsman, each of you have taken the time to talk, listen, and share encouragement. You made it possible to keep my mental sanity every time I wanted to give up.

To Dr. David D. Hoffman, thank you for some of the most memorable experiences of my academic career.

To Dr. Breeanne Matheson, thank you for being there for me during an extremely difficult time. Thank you for continuing to check up on me and make sure I’m OK. The world needs more people with your kind of empathy and compassion.

To Dr. Emily January Petersen, you will never know how much your scholarship and your friendship have contributed to my success as a PhD student. I would not have been able to graduate without you.

To my work family in USU Academic and Instructional Services, thank you for the support, encouragement, and financial resources you provided me with throughout my degree program. You have made USU an incredible place to work.

To Shari Christopherson and all of the USU Testing Center staff, thank you for enduring all of my antics and for making me feel like I matter.

To my parents, Michael and Susan Dayley and my brothers and sisters, Jason, Marcus, Anthony, Cami, and Rebecca, thank you for enduring my incessant academic narcissism and for showing love to me even when I haven’t always shown that love in return.

To Trina Coleen Brown Dayley, my life partner and my dearest and closest friend, this could not have happened without you. Thank you for believing in me even when I didn’t. We did it.

Chris Dayley
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUBLIC ABSTRACT</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### CHAPTER

#### I. INTRODUCTION AND CRITICAL RACE THEORY

- Critical Race Theory and Inequality in Higher Education | 3

#### II. TECHNICAL AND PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION, SOCIAL JUSTICE, AND DIVERSITY

- Technical and Professional Communication and the Cultural Turn | 25
- Power and Ethics in Technical and Professional Communication | 27
- Technical and Professional Communication and Social Justice | 32
- Diversity in TPC Academic Programs | 35
- Conclusion | 48

#### III. STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF DIVERSITY IN TECHNICAL AND PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

- Methods | 52
- Results | 54
- Discussion | 66
- Conclusion | 73

#### IV. FINDING AND CHOOSING A TPC PROGRAM

- Methods | 77
- Findings and Discussion | 87
- How Do TPC Faculty and Students of Color Find the Field of Technical and Professional Communication and What Attracted Them to This Field? | 88
- Conclusion | 103

#### V. PERSISTENCE AND FIT

- Models What Sustains Student/Faculty Over Time While Navigating an Academic Career? | 106
- What, if Anything, Makes Technical and Professional Communication a Good Fit for People of Color? | 126
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Organizational Diversity: A bar graph showing what organizational</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>diversity means to the total group of respondents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Organizational Diversity (POC): A bar graph showing what organizational</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>diversity means to respondents who identify as persons of color</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Program Diversity: A bar graph showing the total group of respondents’</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>perceptions of TPC program diversity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Program Diversity: A bar graph showing respondents who identify as</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>persons of colors’ perceptions of TPC program diversity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Fitting in: A bar graph showing the total group of respondents’</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>perceptions of whether or not they would fit in</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Fitting in: A bar graph showing respondents who identify as persons</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of colors’ perceptions of whether or not they would fit in</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Representation: A bar graph showing respondents who identify as</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>persons of colors’ perceptions of whether or not there are people</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>who they can identify with in their TPC academic program</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Representation: A bar graph showing the total group of respondents’</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>perceptions of whether or not there are people who they can identify</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>with in their TPC academic program</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Importance of Diversity: A bar graph showing the total group of</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>respondents’ perceptions of the importance of diversity in TPC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>academic programs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Representation: A bar graph showing respondents who identify as</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>persons of colors’ perceptions of the importance of diversity in TPC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>academic programs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Support: A bar graph showing the total group of respondents’</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>perceptions of their TPC academic program’s support for diversity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION AND CRITICAL RACE THEORY

Recently, a co-worker shared with me his experience as an adoptive father of two African American boys. He, like me, is a straight, cisgender, white, middle class, male. As he recounted the challenges his sons have faced every day regarding racism and discrimination, I asked him how it felt to be experiencing these things firsthand. “I’m experiencing them secondhand, not firsthand,” he said. “They’re the ones that have to go through it. I might be helping them, and advocating for them, but I’m not experiencing it. They are.” As I open my dissertation, I want to acknowledge the privilege with which I was born. Because of my background, I enjoy privileges in society I did not earn. I cannot truly understand the experiences of the people whose stories I will share in this dissertation. I can never experience what it is like to navigate college in a technical and professional communication (TPC) academic program as a person of color in a predominately white society. I can only ever experience it secondhand. I acknowledge this limitation in my work. Nevertheless, as a person with privilege, I can use my unearned ethos to listen to, and amplify, the voices of people of color. I can produce scholarly work which will dispel myths and advocate for inclusive practices. My goal for this dissertation is not to share my own opinion about what TPC administrators should do to create more diverse and inclusive academic programs. Rather, my aim is to amplify the voices of the participants in this study and to advocate for change based on the stories they have shared with me.

My first experiences with privilege and marginalization came when I lived in the Bronx in New York City. While there I was able to interact with people who had
different backgrounds from my own. I saw how circumstances which they had no control over, such as race, were important factors in a system which holds them back from transcending the socioeconomic class they were born into. As I moved into my university studies, I chose to study social work. This field gave me further insight into the challenges people face, but it also taught me about the strengths all people have and the importance of listening to diverse voices. My graduate education was focused on leadership in higher education. Here I learned about how transformational a college education can be for many people and how systemic inequality keeps the people who would benefit the most from a college experience out of the higher education system. As a PhD student studying technical and professional communication, I have seen the excellent opportunity TPC can be for prospective students, and how effective user focused TPC scholars and TPC professionals can be in advocating for social justice issues. This dissertation is a culmination of my higher education studies and a beginning of what I hope to be a prolific career in research relating to disadvantaged populations and higher education.

For the purposes of this study I am using the name “technical and professional communication” or “TPC” to represent a field which has a broad range of naming conventions (Dayley & Walton, 2018). Other names commonly used are “Technical Writing,” “technical communication,” “Professional Writing,” “Business Writing,” “Science Communication,” as well as others. Issues of diversity in technical and professional communication have gained recent attention from TPC scholars (Jones, 2017; Jones, Savage, & Yu, 2014; Popham, 2016; Savage & Mattson; Savage & Matveeva, 2011). However, action-based research presenting empirical evidence of the
need for TPC academic program administrators to focus on diversity and inclusion and suggestions for action steps to improve the inclusivity of these programs is scarce. The present dissertation seeks to begin to address this gap in the research.

The remaining sections of this chapter will give the reader background and context for the underlying issues that affect race and racism in society and in higher education specifically. Readers will learn about the history and basic tenets of critical race theory, the history of racism in higher education, and how critical race theory can be applied in higher education. Chapter two describes the social turn in technical and professional communication, the recent surge in TPC social justice scholarship, and the current TPC research regarding diversity and inclusion. Chapter three is a report of a pilot study I conducted which informed the research for this dissertation. This chapter reads as a standalone article. The study examines student perceptions of diversity in TPC programs and how student responses relate to critical race theory. Chapter four reports the results of interviews I conducted with people who identify as a person of color find and choose TPC academic programs. Chapter five reports the results of the aforementioned interviews with a specific focus on how inclusion can increase diversity and student persistence. Chapter six reports on suggestions research participants gave for increasing diversity and inclusion in TPC academic programs, implications and limitations of the study, ideas for future research, and lists specific suggestions for TPC administrators interested in increasing diversity and inclusion in their academic programs.

**Critical Race Theory and Inequality in Higher Education**

This section explores the theoretical framework that forms the basis for my
dissertation research (critical race theory) and the ways by which critical race theory (CRT) can be used to identify issues of racial inequality in higher education. The purpose of this section is to give the reader some foundational knowledge of critical race theory as well as the current state of research on inequality as it relates to underrepresented racial/ethnic groups in higher education. This section will give readers context which will help them better understand how issues of diversity and inclusion in TPC academic programs fit into the larger context of diversity in higher education and systemic racism in American society. I begin the chapter by explaining the development of critical race theory and describing its basic tenets. I then discuss some of the literature regarding access and inequality in higher education, specifically, efforts made to increase diversity in higher education, and the shortcomings of those efforts. I conclude by showing how critical race theory can be used to better understand why institutions of higher education have a difficult time retaining students of color and give some suggestions for solutions.

**Critical Race Theory**

Critical race theory (CRT) is a theoretical framework that was developed by legal scholars as a branch of critical legal studies. Critical race theory seeks to explain the pervasiveness of racism in American society by rejecting the assumption of neutrality within the law and pointing out the foundational influence and permanence of racist ideology (Savas, 2014). The original development of the basic ideas of CRT are generally attributed to Derrick Bell, an African American law professor and prolific writer and scholar whose work often focused on racial discrimination in American society (Savas, 2014; Hiraldo, 2010; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). Although Bell doesn’t take credit for the development of the theory, his unique style and voice drew attention to the
permanence and pervasive nature of racism in America (Delgado & Stefancic, 2005). Bell’s writing inspired a new generation of legal scholars to focus their scholarship on the inherent racial disparities present in the founding documents of the United States and in the laws that comprise the foundation of U.S. society. Eventually taking the name of critical race theory, this type of legal scholarship inspired other fields to use the basic of tenets of CRT to look introspectively at their field and the embedded racism within it, as well as at how racist laws may be affecting their fields from without. Many social scientists now use CRT as a valuable framework for understanding the prevalent nature of racism within their respective fields. Education (Lynn & Dixson, 2013), higher education (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015), and even social justice scholars in technical and professional communication (Haas, 2012) have used CRT to turn a scrutinizing eye toward their own discipline. Proponents of this theoretical framework assert that racism is entrenched in the fabric of American society, that racism has existed since the foundation of the United States, and is deep-rooted in its laws and institutions. As prominent CRT scholars Delgado & Stefancic have stated, “What do critical race theorists believe? First, that racism is ordinary, not aberrational – ‘normal science,’ the usual way society does business, the common, everyday experience of most people of color in this country” (2012, pp. 6-7). Although most legal discourse assumes that the law is neutral and colorblind, CRT seeks to challenge this notion through showing that American meritocracy is a myth for people of color and liberal policy-making only works for the disadvantaged when those policies are advantageous for the privileged.

Although what is included as a key tenet of CRT differs among scholars, the following are generally accepted as the main tenets to which proponents of the theory
subscribe (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Savas, 2014; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Taylor, 2009). These tenets include:

- The permanence of racism
- Experiential knowledge/counter storytelling
- Interest convergence theory
- Intersectionality
- Whiteness as property
- Critique of liberalism
- Commitment to social justice

Each of these tenets is discussed in greater detail in the sections below.

The persistence of racism. Critical race theorists accept that racism is common and deeply rooted in American society. Racism influences all economic, political, and social aspects of society (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2013; Lynn & Adams, 2002; Taylor, 2009; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). Critical race theorists recognize that race is a social construct with very real consequences for people from minority groups, and that racism is “so ingrained in U.S. society that it seems natural and is often unrecognizable or invisible to most individuals” (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015).

For example, since the 1930s, banks have assessed the risk of loan defaults on a neighborhood-by-neighborhood basis, resulting in inner-city neighborhoods receiving fewer mortgages and, consequently, fewer homeowners. While this practice was not necessarily racist in and of itself, it did result in dramatic financial gains for white, suburban families who were able to secure mortgages, business loans, and even financial
aid for access to higher education, based solely upon what neighborhoods they did not live in. In this way, racism becomes pervasive across economic, political, and social structures.

**Experiential knowledge/counter storytelling.** The voices of people of color are often silenced or ignored. Critical race theorists believe that the stories that come from the lived experiences of people of color are valid and valuable. The knowledge they have gained through experience is essential for “the theorizing of race within context” (Lynn & Adams, 2002, p. 88). Education researchers Lynn & Adams (2002) argued that scholars and writers in the CRT tradition have resisted “traditional scholarly forms and genres” in favor of stories, folk tales, and other types of “counter narratives” that demonstrate how people of color experience racism in their own voices and from the expertise that comes from living with racism everyday (p. 88). The present dissertation seeks the experiential knowledge of people of color through interviews which ask about the lived experiences of students of color in technical and professional communication programs.

**Interest convergence theory.** Interest convergence theory asserts that only when the interests of powerful white people converge with the interests of people of color will social justice be enacted. Derrick Bell gave a strong example of this in his seminal work “*Brown v. Board of Education* and the Interest-Convergence Dilemma” (1980). In this work, Bell points out that we cannot fully understand the significance of the Brown v. Board decision, which ended the legality of racially segregated schools, without also considering the ways in which this decision benefitted white people. At the time of the Brown decision, the United States had just ended the Korean War and the Second World
War was still well remembered by most of the population. During both of these wars, African American armed service members fought valiantly for the United States. These servicewomen and servicemen returned “having experienced for the first time in their lives a setting in which cooperation and survival took precedence over racism” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 23). These returning servicewomen and servicemen were not willing to return to their lives as social outcasts and menial laborers. The unwillingness of these servicemembers to return to their former lives as racially oppressed people threatened mass social unrest (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Also, at this time, the U.S. was in the midst of the Cold War which pitted the ideology of western democracy against Soviet communism. Part of this cold war included a massive effort to win the loyalty of emerging nations. These emerging nations were largely populated by non-white people who were not impressed with the news coming from the United States detailing lynchings, corrupt government officials, racist laws, and the many other injustices perpetrated against people of color. In an effort to avoid more social unrest, and to improve the image of the United States, civil rights laws like the Brown v. Board decision were passed. The board decision did not come about because it was the right thing to do. It came about because, without it, the United States could not win the Cold War (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Bell used the example of Brown v. Board to illustrate the larger point that all progress made to redress inequality in the law happens not because of some altruistic ideal, but because it benefits white people (Ladson-Billings, 2013).

Evidence of this type of interest convergence outlined in Bell’s example can be seen in many other areas of society including the efforts of institutions of higher learning
to increase diversity in their incoming classes. Program administrators may look to
diversity in their programs as a badge of honor rather than an opportunity to increase
inclusiveness and provide better opportunities for all of their students. Using diversity as
a way to increase prestige is a form of interest convergence. This can make initiatives
meant to increase diversity more harmful than helpful as they seek to increase recognition
of a program rather than increasing the inclusion of diverse voices.

**Intersectionality.** Although racism is the central theme of critical race theory,
critical race theorists recognize that oppression experienced from racism is compounded
when combined with other identity markers such as gender, sexual orientation, and ability
(Crenshaw, 1991; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). As pedagogical theorist Gloria Landson-
Billings has noted, people are often organized into binaries by society, but CRT rejects
these binaries and seeks to see people as complex individuals (Ladson-Billings, 2013).
There is no magic bullet to foster an inclusive community. Systems of oppression are
experienced differently because a person's race can't be separated from her gender,
sexuality, nationality, and other identity markers.

**Whiteness as property.** Whiteness as property refers to the closely guarded
privileges and benefits people who identify as or pass as white enjoy. White people
possess whiteness and can exchange it for better education, housing, schools, etc.
(Manning, 2013; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). In our society, each of us is compared to an
ideal and given power and value based on how close or far away we are from that ideal.
Audre Lorde, noted poet and civil rights activist, referred to this ideal person as the
“mythical norm.”

Somewhere on the edge of consciousness, there is what I call the *mythical*
norm, which each one of us within our hearts knows “that is not me.” In America,¹ this norm is usually defined as white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure. It is within this mythical norm that the trappings of power reside within this society (Lorde, 2007, p.116).

Those that are closer to the mythical norm wield power. Whiteness, perhaps more than any other characteristic of the mythical norm, comes with power, privilege, and prestige. The works of white people are held in higher regard and are given more attention than the works of non-white people.

**Critique of liberalism.** Liberal principles of government are so ingrained in American culture and ideology that they are often taken for granted. When CRT scholars refer to a critique of liberalism they are talking about classical liberalism. Some of the main ideas of classical liberalism include representative democracy, individual freedom, guaranteed and inherent rights, and equal protection under the law (Lal, 2006; Pyle, 1999). The idea that all humans are born with certain rights and that, according to the laws of the United States, all persons have equal protection under the law have led some to believe that American society is a colorblind meritocracy in which all people have equal protections and an equal chance at success. However, critical race scholars reject the idea of an objective colorblind meritocracy (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). Critical race scholars believe that racism is deeply embedded into society. This means that although a colorblind society may sound ideal, political and social realities make that impossible.

¹ In her writing, Lorde purposefully does not capitalize words such as “america.” This rhetorical choice serves as a personal commentary on her dissatisfaction with the state of the nation.
(Bartlett & Brayboy, 2005; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010; Lynn & Adams, 2002; Museus, 2013; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Taylor, 1998). Higher education research and sociologist Gokhan Savas explained the relationship between CRT and claims of color blindness in higher education. “CRT challenges white privilege and refutes the claims that educational institutions make toward objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity. In this sense, CRT scholars believe that these traditional discourses of objectivity and neutrality are made to camouflage white privilege, power, and self-interest” (Savas, 2014, p. 510).

**Commitment to social justice.** Working toward a socially just society is an important part of CRT. In describing critical race theory, education scholars Bartlett and Brayboy noted that CRT is activist in nature and that CRT scholars should maintain a commitment to social justice (2005). As Savas said, “Scholars should be actively seeking the elimination of racism, sexism, classism, and all other forms of oppression. That is why they work toward the empowerment of people of color and other subordinated groups” (2014, p. 510). TPC program administrators cannot be passively committed to diversity and inclusion. They need to be actively engaged in it. Some may be open to diversity and inclusive ideas, but are not interested in the active pursuit of diversity and inclusion in their programs. Critical race theory asserts that racism is the norm in society. It is persistent and entrenched in our culture and ideologies. Those who do not actively engage in creating a more diverse and inclusive culture may run the risk of alienating people of color and perpetuating oppression by creating a homogenized group of students and ideas.

Critical race theory can be used as a theoretical lens to examine the effects of
Racist foundations and policy-making in many types of groups. The next section shows how CRT is active in higher education by discussing how racism in higher education, especially in the admission process, has been present from the foundation of America’s earliest institutions of higher learning to the present day and how this embedded racism affects students of color in the form of lower graduation rates thereby affecting their social mobility and overall quality of life.

**Race and racism in higher education**

The following section describes some of the history of higher education specifically regarding race and racism in the academy. By examining racism in higher education, readers are able to see examples of critical race theory at play. The foundations of higher education were largely based on racist policies and actions. These racist policies still affect students today.

The beginnings of higher education in America can be traced back to the colonial era. In the beginning, American academies of higher education were predominantly influenced by British institutions, British culture, and Christian tradition (Cohen et al., 2006; Savas, 2014; Thelin, 2004). The earliest institutions of higher education in America (Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Columbia, Brown, Dartmouth, Rutgers, William and Mary, University of Pennsylvania) were based on Cambridge and Oxford. Their main purpose was to educate men who were expected to become societal leaders (Brubacher and Rudy, 1997; Cohen et al., 2006; Savas, 2014; Thelin, 2004). Along with delivering education to the children of elites, higher education was seen as a tool for transmitting European ideas and culture to subsequent generations. Those colonial colleges, now known as American colleges and universities, were initially reserved for rich, white, Protestant males.
(Karabel, 2005; Stampnitzky, 2006). These early colleges were a powerful force in taking the power of white colonizers and passing it down to future generations as property.

Racial segregation remained prevalent in higher education for hundreds of years despite nominal efforts to create equality in educational opportunity. The Morrill Act of 1862 sought to increase educational opportunities for those without access to higher education throughout the United States. However, many of the new institutions created under the Morrill Act limited these opportunities, offering enrollment exclusively to white students (Redd, 1998). The Second Morrill Act of 1890 significantly increased educational opportunities for blacks, as it required states to show that race was not a factor in the admissions process. This meant that states which received funding from the federal government to create land grant colleges were required to force these colleges to open their doors to people of all races or to create a separate college which would provide equal access to opportunities for higher learning. This resulted in the creation of some the historically black colleges and universities that exist today. These “1890 colleges” were brought into being because of the decision by some states to deny non-white students admission into their existing colleges thereby requiring the creation of entirely separate colleges (Redd, 1998).

The Second Morrill Act was not a purely altruistic measure enacted to help blacks with access to higher learning. It was the convergence of the interests of powerful white people with oppressed black people that made the act happen. The Second Morrill Act was aimed specifically at former confederate states, the majority of which had no public education system at all including public education for whites. The Second Morrill Act helped pressure confederate states to embrace a relatively new philosophy of education in
the creation of a public education system (Brown & Richard, 2007). This act also, albeit unintentionally, helped cement the doctrine of segregation as it made formal the standard of separate but equal in higher education (Brown & Davis, 2001).

As efforts, such as the Morrill acts, sought to create better access to higher learning, academic institutions sought other ways to exclude certain groups of students. For nearly 200 years, admission at the nation’s elite private colleges was based purely on academic criteria. This changed in the 1920s when academic criteria were no longer enough to screen out the “socially undesirable.” At this time in American history, the country was moving toward restricting immigration. The possibility of Anglo-Saxon gentlemen being replaced by immigrants at their universities, especially Eastern European Jews, was not acceptable to the leadership of the big three of the time—Harvard, Princeton, and Yale (Karabel, 2005). It was at this time that college admissions changed forever as the aforementioned institutions developed the merit-based admission process. This meant that a student would no longer be admitted to an institution based on academic criteria alone. University leadership realized that if admission was based on academic achievement, which could be measured, they would lose the power to control who is included in the incoming freshman class. In part, these leaders felt forced to do this in order to protect the interests of the institution. The new policy allowed the admission of the sons of major donors, who would themselves become future donors, while excluding the children of immigrants whose presence at the college would drive away those donors’ sons to seek education elsewhere. The new “merit-based” admission process gave admission regimes the freedom to admit whomever they wanted to admit with just the right amount of opacity to make sure that the institution would face little to
no public scrutiny. “Character,” today’s “well roundedness,” became the desirable quality. This quality was thought to be, at the time, missing from Jewish immigrants, but merit-based admission would continue to be used to screen out “undesirable” candidates representing a variety of backgrounds. Measuring character was coupled with other subjective qualities such as leadership, personality, and manliness, giving broad latitude to admit students based on the personal judgment of university officers (Karabel, 2005). This same type of admission process is still used today in the admission of students to selective colleges.

The famous 1954 case Brown v. The Board of Education sought to further limit institutions’ power to discriminate through the removal of the separate but equal standard in education (Savas, 2014). Although the Brown case ended overt segregation in American higher education, it did not usher in an increased number of minority students into the academy. Overt exclusion of non-white students in college admissions was still common until the 1960s (Karabel, 2005; Savas, 2014). From their inception until the 60’s, colleges and universities could freely block the admission of students who they did not want to admit to their institutions. With the onset of the mid 1960’s, colleges and universities began opening their doors to all qualified applicants. This change was aided, in part, by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which banned discrimination based on race and brought with it conversations about affirmative action (Savas, 2014). With the end of segregation and shifting social attitudes on race, colleges gradually began changing their priorities seeing diverse classes as prestigious rather than detrimental. They began creating initiatives to try and increase racial and ethnic diversity in their institutions rather than block it. As I will discuss later, these efforts have helped to increase the
numbers of minority students attending institutions of higher education (Haycock, 2001; Ohene-Okae, 2017), but they have not closed the gap completely (Gregg & Machin, 2000; Kane, 2004). This is because policies such as the merit based admission process still remain which create barriers for students of color. Furthermore, colleges and universities do a poor job of supporting the students who do attend college but do not come from a white, middle-class background (Kuh & Love, 2000; McClain & Perry, 2017; Museus & Quaye, 2009). Because of this, students of color are much more likely to dropout of college than their white peers (Casselman, 2014).

Although colleges and universities have started to address embedded inequality through affirmative action, some have criticized the efforts of colleges to recruit a more diverse group of students claiming that these efforts as unjust and have attempted to force colleges toward a more liberal (in the classical sense) stance on education with an emphasis on colorblind admission processes.

**Recent Court Battles and Affirmative Action in College Admissions**

Recent attempts at increasing the number of students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds through affirmative action have been used by institutions of higher education to try and increase numbers or underrepresented students; however, many of these efforts have been contested in high profile court cases by plaintiffs who state that admissions processes which favor people of color are inherently discriminatory toward white people (e.g. Regents of the University of California v. Bakke 438 U.S. 265; Grutter v. Bollinger, 539 U.S. 306; Gratz v. Bollinger, 539 U.S. 244; Fisher v. University of Texas, 570 U.S.). One of the most cited and influential of these cases was 1978’s University of California v. Bakke. In this case, Alan Bakke (a white male) sued the
University of California’s medical school saying he had been discriminated against since the school had admitted non-white students with lower entrance scores than his. At this time, the medical school at the University of California reserved 16 out of 100 spots in each year’s class for students of color (Little, 2107). The court ultimately ruled that using race as a factor in admission is permissible, but the use of race-based quotas was not.

This decision led to some confusion as to what is and is not allowed in college admission practices. For example, in 2003 the University of Michigan was using a points-based system to determine admissibility in their highly selective undergraduate admission process. Applicants were awarded points on a 150-point scale with 100 points needed for admission. Students of color were awarded an automatic 20-point bonus to their score. This point system led to a lawsuit (Gratz v. Bollinger) arguing that awarding points based on race was discriminatory. The Supreme Court cited the Bakke case when ruling the University of Michigan’s undergraduate admission process discriminatory against dominant groups.

At around the same time as the Gratz v. Bollinger case was being decided, the University of Michigan was involved in another case which worked its way up to the Supreme Court. This time the court was ruling on the university’s law school admission process. In this case (Grutter v. Bollinger) the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the University of Michigan’s law school admission process, though it used a similar system to the University of Michigan’s undergraduate admissions office used during the Gratz case, was not discriminatory. The court ruled that admission processes may favor underrepresented groups as long as there is a narrowly tailored use for such a practice. The university was able to show compelling interest for their admission policy in the
need to admit a “critical mass” of minority students to "ensure that these minority
students do not feel isolated or like spokespersons for their race; to provide adequate
opportunities for the type of interaction upon which the educational benefits of diversity
depend; and to challenge all students to think critically and re-examine stereotypes"
(Grutter v. Bollinger, 2003). This compelling interest was ruled as “narrowly tailored” by
the court and was ultimately ruled as constitutional.

More recently, the supreme court ruled on a challenge to the University of Texas’
admission process which considers race as a factor after admitting all applicants who are
Texas residents and are in the top 7% (then 10%) of their graduating class. The Supreme
Court ruled in 2016 that the University of Texas’ admission process was lawful and had
met the standards of “strict scrutiny” that must be applied to race-based considerations in
college admission leaving the issue still somewhat confusing for current colleges and
universities. For now, it seems that college admissions offices can consider race as a
factor in the admission process but must show a compelling reason for such
considerations and must show that it is only a minor factor among many the college takes
into consideration.

From these court cases, we see evidence that colleges and universities are, at the
very least, now trying to increase diversity in their respective institutions. This effort is
having an effect. Although there are persistent gaps in college attendance that correspond
to race (Gregg & Machin, 2000; Kane, 2004), the gap in the number of students of color
being admitted to predominantly white institutions versus the number of white students
being admitted is shrinking (Haycock, 2001; Ohene-Oake, 2017). The admission gap in
higher education is shrinking; however, students of color face a much more pressing
problem. Higher education institutions are not currently equipped to support the diverse classes they are bringing in (McClain & Perry, 2017). Institutions of higher education need to support these students and help them persist to graduation.

**Increasing Diversity is not Enough**

Colleges and universities don’t just have a problem with attracting and admitting students of color. The much more serious problem is their ability to support these students and help them persist to graduation (McClain & Perry, 2017). Efforts to create a more inclusive and diverse student body at colleges and universities both increase the likelihood of success for students of color (Bowen & Bock, 1998) and enhance learning for all students at the institution (Terenzini et. al., 2001). However, there are still significant challenges to overcome if students, faculty, and administrators are going to increase inclusiveness in the academy. The challenges students face in institutions of higher learning are largely the same challenges students see in the society at large. These challenges stem from the racist foundations of American society.

CRT scholars connect the disadvantages of students of color at predominantly white campuses to a society in which CRT scholars believe that people of color are treated unequally, have higher rates of sickness and death, receive a lower quality education and health services, live in poorer social and economic environments, and are more subject to criminal victimization and incarceration. That is why a CRT framework in education considers broader social, cultural and economic conditions of students of color and how these factors influence those students in their educational journeys (Savas, 2014, p. 515).

Colleges are making efforts, such as those described in the aforementioned court
cases, to bring in more diverse classes, but just recruiting diverse groups of students is not enough. Although higher numbers of racial minorities are entering college, fewer of them persist to graduation and continue on to improve their lives economically (Casselman, 2014). Much like the foundational laws and social norms of the United States, higher education was built on a foundation of white supremacy (Karabel, 2005; Soares, 2007). Students from majority backgrounds face fewer obstacles on their path to a bachelor's degree. Research concerning underrepresented groups and the lack of college achievement has pointed out several key challenges which represent the primary obstacles for people from underrepresented backgrounds as they try to enroll, persist, and graduate from college. These include:

1. College undermatch

   - When an otherwise academically qualified student chooses to attend a less selective institution, this is undermatching. Students who undermatch are more likely to drop out of college (Smith, Pender, & Howell, 2013).

2. Insufficient and/or inaccessible financial aid information and support

   - The general lack of financial aid for post-secondary education is a significant barrier to college persistence and completion. Regrettably, while financial aid is often available for students from low socioeconomic or underrepresented backgrounds, the potential student often remains unaware of that aid or how to access it.

3. Racial and stereotype threat linked to high school and post-secondary dropout
- “The threat to an individual that others’ judgments on their own actions will negatively stereotype them in the [educational] domain, has a significant negative effect on standardized test scores and leads to educational disengagement” (Dukakis, Duong, Velasco, & Henderson, 2014, p. 8). In other words, stereotypes that blanket students and are reinforced by others, whether perceived or not, create anxiety to the student in question, causing him/her to falter in his/her educational pursuit until the burden becomes so overwhelming that leaving the path of education seems preferable.

4. Lack of equity-focused institutional practices in K-12 and postsecondary education

- Educational institutions often only focus on academic preparedness rather than other skills, such as social or emotional, that are needed to persist in college. Also, institutions need to have an introspective focus to determine how the needs of students of color are not currently being met.

5. Experiences as people of color, low-income, and/or first-generation-to-attend students

- The lived experiences of students of color often contain many factors which affect academic performance including economic inequality, residential segregation, and poor performing schools (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998; Massey & Denton, 2003; Savas, 2014; Tinto, 1975). A student’s background can contribute heavily to her/his success in college. Not only will students from underrepresented backgrounds have a more difficult time
graduating, colleges and universities are ill-equipped to give these students adequate support (Kuh & Love, 2000; Museus & Quaye, 2009). The norms of an institution can reproduce disparities on the campus. A pioneer in research regarding student retention, Vincent Tinto asserted that students must “physically as well as socially dissociate from the communities of the past” to fully integrate into college life (1993, p. 96). In the late 90’s and early 2000’s, higher education scholars began to critique the assumptions in Tinto’s theory of integration for being culturally biased and its inadequacy in explaining the departure of students of color (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Kuh & Love, 2000; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000; Tierney, 1999).

Research now shows the importance of cultural integrity, showing that college students from minority backgrounds benefit greatly from being secure in their cultural heritage (Helm, Sedlacek, & Prieto, 1998; Museus & Quaye, 2009; Tierney, 1992). Students should be encouraged to find connections at their colleges and universities which will enable them to make the transition to academia while minimizing the disruption of total immersion into an unfamiliar culture. These connections can be made by encouraging students to connect with faculty and staff members of color as well as giving them the option to find “cultural enclaves” they can be a part of such as racial and ethnically focused organizations, e.g. Black Student Unions or Native American Student Associations.

Along with cultural ignorance and insensitivity on the part of college administrators, outright discrimination still occurs on college campuses, and racial
climate is a contributing factor in students from underrepresented racial and ethnic backgrounds leaving the academy at higher rates than white students (McClain & Perry, 2017). Although open racial conflicts are not as common on college campuses as they were in the past, with the exception of the recent spike in campus hate crimes after the 2016 election (Bauman, 2018), subtle racial discrimination continues to be widespread for students of color. Colleges still struggle with institutional racism. For example, the merit-based admission process, which was originally meant to exclude “undesirable” groups of students, still remains largely intact today, and although the intentions of merit-based admissions may not be discriminatory, because merit-based admissions was based on discriminatory practices, it still serves as a tool to weed out minority groups even if unintentionally (Karabel, 2005; Soares, 2007). Students are not the only ones who experience discrimination at colleges and universities. Faculty members of color are less likely to be granted tenure than their white colleagues (Finkelstein, Conley, & Schuster, 2016; Matthew, 2016). “American institutions, especially schools, have embedded ideologies maintaining inequality. Thus, minority students are more likely to perceive a hostile racial climate on campus compared with majority students whose values are generally more valued by schools” (Savas, 2014). Hostility can include blatant racism and a weak response by institutional administrators (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015, pp. 2-3) as well as more understated microaggressions which lead to low retention rates of students of color at predominantly white institutions (McClain & Perry, 2017).

More students of color are being admitted to college campuses, but fewer students of color are graduating. The problem isn’t being solved by simply increasing the number of diverse students at an institution. College administrators must do more to increase
inclusiveness. Critical race theory can help researchers interested in higher education identify the source of the hostility felt at institutions of higher education by students of color thereby giving us a starting point for addressing systemic issues directly.
CHAPTER 2
TECHNICAL AND PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION, SOCIAL JUSTICE, AND DIVERSITY

In the previous chapter I broadly discussed critical race theory and how issues of racism affect higher education. This chapter is meant to take the broad discussion from the previous chapter and narrow the focus to TPC academic programs by situating my dissertation research within the overall scholarly field of technical and professional communication and, more specifically, within the social justice movement of said field.

In this chapter I start by briefly discussing the history of the cultural turn in technical and professional communication, a move which marked a shift in focus for technical and professional communication from a more pragmatic discipline to one focused on the rhetorical nature of technical writing and the consideration of humanistic values in its efforts to communicate information. I then discuss how this focus on people rather than pragmatism paved the way for the current social justice movement visible in technical and professional communication scholarship today. The section on social justice is followed by an examination of current scholarly work related to issues of diversity and inclusion in TPC academic programs. The present dissertation seeks to extend the current literature on diversity and inclusion in TPC programs through an examination of the experiences of persons of color in TPC academic programs.

Technical and Professional Communication and the Cultural Turn

With its roots in the fields of science and engineering, technical and professional communication has evolved from an effort to enable better communication of scientific knowledge into a multifaceted discipline dedicated to a wide variety of issues involving
human communication (Dobrin, 1983; Elliot, 2017). Technical and professional communication is a highly complex and somewhat broad field, and much effort has been put into describing how scholars and practitioners should define, or not define it (Allen, 2004; Durack, 1997; Rude, 2009). Dobrin gave a now seminal definition when he stated that “Technical writing is writing that accommodates technology to the user” (1983, p. 242). Though influential, this definition is being reimagined by more current conceptualizations. Albers wrote that “technical communication is about creating communication that properly conforms to human behavior in complex situations” (2008, p. 122). Albers’ definition reflects a long evolution of thought by many technical and professional communication scholars that began from a utilitarian and pragmatic approach and then transformed into a focus on humanistic values.

The late 70’s and early 80’s brought about a change in focus of TPC research from logical positivism to a more rhetorical and humanistic focus (Miller, 1979; Zappen, 1987). An influential work by Carolyn Miller, “A Humanistic Rationale for Technical Writing,” marked the rejection of positivism in the field and a move toward a larger focus on the rhetorical nature of technical and professional communication (1979). In it, Miller argued against positivistic thinking in which technical writing and scientific writing “…aims at being an efficient way of coercing minds to submit to reality.” This positivist approach is in opposition to the humanistic approach to writing which acknowledges that scientific ideas are created by humans and that writing is a communal effort (Miller, 1979). With this article, Miller paved the way for a large body of research to follow, examining technical and professional communication as a rhetorical and humanistic field.

The classic Aristotelian definition of rhetoric, “the faculty to observe in any
given case the means of persuasion,” was, according to Aristotle, to be used in “all arts and sciences in order to persuade audiences of some specific point” (Aristotle & Kennedy, 2007). As Miller and others have noted, technical and professional communication originally followed a parallel course of development along with science, espousing empiricist and logical positivist notions (Miller, 1979; Zappen, 1987). Rhetoric has long been a part of science, and the rhetorical aspects of science and scientific research are well recognized by many scholars today (see Harris, 1997, for a collection of essays on the topic). Following this line of thought, readers can observe that rhetoric is also an important aspect of technical and professional communication, helping scholars and practitioners better understand the social and political complexity of the field (Grant-Davie, 1997; Miller, 1979; Selfe & Selfe, 1996; Thralls & Blyler, 1993; Zappen, 1987). Extensions of Miller’s idea led to an exploration of social approaches in TPC scholarship (Thralls & Blyler, 1993). Though this “social turn” included many social approaches to scholarship, it was largely dominated by social constructionist ideas “which [seek] to better understand social contexts and dynamics that specific communities deploy in order to facilitate enculturation” (Scott & Longo, 2006). Scholars soon began to complicate and extend the ideas of the social turn shifting focus toward how values, culture, and perceptions are shaped through communication resulting in what some scholars call the “cultural turn.” (Faigley, 1985; Scott & Longo, 2006; Thralls & Blyler, 1993). In the following sections I will discuss in more detail the cultural turn in TPC scholarship and how this turn led to the recent social justice turn.

**Power and Ethics in Technical and Professional Communication**

Technical and professional communication in practice is not simply an activity in
which maximally transparent, neutral, formulaic, and pragmatic writing occurs (Hallenbeck, 2012; Scott, Longo, & Wills, 2006). The job of a technical communicator is much more broad and complex than simply that of a “talking handbook” (Henry, 2006, p. 208). Practitioners’ roles have evolved to what Slack, Miller, and Doak call the role of “authorship” (2006). Authors exercise power as they negotiate meanings and relationships in an organization.

Managers … need to recognize the following: that writing needs to assume a high status in corporate work, and be viewed as a critical means to just about every organizational end. The lingering idea that writing is somehow a ‘basic skill’ rather than an area of strategic activity for a whole enterprise sometimes causes managers to make poor choices when implementing CM practices and systems” (Hart-Davidson, 2010, p. 142).

The social and cultural turns in technical and professional communication scholarship led to the confirmation that technical and professional communication is not neutral. Technical communicators have power. This power influences users. Examples of this are the interfaces on the internet, such as search engines, which are designed for users to be able to easily find information such as nearby goods and services. Although interfaces are often designed to be presented as neutral, information delivering, software, interfaces are not neutral (de Souza e Silva & Frith, 2012). These designs are meant to influence the user to see their environment in a certain way sometimes favoring a certain company or activity over another. A strong example of this can be seen in the world’s most popular search engine, Google. Type a search query into the search bar and the first results you see are at the top because companies paid Google to be at the top. With the
exception of a small square with the word “Ad” in it, these paid-for results appear exactly the same as the other search results. This is a rhetorical choice meant to influence users to consider the paid-for results first before the results from business which have not paid for their results to be prioritized. Texts often thought of as neutral, such as a search engine, contain rhetorical power (Pawlowski & Johnson, 2015). Texts and interfaces created by technical communicators and sent out into the world can influence the way users think and act. This means that technical communicators wield power. Our society relies on technical communicators to provide information that is accurate and reliable (Hartelius, 2011). Information has become a valuable commodity and, in many cases, technical communicators hold the key to disseminating that information (Hart-Davidson, 2010).

Because technical communicators wield power, they face a choice in how they will use that power. As stated previously, many technical and professional communication scholars have adopted the idea of technical and professional communication as a rhetorical and social discipline, rejecting the positivistic and hegemonic lens of Western science. A pragmatic and apolitical approach to technical and professional communication research also rejects the idea that technical and professional communication can be a force for social change when in fact, “Technical writing, perhaps even more than other kinds of rhetorical discourse, always leads to action” (Katz, 1992, p. 259). This tendency to move users toward action means that technical and professional communication cannot be apolitical or neutral (Jones, Moore, & Walton, 2016).

As TPC scholars begin to navigate the “complex role of social context in creating, shaping, and giving meaning to information,” they must constantly be aware of the consequences of their actions (Dombrowski, 2000, p. ix). Ethical decisions are ever
present in the work of technical communicators. Many textbooks on technical and professional communication include a chapter discussing ethics and ethical decision-making in the field (Graves & Graves, 2012; Markel, 2001); however, Moeller & McAllister argue that it’s problematic to include only one chapter on ethics in a textbook when the entire field is ethical (2002). In its simplest form, “ethics is all about values, what is right and good” (Dombrowski, 2000, p. ix). Ethical decision-making, by technical communicators as well as by others, is an important issue in all organizations (By & Burns, 2013; Pope, 2015; Pullen & Rhodes, 2014; Weaver & Brown, 2012). Technical and professional communicators within these organizations may face pressure to use their rhetorical skills to bend the truth, create a text that is deliberately misleading, or communicate information that is completely false (Graves & Graves, 2012; Markel, 2001). Many rhetorical thinkers and philosophers believe that rhetoric and ethics are inseparably linked— you can’t have one without the other (Dombrowski, 2000, p. 15). If we understand technical and professional communication as rhetorical (Miller, 1979; Zappen, 1987), we can see that the use of that rhetoric is governed by the decisions we make. Technical communicators hold tremendous power to use rhetoric to influence and manipulate (Castels, 2007; Faber, 2002; Hart-Davidson, 2010). Because of this power, consideration must be given to how power is used and in what ways this usage reflects the values of the author or creator.

Faber, in working to define technical communicators as “professionals” noted that “there is a higher responsibility in such a definition, for it means the professional must transcend the occupational focus and achieve an almost artistic status by allowing their work to be more connected to social and multicultural issues…”
self-conscious social, theoretical, and ethical awareness” (2002, p. 319). Here, Faber suggests that the desire for technical and professional communication practitioners to be recognized as more than low-level copywriters and editors comes with a responsibility. Professional communicators, must be aware of the effect their work has on people.

Because technical and professional communication cannot be neutral, it is political. It is important for researchers to be intentional about whose lives are affected, whose voices are centralized, and what actions are recommended. Researchers should identify problems that will be beneficial and meaningful to research subjects as they select research sites (Creswell, 2009, p. 88). It is also essential for “participants [to] believe in the findings of the research and [be] willing to act on them” (Blakeslee, Cole, & Confrey, 2010, p. 28). By carefully choosing research sites, TPC scholars can engage in research projects that help the participants as much as the researcher.

Recent work of some professional writing scholars has sought to bring ‘action’ to our research, to embrace community engagement as a means to give students non academic contexts for their work, to promote an active vision of citizenship, to serve the community, and to create a new variety of relevance for our research. This is a relevance that may not gain us citations in sociological journals or in nature, but it leverages our best research tools and strategies to new applications that have the potential to increase the value placed on our work by a wide variety of community agencies (Clark, 2004 p. 309).

In their role as experts in the field of communication, students, scholars, and practitioners can become agents of change and “post-modern experts.” Technical
communication scholars can work to design a better future for communities by engaging in “the rearrangement of people, technologies, and institutions through discourse to better accomplish civic goals (in addition to those of commerce)” (Salvo, 2006, p. 238). Instead of simply describing issues, TPC scholars can take a participatory role in their communities by advocating for positive change (Dilger, 2006).

**Technical and Professional Communication and Social Justice**

The idea of technical communicators as powerful change agents has inspired a growing group of scholars to use their expertise in technical and professional communication to take up causes of social justice (Agboka, 2013; Bowden, Pompos, & Turner, 2013; Dura, Singhal, & Elias, 2013; Jones, Savage, & Yu, 2014; Jones, Moore, & Walton, 2016; Walton & Jones, 2013). This social justice turn extends the ideas of the cultural turn by recognizing that TPC scholars “cannot sit idly by in the midst of such sociopolitical and socioeconomic strain” such as minority oppression, a flawed criminal justice system, strained international relations, and disenchantment with government (Jones, 2016, p. 343).

Technical communicators, by virtue of their training, are well-equipped to use their expertise in forwarding issues of social justice (Agboka, 2013, p. 28-29; Rude, 2008, p. 267).

Our research is often driven by personal commitment to types of issues, but it is also motivated by a sense of civic responsibility that is enhanced by awareness that the field's knowledge gives it the potential to contribute to social justice. The same values that motivate research into public issues motivate service learning courses or projects for nonprofit organizations" (Rude, 2008, p. 267).
Many technical and professional communication researchers have put the idea of social responsibility into practice by addressing issues of social justice. This includes research related to human rights (Dura, Singhal, & Elias, 2013; Walton, Price, & Zraly, 2013), civic engagement (Bowden, 2004; Rude, 2004; Moore, 2013), technological development (Dysart-Gale, Pitula, & Radhakrishnan, 2011; Walton, 2013), and service learning (Crabtree & Sapp, 2005; Youngblood & Mackiewicz, 2013).

With the ability to influence others through technology and communication comes the power to create change. “Communication and information have been fundamental sources of power and counter-power, of domination and social change… because the fundamental battle being fought in society is the battle over the minds of the people” (Castels, 2007, p. 238). In fact, change doesn’t occur within a group or organization without the ability to communicate (Faber, 2002, pp. 24-25). This ability to influence others through communication gives technical communicators a tremendous capacity to use their power as a “means of cultural transformation” (Hallenbeck, 2012, p. 306). Technical and professional communication scholars and practitioners can “attend closely to the role technical communication can play in enlisting technologies to perpetuate the cultural status quo, and be mindful of [technical communication’s] potential to act specifically as a location from which individuals… can speak back to that status quo in productive ways” (Hallenbeck, 2012, p. 306).

When focused on issues of social justice, technical and professional communication can act as a catalyst to promote social action (Clark, 2004; Crabtree & Sapp, 2005; Jones, 2016). Technical and professional communication research can and should have a positive impact on participants (Creswell, 2009, p. 88; Blakeslee, Cole, &
Technical communicators, by virtue of their focus on “producing communication that is easy to use and appropriate for the needs of users,” (Walton, 2016, p. 404) have the opportunity to use their skills and training as user advocates to focus on issues that impact the lives of oppressed peoples by working with the marginalized to create solutions based listening to their needs and following their lead.

Technical communicators employ a unique perspective in the study of communication. They see problems through the perspective of communicating complicated information to the end user, focusing on how communication strategies can be tailored to help users through usability studies, genre studies, cultural communication, activity theory, and actor network theory, to name a few. The technical communicator’s thought process often begins with the audience, reflecting on how a creator can best communicate with that audience rather than how the text can be created in such a way as to try and force users to see the intended message from the content creator’s point of view. This focus on shared human values in the creation of technologies, artifacts, and systems is often referred to as “human centered design” (Zachry & Spyridakis, 2016). Human centered design is an approach that puts the focus squarely on the “needs, contexts, desires, and input of the people who are the audience” (Rose, 2016, p. 428). “Human-centered design expands the context and reach of the work of technical communicators and provides an opportunity to investigate and advocate for the needs of vulnerable populations” (Rose, 2016, p. 427). Technical and professional communication and human centered design are closely related fields in that both are concerned with “making people our priority…” and “[are] well positioned to support human dignity and human rights” (Walton, 2016, p. 404). Technical communicators see the needs of end
users as an important part of the writing and design process. This mindset is well suited to issues of social justice. Social justice advocates see their work in much the same way a technical communicator sees her work, striving to see social injustices from the point of view of those in need rather than dictating their needs from a privileged position (Colton & Holmes, 2016; Jones, Moore, Walton, 2016; Savage & Mattson, 2011; Walton, 2016). However, users—marginalized people in this example—should not be viewed as a monolith. Design should occur in partnership with marginalized people. Scholars and administrators must seek out and respect the contributions of people who are not normally represented in order to improve the efficacy of communication and design aimed at oppressed peoples. TPC scholars interested in furthering causes of social justice should allow the voices of marginalized peoples to take the lead when collecting data (Walton, 2016).

**Diversity in TPC Academic Programs**

Some social justice driven research in TPC has focused on improving diversity and inclusion in TPC academic programs (Jones, Savage, & Yu, 2014; Savage & Mattson, 2011; Savage & Matveeva, 2011). In this section I look specifically at current literature and research trends regarding diversity and inclusion specifically in TPC academic programs.

Attracting students of color into TPC programs is not the only consideration program administrators should be making when looking to diversify programs. For those interested in issues of diversity and social justice in TPC programs, the goal should be not just to increase the number of people from different backgrounds, but to foster more inclusiveness in the dialogue and ideas shared in TPC programs (Jones, Moore, &
Walton, 2016). In essence, just increasing the number of people from underrepresented backgrounds is not enough. TPC academic programs must create spaces for others to speak and allow ideas from outside of the “mythical norm” (Lorde, 2007) to be included and taken seriously. In this sense, the term inclusion “refer[s] to efforts to forward a more expansive vision of TPC, one that intentionally seeks marginalized perspectives, privileges these perspectives, and promotes them through action” (Jones, Moore, & Walton, 2016, p. 214). However, TPC departments cannot increase inclusiveness without first working toward a more diverse representation in TPC programs. “Diversity, which addresses representation in its most basic form, is a necessary precondition of inclusion: We have to get everyone to the table to be able to do the messy work of promoting and enacting social justice to create a more inclusive environment” (Jones, Moore, & Walton, 2016, p. 219). Therefore, this study seeks to take steps to address the lack of racial and ethnic diversity in TPC programs (Jones, Savage, & Yu, 2014; Savage & Mattson, 2011; Savage & Matveeva, 2011) in terms of the physical presence of students of color in TPC programs in the hope that future research may be conducted regarding the creation of more inclusive academic programs and curricula.

At the 2003 business meeting of the Council for Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication (CPTSC), Cynthia Selfe challenged the assembly “to take up the issue of the lack of diversity in technical communication” (Savage & Mattson, 2011, p. 6). In that meeting, several of the members committed to forming an ad hoc diversity committee. That committee put together their inaugural diversity report and presented it at the 2004 business meeting. Within the report were three goals regarding diversity, one of which being to “Promote diversity within CPTSC as an organization, our
undergraduate and graduate programs in tech. communication and within tech.
communication faculty” (Jones, Savage, & Yu, 2014). Previous calls for a dialogue about
recruitment efforts and the lack of diversity in technical and professional communication
programs, pedagogy, and faculty have also pointed out significant deficits in technical
and professional communication as a whole in regards to racial and ethnic diversity
(Savage & Matveeva, 2011; Savage & Mattson, 2011). Through what little discussion has
been had concerning diversity in the field, there seems to be a general consensus that a
problem exists. Some scholars have suggested actions that can be taken toward a
resolution, such as participating in local community initiatives for diversity (Savage &
Mattson, 2011); creating programmatic collaborations with community colleges (Savage
& Mattson, 2011); encouraging diversity-focused service learning projects (Savage &
Mattson, 2011); forming research, teaching, and service partnerships with faculty,
students, and programs of historically black colleges and universities as well as tribal
colleges and universities (Savage & Matveeva, 2011); increasing research based on
participatory action and decolonial methodologies (Jones, Savage, & Yu, 2014);
encouraging supportive peer networks (Popham, 2016); more clearly defining the field to
allow prospective students to be better able to find TPC academic programs and
understand what they can expect from a career in TPC (Dayley & Walton, 2018; Popham,
2016); and working with admission offices and local high schools to create outreach
programs to educate prospective students about career and educational opportunities in
TPC. However, there has been little scholarship showing evidence based results
regarding what efforts may be effective in creating more diverse and inclusive programs,
or reporting focused on diversity initiatives that have actually been carried out by TPC
program administrators.

Diversity, including considerations of race, gender, sexual orientation, language, ability, religion, nationality, and social justice for traditionally marginalized and disenfranchised populations, “…has been defined broadly in attempts to incorporate multiple perspectives and viewpoints and include a variety of stakeholders and audiences” (Jones, Savage, & Yu, 2014, p. 133). However, the use of “diversity” as a catch-all term can be problematic in its lack of specificity in that often the word diversity has “at times, served as an insufficient stand-in for addressing race and ethnicity” (Jones, Moore, & Walton, 2016, p. 215). In including such a wide variety of groups into a term like “diversity,” we ignore the fact that each group has distinct needs and faces unique challenges and problems as well as distinct strengths and unique points of view that can positively shape society and its institutions. Narrowing our focus allows us to better address issues for specific groups.

For the purposes of this dissertation, I will be focusing specifically on issues of racial and ethnic diversity. This focus is in an effort to further the work of other scholars interested in diversity in TPC programs. Scholarly studies on racial and ethnic diversity in technical and professional communication programs are relatively rare; however, some research is available. Susan Popham’s recent article regarding African-American students in TPC graduate programs points out many problems in technical and professional communication efforts to increase diversity. She notes the lack of African-participation in TPC programs as reported by Rachel Spilka in 2007 at the CCCC Conference (Popham, 2016, p. 73). Popham points out that current recruitment efforts, including offering minority students scholarships, seem to have little effect and that “recruitment efforts
alone may not be enough to more suitably engage with the interests and needs of diverse student populations” (Popham, 2016, p. 73). Some of the reasons Popham points out for low enrollment by African-American students in TPC programs include ignorance of the field’s existence, the perception that TPC programs are highly stringent and demanding, requiring literary skills which some students may believe they do not possess, and the technological divide which may exclude students from learning the technical skills necessary for a TPC degree program.

Other relatively recent scholarship explores the issues surrounding racial and ethnic diversity in technical and professional communication programs. Savage and Mattson’s 2011 article explores the perceptions of TPC program administrators regarding the state of racial and ethnic diversity in TPC programs. In their article, Savage and Mattson pointed out that “we need to do a great deal more than most of us have done so far to diversify student and faculty populations in programs and to incorporate diverse cultural perspectives in curricula” (Savage & Mattson, 2011, p. 43). They argue that the many benefits that come from program diversity are not necessarily achieved simply by merely increasing enrollment numbers of students of color. Program administrators need to also seek to diversify program faculty and thoughtfully examine program curricula in an effort to incorporate diversity in all areas of the program, the latter of which has been done to some extent in TPC academic programs. An example of this can be found in the Fall 2016 Program Showcase in Programmatic Perspectives in which Walton, Colton, Wheatley-Boxx, and Gurko, describe how Utah State University’s Technical Communication and Rhetoric program redesigned their curriculum to incorporate social justice issues throughout academic programs (2016).
Savage and Matveeva explored TPC programs and curriculum at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) as well as in Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) (2011). In their article, they point out that there may be opportunities to increase racial and cultural diversity in TPC through outreach and partnerships with HBCUs and TCUs, but urge caution: “HBCUs and TCUs exist because of social and cultural realities with deep roots in histories of colonization, slavery, and genocide” (Savage & Matveeva, 2011, p. 81). Savage and Matveeva encourage an ethical approach in which administrators avoid missionary style zealotry in hiring minority faculty and enrolling minority students just to enculturate them into becoming “just like us” (Savage & Matveeva, 2011, p. 82). They encourage embracing diversity and being open to change in all areas including pedagogies, course designs, curricula, knowledge, and even educational facilities themselves.

In 2014, Natasha Jones collaborated with Gerald Savage and Han Yu to update us on the status of diversity initiatives in technical and professional communication. The article reviews the goals of the CPTSC diversity committee, outlined in 2004, and reviews the field’s progress toward these goals. Jones, Savage, and Yu reported some progress but stressed that much needs to be done to bring TPC research on issues of diversity up to the level of other English-related disciplines as well as other applied fields. Jones, Savage, and Yu, remind us that “the kind of work [they] are calling for here is going to be difficult” (2014, p. 147), and that TPC scholars may have to adopt research methods that many in the field are not accustomed to.

When working to increase diversity in TPC academic programs, it may be valuable for program administrators to discover why students choose to study TPC. Little
exploration has been done concerning the reasons current students chose to study TPC. In fact, little research has been done regarding techniques to proactively attract students to universities in any field. Studies from higher education researchers regarding reasons students attend universities focus on federal aid (Steinberg, Piraino, & Haveman, 2009), the effects of public policy (Perna, Steele, Woda, & Hibbert, 2005), and the influence of campus climate (Griffin, Muniz, & Espinosa, 2012). In the aforementioned article on the state of diversity in TPC, Jones, Savage, and Yu (2014) pointed out many positive actions that have been taken to create awareness and foster diversity in the field. These efforts include reaching out to historically Black colleges as well as tribal colleges and Hispanic serving institutions; offering more sessions at conferences to address race, class, and social justice issues; and creating a culture of support for scholars interested in these issues. In the few other articles that have addressed actions directed at increasing diversity within technical and professional communication programs, each called for future research informing efforts to create a more diverse community (Savage & Mattson, 2011; Savage & Matveeva, 2011; Jones, Savage, & Yu, 2014).

Having a diverse student body is advantageous to students from both underrepresented and dominant groups. Diverse classes have been shown to increase interpersonal understanding and cognitive growth, as well as an increase in positive learning outcomes for all parties (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez, 2004; Terenzini, Cabrera, Colbeck, Bjorklund, & Parente, 2001). Besides enriching the higher education experience and adding a variety of viewpoints to our dialogue, increasing the variety of student backgrounds in TPC programs will also likely create a chain reaction that will reach into the professional world. The more students
From underrepresented backgrounds TPC programs are able to enroll into undergraduate technical and professional communication programs, the more they will fill graduate programs, take up faculty positions, and move into industry (Savage & Mattson, 2011).

Although a diverse community would be advantageous to TPC programs, administrators need to keep in mind their motivation for creating a diverse environment. In pointing out the lack of diversity in technical and professional communication programs, and devising strategies to increase diversity, administrators often fail to mention why they want a more diverse group of technical communicators in the first place. Are TPC faculty and administrators interested in including diverse viewpoints in program dialogue? Are they concerned with creating a more well-rounded experience for students? Do faculty and program administrators want to create opportunities for underprivileged individuals? Do program administrators and TPC faculty want to redress the inequality present in TPC academic programs? Do faculty and administrators want to bring the voices and contributions and experiences of the marginalized to the forefront? Or do they simply want the prestige that comes with creating a diverse population? One consideration in deciding the motivation for generating diversity initiatives is whether or not the values of faculty and administration match those of the population they are interested in attracting (Franke & Shah, 2003; McCarthy, Grabill, Hart-Davidson, & McLeod, 2011; Hallenbeck, 2012; Walton, 2013). In her influential article about cross-cultural collaboration, Bosley points out that “[Western] culture, like others, suffers from the belief that we can examine and evaluate the behavior of others according to our own values” (1993, p. 51). She also points out the pervasiveness of assumptions of homogeneity and the problems such attitudes can cause. Barry Thatcher, in his work
regarding Professional communication and rhetorical studies in global contexts, advocates for the rejection of using local-only approaches to solve study global issues (Thatcher, 2012, p. xv). Thatcher also stated that scholars should strive to use research methods developed by scholars outside the U.S. if they are going to study global issues. He suggests that using frameworks and methodologies developed completely within the context of western scholarship creates a significant risk of neocolonialism or ethnocentrism (Thatcher, 2012, p. 21). Some may believe that a college education is in the best interest of every potential student. However, faculty and administrators cannot possibly understand each student’s situation, or decide what is or is not in his or her best interest. In the same way that “using approaches that implicitly espouse U.S. or western cultural values” (Thatcher, 2012, p. 23) jeopardizes global scholarship, using privileged viewpoints to develop outreach and inclusion efforts may be more harmful than helpful.

A traditional tactic for colleges trying to recruit a diverse student population is to feature diverse students prominently in recruitment texts. This can include showing several students of different ethnicities in recruitment view books and on websites, hiring people of color as admission counselors, and using campus tour guides which represent a variety of backgrounds. Often this diverse representation in recruitment materials and personnel does not reflect the overall diversity of the campus. Because of this, a student may feel tricked when she arrives on campus and realizes that she is now the student on the cover of the brochure that she saw while in high school (160over90, 2012). Students aren’t looking for a few diverse faces in a crowd. They’re looking for a community in which they can relate and feel comfortable (Blackmon, 2004). They’re looking for faculty and scholars who look like them, and have similar backgrounds and values. And beyond
adequate representation, they’re looking for a place to be included and heard. They’re looking for a voice: “...consideration of inclusion can often be characterized as voice, pointing to the idea that allowing a space for voice eliminates oppressive silences…” (Jones, 2016, p. 478). People in privileged positions have power to silence or support the voices of marginalized or oppressed populations (Jones, 2016). When administrators only use students of color to further an agenda of increased physical diversity, they are missing an important aspect of diversity which is inclusion, that is to say, creating spaces for diverse voices to be heard. Students of color may interpret a recruitment brochure to mean that a college or university is an inclusive place that encourages diverse points of view in an inclusive atmosphere. However, if a student comes to campus and discovers a different reality, her/his voice may effectively be silenced when s/he realizes that s/he is not in the inclusive environment s/he thought would be there.

This example of misrepresenting the diversity of a college campus through recruitment materials, brings up a difficult issue—a sort of chicken-or-egg scenario. How can administrators bring in a diverse group of students when they don’t already have a group of students and faculty to whom students from underrepresented backgrounds can relate (Blackmon, 2004)? How can program administrators be inclusive if all of the voices on the campus are homogenized? Should TPC programs use deceptive recruitment materials, such as in the example mentioned in the previous paragraph, as a way to recruit a diverse group of students into academic programs in order to create a more diverse and inclusive space for students who will attend later? Does the eventual development of a more diverse faculty and industry justify using deceptive means to recruit students now? In his much-cited article, “the ethic of expediency,” Katz conducts a rhetorical analysis
on a memo from Nazi Germany (1992). He finds that the “memo is \(too\) technical, \(too\)
logical [and that] [t]he writer shows no concern that the purpose of his memo is . . . to
exterminate people” (p. 257, emphasis in original). Katz goes on to explain this rhetorical
problem, the ethic of expediency, as a problem of the author simply using a rhetorical
style which shows no regard for the contents or consequences of the writing. Katz’s ideas
relate to the Machiavellian philosophy demonstrated when one’s actions, no matter how
unscrupulous, are acceptable when the outcome is considered favorable, or, in other
words, when “the ends justify the means.” Katz argues that “we need to consider
technical writing based on deliberative rhetoric from the standpoint of both rhetoric and
ethics” (p. 260). Colton, Holmes, and Walwema extend Katz’s thinking through an
exploration of the ethics of tactical technical and professional communication used to
further social justice causes (2016). Colton et al. caution against thinking in ethical
binaries and advocate for adoption of Cavarero’s (2011) ethic of care.

For Cavaero wounding and caring do not correspond to a basic binary (e.g.,
wounding = bad, caring = good). Rather, these terms offer a set of fluid ratios to
allow us to characterize the totality of relations of those affected by a given
tactical action, and, in turn, to attribute ethical behavior which, in some cases, will
involve wounding certain individuals to help ensure our collective ability to
ensure an ethics of care for the most vulnerable (Colton et al., 2016, p. 60).

So should program administrators imply institutional diversity in their recruitment
efforts in order to try and attract a diverse student body? A student who attends college
has a much better chance at class mobility and financial success (Bowen, 1977; Card,
2001; Dearden, McGranahan, & Sianesi, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Program
administrators might be tempted to say “by attracting underrepresented students, are we not giving them an opportunity they might not otherwise have had?” However, deceptive tactics may do more harm than good. Often program administrators paint a rosy picture of the experience the student will have at an institution, leaving out harsh realities, in order to convince the student to choose said institution. Does a little embellishment justify the boost diversity will give to academic departments and the opportunities that will be possible for students of color who enroll? Program administrators may attempt to answer these questions and implement strategies themselves, but people in power are not the best equipped to answer these types of questions. This is why the inclusion of diverse voices is so important. Coalitional approaches which include listening to and being guided by those who are marginalized can aid administrators as they strive to reason out ethical recruitment strategies. If the intent of recruiting a diverse class of students is to bring students from underrepresented backgrounds in purely for diversity’s sake, then the intent of those doing the recruiting is misguided. However, if program administrators bring in students from underrepresented backgrounds with the intention of inviting them to shape department policies and recruitment strategies, that is a goal rooted in inclusivity which puts the needs of students first. One example of this can be seen in the Gonzales and Baca’s description of UTEP’s bilingual technical writing certificates (2017). They state that although courses on diversity and inclusion are important, students in TPC programs may benefit from “conversations on difference centered in multiple class assignments across all courses in their curricula” (Gonzales & Bacca, 2017, p. 279). UTEP’s technical writing certificate programs embrace linguistic and cultural differences throughout the program. Instead of forcing students to “always adapt their linguistic
practices to [standard written English], TPC instructors can benefit from helping students to rhetorically enact their diverse languages and communicative practices for various audiences” (Gonzales & Bacca, 2017, p. 276). A program that embraces differences such as UTEP’s not only offers a more welcoming and inclusive academic environment for students, it may better prepare students as they engage in a multicultural world professionally. This type of training aids in students-turned-practitioners’ ability to create more localized texts for a global audience (Shivers-McNair & San Diego, 2017). Program administrators should strive to create a culture that invites the mutual exchange of ideas, allows the ideas of underrepresented students to shape the program and the field, and explicitly acknowledges the field’s complicity in oppression while taking responsibility for redressing wrongs.

Although some TPC programs and organizations have taken positive steps to increase diversity, these steps are limited in their ability to influence the overall diversity within technical and professional communication programs. The development of recruitment plans is influenced by institutional policies and administrative agendas, but ultimately the responsibility to bring in a class of students, diverse or not, falls to admission offices. TPC program administrators cannot create an “equitable representation of diverse populations in student enrollments…” without the cooperation of the admission office at whose mercy program administrators are to bring in the diverse students they want to fill TPC classes (Savage, & Mattson, 2011, p. 6). If the admission office does not bring in a diverse class, the various majors will reflect that lack of diversity no matter how much they want to include first generation college students, students from low income families, or students of color. Included in their suggestions to
increase diversity in technical and professional communication departments, Savage and Mattson call for collaboration with other university departments as well as with local community colleges (2011). To this, I add a call for collaboration with college and university admission offices.

**Conclusion**

Technical and professional communication faculty, researchers, and program administrators face many challenges as they examine issues of diversity in TPC academic programs. As people in positions of power in TPC programs work to overcome these challenges, they must not forget that “by regarding obstacles to diversity as peripheral to our work, we in fact tolerate and sustain those obstacles” (Savage & Mattson, 2011, p. 6). With the recent social justice turn in TPC research, technical and professional communication researchers have made valuable contributions in social justice research (Agboka, 2013; Bowden, Pompos, & Turner, 2013; Dura, Singhal, & Elias, 2013; Jones, Savage, & Yu, 2014; Jones, Moore, & Walton, 2016; Walton & Jones, 2013). With increased interest in social justice research, TPC researchers should consider some introspection and turn a critical eye toward their own academic programs. Currently there is little research exploring issues of diversity and inclusion in TPC academic programs. This dissertation seeks to begin addressing this research gap through qualitative interviews with TPC students who identify as people of color. As TPC scholars continue to engage with questions regarding increasing diversity and inclusion in TPC academic programs (Jones, 2017; Jones, Savage, & Yu, 2014; Popham, 2016; Savage & Mattson; Savage & Matveeva, 2011) they can begin extending TPC research into practice. Researchers may begin engaging directly with students and program administrators to
test theoretical frameworks and create models which can inform effective practice in recruitment and inclusion efforts.
In the fall of 2016 I began a research project which explored technical and professional communication student opinions of what diversity means, how diverse the academic programs they are enrolled in are, and their perception of the level of support for diversity provided by program administrators. This research project provided some interesting results, but as with many research projects, it also led to many questions. These questions were the inspiration for my dissertation research project. The contents of this chapter are a report of the findings of this 2016 research project. This chapter is meant to provide context to dissertation readers and establish exigency for the present dissertation. The preceding chapters reviewed scholarship regarding issues of diversity and inclusion in higher education and in technical and professional communication programs specifically. The research findings presented in this chapter, as well as this dissertation in its entirety, seek to begin to answer the call from TPC scholars for research regarding increasing diversity and inclusion in TPC programs (Jones, Savage, Yu, 2014; Savage & Mattson, 2011; Savage & Matveeva, 2011). The data collection done for the study discussed in this chapter was done through a survey of technical and professional communication undergraduate and graduate students. The data collected offered some general insights of TPD students' perceptions of diversity and inclusion in their academic programs, but also led to questions best answered by a qualitative research. Thus, the data presented in this chapter, while meritorious in its own right, provided the catalyst for the research methods and questions discussed in the chapters following this one.

While working as a university admissions counselor, I was assigned to a college fair at a local high school. Standing at my assigned table, I was approached by a young African
American woman who had been collecting pamphlets and viewbooks from the various tables lined up around the gym. She took one of my viewbooks, looked right at me and asked, “Are there even any black people at your school?” The answer, of course, was yes, but her question got me thinking. How comfortable are people of color at our university? Do people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds feel like they fit in or do they have a hard time finding peers and mentors with whom they can identify? Racial and ethnic diversity is often worn as a badge of honor by institutions of higher education and the departments housed therein. However, shiny recruitment pamphlets depicting a racially diverse group of students smiling in front of campus greenery rarely reflect the reality of the racial makeup of the campus. The purposes of including pictures of diverse groups of students in recruitment materials can vary widely. These viewbooks and flyers can be meant to make prospective students of color feel like they will be a welcome addition to the university at an inclusive campus. They can also be meant to project an image of diversity to both the community and to students who may be concerned that they will be walking in to a homogenous environment and be exposed to tokenism or worse. Although likely not meant to be maliciously deceptive, recruitment materials like this can create an image of a racially diverse campus when that institution may have a very small number of students of color enrolled. Two possible problems arise with deceptively diverse recruitment materials: (1) a person of color will see through the misrepresentation and decide not to enroll; (2) a person will be fooled into thinking they are coming into a diverse environment with people who look like them and are from a similar cultural background. Either way, the perception of diversity may affect a student’s decision to enroll at an institution or in a specific program therein. Therefore, one of the major challenges of college recruitment is the desire to bring in a diverse class of students while not misrepresenting the environment and racial makeup. This challenge applies not only to college and university admission offices, but to
Administrators who oversee TPC academic programs are interested in increasing diversity within their programs (Savage & Mattson, 2011), but lack an effective guide to ethically attract diverse groups of students. Along with attracting diverse incoming classes, program administrators must be cognizant of the fact that increasing diversity must come with a concerted effort to increase inclusiveness. Administrators should be cautious not to silence diverse voices in an effort to get students to succeed through cultural assimilation (Tierney, 1999). One way program administrators can discover how to better recruit more diverse classes while increasing inclusiveness is to ask current students directly about their experiences in our programs. By asking students about their perceptions of diversity and experiences in our programs, administrators can begin to analyze what attracts students from diverse backgrounds to our programs and what keeps them there.

This study reports on the findings of a 2016 survey in which technical and professional communication students were asked about their perceptions of diversity in their TPC academic programs. I first describe the methods used to gather data. I then report the findings from the survey, and provide an analysis for those findings. Limitations of the study are described and suggestions for future research are discussed.

**Methods**

The methods described in this section were intended to find students perceptions of diversity in the academic program where they are currently studying. This section describes recruitment methods for finding participants, the participants included in the study, data collection methods, and how the data was analyzed.

**Recruitment**

To recruit survey participants, I sent an email through the ATTW and CPTSC listservs, asking faculty members to share the survey link with their students. Additionally, I
created a list of institutions offering TPC undergraduate and graduate programs in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet (Dayley & Walton, 2018). For each of the institutions in the spreadsheet, I emailed the program contact to invite faculty to share our survey link with all TPC students. When a program contact could not be found, I contacted the department directly by emailing a staff assistant or the department chair’s office. After the initial invitation was distributed, a follow-up email was sent again asking faculty contacts to send the survey link to students.

**Survey Respondents**

To be included in the survey, participants needed to be at least 18 years old as well as a current TPC undergraduate or graduate student. Seventy-five percent of survey respondents identified as women, 22% as men, and 3% as another identity such as transgender or non-binary. This gender distribution was more heavily female than the national average of about 57% of US university students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016).

The majority of respondents were of traditional college age, with 54% in the 18-25 year range. The next-largest age group was 26-35 years with 20%, then 36-45 years with 15%, 46-55 with 9%, and 56 years or older with 2%.

In reporting racial/ethnic identity, respondents were able to choose as many of the racial/ethnic categories with which they identified. Most students who responded to the survey identified as solely white (226 or 83.7%). Every other racial and ethnic group represented less than 10% of the responding population. Of all the respondents who chose to indicate a racial/ethnic identity, 17 (6.2%) chose more than one identity. If a respondent identified with more than one racial/ethnic category, that respondent could choose more than one. Students who identified as solely Asian represented the next largest group (16 or 5.9%). Those who identified as solely African American were the next-largest groups with
15 respondents (5.5%). The next highest number of respondents in order from most to least were Hispanic/Latino or of Spanish origin 11 (4%), Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander 8 (2.9%), and American Indian or Alaska Native 5 (1.8%). The majority of respondents (92%) indicated their country of citizenship as the United States, 4% Canada, and 1% India.

Data Collection

In order to discover students’ perceptions of diversity within TPC programs, I created an IRB-approved online survey (IRB General Review #7006) to reach as many TPC students as possible while collecting data in a way that could be easily analyzed. The survey was created in Qualtrics, an online survey generator and data collector. The survey was pilot tested with members of [university redacted]’s student branch of the Society of technical and professional communication. Improvements to the survey were made based on faculty and student feedback. The final survey included 29 questions, a subset of which inform this article.

Data Analysis

After 15 weeks, the survey was closed, having collected responses from a total of 325 students, with 295 completing the survey for a 91% completion rate. Respondents came from a reported 51 institutions. Reports were created to separate the results based on independent variables such as race/ethnicity, gender identity, age, and degree level. Data from each set of independent variables was placed in a frequency distribution table as part of a univariate analysis. Distribution data was compared and analyzed for differences among variables.

Results

In the following subsections I discuss the responses to a subset of questions from the survey described in the methods section. The responses from the overall group were compared to the responses given by students who identified with a race/ethnicity other
than white. This group is referred to as people of color (POC). The responses from POC are reported as one group to create a large enough sample size to analyze. However, it should be noted that the POC group is not monolithic and neither the group as a whole nor individuals in that group stand in as representatives of the groups with which they identify. Results are reported using descriptive statistics and possible implications and inferences from the data are discussed in the discussion section.

**What Does Diversity Mean to You?**

Students were asked to select which of the listed groups should be in a TPC program to make it diverse. Most survey respondents (239/88%) indicated they believe an organization with different races and ethnicities indicates a diverse organization followed by people with different abilities (226/83%) and people with different life experiences (226/83%) which each received the same number of responses. This was followed by people of various ages (218/80%), various attitudes and ideas (213/78%), various gender identities, (193/71%), sexual orientations (192/70%), different religious beliefs (192/70%), and having similar numbers of men and women (190/69.5%).

![Bar graph showing organizational diversity](image)

**Table 1: Organizational Diversity.** A bar graph showing what organizational diversity means to the total group of students.
When comparing responses of people of color to those of the overall group we see very similar results. The only difference of note was “having similar numbers of men and women.” For POC, “having similar numbers of men and women” was the sixth most chosen response for this question while the overall group ranked it as last. In the POC group, “having people of different races/ethnicities” had the highest percentage of respondents with 51 (94%). "Having people of various religions” got the least amount of positive responses in this groups with 33 (61%).

Table 2: Organizational Diversity (POC). A bar graph showing what organizational diversity means to respondents who identify as persons of color.

**Student Perception of Diversity**

Survey respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they thought the TPC program they were enrolled in was diverse in the following areas:

- Race and/or ethnicity
- Gender
(Dis)ability
Age
Socioeconomic background
Sexual orientation
Culture
Religion

Respondents could select from “very diverse,” “somewhat diverse,” “a little diverse,” “not very diverse,” or “not diverse at all” for each area. Respondents could also select “don’t know.”

The area where responding students indicated the largest amount of diversity was in gender diversity where 74 respondents (27%) indicated that their program was “very diverse” in terms of gender and 91 (33%) indicated it was “somewhat diverse.” Age also rated as being highly diverse in TPC programs receiving 64 (23%) very diverse and 87 (32%) “somewhat diverse” responses. “Socioeconomic background” received 34 (12%) “very diverse” responses, 62 (23%) “somewhat diverse” responses, and 36 (13%) “a little diverse” responses making it also one of the categories perceived as most diverse. The race/ethnicity category received 30 (11%) “very diverse” responses and 81 (30%) “somewhat diverse” responses. It also received 57 (21%) “a little diverse” responses, 57 (21%) “not very diverse” responses, and 26 (9.5%) “not at all diverse” responses making it the category with the most evenly distributed responses. “Culture” ranked in the middle as well with 39 (14%) “very diverse” responses, 61 (22%) “somewhat diverse” responses, 55 (20%) “a little diverse” responses, 40 (15%) “not very diverse” responses, and 7 (3%) “not at all diverse” responses. The area which respondents perceived their programs to be the least diverse was in people with disabilities. Of those who responded, 66 (24%) reported their program was “not very diverse” in terms of people with disabilities and 37 (14%)
respondents said their program was “not diverse at all.” Survey respondents were able to select “don’t know” if they weren’t sure about how diverse a program was in a specific category. The “don’t know” category received some of the most responses. Gender, race, and age received the lowest number of “don’t know” responses with 14 (5%), 22 (8%), and 23 (8%) respectively. Religion received the highest number of “don’t know” selections with 145 (55%), followed by sexual orientation (126/46%), socioeconomic background, (116/42%), and disability (98/36%).

Table 3: Program Diversity. A bar graph showing the total group of respondents’ perceptions of TPC program diversity.

Respondents were asked how diverse their programs are in terms of race, gender, (dis)ability, age, socioeconomic background, sexual orientation, culture, and religion. Responses from POC reflected the views of the overall population of survey respondents with very few differences relative to the sample size. For example, when asked about racial/ethnic diversity, 45% of POC respondents indicated their program was very diverse or somewhat diverse compared to 41% of the overall group, and 32% of the POC
respondents indicated that their program was not very diverse or not at all diverse compared to 30% of the overall group.

![Table 4: Program Diversity. A bar graph showing respondents who identify as persons of colors' perceptions of TPC program diversity.](image)

**Fitting in**

Student respondents were asked to indicate whether they believed they would fit in with others in their program based on gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, culture, socioeconomic background, disability, or religion. They were also asked if they thought TPC would be too difficult or complicated for them, a question that was intended to find out if the student felt s/he would not fit in because of academic ability. When selecting their level of agreement, responders were able to choose between “strongly agree,” “somewhat agree,” “no opinion,” “somewhat disagree,” and “strongly disagree.”
Table 5: Fitting in. A bar graph showing the total group of respondents’ perceptions of whether or not they would fit in.

When looking at the group as a whole, we can see that respondents overwhelmingly indicated they were not worried about fitting in with the response of “Strongly Disagree” representing 49.25% or more of responses in each category. People of color responded the same with the majority of respondents reporting that they were not worried about fitting in when enrolling in their TPC program.
Table 6: Fitting in. A bar graph showing respondents who identify as persons of colors’ perceptions of whether or not they would fit in.

**Faculty and Peers**

Related to students’ opinions on fitting in are students’ perception of whether or not there are people they can identify with in the program. Participants were asked to think about their TPC program and indicate to what level they agreed with the following statements:

- There aren’t many faculty who look like me.
- There aren’t many students who look like me.
- I am different from other students.
- I don’t have many friends who are studying TPC.

When breaking out responses by participants who indicated they were a part of another racial group other than white, we see that 21 respondents (39%) indicated they “strongly agreed” that there weren’t many faculty who looked like them in their programs and 8 respondents (15%) indicated that they somewhat agreed that there weren’t many faculty who looked like them. There were 3 respondents (5%) who “somewhat disagreed” that there weren’t many faculty who looked like them and 8 (15%) who “strongly disagreed”
with 14 (26%) who indicated “no opinion.”

Table 7: Representation. A bar graph showing respondents who identify as persons of colors’ perceptions of whether or not there are people who they can identify with in their TPC academic program.

This pattern of responses contrasts with the overall group. The overall group mostly indicated that they somewhat disagree (52/23%) or strongly disagree (90/40%) that there aren’t faculty who look like them.
The Importance of Diversity

When asked about the importance of diversity in various aspects of a TPC program, respondents indicated the level of importance of having leaders from diverse backgrounds, faculty from diverse backgrounds, students from diverse backgrounds, having a curriculum which teaches about diversity, and a curriculum that represents the contributions of people from diverse backgrounds. Each category was rated on a scale which included “very important,” “somewhat important,” “not very important,” and “not important at all.” A majority of the overall respondents indicated that each category was either “very important” or “somewhat important.” The same pattern was seen in the group of respondents who identify as people of color.
Table 9: Importance of diversity. A bar graph showing the total group of respondents’ perceptions of the importance of diversity in TPC academic programs.

Table 10: Representation. A bar graph showing respondents who identify as persons of colors’ perceptions of the importance of diversity in TPC academic programs.
Administration and Faculty Support of Diversity

Respondents were asked to think about their TPC program and indicate how much they agreed with several statements. Those statements included:

- TPC program leadership encourages diversity
- Professors are committed to, and support, diversity
- Students from different backgrounds are encouraged to pursue TPC
- The TPC program shows that diversity is important through its actions
- The TPC program respects individuals and values their differences
- Students who are different than most are treated fairly
- Students in the program respect others who are different from themselves
- The TPC program provides an environment for free and open expression of ideas

When looking at the group as a whole, most respondents either selected “strongly agree” or “somewhat agree” for each statement.

Table 11: Support. A bar graph showing the total group of respondents’ perceptions of their TPC academic program’s support for diversity.
Students of color responded in the same way the overall group did. These students from minority backgrounds seem to be mostly satisfied that their program supports and encourages diversity.

Table 12: Representation. A bar graph showing respondents who identify as persons of colors’ perceptions of their TPC academic program’s support for diversity.

Discussion

The results of the survey indicate five major findings which will be discussed in this section. The first four findings in the following list are true whether the survey responses are analyzed all together or bifurcated by race and ethnicity. Only the fifth finding is significantly different when the results are bifurcated. Those findings include:

1. A majority of respondents believe their TPC program is at least a little diverse (this includes respondents who identify as persons of color).

2. A majority of respondents believe their TPC program is supportive of diversity.

3. A majority of respondents believe their TPC program’s diversity, and support for
diversity, is an important part of the academic program.

4. A majority of respondents were not worried about fitting in when enrolling in a TPC academic program.

5. Respondents who identified as a person of color reported that there are not many faculty and staff in their programs who look like them. This is in contrast to the overall group.

For the purposes of this analysis I will discuss these findings in two distinct groups. Group one includes the first three findings listed above which suggest that TPC programs are diverse and supportive of diversity. Group two includes findings four and five from the list above which are related to fitting in when studying in a TPC academic program.

**Diversity in TPC Academic Programs**

On its face, the results from the survey data seem to indicate very few problems with diversity in TPC academic programs. When asked whether their programs are diverse in terms of race and/or ethnicity, 41% of respondents indicated that their program is somewhat or very diverse. That percentage goes up to 64% if you include respondents who indicated that their program is at least a little diverse. The fact that most respondents said that their program is at least a little racially/ethnically diverse is somewhat surprising considering some of the scholarship we have indicating that TPC programs are largely homogenous (Popham, 2016; Savage & Mattson, 2011), but what makes this result even more surprising is that when separating out the responses for persons of color for this question the results are almost exactly the same with 45% of the POC group indicating that their program is very or somewhat diverse with that number increasing to 60% if you include the respondents who indicated that their program is at least a little diverse.

A vast majority of respondents also indicated that their TPC academic program is supportive of diversity with large majorities indicating that they either strongly agree or
somewhat agree that their program supports diversity for each possible answer choice. When asked if their TPC program provides an environment for free and open expression of ideas, opinions, and/or beliefs, 88% of respondents indicated that they agree or somewhat agree that it does. Of the other response choices, 82% said their TPC program respects individuals and values their differences, 81% said students in the program respect others who are different from themselves, 76% said professors are committed to, and support, diversity, 73% said students who are different from most are treated fairly, 59% said their TPC program leadership encourage diversity, 54% said students from different backgrounds are encouraged to study TPC, and 51% said their TPC program shows that diversity is important through its actions.

Again, the results to this question from the POC group very closely mirror the results overall. Of the people from the POC group, 76% indicated that their TPC program provides an environment for free and open expression of ideas, opinions, 70% said their TPC program respects individuals and values their differences, 80% said students in the program respect others who are different from themselves, 70% said professors are committed to, and support, diversity, 56% said students who are different from most are treated fairly, 56% said their TPC program leadership encourage diversity, 52% said students from different backgrounds are encouraged to study TPC, and 52% said their TPC program shows that diversity is important through its actions.

Respondents also showed support for the importance of having diversity in their programs. When asked about the importance of diversity in their TPC programs, 86% said it is important to have faculty from diverse backgrounds, 86% said it is important to have a curriculum that represents the contributions of people from diverse backgrounds, 85% said it is important to have faculty from diverse backgrounds, 83% said it is important to have students from diverse backgrounds, and 77% said it is important to have a curriculum
related to diversity. When separating out the responses for people of color, the percentages are similar. Of the respondents in the POC group, 85% said it is important to have faculty from diverse backgrounds, 85% said it is important to have a curriculum that represents the contributions of people from diverse backgrounds, 85% said it is important to have faculty from diverse backgrounds, 87% said it is important to have students from diverse backgrounds, and 76% said it is important to have a curriculum related to diversity.

In analyzing this group of findings from the survey, it would be tempting to conclude that—at least as far as we can see with this limited data set—TPC programs are at least somewhat diverse and have few problems with inclusion. This conclusion would seem to conflict with anecdotal evidence reported by TPC students, faculty members, and administrators that TPC programs lack diversity. However, there are several indicators which show us that, although the results from this study seem to indicate no problems with diversity and inclusion in TPC programs, this is likely not the case.

Critical race theory asserts that racism is common and deeply rooted in American society. These deep roots of racism affect all aspects of society (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2013; Lynn & Adams, 2002; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Taylor, 2009). The effects of the persistence of racism can be found specifically in higher education (Karabel, 2005; Savas, 2014). If racism permeates all aspects of society, including higher education, then TPC academic programs are surely not immune. The data from this study shouldn’t simply be interpreted to mean that there are few problems with diversity and inclusion in TPC programs. Like all other institutions, TPC academic programs are influenced by embedded racism. Racism is “so ingrained in U.S. society that it seems natural and is often unrecognizable or invisible to most individuals” (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015, p. 7). This embedded racism affects not only the numbers of students and faculty from underrepresented backgrounds, but also the hospitality they experience in the departments.
which house TPC programs. This type of racism is so embedded that it may appear like the norm and can be difficult to recognize.

More than four in five (84%) survey respondents identified as white. Also, survey respondents who identified as persons of color indicted that there are not many students and faculty who look like them in their programs while the group of respondents as a whole reported that there are students who look like them in their programs. American society is a space in which the dominance of white people and white culture is seen as the standard. Critical race theorists recognize that white people use whiteness as power. This power can be wielded to control narratives and to further the interests of white people through the perpetuation of the idea that white culture is normal (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). This dominance of whiteness and the patterns of discrimination that go along with it go mostly unnoticed (Mills, 2011). The survey results reflect that, although TPC academic programs have a large majority of white people, survey respondents fail to recognize the homogeneity of their home institution and program.

Some TPC scholars have begun to identify and call out the homogeneity discussed above in TPC academic programs. As indicated in the literature review, TPC scholars recognize that technical and professional communication academic programs currently lack diversity and that there is work to be done to make TPC academic programs more diverse and inclusive (Jones, Savage, & Yu, 2014; Popham, 2016; Savage & Mattson, 2011; Savage & Matveeva, 2011). When this acknowledgment by TPC scholars is viewed through the theoretical lens of critical race theory alongside this article’s survey demographics, we see that despite survey respondents’ positive indication of diversity in TPC academic programs, these are not likely accurate summations. There is more going on here.

People want to believe in the existence of a colorblind meritocracy. Critical race theory rejects the idea of a colorblind meritocracy and asserts that the effects of racism are
prevalent throughout society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Harris, 1995). Often, counternarratives are ignored or dismissed in favor of the belief that the ideal society doesn’t notice race. Critical race theory asserts that “majoritarian” stories are told from the white majority perspective and are seen as the norm while narratives from the perspective of persons of color are relegated to the fringes (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). This means that dominant white narratives are often the only narratives heard in society and may even be believed and retold by persons of color while counternarratives are seen as invalid or even radical (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 28). One possible explanation for the failure of survey participants to identify the homogeneity in their own departments may be that they have been taught to ignore issues of race and dismiss counternarratives in favor of an idealized society in which race doesn’t matter. While likely not done consciously, this type of thinking may do more harm than good by masking real problems in a program.

Another possible explanation for survey responses reflecting widespread belief that TPC programs are diverse and inclusive may be the type of student responding to the survey. One characteristic of all survey respondents is that all were current students in a TPC program. Likely, they were highly active participants as they responded to the invitation to participate in this survey. It is also likely that those who felt like they did not fit in never joined the program or dropped out meaning their opinions could not have been included in the survey. Students who were not satisfied with a program’s level of diversity or commitment to people of color also may not have joined or persisted in a TPC academic program. Students who remained in a TPC program, and who self-select to take a survey about TPC programs, may have had mostly positive experiences in their programs and might be more apt to dismiss any negative experiences or reports they may have heard.

**Fitting In and Representation**

When asked if they felt like they would “fit in” in their academic programs, the
majority of student responders (77%) indicated that they did not have concerns about fitting in when they joined their program. When filtering responses to only show answers from people of color, the percentages, while a bit lower, remain in the majority (54%). There are many possible reasons for this. One reason may be the same as indicated above in that survey respondents were already members of TPC programs. If student responders felt like they had no trouble fitting in, then they may not notice, or perhaps dismiss, disparities or problems related to race or other personal identity characteristics. Current students are already enrolled in a program. Students who felt like they don’t fit in could have just decided not to enroll. Also, students who feel like they do fit into a program may have learned how to navigate in a traditionally white culture, such as higher education.

Critical race researchers acknowledge that educational institutions operate in contradictory ways, with their potential to oppress and marginalize coexisting with their potential to emancipate and empower. Likewise, a critical race methodology in education recognizes that multiple layers of oppression and discrimination are met with multiple forms of resistance. (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 26).

Critical race theory says that whiteness is a form of privilege and is the invisible norm by which we live in society. Institutions of higher education are also spaces of white privilege. Colleges and universities were founded by white people for white people. White people determined what a college would be and how it would operate. Students of color are forced to navigate this white-dominated world. This is normal for persons of color. However, this does not mean that it is easy for marginalized people to navigate white social norms or that it causes no trauma. It just means that it is typical.

Previous research has shown students appear to choose TPC programs based on their perception that their talents and aptitudes match with the field (Dayley & Walton, 2018). A result showing that students feel they fit in regardless of whether or not they are
from an underrepresented background may suggest that students who feel their talents and interests match the field are not discouraged from moving forward based on a worry generated by an engrained cultural preference. In other words, the fact that a student enjoys technical writing, is good at it, and wants to do it as a career, may have overridden any problems with homogeneity they encountered.

The observation by the POC group about TPC programs not having faculty or students who look like them gives us another important insight on fitting in and how it relates to success in a TPC program. According to current research, students of color have a better chance of succeeding in school if they work with a teacher or faculty member of color (Carver-Thomas, 2018; Egalite & Kisida, 2016; Madyun, Williams, McGee, & Milner, 2013). There are many reasons why having representation in the faculty can be beneficial to students of color. These reasons include having a role model to follow, someone who looks like them in a position of power, connecting with someone who better understands a student’s cultural background and can help that student navigate the unfamiliar culture of higher education, and having someone who can help increase the cultural competence of other students in the program (Madyun, Williams, McGee, & Milner, 2013). Survey respondents who identify as persons of color reported that their programs are supportive of diversity and of diverse groups of people. However, if programs are not employing faculty members of color, program administrators are missing a key point of support for their students of color because they are not investing in one of the primary ways to aid in student success.

Conclusion

From the survey results we can see that the students who responded to this survey perceive that their TPC academic programs are generally diverse and are supportive of diversity. However, there are several clues which indicate that the situation might not be as
it initially appears. From critical race theory we understand that racism is embedded into every aspect of society, including higher education. Also, the demographics of the survey respondents as well as published research by other TPC scholars suggest that the TPC programs which the respondents are enrolled in are likely not diverse in terms of having students and faculty members from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. There are several possible reasons students responded positively about diversity in their programs when their programs are likely not as diverse as indicated. This includes the embedded nature of racism in society, the rejection of counternarratives in favor of an idealized version of society, and the comfort level of students enrolled in TPC programs who self-selected to take the survey.

Respondents who identified as persons of color indicated that they were not worried about fitting in when enrolling in a TPC academic program while also indicating that there are not many other faculty or students who look like them in their programs. Part of the reason for this may be that students who are already enrolled and finding success in their programs have found ways to navigate white-dominated spaces. However, the lack of faculty of color to serve as mentors for students of color may be causing students of color to miss out on an important form of support.

Although the results of this survey do provide some interesting insights into the perceptions of diversity and inclusion of TPC students, there is not enough data to make definitive conclusions about TPC students of color or TPC students in general. Not only was there not a large enough sample in this study to generalize the data across the field, there are few other research studies exploring diversity and inclusion in TPC academic programs. Also, a survey is limited in its ability to fully explore student responses. The following chapters discuss the results of a series of interviews I conducted to address this limitation. I conducted qualitative interviews to seek more detailed information about the experiences
of students of color in TPC programs. The results of these interviews provide deeper insights and suggest ways in which TPC program administrators can foster more diversity and better inclusiveness.

It is likely that there are many ways in which TPC programs are hostile to persons of color. That isn’t to say TPC program administrators are overtly racist or that are purposefully trying to harm students. However, identifying the covertly rooted problems makes creating an inclusive environment for students of color challenging. Embedded racism is difficult to detect because it appears ordinary. However, faculty and administrators can begin to combat this ordinary racism through awareness of the history of racism in American society, listening to counternarratives rather than dismissing them, and being sensitive to the needs of students of color by offering the support they need.
CHAPTER 4
FINDING AND CHOOSING A TPC PROGRAM

The present chapter, along with the following chapter, reports findings from research conducted for this dissertation. The theoretical framing for this dissertation, critical race theory, along with the pilot study discussed in the preceding chapter, provided the main influence for my research questions and the methods I used. The research questions I focused on in this study are:

- How do TPC faculty and students of color find the field of technical and professional communication and what attracted them to this field?
- What sustains TPC students/faculty over time while navigating an academic career?
- What, if anything, makes technical and professional communication a good fit for people of color?

Interview answers relating to the first research question are addressed in this chapter. The answers to the first research question relate specifically to how students find and enroll in TPC programs. The second and third research questions are addressed in the next chapter. The answer to these last two questions relate specifically to how students persist in TPC academic programs and were separated into a separate chapter to differentiate between student recruitment and student retention.

This chapter begins with a methods section which describes how data was collected, analyzed, and reported. Following the methods section, this chapter reports participants’ answers from when they were asked about how they discovered the field of technical and professional communication and what was it about TPC that made them
want to pursue an academic degree in the field. Participant answers show that TPC academic programs are difficult to find both because of desperate naming conventions as well as low public knowledge of the field. The importance of outside influencers is discussed as well as how the challenge of discovering a TPC academic program is especially difficult for people with marginalized backgrounds.

**Methods**

Although this study is based on the theoretical framework of critical race theory in general, I specifically designed the study around the CRT tenet of experiential knowledge/counter storytelling. This tenet emphasizes that the voices of people of color are often silenced or marginalized. The goal of my dissertation research is not to explain to the reader my interpretation of the experiences of people of color in TPC programs nor express my own ideas regarding how TPC programs can be more inclusive and meet diversity goals. Rather, my goal is to share the stories of the people I interviewed and allow them to dictate what is important in diversity and inclusion in TPC programs and to share with the reader what they shared with me. Education scholars Marvin Lynn and Maurianne Adams, in their article discussing how critical race theory, a theory with its roots in legal scholarship, relates to scholarly work in the field of education, noted that the knowledge people of color have gained through experience is essential for “the theorizing of race within context” (Lynn & Adams, 2002, p. 88). I agree with Lynn and Adams and strive to accurately report the thoughts and experiences of the research participants so that readers can correctly place participant experiences within the context of TPC academic programs.
Recruitment

The study focused on persons of color participating in TPC academic programs. Participants included five undergraduate students, six graduate students, and five pre-tenure faculty members. As part of the study, participants were asked to name a person who was a major influencer in their decision to study technical and professional communication or who was an important person in influencing her/him to persist in a TPC academic program. Of the 16 participants, six identified an influencer and gave permission for that influencer to be contacted. The initial student participants were identified from the participants in the survey discussed in the previous chapter who indicated they are a part of a racial or ethnic minority group. Additional student participants were identified through referral from student and faculty member participants. Faculty member participants were identified through personal knowledge of TPC faculty members of color, Utah State University faculty member knowledge of possible faculty members who would like to participate, and through referral from other faculty member participants.

Data Collection

Participants were asked a set of questions focusing on how participants selected a major in TPC and what factors influenced them. Questions I asked all participants included:

- How did you learn about the field of TPC?
- Why did you decide to study TPC? (The answer(s) to this question led to follow-up questions that attempted to discover deeper insights regarding the subject’s motivation to choose TPC).
• Who influenced you to study TPC? (If no one was credited, I asked follow up questions, such as “Did a teacher or friend or family member influence you?”).

• Why did you stay in TPC? What keeps you participating in the field?

• As you pursue your education/career in TPC, who helps you?

• Did you face any challenges or barriers with finding TPC? With remaining in the field?

• What kinds of support got you to the field in the first place? What kinds of support keep you participating in this field, as opposed to leaving for another major/career, etc?

• Do you think you support others in finding out about TPC? Why? How?

• Do you think you support others in staying in TPC? Why? How?

• How many students in a typical TPC class are persons of color?

• What are your career aspirations? What kinds of support would you need to achieve those aspirations?

• What advice do you have for recruiting more people of color to TPC as a field? For recruiting more people of color into TPC academic programs?

• Why do you think people of color are underrepresented in TPC? Why do you think there aren’t more people of color in TPC?

Interviews were conducted over the phone and audio recorded. Interviews were semi-structured in order to allow more leeway when asking questions to interviewees. If the participants identified a person or persons who played a key role in bringing them to the field, I asked for permission to contact that person for an interview to ask about their
perception of their role as an influencer. The interview questions for influencers were based on the results of the initial interviews I conducted with students and faculty members. The questions focused on the influencer’s perception of how s/he functions as an influencer, if influencing is done on purpose, and what the best ways are to influence students of color to become interested in TPC programs.

**Data Analysis**

In their definitive volume on qualitative research methods, *Naturalistic Inquiry*, Lincoln and Guba outlined four criteria for judging the soundness of qualitative research (1985). Many subsequent scholars have discussed Lincoln and Guba’s four criteria adding clarification, insight, and strategies for implementing the Lincoln and Guba’s ideas into qualitative scholarship. Some of the scholarship inspired by Lincoln and Guba’s work that I consulted as I designed this study, include Shenton’s article on establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research (2004), Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen’s book on naturalistic inquiry and qualitative research methods (1993), Bassey’s book on educational research (1981), Berkowitz’s chapter on analyzing qualitative data (1997), and Lindolf and Taylor’s (2011) book on communication methods in qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba’s four criteria are:

- **Credibility**
- **Transferability**
- **Dependability**
- **Confirmability**

**Credibility.** Establishing credibility helps researchers to show how congruent their results are with reality (Shenton, 2004). In order to establish credibility, I employed
several measures in order to promote confidence that I am accurately representing the people who participated in my study. Each participant had the opportunity to refuse to participate in the study in order to ensure participants were genuinely willing to take part and offer data freely. It was made clear to participants that they could withdraw from the study at any time. By doing this, participants were encouraged to be frank and honest. This helped ensure honest answers that are true reflections of the participants’ experiences. During the data-gathering phase, I had four undergraduate participants drop out of the study and one who refused to participate.

When conducting interviews, I tried to create a space where participants felt they could openly express their thoughts and experiences (Shenton, 2004). After data collection, I used member checks wherein participants were asked to read transcripts of the interview in which they participated. To do this, I transcribed the interview into a Microsoft Word document. I then sent the transcription of that interview to the participant. I asked the participant to read over the transcript and let me know if any changes needed to be made so that I could make my reporting reflect what they were trying to say as accurately as possible. Any requested changes were made in the transcription document and that document was used for all quotations and analysis in this study. I also employed “on the spot” checks where I conferred with research participants during the interview process to make sure I accurately understood what they were saying. My goal was to ensure that participants’ words matched what they intended to say.

**Transferability.** Transferability is related to external validity in positivist work. Although it is likely impossible for a qualitative study focused on the behavior and opinions of a small group of subjects to be generalized to a larger group in the same way
a quantitative study could be (Erlandson et al., 1993), by including rich descriptions of research methods and settings, other researchers who find they are working with a similar group of research participants may be able to relate the findings of another study to their own (Bassey, 1981). In order to aid in transferability, I include detailed information regarding the research subjects and the methods used to gather information while still protecting their anonymity. Information in the research report includes:

- The basic area and type of institution where the participants are based
- Restrictions in the type of people who contributed to the data
- The specific number of participants and participant background information
- The specific data collection methods that were employed

**Dependability.** Dependability refers to having sufficient details and documentation of the methods employed so that the study can be scrutinized and replicated. Researchers who are interested in the same research population may find it advantageous to replicate an already completed study to see if they obtain similar results. In order to make this possible with my study I included specific details, including:

- The research design and implementation
- The operational detail of data gathering
- A discussion of the limitations of the study

**Confirmability.** Confirmability relates to ensuring the researcher’s biases, to the extent possible, do not affect the findings or, in other words, participants’ words should be their own and not influenced by the researcher (Shenton, 2004). Ensuring credibility plays an important role in confirmability, but further steps can be taken to increase
confirmability. In order to accomplish this, I have implemented “member checks” as stated in the credibility section. These member checks also relate to confirmability in that their purpose is to make sure participants’ words and opinions are the ones being represented rather than my own. This dissertation is also being reviewed by several critical scholars who, among many other things, will point out areas where I may be showing bias rather than simply reporting results. The recommendations section of the dissertation, where I discuss my interpretation of my findings, is clearly identified, and my analysis of the findings in the discussion section is based specifically on my findings rather than personal opinions.

**Analysis**

I recorded and transcribed each interview I conducted. I then sent the transcriptions to each interview participant. Responses varied widely. The majority of participants told me the transcription needed no changes. A few participants did not reply to my email containing the transcription even after a follow-up email. Four participants told me that their transcript needed changes which I made. After making requested changes to the transcription, I reduced and reconfigured the data. The process of reduction included choosing which aspects of the assembled data should be emphasized, minimized, or set aside completely for the purposes of addressing my specific research questions (Berkowitz, 1997). After the initial reduction, I organized and analyzed the data for emerging themes. Responses were coded by specifically looking for similarities and differences in the experiences of interviewees and by comparing and contrasting groups. Similar answers that appeared frequently within the data were recorded and given special consideration when drawing conclusions and stating implications. Throughout the
analysis, I used the participants’ own words in my description of emerging themes. The words of the participants drive the analysis. In other words, I let them tell me what was important rather than make assumptions. Once data coding was complete, I formed conclusions by stepping back to consider the analyzed data and its implications on my research questions. I then revisited the data to verify emergent conclusions and verify validity so that “the conclusions being drawn from the data are credible, defensible, warranted, and able to withstand alternative explanations” (Berkowitz, 1997). Emergent conclusions were also analyzed for implications for TPC programs. These implications inform the recommendations discussed later in the dissertation. In reporting my findings and delivering conclusions, I made sure to include participants’ own words in order to accurately and concretely show how my conclusions and recommendations might be implemented and related to the overall theoretical framing. When quoting interview participants in the reporting I “tried to balance a concern for the dignity and interests of the interviewee with the informational value of the speech being transcribed” (Lindolf & Taylor, 2011, p. 215). This means that I removed some of the ungrammatical or extraneous speech in the interviews in order to try and level power differences while trying to preserve the integrity of the interview (Lindolf & Taylor, 2011). For example, if an interview participant used “filler words” excessively such as “um,” “like,” or “you know,” I removed those words. This was meant to allow the words of participants to be understood clearly.

Participants

Interview participants were limited specifically to undergraduate, graduate, and pre-tenure faculty members who are majoring in, or consider their primary
research/teaching activities to be focused on, technical and professional communication. All of the participants attended or worked at public universities. Each participant also self-identified as a person of color. As mentioned previously, I interviewed five undergraduate students, six graduate students, and five pre-tenure faculty members. I also interviewed six people who were identified as influencers by the participants. The names of each participant have been changed to protect anonymity. Interview participants are identified by a pseudonymous first name or with the title “Dr.” and a pseudonymous last name in the case to the pre-tenure faculty members and influencers.

Undergraduate students. All of the undergraduate students I interviewed were female. This reflects what several interview participants told me which is that most TPC academic programs have a large majority of female students. Undergraduate participants included:

- Charlotte, an African American undergraduate student studying at a large southern university.
- Jane, an undergraduate student who identifies as African American, Native American, and white. She is a non-traditional student in that she’s a bit older than most students and has children. Jane attends a mid-size midwestern university.
- Louisa, an undergraduate student who identified as a South Asian person from Palestine and attends a mid-size southern university.
- Mary, a Hispanic undergraduate student at a mid-sized western university. She works as a technical communicator at the IRS.
- Virginia, an African American student at a mid-size southern university. She also considers herself to be a non-traditional student as she is older than the average
Graduate students. Although the original plan for this study was to interview five graduate students, six ended up being interviewed for the study because a faculty member I interviewed referred another graduate student to participate in the study who I wanted to include. In the end, there were three male and three female graduate student participants. Graduate student participants included:

- Abigail, who identifies as Native American and white. She attends a mid-size southern university.
- Alice, an African American female who attends a mid-size southern university.
- Bill, an African American male who attends a mid-size southern university.
- Blair, and African American female who attends a large southern university
- Mark, an African American male who attends a mid-size eastern university.
- Warren, a South Asian male from India who attends a large mid-western university.

Pre-tenure faculty. I interviewed faculty members who were early in their career to gain insights from their experience as students as well as their transition into a mentoring role. Pre-tenure faculty participants included:

- Dr. Werner, a Hispanic male working at a mid-size southern university.
- Dr. Williams, a Hispanic female working at a large western university.
• Dr. Hodgkin, an African Caribbean female working at a mid-size eastern university.
• Dr. Joliot, an Asian woman working at a mid-size western university.
• Dr. Curie, an African American woman working at a large southern university.

Influencers. Throughout chapters five and six the responses from the influencers identified by participants are reported. Each of the influencers are professors working in TPC academic programs. Influencer answers provide context and insight from people who are the primary intended audience of this dissertation, TPC program administrators. All influencers were faculty members at an institution one of the participants attended. I did not ask participants to specifically identify faculty members. I simply asked them if there was someone who influenced them to study technical and professional communication or who helped them persist in their program. The six influencers I interviewed included:

• Dr. Carson, a white male who works at a large midwestern university.
• Dr. Elion, a white female who works at a large midwestern university.
• Dr. Franklin, a white female who works at a mid-size western university.
• Dr. Hodgkin, an African American female who works at a large southern university.
• Dr. Lovelace, an Asian female at a mid-size southern university.
• Dr. McClintock, a white female who works at a large southern university.

Findings and Discussion

This chapter and the next report on my findings from the interviews I conducted
with TPC undergraduate, graduate, pre-tenure faculty, and influencers. It is organized into sections based on my research questions with this chapter addressing the first research question that is primarily concerned with recruitment and the second a third research questions in being addresses in the next chapter which are primarily concerned with retention and persistence to graduation.

Critical race theorists believe that the voices of people of color are often silenced or ignored. This study seeks to tell the stories and experiences of research participants in their own words. Participant responses have been grouped in sections by research question. Within each research question, reported responses are grouped by similar answers with undergraduate, graduate, and pre-tenure faculty responses mixed throughout. Some interpretation and analysis has been included in this discussion which is based on my overall observations of participant answers as well as the theoretical framework of critical race theory. The present chapter reports on findings regarding my first research question. The following chapter reports on the second and third questions.

By answering these research questions, I hoped to shed light on what influences students from underrepresented racial and ethnic backgrounds to choose a TPC program and what factors help them persist in those programs.

**How Do TPC Faculty and Students of Color Find the Field of Technical and Professional Communication and What Attracted Them to This Field?**

Anecdotally, most TPC students, scholars, and administrators seem to agree that students usually don’t enter the academy intent on a major in technical and professional communication. One problem is the lack of a unifying naming convention for TPC programs (Dayley & Walton, 2018).
lack a unifying name and department home. Disciplines such as biology, sociology, or political science are easily identified and understood by potential students. However, it seems as though students must discover TPC programs almost by accident. I asked the students and faculty members in this study how they discovered their TPC program and what made them decide to choose technical and professional communication. They described a variety of experiences from being introduced to the field by friends or faculty members to discovering the term “technical and professional communication” for the first time in a textbook. Many of their stories included anecdotes about their experiences with getting into college in general as well as how they passed on their knowledge of technical and professional communication to a peer, influencing her/him to then discover the field.

**Decision to attend college**

When interviewing study participants about their decision to enroll in a TPC academic program, often their reasons for attending college in general would come up. In studying how students find TPC academic programs and decide to enroll in those programs, learning about why students decide to attend college can be helpful. Although the decision to enroll in a TPC academic program may be the catalyst for a student deciding to attend a college or university, as discussed in a later section of this chapter, it seems that most often students will enroll at an institution of higher education and then subsequently discover TPC. Therefore, understanding a student’s decision to attend college is important for this discussion as deciding to attend college is the first step in choosing to enroll in a TPC program. As discussed in chapter 1, much like the foundational laws and social norms of the United States, higher education was built on a foundation of white supremacy (Karabel, 2005; Soares, 2007). This makes that journey to
college more difficult for people of color. When asked if she always knew she wanted to attend college, Virginia, said:

I always knew my mom always wanted me to [go to college] because she felt like she didn't have the opportunity growing up and she went once she got older and was able to pay for it. She always wanted us to go so I always kind of said I'm going to go, but once I actually got in college I knew it was something that I kind of like loved. I’m just always learning something new so college is definitely something that I've fallen in love with absolutely.

Mark was also influenced to attend college by his parents.

I came from a pretty solidly middle-class family. I remember my parents starting to ask me when I was like eight where I wanted to go to college. Yeah it's always been assumed that I would go to college not necessarily graduate school but the college was not ever like an option. It was assumed that I would go for sure.

Both Virginia and Mark were influenced by their parents to attend college; however, intersectionality plays a big role in why their parents influenced them. Specifically, Virginia and Mark’s families differed socioeconomically. Both Virginia and Mark identify as African American, but Virginia’s mother did not have the opportunity to attend college at a traditional age as she felt that she could not afford it. Virginia’s mother wanted Virginia to have an opportunity that she did not have. Mark on the other hand came from a middle-class family. His parents expected him to attend college. This is likely because attending college is part of the middle-class social norm. Virginia’s mother saw college as an opportunity for her children to avoid poverty while Mark’s parents assumed he would attend college because that’s what people in his socioeconomic class
As you will see throughout the results from this study, the influence of mentor figures, such as parents, was very important for most participants. It was influential for the preceding students as they decided to attend college and, as will be discussed next, it was important for many of our participants in discovering the field of technical and professional communication.

**Decision to study TPC**

Many of the interview participants indicated that they were unaware of the field until a friend or family member, who was not studying or working in the field of technical and professional communication, suggested it to them. Dr. Curie, one of the pre-tenure faculty members, when asked about how she discovered technical and professional communication, said:

> It was pretty much honestly an accident. I've previously done editorial assistant work for a magazine. I've done some work for a newspaper so I was really into print journalism and editing and those kinds of things and my sister who was actually at [a large southern university] at the time in the psychology department said “Well have you looked into this interesting program here called the Masters of technical and professional communication? You could probably do some editing because I know you like to do that.” I looked at the program and said I could totally do technical editing so I applied to the program with the idea that I would get my masters to kind of harness a career in editing.

Dr. Curie was one of three of the respondents who indicated that they were already in another career or degree program and were not satisfied with it. They each
happened to find the field of technical and professional communication seemingly by
chance. Warren, a graduate student from India said:

I had worked in the manufacturing industry for 19 years and had no idea that
something like TPC existed. My wife and I were discussing my career options
because salary levels were not great in the manufacturing industry. I had done
several courses in computer programming, there was very limited scope for IT in
Coimbatore. We decided that, to get an opportunity, I had to go to a bigger city. I
was doing an online CP course from Carnegie Mellon University at that time
(2002). My first encounter with the term ‘technical writing’ was in a text book (by
Parsons and Oja) recommended for that course.

Although some interview participants discovered TPC as a way to better their
career options, three other participants indicated that they were already working in TPC
but did not know it. Two of them were pre-tenure faculty members. Dr. Hodgkin, a pre-
tenure faculty member, who identified as African Caribbean, was assigned to teach
engineers writing at a Caribbean university before coming to the United States. In her
interview she said that the term “technical communication” doesn’t exist in the Caribbean
so she was unaware of the field. Her dean sent her information about a conference in
Liverpool for the International Society of Technical Communication and suggested she
attend a conference. When describing her first academic conference for TPC scholars, Dr.
Hodgkin said:

It was one of those moments when you start hearing people talking your language
and it was just an amazing realization that there's a community of people who do
what I do and that’s what prompted me then to start looking around for [TPC]
PhD programs.

Had Dr. Hodgkin’s dean never suggested that conference, she may never have found the TPC community and would have missed out on a whole world of scholars and scholarship and may never have applied for a technical and professional communication PhD program. Dr. Williams, another pre-tenure faculty member, had a similar experience. She was working on research that was frequently discussed in TPC scholarship, but she did not know about the scholarly conversations happening in the field related to her work.

I [asked my faculty mentor if] my research...fit in with techcomm and he said “Well actually a lot of the [type of research you are doing] started here.” So he gave me some readings about [my research interests] from techcomm scholars and I was like “Oh my gosh! I had no idea and I had been missing all these conversations!”

Had Dr. Williams not gotten advice from her mentor, she may never had discovered TPC, and her research would have been missing a large segment of the conversation. These types of experiences are not exclusive to academia. Many people working in companies and organizations work as technical and professional communicators without recognizing they are in the profession. Abigail, was already working as a technical communicator in industry without knowing it.

I was working in a documentation specialist and analyst position. It’s sort of like a technical writer and a business analyst role combined together so that's how I sort of got into technical communication. We didn't really call it technical communication at that time, but that's what it was. Then at one point I just
decided I needed to get back and finish up my degree so I put my career on hold you know just the entire career on hold and went back to the university and said, “Hey what's the quickest way for me to get my degree?” and they talked to me about a couple of things. I took this English class and in that class I learned that there was this program called technical communication. I started looking at it and I’m like, “Oh that is absolutely perfect. That's what I was already doing. I really enjoy it.” So I think I just lucked out in a lot of ways.

Five study participants learned about technical and professional communication through a class they took. Dr. Werner described taking a course as a master’s degree student studying literature. In that course, often the topics and activities would center around technical and professional communication skills and practices. This led him to decide to take a TPC course.

What I decided to do was to try out a tech comm course... it was a course in document design and so having taken that course I grew interested in editing, and obviously, issues of design, but when we did things like usability testing I just grew more and more interested basically in what tech comm entailed, what the tools and processes looked like, and it just grew more interesting to me so I made the decision to change my MA from a literature MA to a tech comm MA.

Dr. Werner did not know TPC was an option for him before hearing about it in another class. After experiencing a class specifically in the TPC program, he realized that he was much more interested in TPC than in literature. Bill, an African American graduate student, also took a course during his bachelor’s degree program in which he learned about TPC.
In undergrad... I took a course. I believe it was called “professional communication” or something like that, and that was maybe the first time I had taken a course that was even remotely related to [technical communication]...and that's when I learned that it was a real concentration and I actually had a faculty member tell me that I would be a good fit for the graduate program in technical writing as well so I just kind of went under her wing.

In Bill’s case, after taking a TPC course and learning about the field, he was encouraged by a faculty member to pursue a TPC degree. This combination of taking a related course along with encouragement by a faculty member helped him to choose to study TPC. Like several other participants in this study, Bill reported that a faculty member had been a primary influence in his decision to study technical and professional communication. Bill went on to say:

The instructor of that course, what she told me is that she saw my ability and affinity for analytical thinking and that that's exactly what they were looking for not only in the PhD program but in technical writing.

It’s possible that Bill would not have known of his aptitude for technical and professional communication, and his potential for graduate studies, had his instructor not talked with him about it. Louisa had a similar experience.

Well, first of all, when I entered university I didn't have a major at all. I was undecided. So the professor at that university, she would compliment my writing and she would tell me oh you know you should consider an English major.

From Louisa’s experience we can see that when students enter the academy without a decided major, faculty members can have a significant influence on their
decision. Abigail was attending a community college when an instructor told her about a TPC program at her local university.

I needed to get back and you know, finish that degree. So it was at a community college where I learned that [the local university] had a fantastic technical communication program. It happened to be the instructor there at that community college who was teaching English who told me about it. She was just talking to the class and she said you know if anyone that really enjoys writing or if you are good at it and you want to pursue a really good degree and a great paycheck, check this plan out. And so she was the one that told me about the technical communication program at [my university].

However, influence by an instructor inspiring a student to study TPC doesn’t necessarily have to start in college. Virginia discovered her talent for writing in high school.

I think it was middle school where I would just randomly write stories and I wrote like four and they were in these folders and somehow they got around the school and it was probably my freshman year in high school and I got called to the principal's office. I thought I was in trouble and my principal said “I read your story and you are a great writer,” and it's kind of always stuck with me since then. I've always written my entire life so I've always known I loved writing.

But Virginia didn’t immediately find her TPC program transitioning from high school to college. She needed more encouragement once she started classes in college. I took a class, actually weirdly it was philosophy, that's when I met one of my favorite professors at [the University]. I was actually like talking with her about
possibly becoming a philosophy minor and we just talked about what I loved and
she asked me why was I not an English major and I kind of talked to her about it
and she actually walked me over to the English department. That's kind of how I
transitioned.

Virginia had wanted to study writing all along, but felt that she couldn’t justify it
because she would not be able to make money after she graduated.

A lot of thinking of whether I want to make money or do what I actually love
doing I started school and I was going the criminal justice route. I was going to do
the whole lawyer thing just because I knew I wanted to do something with
government or some form of law but I always knew writing was my passion...so I
was like okay I don't want to be broke for the rest of my life. I already have to pay
back student loans and stuff like that so I kind of like settled but then once I got to
I think two, two and a half years in college I was like I refuse to do something that
I don't want to do and so I went to writing.

Surprisingly, the need to make money was not mentioned often in the interviews.
Like Virginia, most participants mentioned an aptitude and affinity for writing rather than
a desire to get a good paycheck. Warren said:

I enjoy writing. I could say that it was the first activity that I tried on my own and
which got me some rewards--a caption or slogan contest by Palmolive in which I
won a cash prize and a one-year subscription to a sports magazine. I started
participating more and gained confidence as I won more prizes. But at that point, I
had no idea about TPC or that I could make a career out of it. I wanted to stay
close to technology but not too close. I enjoy the work. I give it my all and am
happy with the rewards or constructive feedback.

Warren’s aptitude for writing eventually led him to a TPC academic program that he enjoys. He has been able to use his talent as a writer to find a program that he is happy with and can lead him to a satisfying career path. Blair also found TPC through her talent as a writer. She learned about her talent for writing at a young age. Her mother emphasized the importance of writing skills as she grew up. When asked about her talent for writing Blair said:

It’s kind of, I guess, the gift of gab is what a lot of people say. But for me I think it was always being taught by my mom that if it’s not in writing it didn’t happen. I used to get in a lot of trouble when I was in school like K-12, but my favorite phrase used to always be “is it in writing?” because if it’s not in writing then you can’t suspend me for it. I can’t get in trouble for it because it’s not in writing. So that has been my rule of thumb for a lot of things in life. If it’s not in writing it didn’t happen.

Blair used her “gift of gab” to become a radio personality, but eventually realized that writing is where she needed to be.

I started out in radio production so I was on the radio, I was an on-air personality, doing all that good stuff then I realized they don’t make any money so I was like “oh I will be a journalist instead.” So I always knew I wanted to do something communication-oriented. I just wasn’t sure how I was going to reach the masses--that was my main thing.

From journalism, she eventually found a master’s degree in technical and professional communication through a course in technical editing much like the students
mentioned earlier. Through her master’s degree program and now her PhD, Blair has
discovered how she is going to make her contribution to society and “reach the masses.”

So I graduated undergraduate, couldn’t get a job and decided to go back to
school. At that time some of the studies were coming out about racial identity
markers in professional documents, and I already got a sense of that, even in high
school, because [at high school graduation] my mom asked “do you want to
graduate with your middle name or do you want to go with your first name?” (It
should be noted here that Blair’s real first name is a name that would likely
identify her as being African American and her middle name likely would not.)
That was really hard for me to decide at 17 but I decided to go with my first
name. When I was coming out of my master’s program I was applying for jobs
and I was doing it under two different names. I would send out applications with
[my first name] and I would send out applications with [my middle name] and in
one specific instance [the application with my first name on it] immediately was
rejected and [the application with my middle name on it] got a call back. It just so
happened that when the lady called she got my voicemail which said “hi you’ve
reached [first name]” and she didn’t want to go any further because she claimed I
lied on the application. So that happened and I was like “I need to get to the
bottom of why this happens to other people.” So I went into the program trying to
learn about racial identity markers in technical communication documents. Like
that was my thing so I can go in and change the way we shape that narrative and
kind of rock that boat a little bit.

Blair’s story about the racism she faced while searching for a job is a typical
occurrence for African American job seekers (see Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004 for a seminal article on the topic) and is a good example of the embedded racism in American society posited by critical race scholars. However, Blair’s experience led her to graduate school and was part of the reason she chose to study racial identity markers. That’s not to say that racism like this can be a good thing, but that Blair turned her difficult experience ultimately into something positive through a TPC academic program.

Like Blair, Warren started in another career and eventually enrolled in a TPC degree program because he discovered not only that he liked writing, but that he could use his degree to build his career.

While doing several computer programming courses, I realized that I did not enjoy programming all that much. I knew the basics but did not have the aptitude, or passion to dig deep. It so happened that the first IT job I got was about writing and managing content. I spoke to several colleagues and explored more about technical writing as a good career. Technical writing excited me because I had the basic knowledge about IT industry/software development and also good English language skills. MY TOEFL [a test for international students to measure their English language proficiency] score at that time was in the top 3 or 4% of the class. I was an avid reader during my school days and used to enjoy writing more than speaking. I decided to do the certificate course in technical writing because I knew for sure, at that point in time, that I could use the knowledge to build upon my basic writing skills.

Warren, as with the other students previously mentioned in this section, did not initially know about technical and professional communication. Each of the people we
have talked about so far found technical and professional communication in some unexpected way. They were not seeking it. This may lead one to speculate how many other people are out there who have an aptitude for, or would enjoy, technical and professional communication. This is one of the fundamental problems seen in this data. Technical and professional communication programs are hard to find. A degree in technical and professional communication is not as well-known as other degrees such as business, engineering, or even English literature. Part of the problem may be the disparate naming conventions for TPC programs (Dayley & Walton, 2018), and part of the problem may be a need by the field to educate the public about its existence. Compounding this problem, the general difficulty institutions of higher education have in bringing in people of color because of the foundational racism institutions of higher education are still trying to overcome (Haycock, 2001; Karabel, 2005; Stampnitzky, 2006). TPC programs are generally difficult to find for all groups, even for the white middle- and upper-class students who traditionally attend college in higher numbers. There is an added obstacle for people of color who already have difficulty accessing college in general.

Although most participants found TPC seemingly by chance, some study participants were already working in the field and enrolled in a degree program to help advance their career. When asked about why she enrolled in a TPC master’s degree program, Alice said:

Honestly, I wanted the master’s just to backup my experience. I mean, it's one thing to go out and apply for jobs and have years of experience, but I would rather have the knowledge to go with it. I mean, it's partially to say, “hey I have the
degree to backup my experience,” but more for me to kind of I guess get a well-rounded view of the field.

The desire to get a credential and extra training to advance career opportunities seems to be an important source of new students for TPC academic programs. Mary was looking at a TPC certificate to help advance her career.

Actually, I work at the IRS and we have just tons of work manuals, training materials—all kinds of different things. I was talking to a friend of mine who's actually going through the master's program up at [my university] now and he told me you know they had that professional and technical writing certificate. He's like “Why don't you do it and then just certify for the position at IRS?” So I looked into it and I actually went back last fall specifically to get that writing certificate which is I believe an additional 24 credit hours. So I was simply going to do the certificate while I went in and met with my academic advisor over the summer and she said you’re 32 credits from your bachelor's in English you could pull the bachelors in professional and technical writing and so I went ahead and switched majors and just enrolled and figured that the bachelors would be better than certificate anyway.

Deciding to do a full bachelor’s degree wasn’t just a matter of her deciding it wouldn’t take much more time than a certificate. Mary spoke about the difficulties of being female in her workplace. She said that her degree will help her to be taken more seriously.

I know that in my job place now, once I have a degree in-hand, it won't be something that they can dismiss. It puts me in a bargaining position that, like I
said, these men will be competing against me for jobs and my degree right or wrong puts me head and shoulders above them because they will recognize that I went the extra mile to get the education, to get the degree, to have the GPA, that I can walk in and say this was my GPA when I graduated and and be able to kind of stand on that. Right now it feels like a bit of a boys club.

Surprisingly, Mary was the only woman in the study to mention sexism in her interview; however, this may be because interview questions were specifically directed at issues of race and ethnicity. Mary’s experience is an example of how intersectionality manifests in the lives of technical communicators. Female technical communicators often face difficulties in the workplace related to their sex (Petersen, 2019). Mary is using her degree as a form of power to help her gain more equality in her workplace.

**Conclusion**

Discovering a technical and professional communication academic program can be surprisingly difficult. It seems that most students do not initially come to a college or university with the intent to choose TPC as a major. Many students discover the field through, friends, relatives, or faculty members. They may also find the field by searching for better job opportunities that align with their talents, or they may find that they are already working in TPC by discovering a degree program that matches with their job duties. Regardless of how they find it, there are many obstacles to locating TPC academic programs. One of these obstacles is the fact that TPC academic programs do not have a unifying convention (Dayley & Walton, 2018). A TPC academic program can be called any number of things. If a student hears from a family member that technical writing may be a good career for her, she may look for a program at a local college and find a
“professional communication” program and pass it by because it was not called technical writing although it likely trains students for a technical writing career.

Another obstacle for students discovering is the general lack of knowledge that technical and professional communication exists as a career. This is related to the previously discussed disparate naming conventions for TPC programs in that a person who works in technical and professional communication may be called many different things and different professional communicators may have very different jobs. Other fields have specific names and somewhat defined job duties. If a prospective student has an aunt who works at a hospital, that aunt might work with a social worker. She knows the term “social worker” and has a basic idea of what social workers do. She can then suggest a career in social work to her niece who enjoys helping and interacting with people. If that same aunt has a niece who loves writing, is good at communication with many different types of people, and is detail oriented, she probably won’t suggest technical and professional communication as a career because she doesn’t’ know it exists.

For students of color, these aforementioned obstacles are combined with the challenges people of color face in deciding to attend, getting admitted to, and persisting in, colleges and universities as discussed in chapter one. Also, as we can see by the student responses in this chapter, mentor influence is an important part of discovering a TPC program. People of color often lack that mentor influence as a disproportionate number of people of color have not attended college. TPC program administrators can begin to address the challenges presented by these obstacles through more frequent, organized, community outreach which is discussed in more detail in chapter six.

Once a student overcomes the obstacles discussed in this chapter by discovering
and enrolling in a TPC academic program, she/he must persist in that program in order to graduate. The next chapter discusses how study participants have been able to persist in their academic programs and early faculty careers and inclusiveness in TPC programs.
CHAPTER 5
PERSISTENCE AND FIT

Institutions of higher education in the United States were designed for white middle- and upper-class students. As mentioned in the first chapter, there are several factors which make the higher education experience more difficult for students of color. In this chapter, responses from interview participants are reviewed which identified ways in which they were able to persevere in their academic career. The chapter organizes responses into two main sections. Each section corresponds to two of the three research questions used in this study. Participant responses were coded and organized by how they help to answer the research questions posed by this study. The answers which relate to the first research question, “How do TPC faculty and students of color find the field of technical and professional communication and what attracted them to this field?” were reported in the previous chapter. The answers to this first research question related specifically to how students find and enroll in TPC programs. The second and third research questions, “What sustains TPC students/faculty over time while navigating an academic career?” and “What, if anything, makes technical and professional communication a good fit for people of color?” are addressed in this chapter. The participant answers relating to these last two questions specifically focus on how students persist in TPC academic programs. The second and third research questions were included in a separate chapter to differentiate between recruitment of diverse students and student retention through creating an inclusive environment.

The answers of study participants reported in this chapter discuss many factors
which may affect the inclusiveness of an academic department. These factors include the
importance of faculty mentors, creating a space where students can feel comfortable and
supported, and recognizing weaknesses in inclusion efforts so that program
administrators can proactively work to correct those weaknesses. This chapter will
discuss these major takeaways as well as suggest actions which program administrators
may take to increase program inclusiveness.

**What Sustains TPC Students/Faculty Over Time While Navigating an Academic Career?**

The effect of racist policies in institutions of higher education are still felt by
students today. The early attempts to keep certain students from being admitted to college
and universities have resulted in the merit-based admission process which is still,
although perhaps unintentionally, selecting for white middle and upper-class students
(Karabel, 2005). With renewed efforts by colleges and universities to focus on diversity,
we are seeing increased numbers of students from underrepresented backgrounds being
admitted into the academy; however, these students are not persisting to graduation
(Casselman, 2014). After successfully recruiting students into academic programs,
program administrators may think their job is done. However, it is very important that
administrators not forget about student retention. Bringing in students is not enough.
Students need to persist to graduation or the effort to get them to enroll is in vain.
Currently, many colleges and universities are not equipped to properly support students
of color (McClain & Perry, 2017). Much of this has to do with efforts, or the lack thereof,
to create an inclusive environment for students of color.
Mentors help sustain students over time

Many responses from participants regarding their ability to persist in their degree program revolved around students receiving help from faculty members. Sometimes a student may feel lonely or isolated when starting a new degree program. Especially if that student is from a background that is different from the students around her/him. Graduate students were more likely to report having a close relationship with a mentor while undergraduates were more likely to mention being influenced by a faculty member in a classroom setting. This is likely because graduate students choose mentors to help with thesis/dissertation projects and because graduate students’ interests align more closely with faculty members’ interests. Of the faculty influencers who participated in the study, only two reported that they were a person of color. This seems to largely reflect the general population of faculty members in TPC programs who tend to be white. Although some study participants reported that they wish there were more faculty members of color at their institution, having a close relationship with any faculty member seems to make a difference in the retention of students.

Although there is some mention of other types of mentors, this section mainly focuses on faculty members as mentors and advisers. Throughout this chapter, when I refer to an “adviser” I am specifically talking about faculty members serving as mentors to students and not professional academic advisers.

When Dr. Curie moved to pursue her PhD she felt out of place and isolated, but support from faculty advisers helped her to be successful.

It got a little bit more difficult when I went to [my PhD institution in the west]. I
think because I was kind of out of my element. I am born and raised in [the south]. I’ve always been from the southeast and I was in [the west] by myself with my five-year-old, you know, and didn't know anyone. It was really a kind of an isolating experience. I think PhD programs can be isolating anyway and so it was even more so but I had a really great support there. At the time [the chair of the department] was just so kind. I remember I took one of my classes from her my first semester there and my childcare fell through and she was like “bring your daughter to class” and I was like “OK, I can do that.” And after [the department chair] left [a new department chair] took over and, oh my gosh, this woman she [was] a straight shooter. In the best way she really pushed me to develop my research skills. I actually joined a research group with her and learned how to do mixed method research. I mean, I sat with her and went through like statistics tutorials, I went to statistics study groups. I couldn’t do it now but she pushed me to my limit. And then my major advisor... he supported my interest in like social justice and activism and narrative... So my mentors continued to be the people that were teaching me.

Faculty members have power to influence the lives of the students they encounter. As discussed previously, a faculty member telling a student they have an aptitude for writing can influence that student to choose a major related to writing thus influencing their future career and life. For Dr. Curie, her career trajectory was altered because of a faculty adviser who introduced her to academic research which ultimately led Dr. Curie to a PhD program and a career as a faculty member herself.

I would have to say for my master's program definitely [my master’s degree
adviser] was a big influence. Because originally, like I said, I came in wanting to just harness that degree and capitalize on it for a job in industry and so the research really began to fascinate me, and then, of course, after I was like able to work with her to actually do a research project and understand how research is conducted and what it looks like at the professional level in academia. So I would say through my master's program the motivation [to complete my degree] was easy.

Faculty can influence students in other ways as well. Virginia said “I had a great professor who actually helped me figure out what I wanted to do in life.” This professor who worked with Virgina directly guided her to discover her passion for helping others. This led her to work in a mentorship program where she was able to teach other students. This program also helped sustain her when times became difficult.

Although individual mentoring experiences with faculty, such as the ones described previously, are valuable, faculty influence doesn’t always have to come from one on one mentoring. It also happens in the classroom. Mary had a professor who taught classes she enjoyed. This helped her to look forward to going to class and made her feel like her time spent in her degree program was worthwhile. Mary remarked:

I’ve had some really good professors. [My professor] is someone that let me know about [your research project] and I actually had her class in the fall and I really enjoyed just being in her class. We had a lot of fun. She's got some very different ideas about teaching, that it shouldn't just be lecture, lecture, lecture. I really enjoyed it and just--I just felt like this would be something that I could do in my
current job as well as really anywhere else I wanted to go.

Mary’s response reminded me that most undergraduate students’ experiences with their degree programs begin and end in the classroom. In fact, most of my undergraduate participants didn’t speak beyond their classroom-based interactions. Because of this, inclusive TPC programs should identify and support inclusive teaching practices like, as Mary suggests, employing a variety of active learning approaches to the course material beyond lecturing and helping students articulate how they might apply the course materials outside of the classroom. Furthermore, inclusive teaching practices should foster mentoring opportunities between faculty and students inside and outside of the classroom. For example, faculty members can organize and participate in informal social gatherings in which students get to know faculty members, making them more approachable. Also, faculty members can require students to meet with them at least once per semester as part of their course requirements. Several participants listed faculty advisers as important mentors, but others did not. Mark said:

Yeah, definitely my thesis adviser... I didn't have her my first semester, but I had her on my second semester. Kind of immediately, you know, sort of a mentorship formed. My thesis grew out of a paper that I wrote for one of her classes. She was always willing to meet with me.

Working closely with a faculty member on big projects such as a thesis doesn’t just serve to fulfill graduation requirements for the student. This relationship becomes an integral part of a student’s support network. Relationships like this can last even after graduation, helping a student succeed in her/his future career. As a pre-tenure faculty member, Dr.
Williams has kept her advising relationships with her PhD institution intact after graduation.

I have a really incredible support network and I manage to because my advisors are so generous. I've managed to keep my network outside of the university that I'm currently at which is really helpful because you always have that outsider's perspective. Even if things are not so good where I am in my department, I have people to talk to outside of here who can give me perspective and that's been one of the most valuable, if not the most valuable, professional asset that I have. It’s the mentorship of people who have seen me and know me from the beginning so they don't really know me as the professor, they know me as my mentor or friend or collaborator and that's been really really helpful.

Dr. Williams has a group a people who she relies on for support. This network helps to support and sustain her when she runs into difficulty. Dr. Werner also has support from a group of mentors. He noted that it’s not just his assigned adviser he relies on while working on tenure. He receives support from the entire department.

I do have a mentor but I would consider that most of, not most, all the faculty here have been very thoughtful and considerate of my being a junior faculty and wanting to help me to succeed to gain tenure, and beyond that--just the basic practicalities of being an academic, the things that you wouldn't otherwise know even as a PhD student, especially being an academic at this university, the ins and outs, etc. I never feel that I can’t ask people to help me with a question or even getting feedback on research ideas or whatever so I would certainly agree that I
have the support I need.

Mentor support plays a key role in student success. Having a support system helps students overcome challenges that would otherwise impede their education. Mentor support can also help students feel included in an academic program. Mentors can help students find a place in their program and give them a person to turn to when difficulties arise. As we have seen from participant responses, faculty members can serve as strong mentors for students of color both in and out of the classroom and even beyond graduation.

Program administrators should actively seek to foster mentoring relationships between faculty and students. Program administrators can encourage faculty mentoring activities by working to create and sponsor activities and where informal mentoring can take place. Administrators can also develop programs to create more formal mentoring relationships perhaps by utilizing often underutilized office hours to set up meetings with students and faculty members specifically for mentoring purposes. Program administrators can also encourage the development of strong alumni networks connected with faculty to help sustain students as they leave to pursue academic and professional careers.

**Knowledge about financial support helps students to persist**

Faculty mentors and other advisers can offer more than just academic knowledge and emotional support. One example is knowledge about financial opportunities for students. Bill remarked:

I actually learned about [a] fellowship because my advisor had kind of came
across it and told me that I may have a good chance of being awarded that financial support if I went for it. So just having faculty members who can see those opportunities and are able to guide students to those opportunities I think helps a lot as well.

Faculty mentors generally have more experience navigating higher education and have a better understanding of the opportunities available at their institution. Students often find the bureaucracy of higher education daunting. Students of color may find it especially difficult as institutions of higher education are built around white middle and upper-class norms. Helping a student find financial support s/he may not have otherwise known about can relieve a large burden of stress for the student and her/his family. Bill went on to say:

One [aspect of student persistence] which is important for not only students of color but for all students is financial support. There's just no way that I would be able to continue doing or pursuing this degree if I didn't have some kind of financial support from the University and so through my teaching assistantship I've been able to continue learning and also through an on-campus organization at the graduate school... I was able to receive a fellowship there and that was just more financial support.

Often the financial opportunities are there, as Bill discovered, but students don’t know where to look. When talking about financial issues being a barrier to completing college, Virginia said:

I think most students will say the financial aspect of college is what deters them from finishing. A lot of people want to [attend college,] but college is so
expensive. When you get to the point where you can't get all of the grants because you're over a certain age, and/or you can't get every scholarship because you applied and so did a million other students, it's really hard. I think a lot of people understand that it’s work, pay for college, plus your life outside of school, so I think a lot of students have that same issues paying for school period. Especially when you have 400 dollar books that you barely open, it just becomes really costly going to school.

There is a myth in higher education that people of color have many more financial opportunities than students who are white. However, students of color also struggle with finances. Sometimes this financial burden is compounded because the student may come from a background of poverty and may have gone to an at risk school with counselors who are not knowledgeable about financial opportunities for college. Also the student may lack a mentor who knows how to navigate the college process. Since more white people have historically attended college, there are more white parents and mentors available to white students to help them through the college process. People who have graduated college know how to navigate the financial challenges of college because they have faced these challenges themselves. This difficulty in finding ways to pay for college can be a factor in students being able to persist to graduation. However, some study participants said that lack of finances was one of their primary motivations for finishing their degree. Abigail said:

It wasn't like [my tuition] was coming out of, you know, a parent’s pocket or anything like that so I mean I had, you know, received a scholarship, but it was a very small scholarship--it didn't even pay for an entire semester. So anyway, it
was the motivation on the investment piece that really kept me going.

Abigail felt that since she had invested money into college she needed to graduate in order to see a return on her investment. The same was true of Dr. Hodgkin who was an international student before becoming a faculty member. Her financial situation, as well as her visa status, meant she couldn't take her time in finishing her degree.

There's something about being an international student. If you say to them “what motivated you?” they will say to you “I have a visa, it needs to get done,” or like my adviser is saying to me, “your funding runs out in three years; we don’t have any other resources.” And so there were really tangible pressing things, you know, that one deals with in a five-year period. I had met people in the program and [graduated before them] because they were working full-time jobs and I had to get done.

In Dr. Hodgkin’s case, her financial burden was less about being able to pay and more about the money she did have being cut off. This threat of the loss of finances served as motivation to complete her degree quickly. Whether it is a lack of funds, the thought of getting a return on investment, or the threat of losing funding, financial assistance is a strong motivator for success.

Finding and keeping financial resources can be a significant barrier for students who want to persist to graduation. Most students struggle to find adequate financial resources and this struggle can be compounded for students of color who are often first generation college students and frequently come from families with a low socioeconomic background.
Administrators looking to foster inclusiveness in their programs need to address this issue. Administrators can work with faculty, staff members, and financial aid offices to create clear communication informing students about available financial resources. They can learn about financial resources and train faculty and staff who can then proactively reach out to students who may have need and qualify for these resources. Administrators can also look outside of the institution to find other financial resources available to students such as scholarships and grants.

College is a normal rite of passage for middle and upper class white students. Students of color may not have the same opportunities to get advice about financial support as their white peers. Making sure all students have adequate access to information about financial resources can help students of color meet their financial obligations.

**Family members help influence and sustain students**

Another important motivator identified by research participants was the influence of family members. Students may face many difficult challenges when working through their degree programs. Family members can be a strong support system to help them through these challenges. Undergraduate students specifically were more likely to talk about the influence and motivation of family members when asked about their ability to persist in their degree programs. This may be because undergraduate students don’t generally have close relationships with faculty members which influence them to persist to graduation. One example of how a family member helped to motivate a student to continue on through a difficult time is a story that came from Virginia. She got bad advice from an academic adviser regarding what classes she needed to take in order to
graduate and was about to quit, but found motivation to persevere after talking with her mother.

Yeah, there was actually a time when I got really close [to dropping out], probably about three semesters ago, where I actually was going to drop out but I didn’t. It was just a lot of factors going on at one time. I ended up finding out from my advisor, I'm not gonna say she's horrible but she wasn't really the best, really close to me being able to graduate, that I had four classes I still hadn't taken and it was kind of like one of those things where I thought I was so close and I was like “oh I may have to be here another semester.” Being told that you have to do one more semester when you think you're about to graduate it just kind of sucks, and I was at a point where I'm now having to pay for college out of pocket so I kind of wanted to give up. I had to have like a really long talk with my mom and although it was really, really hard, and I remember nights where I was working my butt off and then I had to come home and do homework, I knew I was too close give up now.

Virginia also found motivation from the example of her family. Her mother didn’t go to college until later in life, but her sister and her cousins went on to college right out of high school and she wanted to do the same.

The generation before mine didn't go to college. My mom, she went afterwards, but they didn't go automatically right out of high school. All of me, my sister, and my cousins we all went because [our mothers] wanted us to go and I can't lie--I kind of wanted to because they did.
Virginia decided to attend college because of the influence of her mother as well as her cousins. Having close family and friends attend college can be a good motivator for a student to attend college themselves. Like Virginia, Louisa also found motivation to attend and graduate from college because of the encouragement of her family.

I guess it's maybe because ever since I was younger, my family or my parents, they instilled this value, you know, the importance of learning. So I was always one to kind of take my education seriously. They also told me I remember, you know before I started University, your degree is gonna be like a key or a weapon for you later. In case anything happens, it's there if you want to get a job or you need to make money or anything like that.

Jane found support from her family as well. However, rather than receive motivation from her parents, Jane found help and motivation in her daughter. When asking about how she stays motivated in school, Jane said:

I would say most definitely my family, especially with my kids. My oldest, she wrote this thing at school kinda like “who's your role model.” She was only in first-grade. [The assignment] was filling in the boxes and she picked me and said that like I was really good at math and helping people understand things. She’s the one, she would monitor me when I would do my homework and would point out “Hey mom you spelled that wrong. Isn't it time that you take a break? Isn't that what you tell your students?” One of my reasons for doing it was to make things better for her. When I first started I was just a single mom so everything was always about making sure she didn't suffer for anything with only having one
parent. She also became like a slave-driver like “Mom, do you got homework today? Oh, you do? Well, you better get working on it.” So she'd be sitting there doing her little homework by me while I was doing mine.

In Jane’s case, it wasn’t just her daughter's motivating words that helped drive her. It was also her desire to make a better life for her daughter and her family. This desire to create a better life for your family is an important motivator for many people. However, educational success is less likely for students whose parents have not attained wealth or educational success themselves (Dubow, Boxer, & Huesmann, 2009). This means that using education to create a better life for one’s self and family is harder for those whose ancestors have not had adequate access to higher education in the past. This may be why family motivation can be so strong for students of color. Parents may want to motivate their children to go to college to take advantage of the opportunity they never had and to help lift their family out of the cycle of poverty. Parents may be motivated to finish school in order to give the gift of class mobility to their children.

As we can see from these responses, families can be a strong motivator for students success both through verbal communication and by example. Administrators can encourage students to communicate with their families and even create family events and activities to foster family participation. Program administrators might also consider creating a website or blog as a way to share what is going on with families and as a way to solicit encouragement from families. These types of programs may even work to create an extended family relationship between students and the families of their peers creating even more support.
Peer groups offer support to students

As we can see from previous sections, support from other people is a key to success in an academic program. Along with support from faculty mentors and family, peer support is also an important aspect of an academic program. A group of students, whether or not it is formal or informal, that meets regularly and supports each other is common in many programs. However, two students in this study did not have that type of group in their programs. Bill said this about his program:

I will say I think something that would be super beneficial for students that I didn't necessarily have because our program is so small is to have like a cadre of students formed. I didn't necessarily have that because a lot of the technical writers are maybe more well-established in their careers when they come back for their PhDs. They’re in their 40s and 50s and have families and might be commuter students who are also doing full-time jobs, whereas I was I guess 22 or 23 when I came into the program and I just didn't have the same kind of relationship that other graduate students have when they were able to form a cadre. If I had other people around me who were doing the same thing as I was that would help a lot, I think.

This is an important consideration for some TPC programs. “Commuter schools” include some of the largest institutions in the nation. Traditionally, students at a “commuter school” come to the institution to attend class and then immediately go home when their classes are done. They don’t stick around on campus. This can be a problem for students who could benefit from support from other students. Dr. Hodgkin said something similar about her program:
I'm going to say I don't think there was anybody in my program who wasn't also working which meant that once our courses had stopped I didn't see any of my colleagues unless they were perhaps teaching a course. So what I had hoped for in a PhD program that would have allowed me to engage with colleagues and to be able to have these collegial relationships and have a cohort, that was absent for me which is one of the reasons I went on to do a postdoc.

Dr. Hodgkin was missing a support group during her PhD studies. She felt like she wasn’t able to form those valuable relationships that students at more residential campuses form. For students from underrepresented racial backgrounds, having a support group of other students can be especially important. Blair said of her experience:

My program is predominantly white so that kind of makes things a little difficult, but one of my cohorts... she’s a black female who also came from a historically black college, she and I both have kind of the same educational background so she and I have been able to make connections in the class some of our peers can’t. The first two years it was me and my cohort..., but there were also three other black students in the MA program so all of us kind of formed our own family where we were kind of leaning on one another to get through those two years. Luckily I was done for the coursework by the time they graduated so it's definitely a situation where we needed each other much more than we could have imagined because I know I couldn’t have made it through if I didn't have all of them.

Blair found comfort in a group of students with a similar background to hers. Her group
formed organically and was not formally created by the program. Purposefully creating a space on campus where students can support each other can be challenging but is possible. There may already be spaces available at the institution. Mark found a place at his campus’ writing center.

It also helps I think if writing [academic] programs are connected to like a writing center on campus. I found that a lot of my discussions about writing and identity actually either involved or occurred in the Writing Center physically. I was a graduate tutor for the Writing Center and we would talk a lot about theorizing the space of the Writing Center and how the Writing Center is a race space on campus. Like, how do we treat African American vernacular English or how do writing centers--how can writing centers be complicit in reinforcing, you know, oppression?

Facilitating opportunities for students to support each other could go a long way in encouraging success among students of color in TPC academic programs. One way to do this may be for program administrators to become familiar with the resources already on campus, such as a Black Student Union or a Latin American Student Association, and communicate those opportunities to their students. Administrators could not only tell students that these organizations exist, but reiterate the importance of being involved with a support group to find academic success. Administrators can also encourage the creation of new groups with support such as funding, space, faculty support etc.

**Students use self-motivation to sustain themselves to graduation**

One aspect of persistence in academic programs that came from interview
participants was self motivation—the ability to motivate oneself to persist to graduation. This is not to say that asking for, and receiving help is a form of weakness. Only that some must overcome certain challenges through personal effort. Self motivation can come in many forms. One form is the fear of failure. An example of this can be found in Dr. Curie’s experience when she moved from the southern United States to the west for her PhD program.

I think if I'm honest, [I was also motivated by] fear of failure. I came all the way over [to the west] with my kid. My parents were like “What in the world are you doing?” So it was just like “I have to do this and I have to do it well.” You know? So even though I felt isolated and frustrated, I said there's no going back. I want to do this, it's going to happen and so some of that was honestly fear of failure like I didn't want to go back to [the south] with my tail between my legs.

Dr. Curie’s fear of failure relates to family motivation as discussed previously. She did not want her parents to be disappointed if she was not able to finish her degree. However, motivation from family is not always a factor in persistence to graduation. When I asked Alice if there was anyone who influenced her to choose to study a TPC program or who helped her persist in her program, she said:

No, it was just me. I mean, I don't like quitting. What kept me motivated is really just one. the accomplishment of knowing that I finished something and two. how it would potentially help me in the future.

It seems that even though Alice didn’t have a support structure, she was able to motivate herself through focusing on creating a better future. Similarly, Abigail kept herself
motivated by concentrating on the investment she was making in her future career. Also, similar to Dr. Curie, she was worried that her former co-workers would be disappointed in her if she failed.

What kept me going was that I realized that I only have this one opportunity to finish this investment and I wasn't just going to quit after I had already started because it was coming out of my pocket... and I was determined to get it because I had started the process so I was determined. It had been such a big deal because I had left my career and it was a really successful career and I was unbelievably happy and thought I would never leave that place so everyone knew the reason I was leaving was because I was getting my degree so I, you know, had to save face, too.

Abigail made a personal sacrifice to invest in her future. This sacrifice kept her motivated because she wanted that sacrifice to not be wasted. Mary also decided to get a degree to better her future, but she was motivated to continue in her degree program by her desire to learn new things. When asking about her motivation to continue in her degree program, Mary said:

I would say the types of classes they have in the department [motivated me]. There are a lot of different types of classes so I was able to take different classes to see if I liked different things. I was able to take a couple of coding classes, I was able to take a desktop design class where we basically did all of our projects in Adobe products. I was able to take technical editing classes. The program’s got a good sort of sampling of classes and so you can figure out what you like. Right
now, I'm taking [a professor’s] grant writing class so that's another thing that kind of pops up. You're like “Well I don't know if I like to write grants, I don’t know if I would be good at this.” So you get a chance to take other classes and then and then sort of get introduced to all these different technologies you just become interested in them. So as I would find out, for example, what single source authoring is, or what new technologies are used primarily in industry. It makes you want to take classes and makes you want to learn so that’s kind of driven it.

Personal motivation can come in many different ways including a desire to learn, wanting to make a better future, and not wanting to disappoint friends and family. TPC program administrators can support personal motivation simply be supporting students. By supporting students, in the ways that have been mentioned so far as well as in other ways, program administrators give students a better chance of being able to support and motivate themselves.

There are many factors that motivate students to persist in their academic programs. Study participants received motivation in many different ways. This includes influence from family, peer group support, the desire to improve personal circumstances, and the desire to better themselves. The types of support described in the prior paragraphs can be helpful to students of color trying to navigate to predominantly white culture of academia, but there is a lot more TPC program administrators can do to increase inclusivity in TPC academic programs. The previous section focused on the students themselves and their personal circumstances contributed to their success in a TPC academic program. However, the academic program itself may be a factor in students’ ability to continue on to graduation. The next section explores participants’ experiences
What, if Anything, Makes Technical and Professional Communication a Good Fit for People of Color?

The original purpose behind this research question was to try and determine if TPC programs were an especially good option for people of color. Before conducting my interviews, I hypothesized that TPC academic programs would be a “good fit” for people of color with a desire for writing who were driven by the need to come out of a degree program with money-making opportunities. Anecdotally, I have seen many students from underrepresented backgrounds pushed toward well known money-making fields, such as medical doctor or lawyer, by their parents or guardians much more often and much more aggressively than their peers. In my mind, TPC would be a great opportunity for a student who did not want to study science or apply to law school, and had a talent for writing. I still think this is true, but after conducting the interviews for this study, the meaning of this research question changed for me. Because of the responses of the people I interviewed, I now think of a “good fit” is a program that is inclusive, meaning the program seeks “to forward a more expansive vision of TPC, one that intentionally seeks marginalized perspectives, privileges these perspectives, and promotes them through action” (Jones, Moore, & Walton, 2016, p. 214). In the next section, I discuss inclusiveness in TPC academic programs in the context of whether or not study participants felt included enough to be comfortable in that program and believed that their voices were sought after and considered valuable.

Having Diverse People Helps Make TPC Programs a “Good Fit”

In chapter three I shared the results of a survey I conducted in which TPC
students were asked about their perceptions of diversity within their academic programs. The results of this survey showed that both the overall group and the group of students identifying as persons of color (POC) see their TPC programs as both diverse and supportive of diversity. Respondents identifying as a person of color also reported that they were not worried about fitting in when enrolling in their TPC programs. However, this group’s responses also showed that TPC students who identify as persons of color have observed a lack of students and faculty of color in TPC academic programs and departments. These survey results were an important influence for the research conducted for this dissertation. I wanted to find out why so many survey respondents had said their programs were diverse even when they recognized a lack of persons of color in their TPC academic programs. When I asked interview participants about the level of diversity in their programs, their perception of the level of diversity in their programs varied widely. From Dr. Joliot who said “I was the only non-white student” to Alice who said “I wouldn't say that majority of my classes were just one race. For the most part, it was it was a good mix.” Although many participants mentioned that there was some racial diversity in their program, most acknowledged that the majority of students in their classes identified as white. For example, Virginia said:

I will say it was mostly white. Honestly, I'm trying to look back at most of my writing classes and while it didn't affect like my learning or anything... I would say in a class of 15, it was probably about three black students and the others were white.

In regards to the racial/ethnic diversity in his program, Warren remarked, “In [my degree program], only 1 or 2 members were of color, in most courses. Including me, it would be
two or three out of a total of eight to 10 students.” Similarly, when asked about the number of students of color in his program, Mark said, “Very few, it's a small program to begin with. My last class that I took was the first class that I had more than just one person who's African American. We had three so that was crazy.” Alice noted that her TPC program was less diverse than the rest of the department programs; however, since some of the classes had students from many different majors, it helped her feel like there was more diversity in her degree program.

Some of the [TPC] classes, you know, were made up of primarily one racial group, but throughout my program it kind of got mixed up because a lot of times you would have students from other programs that were just starting to take some of our courses that fit their [degree] criteria so it would kind of mix things up.

Bill’s experience was somewhat different than the previously mentioned students. He observed that his program draws a diverse group of students from the international community; however, his program also does not have strong representation from diverse racial/ethnic groups from within the United States.

Thinking particularly about English and Technical Writing, we actually have a pretty large Saudi Arabian community who are exchange students. Sometimes we have quite a few students with those backgrounds in the classes, but otherwise I know, as far as African-Americans, one maybe two others, and maybe that's about it. [The program is] very largely comprised of students who probably identify as white.

Institutions of higher learning in the United States are often seen as prestigious
destinations for students from other countries. This means that at some colleges and universities there may be diversity in their programs from financially well-off families sending their students to get educated in the U.S. rather than from the local marginalized population.

Although Dr. Williams has also noticed a general lack of diversity in higher education, she does see positive progress being made:

Is there a lack of diversity in the field? Of course. I think there's a lack of diversity in academia in general, but I have noticed even just in the short span of my career, which is super short, I have noticed increased support for diversity initiatives. Like ATTW now has diversity-focused awards—“Impact Award” I think it's called, and just people committed to social justice and being open to kind of hearing the tough truth about how diversity has not been supported in the past has helped us, I think, be more supportive and welcoming and purposeful in recruiting a diversity of perspectives and people into the field. So I think of course there's a lack of diversity, but I think our awareness about that is increasing and that in turn is yielding more support networks to continue diversifying the field.

When trying to find out if TPC programs are a “good fit” for people of color, the first step is to see if there are already people of color in TPC programs. Although a comprehensive study has not yet been done to examine how diverse TPC academic programs are, anecdotally it seems that TPC programs are largely homogenous. However, as Dr. Williams mentioned, efforts are being made to increase that diversity. As more scholars explore diversity and inclusion in TPC programs, and more program
administrators work to implement research backed suggestions to increase diversity and inclusion, we should begin to see the numbers of students from diverse backgrounds in TPC programs rise.

**Focused Recruitment Efforts Increase Inclusion**

Part of the progress being made with diversity and inclusion in TPC programs is because of faculty members and administrators who are putting more focus on increasing diversity and inclusion in their programs. Dr. Hodgkin, one of the identified influencers in this study, spoke about the graduate program at her institution. “We have probably the most ethnically diverse graduate program in, you know, in the country, tech comm graduate program, so we're proud of that. We're proud of the work we're doing now.”

However, having a diverse graduate program seems to be much more common than a diverse undergraduate program. Dr. Carson, another of the influencers interviewed in this study, when asked about the diversity in the programs at his institution, said:

I have to sort of divide the [program] at the graduate level, at the master's and PhD level. I would say we have an admirably diverse cohort [at the graduate level] and that's because primarily I would attribute a lot of it to [the head of graduate studies in our department]. She set up recruiting patterns and I served on the graduate committee with her several times. She helped us really try to identify students of color from diverse backgrounds and we brought in, I think, very diverse classes at the grad level. Now the undergraduate level we don't really recruit. We're a state institution. Students sign up to come and we're not nearly as diverse at the undergraduate level, because we're [a large midwestern university] in [a midwestern state], which has a largely white undergraduate population, even
though it's, I believe, it's one of one of the more diverse undergraduate schools compared to [other similar schools in our region]. But that still doesn't mean much, right? I mean, if you're more diverse because you have 5% students of color versus 3% that's not anything to really be bragging about, but the undergraduate level I know we're pretty white and actually pretty female.

As Dr. Carson remarked, location seems to be an important factor in predicting whether or not a program has a group of students from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds. When asked if location was a primary factor in the diversity of the students at her institution, Dr. Franklin, one of the influencers in the study, remarked, “I think it definitely helps because [the city where my institution is located] is more ethnically diverse than other parts of [the state].” Dr. Elion, another influencer that was interviewed, also believed location was an important factor in predicting the amount of diversity in an institution's student body.

When I was at [an urban university in the midwest], I was there for three years, and that's an urban university and so there's just more of a mix of people in the city. In the program, we had African American students, and Latino students, and Asian students, and white students, and I mean it's just like a big old melting pot. It was nice, you know, and so I didn't really have to work at it that hard. And then at [a more rural midwestern university], I mean in the last couple of years we're just talking about it like all the time. I mean, I think we really in a state like [this midwestern state] is it's even worse. I mean it's just it's not very diverse around here so you know I think we're always thinking about ways that we can try to bring in different cultures and different ethnicities.
However, the diversity of an academic program does not always reflect the diversity of the surrounding community. Of two of her previous institutions, Dr. Hodgkin said:

The idea of being in [a large midwestern city] at a school on the south side of [the city] and being one of the few black PhD students was mind-blowing to me. [The large southern institution where I previously worked] was also alarming to me only because I was in [a large southern city] in the heart of downtown... and quite often the only time I came across an African American student is because he was an athlete.

Dr. Hodgkin observed that even though the population surrounding the two institutions she mentioned was heavily populated by people of color, the universities she was a part of were not. For these institutions in particular, the surrounding area not being diverse can not be used as a reason for the lack of diversity in a program. Dr. Elion said of a previous institution where she worked:

When I got to [a large southern university], you know it's in the South and the South has got some diversity, a lot actually, that wasn't really reflected in the program. So one way that we tried to kind of fix that was to just try to make our program more recognized and really make it like we tried to sell it as a boutique program. I don't mean sell it, I mean we just changed the way we thought of it, you know. The boutique program, it's a professional program for master's degree students. We would try to recruit people from all over the country rather than more locally like it has been. So that helped a bit like we were getting people from different states and then sometimes they would just add to the diversity of
the student body in our program.

The preceding examples from faculty members regarding the way TPC programs are trying to recruit students of color are admirable; however their primary focus seems to be increasing the number of diverse students rather than creating an inclusive environment where students of color can thrive. Dr. Hodgkin mentioned the pride she takes in the ethnic diversity of her graduate program but did not mention the success of the students they attract there. Dr. Elion lamented about the fact that her institution is in an area where little diversity exists so it is harder to find students of color, but did not mention any steps they were taking to help the few students of color at her current institution feel valued.

Dr. Elion’s example from her previous institution is especially telling in that the institution, rather than look for ways to draw in students of color from the local community would instead search nationally. This is a reflection of that institutions lack of commitment to inclusion in that they were not willing to change their culture to try and bring in students from the local area, but rather decided to look elsewhere for students who were likely better able to adapt to the institution’s culture as they were actively seeking an education from a reputable school and were mobile. It should be noted that the previously mentioned TPC programs are likely not purposefully avoiding creating inclusive environments. Most program administrators likely have their programs’ students’ best interests at heart and are often saddled with a goal of increasing certain metrics (like diversity) with little to no resources to do so, much less the resources it would require to create inclusive spaces for all students. The main problem lies in institutions’ tendencies to look for easy metrics for gauging success. This focus on
numbers rather than inclusiveness is part of the culture of higher education. Program administrators are trained to increase diversity but are not told that they need to create spaces where students of color can feel included nor are they told how to make sure the voices of students of color are included in their program’s decision making. This distinction between seeking diversity for numbers sake instead of seeking to create an inclusive environment for students of color is likely invisible to most program administrators. They believe they are doing the right thing, but are not aware of the problems they may be causing.

**Challenges that prevent TPC programs from being a “good fit”**

Interview participants were asked if they had faced any challenges or barriers while earning their degree that related to their racial/ethnic identity. Some reported no problems at all and several reported specific difficulties which made their experience much more difficult than their white counterparts.

Two of the participants in the study identify as mixed race, and reported that they present as white. Abigail identifies with her Native American heritage and is bothered when people speak disparagingly about Native people. However, she reported that she doesn’t feel like she has faced direct hardships because she presents as white. According to Abigail, her ethnicity is often misinterpreted so she doesn’t generally face direct racism. When asked if she has faced challenges because of her racial identity, Abigail said:

I would say not really. I mean, I do hear people talk about, you know, American Indians and not really understanding that when they talk about American Indians
this is like talking about any other nationality. You know, whatever you joke
around about could be sort of offensive, and whenever people look at me they,
you know, they just see just a regular looking person... I mean not regular
looking, but I do look like I'm Caucasian, you know, but I haven't really seen any
real hardship...The only time I've ever heard anyone say anything that was even
close to offensive was at the University. I was the only person left in the computer
room late at night working away on some project and the people who worked in
the lab, the students who worked there, were saying some different things about
American Indians and, you know, it was just they didn't know I was there. I was a
little [offended] but they were very young and so you know I just chalked it up to
them being ignorant.

Although Abigail reported not facing any hardships, her comments about people making
racist jokes around her point out a hardship that is compounded by her multiracial
background. The racist jokes Abigail heard could be considered microaggressions or
dehumanizing communication. People may feel free to tell jokes like this around Abigail
because they assume she is white. This means that Abigail is subjected to offensive jokes
that might not have otherwise been told around her. She then must choose whether to
speak up and and possibly have to endure a more difficult situation, or to ignore the
offense. Although Abigail has had to endure offensive jokes during her time in her degree
program, she still said she hasn’t “seen any real hardship.” This may be a clue to why the
respondents in the pilot study from chapter three reported that they did not see any
problems with diversity in their academic programs. Perhaps they simply brush of any
offense they experience they same way Abigail did. Jane also found that the fact that
people only see her as Caucasian was a challenge.

Like when people look at me, they just see a Caucasian. They don't know I'm mixed with anything else so in a way that is its own barrier because I love all the races I’m mixed with, you know? I claim them all equally so in a way that was kind of a barrier because when people assume that you're something just because of how you look, whether it's getting extra privilege or less privilege, it's still a barrier.

Most graduate students interviewed felt like they did not face any challenges or barriers because of their race. Dr. Joliot said, “I was the only non-white student, but I didn’t feel I was different. They were kind to me. Was it because of my race or nice in general?--I’m not sure.” Alice said of her program, “It was really just open so I didn't really experience any obstacles.” When asked if he ever felt out of place in his TPC program, Dr. Werner said:

I couldn't say that I ever felt that way... mostly because I think I always felt faculty and mentors, etc. were always willing to help me with any question I might have had. I mean, I felt similarly to everyone else if it was an economic issue regardless of ethnicity or race. Everybody was a graduate student. They all needed some help in some way and so there was always consideration of you know we can't afford to buy Adobe Creative Suite so here's where you can find it. Everybody was in the same boat, so to speak. I don't know that there was particularly any sense in which I felt out of place.

Dr. Werner’s experience as a graduate student was that all of the students in his program
were facing the same problems and all of the students worked together to help each other through those problems. Dr. Werner didn’t feel out of place because he and his fellow students found commonality in the challenges of graduate school.

Virginia reported that her institution was quite diverse. Because of this, she did not feel out of place and enjoyed learning from all of the different people with which she interacted.

You know what? I will say [my university] is a very diverse school. When I get into a classroom and there are three out of 15 students that are white. I've never felt out of place. Take my fiction writing class for instance--we're all like different regardless if it's two white students or it's a black and white student, we were so different in some type of way. There were students who wrote fantasy stories that I would have never read before but instead of it being like a weird thing or me feeling like I'm out of place it was more so me saying “Hey, maybe I should start reading more stories like this” instead of like sticking to the genre that I'm used to. I don't think it made me feel out of place more so of broadening my horizons on different styles or things that other people like, but it was never a thing where I felt out of place at all.

Not only did Virginia’s program have a diverse number of students, she came away from her program feeling like her experience was enriched because of that diversity. This is a reflection of the inclusiveness of her program. She came away with an attitude of embracing differences and learning from those differences. Likely this was an emphasis in her courses. This inclusiveness made her feel comfortable as a student.
Louisa also said that she never really felt out of place, but did want someone she could connect with in her program.

Most of the time, no, I didn't really feel like there were students I could really connect with. I did kind of feel distant. I'm not saying like “Oh I'm out of place I don't belong here”—not like that, but yeah, I did feel that there weren’t really students I could connect with.

Unlike Virginia’s experience, Louisa did not feel like she could relate to the students in her program. This contributed to a feeling of being “distant.” Dr. Curie also felt like she didn’t have someone to relate to in her program so she actively sought out a mentor outside of her institution who she could relate to.

I don't know if there were like blatant barriers, but I definitely noticed that I was not learning from people that look like me, you know? So when in 2010 [a notable African American female TPC scholar] published [a book], I don't know what I was doing at the time, It was during the summer and I think I was supposed to be writing my dissertation proposal or something like that. I came across her book and I googled her name and her face came up and I was like “Oh my gosh, a black woman!” you know? Oh my gosh, I was freaking out and so I reached out to the editor, I think it was TCQ or maybe it was JBTC--I can’t remember, the editor of some journal in our field, and I said I will write a review for this book. I read the book, wrote a review, and after that reached out and was like “Hey, I just reviewed your book…” She was the first black woman in our field that I was able to see myself in because there was no one else. Just to see that she was a full
professor, she was well respected, she has a book out--that meant a lot, it really meant a lot. Basically, I was like “Okay, you're going to mentor me, like, you just are.” She's so kind and that year at CPTSC I made it a point to introduce myself to her, but even like going to CPTSC and other conferences it was very clear that black women were not represented in the field and I don't mean like oh there's only like a handful of us I mean there was so few of us at that time... I want people to be able to see themselves represented in the field and when I say represented I mean visibility matters, you know?

Dr. Curie’s proactive approach in seeking out a mentor was likely aided by the fact that she was a PhD student and felt more free to reach out to a fellow scholar. This would be more difficult as a younger undergraduate student. Blair, also a PhD student, felt like she did have supportive faculty, but like Dr. Curie, needed someone to which she could really relate. She had her cohort, which included a few African American students which worked to support each other, but she wanted a mentor to truly be able to guide her.

As sad as it is, I have faculty support, but I wouldn’t necessarily say that I have like a mentor that has shaped me if that makes sense. I think my cohort has probably shaped me more than any faculty member could have possibly shaped me. If anything, they’ve probably helped me find the tools to navigate through tech comm and the academy, but the things that have made me, that I follow, have mostly come from my cohort more than it has from faculty. Because I feel like with faculty, they care in so many ways, and I love that they’re willing to hear us, but I feel like sometimes they become more of the student when I need them to be my teacher. [My faculty mentors are] great. They’re fabulous people. I mean, I
work with great people, but there’s just sometimes where I’m just like I need someone to really get what I'm saying.

Like Dr. Werner, Dr. Curie also found support in her cohort. She did receive support from faculty members, but felt that her most important relationships came from her fellow students. Being inclusive means creating spaces where people can listen to, support, and influence each other. Even with good faculty mentors, students need spaces where they can feel comfortable,

While navigating her program, Blair faced microaggressions that made her academic journey more difficult. When asked if she ever felt out of place in her program, she said:

I don’t know if out of place would be the best term to describe that, but it’s more so we always say like “Y’all hear me, but do you really hear me?” The example is microaggressions right? We can talk about those things in theory but what I notice is a lot of times the people I’m working with don’t get them in practice. So a presentation I’ve given before is on privileged socialization practices. So an example of that would be at one point [my program] would have like little gatherings and would have alcohol be served. It was just a very informal type set up and I had to bring to their attention that as a black female, I’ve been taught to not do any of this. So it’s more stepping into those socialization practices that are very different culturally and trying to make sure everyone understands it. Like, this is what you’re doing and this is the problem. And even making sure that I take the stand in saying you’re not going to use my labor. Like y’all going to do
the work, too. You’re making me mad, here’s why, now you need to go research why this makes black people mad. So that’s that finicky line where I’m trying to make sure they’re made aware of where they messed up, but I’m not teaching the whole lesson either. Like there has to be some accountability on their end, too.

In the preceding quote, Blair voiced her concern that the faculty and administration at her university aren’t trying to create an inclusive environment for the students of color who are there. Blair’s statement reflects her frustration with constantly having to explain her culture in the context of the dominant culture. People who do not understand Blair’s cultural influences expect Blair to explain why a certain behavior or practice is not OK when they believe it’s perfectly fine. Blair either has to go along with the dominant culture or try and justify why she is not. This reflects the cultural commodity that is whiteness. As a part of the dominant culture, a white person is not asked to justify a cultural practice against the practices of another culture. A white person is not asked to explain or educate other people about their social norms. In this quote Blair brings up a good point. Part of the work should be done by the people in power to understand where she is coming from. Program administrators can take initiative and show students of color that their cultural ideas are important and valued by listening, researching, and validating.

Dr. Williams faced challenges while navigating her degree program when people made assumptions about her because of her racial identity throughout her academic career. Dr. Williams said of the challenges she faced:

I think there's challenges daily that we've kind of just become accustomed to. I think when I first learned to speak English, for example, there was a lot of stigma
about what classes I could, you know, partake in. Even from early on in elementary school, my teachers were like “No, you cannot be in advanced English classes or language arts classes because English is not your first language.” They would say that to me and so of course, me being the stubborn person I am, I would try to counter that by saying “I'm gonna study English and make it my major.” I think, in a way, those kinds of microaggressions and that kind of prejudice has led me to where I am because now I can kind of counter those perspectives in teaching my own students. I do think that there are struggles that we face in the field on many different degrees. So in some ways people want to keep us out of specific conversations in projects but in other ways people want to bring us in to specific conversations and projects just because they want to check off that box that says do you have diversity here, you know? So I think I faced a lot of that too where people are just looking for some more diversity. It doesn't matter who it is, and they will reach out to me because they know that I fit that category. So there's been a lot of that lately. There's also been some of like attributing my success, not that I have a lot of success, but any success that I have to “Well you know you fit the diversity category so that's why you got published,” or “That's why you got a job,” or “That's why” whatever. I think those are things that we face consistently which is why we need those support networks.

Similar to Blair, Dr. Williams was also forced to justify herself within the context of the dominant culture. When she is accused of having advantages because of her race, essentially she is being told that she couldn’t possibly be successful on her own merits. The implication of statements like “Well you know you fit the diversity category so that's
why you got published,” is that only white people can legitimately publish. You need a hand because you’re Hispanic. This is a symptom of the embedded racism in our society. If a white person receives help because they know someone or because they have a connection then they are just “well connected,” but if a person of color receives help from an affirmative action program then that’s unfair. Seeing ingrained hypocrisy like this will be a difficult challenge for administrators who want to create more inclusive academic programs; however, the success of students of color in TPC academic programs depends on efforts like this.

Most of the interview participants did not name specific challenges they faced because of their racial or ethnic identity. For some, this may truly be the case. However, for others it may be the case that they have either ignored or dismissed their challenges, similar to how Abigail simply dismissed the students who made a racist joke, because they have come to accept it as normal. Other students reported facing difficult challenges in connection with their race such as difficulty finding a mentor, cultural ignorance, facing prejudice, or being told that they are getting special treatment because of their race. Working to remove these obstacles is an important part of creating an inclusive program. An important first step is creating an environment where students can talk about the challenges they face in an environment where people will listen, believe, and take action. This is a big cultural change that will take more than a few strategies to implement. As program administrators begin to make the smaller changes necessary to create an inclusive environment, this type of cultural change can be made over time by emphasizing the importance of listening and believing the students in their programs.
Intersectionality and program fit

Sometimes feeling out of place means being singled out as different. According to Mark, he was often singled out as the “liberal voice” in his program. When asked if he ever felt out of place, he said:

Not really. Out of place might not be the word that I’d use. I certainly felt outnumbered in some of our discussions. I'm a fairly confident student and so “out of place” I'm not sure if that's what I would say, but some of our classes, you know when you're talking about teaching college composition, especially as who's going to college changes and the theory kind of surrounding that, and equal access to education, of course it's very difficult for those conversations to not slip into the overtly political realm. So often, whether or not other students agreed with me or not, I was often required to speak as the only voice of like, ya know, liberal opinions whether or not I was actually... the only one that has liberal opinions in class.

Mark’s experience is an interesting point of intersectionality. As discussed in Chapter one, the CRT tenet of intersectionality states that oppression from racism is compounded when combined with other marginalized identity markers. Mark not only stood out in his program because of his race, but also because of his political ideology. As Mark states, likely he was not the only one with a liberal mindset in his class, but he was likely the only African American in his class and so when an issue like equal access to higher education came up, he was immediately singled out.

When asked if her racial/ethnic identity meant she would have to face challenges,
Mary provided a reminder that although race and ethnicity are the central theme of this study, intersectionality is at play in the lives of every interview participant.

Honestly, Chris, I see it more being female, not being Hispanic. I look Hispanic, and from time to time people will approach me and because I look Hispanic and will immediately begin speaking Spanish. Then I correct them and say “No, no--I don't fluently speak Spanish. I understand it. My family speaks Spanish. I do not.” But I think in [TPC], it's more biased to females. I have found that just in my workplace (I've been with the IRS for almost 15 years) and in our workplace the majority of those positions are held by men and it's very rare that women are in those positions... Our technical manuals are filled with $10 words that are absolutely unnecessary, and there's a lot of direction that is absolutely unnecessary. It's as if they're just repeating the same thing 16 times to get the result that a sentence would have taken care of and it would have been more concise and clear a lot of those things just aren't clear. When we, as the clerks that have to use these manuals to do our jobs, when we approach it and we suggest changes, I mean it's immediately shot down. I've sat in roundtables where there have been maybe two women to 14 men and we're kind of immediately shoved aside like our opinions aren't as maybe intelligent as some of the others. It's not a fun position to be in so I find it more on the female side. I don't know that I would say race or ethnicity has ever had much to do with it on my end.

For Mary, the biggest challenges she faces are related to sexism not racism. Mary’s main problems come from her interactions in a male dominated workplace. These problems are so difficult for her that they overshadow any problems she faces because of her race. Her
motivation to complete a degree partly come from her desire to be respected in a workplace that does not respect women. Although she likely does face challenges as a person of color in her degree program, those challenges are overshadowed by the sex discrimination she faces at work.

Although this study is primarily about race and ethnicity, we cannot overlook the fact that no person is simply a certain race. Each of the participants in this study face an intersection of challenges based on many personal characteristics. This makes the ideas discussed in this chapter to increase inclusivity challenging to implement. What might be inclusive to one student might not mean anything to another student. Or worse, efforts to include some students may exclude others. This is a difficult challenge for program administrators to meet. Program administrators should be careful to consider intersectionality in their inclusion efforts and be willing to adjust when mistakes are made.

Conclusion

Faculty and academic departments play a large role in student success. Involvement by faculty members can make the difference between a student dropping out or persisting to graduation. Departments as a whole can also play a large role in student success. Creating an environment where students feel comfortable and supported, both by faculty and other students, can help students thrive. Although factors such as family involvement and personal motivation are important, TPC programs cannot control those factors. However, TPC program administrators can recognize weaknesses in student inclusion and work to strengthen those weaknesses. If TPC program administrators recognize embedded practices which marginalize students such as negligent recruitment
practices, insensitivity to unique challenges faced by students of color, and the
intersectional nature of personal identities, TPC programs may begin to address these
weaknesses and start creating inclusive departments that not only attract students of color
but also support their success.
CHAPTER 6

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This concluding chapter is focused on concrete takeaways for TPC program administrators who want to increase diversity and inclusion in their academic programs. The first section reports participants’ answers regarding how TPC academic programs can increase racial and ethnic diversity and improve the inclusiveness of their programs. These responses are included in this chapter because they are specific recommendations for program administrators and this chapter’s purpose is to provide recommendations. When making recommendations, I did not want my voice to be the only voice making recommendations. Therefore, the first section in the chapter provides participants’ answers to the question “What advice would you give TPC program administrators who are interested in increasing diversity and inclusion in their programs?”

After participant recommendations, the chapter then draws on the findings of my study to outline recommendations for TPC academic programs interested in increasing diversity and inclusion. It concludes with describing the limitations of this study, suggestions for future research, and closing remarks.

Participant Recommendations

This following section reports on suggestions by interview participants on how to increase diversity and inclusion in TPC academic programs. Specific recommendations varied widely, but some patterns did emerge. The following subsections report these patterns according to major themes.
Institutional Barriers to Recruitment

One barrier to efforts to increase inclusion in TPC academic programs repeated frequently by interview participants, especially those who are faculty members, is that they have little to no control over their recruitment initiatives. This is more pronounced in the recruitment of undergraduates than in recruiting graduate students, but in both cases program administrators can often feel like they have little to no power. Traditional recruitment practices are an excellent example of the embedded racism present in higher education. Holistic admissions (the practice of considering multiple factors for admission rather than just grades and test scores) commonly used by institutions of higher education today is often seen as a way to increase diversity. However, this practice was originally created to exclude rather than include (Karabel, 2005). In fact, prestige is given to universities today based on their ability to exclude as many people as possible from their institution. This exclusion makes an institution “highly competitive,” but, as discussed in Chapter 1, it also creates unnecessary barriers for marginalized people. The tendency for colleges and universities to closely guard their admission process can make trying to take more control of the process difficult for program administrators. Dr. McClintock said:

I have to be careful with what I say. Not that it has anything to do with identity politics—just recruitment politics. If we had control over the marketing of our program... I don’t know if you know about [our university], we have [small number] people in Professional and technical communication, we have [small number] people in [Rhetoric and Composition]...They’re great about hiring us but they’re not great about letting us take control of our own programs. We can’t advertise specifically our own program. We have a graduate studies committee for
the whole department in charge of that. So, we’re sort of at the whim of
whoever’s running graduate studies. So, the short answer is no, we don’t [do
recruitment] because we can’t.

At an institution like Dr. McClintock’s, even if their intention is to include people
from diverse backgrounds in their recruitment efforts as discussed in the previous section,
they may feel that their efforts may be fruitless as the university has such strict
parameters for what can and can’t be done with regards to recruitment activities.
However, this kind of situation should not be used as an excuse to forget about
recruitment altogether. Likely there are still things TPC program administrators can do to
work towards increasing diversity and inclusion in their programs. Student advisory
councils can still advise on inclusion--i.e., ways to shape the policies, norms, and other
aspects of the TPC program to make it not only more welcoming for underrepresented
students but also reflective of their contributions. Creating a supportive and inclusive
environment is not only beneficial for current students, but it also attracts future students
who have heard about the program’s favorable reputation. The advisory council can also
advise on ways for program administrators to think outside of the box about their
recruitment efforts. For example, faculty members can guest lecture at local high schools
or community colleges. Faculty members could also develop service learning
opportunities that get them and their classes out and into the community which, in turn,
would give others more exposure to the program and the good it is doing.

Even programs that have more control over their recruiting efforts face
challenges, especially at the undergraduate level, in controlling the efforts made in
recruiting diverse classes of students. Dr. Elion remarked, “I think it-it can kind of be
difficult [recruiting a diverse class of students] because you kind of rely on, for undergraduate students especially, the admissions office to bring you students.” Traditionally, admissions offices are the ones going out and finding students for the university. Generally, they don’t decide admission criteria, but they are the ones enforcing it by making decisions about who is being let into an institution. TPC programs who are not actively involved in recruiting are forced to trust that enough of the students who are admitted to the college or university will choose the TPC degree program or will switch to this major after discovering they’re not a good fit for their original major choice. However, it is certainly not a guarantee that students will choose the TPC major after enrolling at a college or university, even at large noteworthy institutions. Dr. McClintock said, “There’s this attitude [among faculty members] like, ‘They’ll come to us because we’re [a large noteworthy institution].’ I hate to break it to them but we’re an engineering and agriculture school. That’s what [our institution] is known for—not English.” Even if a college or university does have an English department that attracts undergraduate students because of its reputation, it seems as though very few students are choosing TPC programs as their initial undergraduate major (Dayley & Walton, 2018). This leaves program administrators to either work to persuade undergraduate students to leave their initial major choice or hope the student discovers TPC through serendipitous means.

In contrast with undergraduate recruitment efforts, interview participants indicated that TPC programs tend to have more power and control when recruiting graduate students. Dr. McClintock remarked, “You get more diversity in your grad programs, particularly because you get international students, but with undergrads it's not
as easy.” Faculty members who participated in interviews implied that recruiting graduate students from diverse backgrounds was easier because faculty have more control over the recruitment process. For graduate studies, faculty members and program administrators are generally the ones in charge of reaching out to prospective students and making admission decisions. This means faculty members decide whom they will try to recruit and how they will try to recruit them. Dr. Carson talked about the success of their TPC graduate program in creating diverse classes and attributed their success to their head of graduate studies:

I would say we have an admirably diverse [graduate] cohort. I would attribute a lot of it to [our] head of Graduate Studies for quite a few years. I served on the Graduate Committee with her several times. She had procedures that helped us really try to identify students of color and students with diverse student backgrounds. I think we bring in very diverse classes at the grad level.

Having a person dedicated to implementing diversity and inclusion initiatives in recruiting can make a big difference in the success of diversity and inclusion goals. However, many faculty and staff lack the resources necessary to devote time to initiatives such as these. Academic departments are often stretched thin. Dr. Carson said, “There's not a lot of time to go recruit. You don't really have someone who's got that on their portfolio as their full-time job.” Some departments are looking into the possibility of hiring a specific person to focus on recruitment initiatives focused on diversity. Dr. Werner said of his department:

We have, obviously, research faculty as I am who can’t necessarily spend a lot of
time with the service aspect of doing stuff like [recruitment], but as a team we want to identify lecturers, and one in particular, who would be a director of recruitment. That will take some time. We're making quite a bit of transition towards that. So I would imagine, given that we have a new bachelor of science in tech comm, that's one of the ways we want to go is to have a lecturer do those kinds of things. In particular, we would be looking for a lecturer who has a recruitment or academic services background.

technical and professional communication academic programs may need to look for outside-of-the-box solutions, such as hiring a professional staff member with a specific recruitment assignment, to be able to effectively move forward with accomplishing goals of increased student diversity and better inclusion. Another way to think outside of box may be to communicate directly with people who influence students’ decisions when choosing a major, such as admission officers and academic advisors. Dr. Franklin talked about an initiative they are working on at her institution.

We are going to create a fact sheet or a packet of some sort to give to all of the advisors at the university in the different colleges because if students don't know about our program we're doubting that advisors maybe know enough about professional and technical writing to push students in that direction and say “Oh, you are technically-minded but good at communication, and you're interested in editing. Hey, there's this major that's perfect for you.” I don't think [advisors] know that, so our next plan for recruitment is to try to get advisors aware and on our side and funneling students to us.
Admissions counselors, academic advisors, and other staff members are often key influencers when students are deciding which major to declare. This is especially true for colleges and universities that primarily serve local populations. Many students are place-bound because of financial challenges, family obligations, or any of a variety of issues that would prevent them from moving to a new location to attend college. This means that they must choose from among the majors offered by the local college they will be attending. The information given by influencers such as admissions counselors and advisors may be the only information the student gets about available fields of study.

Along with informing influencers about TPC programs, program administrators can proactively reach out to prospective students who are not currently college students. Dr. Werner remarked:

You can go to the high schools and introduce people to tech comm. I think there's a trend in some high schools, at least what we're identifying, asking English teachers to also teach what might be called a business writing course, but-but that never translates as “Oh, there's a whole field of study that does stuff like this.” I'm sure [students are] not necessarily stating “I'm gonna be a tech comm major,” probably because they don't know what it is. I would suggest that it would play out if that was a goal of an administrator to just reach out to high schools and introduce them to tech comm majors. I think our program should make that a way to go.

As Dr. Werner pointed out, even if students are taking classes that teach technical and professional communication skills, the students may not know that they can major in the
subject in college and later make it into a career. When asked how TPC program administrators could better recruit students of color into a TPC major, Charlotte responded: “I think [TPC program administrators] would have to make a concerted effort to go to high schools in their area and let them know this is a thing. I mean, like I said, I didn't find out that the program existed until after I started school.”

Although the main point of this chapter, and the dissertation as a whole, is the importance of increasing inclusion efforts over simply increasing diversity in TPC programs, recruitment is still an important part of increasing overall diversity and inclusion. Some of the recruitment process is not controlled by TPC administrators; however, there are many things administrators can do if they are willing to put in the effort to recruit a diverse class of students. Administrators can work directly with admission and advising offices to help admission counselors and academic advisors know what a TPC major can do for undergraduate students. Administrators can also reach out to teachers and employers who work with potential students to educate them about degree program opportunities so they can direct potential students to TPC degree programs. TPC program administrators should also not be afraid to to find ways to reach out to potential students directly both at schools and workplaces. Appointing a faculty member or hiring a specific staff member to lead recruitment efforts may also prove effective. This is discussed in more detail in the recommendations section of this chapter.

**Facilitating Strong Mentoring**

When asked if he had advice about how TPC program administrators can bring in more students of color, Mark responded “Yeah, employ more people of color.” This frank response suggested frustration with the general lack of representation of people of color
in academic faculty. Mark went on to say:

I don't know, it's strange. It’s almost like a hot topic: how can we increase diversity in our programs. Everyone seems to be talking about this but literally everyone on your faculty is white. So that sends a message to people applying that it's not really valued, you know? So that's, that's one thing. It's not to say that student doesn’t show up because there’s not faculty member of color. That may be the case and it might not, but increasingly those statistics are coming out that students perform better with teachers who look-like them.

As mentioned in Chapter three, students of color notice that there is a lack of diverse representation in the faculty. Along with Mark, several interview participants mentioned the importance of having diverse faculty members in a department. When asked about the importance of diversity in the faculty, Dr. Williams said:

I think that's critical. I mean, I think it's critical for the rigor of the department. I think if you don't have diverse faculty members your way of life is going to be very, I don't know, traditionally white. I think it's important not for the sake of the diverse faculty member, but for the sake of the rigor and the strength of the program. I think it's also important if you have students of color within the program to have faculty members of color who they can talk to and relate to and speak to and learn from. I think it's important on several different levels.

Here, Dr. Williams brings up an excellent point. Without diverse representation in the faculty, your departmental culture is going to be very “traditionally white.” This directly affects the inclusiveness of the program. A “traditionally white” faculty may not be as
open to other ideas or ways of doing things. When thinking about attracting a diverse
group of students, Dr. McClintock said, “So I don’t think there’s a magic bullet. I think
part of it is having a mentor, preferably a person of color. Someone who tells it like it is,
you know?” Dr. Franklin identifies as a person of color and takes her role as a mentor
very seriously.

I really try to be a mentor. I think that is so important for students to feel like they
have someone in their corner, like there's someone who cares about them, and so
that's really how I approach all students is that I like them, I want to be part of
their lives. If I see that they're struggling, I'm always trying to make sure I go the
extra mile.

Mentoring means support, and support is what students need to succeed. A good
mentor will work to recognize what each student needs. When Dr. Carson mentors
students of color, he recognizes that there may be some support he can’t give them:

So I am a, I'm-I'm about as WASPy a white cis hetero male as you can get. You
know, a 54 year-old white guy who grew up in a white town. So, I'm very aware
that I have, I have significant limitations on how I understand the campus. I grew
up on campuses as a white male so I never worried about getting around campus
or being harassed on campus. So usually when I have a student of color, I will just
sort of come out and say you know “Can I help you find a mentor? I know there's
stuff that I just probably have no clue about and do you want me to help find other
kinds of mentors?” And so some students of color have said “Yeah, can we find-
can I find an African American woman?” or “Is there a club of African American
grad students so that I can talk about those issues?” and I've had some students who say “No, I mean, I-it's important, but it's-I'm fine.”

When Dr. Carson made the preceding comments in our interview, I was impressed. He struck me as a wise and confident mentor. I followed up with a question, asking if he felt comfortable having a conversation about race with his students of color. He replied:

No, to be honest. I fear that I'm going to do it wrong again. I'm aware of having grown up in a privileged setting, and that I'm trying to do it well, but that I may just be tripping over myself. I still think I'd rather make the mistake and try and help out. I'd rather talk about it anyway, even though I'm uncomfortable than to not talk about it at all and perhaps have someone miss an opportunity to gain perspectives that I can't give.

Even very experienced and confident mentors with a strong knowledge base regarding issues of diversity and inclusion cannot be all things to all students. The CRT tenet of intersectionality can offer some insight here. The oppression experienced from racism is compounded when combined with other marginalized identity markers (Crenshaw, 1991; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). Every student experiences their identity differently, and each student will have different needs. Mentors should recognize that some students will need support they can’t provide. Faculty members who serve as mentors can increase their effectiveness by learning about all of the resources available to students and disseminating that knowledge to students when appropriate. Resources for students may include other faculty members of color, university counseling services, and clubs and organizations.
In addition to helping students find support systems the way Dr. Carson does, mentors can also have a positive impact on the students of color they work with by observing talent and pointing it out. By this, I mean observing students, analyzing their work, and finding those students who would likely excel in a TPC program. This could be done in any course faculty members or graduate students teach for non-majors. For example, if a faculty member is teaching an introductory English course and identifies a student who shows promise with her/his writing skills, that faculty member can tell the student directly that s/he believes the student has an aptitude for this kind of work and would be successful in the field. Students may not realize they have a talent for something like writing, for example. Also, being told by a friend or family member that you have talent is not the same as being told by an expert in the field. Louisa talked about being told she had an aptitude for English.

When I entered university, I didn't have a major at all. I was undecided. When I was in high school I was taking dual enrollment classes with another university so the professor at that university she would compliment my writing and she would tell me, “You should consider an English major.” Then in middle school I also had some teachers comment on [my writing]... so it was just basically those two or three experiences, but because they were coming from teachers, academic specialists I felt their opinion had value.

Another approach faculty and program administrators can consider is talking about TPC programs in their classroom. Abigail experienced this at the community college she attended.
The instructor there at that community college who was teaching English who told me about [professional communication]. She was just talking to the class and she said, “If anyone really enjoys writing, or is good at it, and you want to pursue a really good degree at a great pay point—well, check this plan out.” So she was the one that told me about the technical communication program at [my university].

This type of encouragement can be especially important for graduate students or students considering graduate school. Dr. Curie wasn’t initially planning on continuing onto a PhD program, but her mentor, Dr. McClinton, saw her aptitude for research and strongly encouraged her to move forward. Dr. Curie said, “Dr. [McClinton] was such a great mentor. You know, as a master student, she said, ‘Okay, you need to go on for your PhD and plus you're gonna-you're gonna write this article with me.’” Dr. McClinton’s encouragement helped give Dr. Curie the confidence to move forward in her education.

Unlike Dr. Curie, Dr. Williams already knew she was going to go on to a PhD program, but didn’t know how well her research interests would fit with TPC scholarship until she spoke with her mentor, Dr. Carson:

I was initially trained as a composition scholar and love composition pedagogy and teaching. Then I went to get my PhD at [a large midwestern university]. I thought that I was going to continue doing [composition] research but [Dr. Carson] actually invited me to apply for the CPTSC diversity scholarship. In thinking about that I was like super new to tech comm. I said, “Does my research on transfer fit in with tech comm?” He said, “Well, actually it started here. A lot
of the transfer research started here.” So he gave me some readings about transfer in tech comm and I was like, “Oh my gosh, I had no idea I had been missing all these conversations.”

Dr. McClintock and Dr. Carson influenced their graduate students through informal conversations. In contrast, Dr. Franklin’s department has formalized the process of identifying potential majors and encouraging them to consider TPC:

> We actually do have postcards in the English department that all the professors have, and we're supposed to write notes to our students if we identify someone with talent, like in our intro classes, and give them to them and say, “Hey, you should be an English major,” but you just told me that I should subvert the system a little bit and tell people they should be technical writing majors because that would be better for me or my program.

This idea of reaching out to students and identifying students with an interest in technical and professional communication differs somewhat from the traditional idea of mentoring in that it asks faculty members to be proactive in finding new students rather than just reaching out to students with a current TPC major declared or waiting for students to decide to reach out.

As stated in a previous chapter, TPC programs should seek “to forward a more expansive vision of TPC, one that intentionally seeks marginalized perspectives, privileges these perspectives, and promotes them through action” (Jones, Moore, & Walton, 2016, p. 214). In the context of strong mentoring practices for the purposes of recruiting students of color, this means not waiting for students to come to you. It means
intentionally providing mentors that represent the student population, intentionally asking students what resources they need to succeed, and intentionally reaching out to students with a strong aptitude who may benefit from enrolling in a TPC program. To be clear, I am not advocating for coercive behavior. I am advocating for a proactive approach that prioritizes support for students in an effort to create a hospitable environment that promotes student success. In the next section I discuss putting this idea into practice. I synthesize the ideas presented in the fourth and fifth chapters as well as in the present chapter to create a set of recommendations for TPC administrators to use to create more diverse, and more importantly, more inclusive academic programs.

Centering Marginalized Students in Recruitment Efforts

Another technique mentioned by interview participants to recruit students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds was to have students from underrepresented backgrounds participate directly in recruitment efforts. However, this technique—encouraging students from underrepresented backgrounds to recruit other students from underrepresented backgrounds—creates a complex situation. Institutions of higher education often see the recruitment of diverse classes of students as a way to increase prestige. This is a form of interest convergence. Interest convergence, as discussed in Chapter 1, is a tenet of critical race theory that states only when the interests of powerful white people converge with the interests of people of color will social justice be enacted. Both administrators and students can benefit from a focus on diversity. However, this can be dangerous because when administrators are working for diversity to advance their own interests, they do not have the interests of the people of color they are recruiting at heart. They create reports and give speeches about how diverse the campus is and write reports
about the increase in percentage of persons of color at the institution, but they may not put the support networks into place that students of color need to succeed.

In today’s higher education culture, a diverse student body can be a form of prestige. The most diverse campuses are ranked in *US News and World Report* in the same way top academic programs are. When administrators seek to recruit a diverse class of students to gain prestige, they may also be creating opportunities for students who might have otherwise struggled to find a place at their institution. However, administrators need to avoid using students as diverse faces purely to attract more diverse faces. As Dr. Joliot said, “Many [universities] put diversity and pictures of people of color on their recruitment materials. I don’t want to be the Asian face. Those posters are a lie. It’s false advertising. It really bothers me. I was there. I was that person.”

Diversity efforts enacted by colleges and universities for prestige and recognition, or that are enacted simply to fulfill a mandate, can be dehumanizing to vulnerable people such as students of color. Administrators need to work to intentionally include students of color in their recruitment activities with the goal not only to increase the overall numbers of diverse students but specifically to increase the inclusiveness of the program. However, program administrators do not need to do this work alone. A group effort is needed to do the work of increasing inclusion in TPC academic programs. In their book *Technical Communication After the Social Justice Turn: Building Coalitions for Action*, Walton, Moore, and Jones suggest a coalitional approach to social justice. “Investing in coalitions allows for those with more power to pick up the slack as needed, with the important caveat that coalitions are built through listening and valuing difference…” (2019, p. 4). A coalitional approach that doesn't require every individual to pursue justice
in the very same ways, topics or areas. Coalition building means coming together to work on an issue from different perspectives and with different intentionalities. This can look like administrators working toward recruiting diverse students and faculty while faculty are working toward recognizing the scholarship of diverse scholars and students, and students, staff, and mentors are working together towards inclusive spaces and practices. The coalition is the common ground they share. All parties do not have to share the same goals to make a better future. Students, working as part of the coalition, can play an important part in creating a more diverse and inclusive environment. Blair talked about what happened when her department empowered her to take ownership of recruitment efforts.

I do the recruitment for our program. I go out to HBCUs (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) and I use my personal network to try to bring in other minority scholars to the program. I do a really good job in this position especially in that first semester of trying to make sure everyone feels welcome. I put people in contact with whomever they need to know while in the program. I call [recruitment practices] on the ground initiatives. And what that essentially does, it kind of takes a political approach to recruiting. I try to tell people “I know political typically has a bad taste in people’s mouths when you hear it but the act of recruiting students is political.” Students become stakeholders within the organization. They become constituents. So it is a political practice. But in those on-the-ground initiatives it’s all about you making personal connections with people. So who do you know, why do you know them, and breaking down the institutionalized pipelines because sometimes those pipelines are only about
recruiting and you know the image of it but it’s not about actually knowing those students. So in my on-the-ground approach I’ve actually visited HBCUs. I go and talk to people that I know personally, I make sure people have my personal contact information. Even if it comes to the point where that person decides the program is not for them or they get there and they’re like “look I don't like this,” I still make sure that I fostered a relationship that they know they can still come to me either way. Granted it’s labor intensive, but it does help with bringing diverse students of color into the program.

Blair’s personalized approach to recruiting is quite different from the recruitment techniques traditionally used by colleges and universities. Blair focuses on developing genuine personal relationships. Rather than trying to impress students with flashy recruitment materials or presentations, or trying to make students of color believe that there is a large population of students from diverse backgrounds at the institution by putting diverse faces on viewbooks and web sites, Blair works to develop sincere and honest relationships. From critical race theory we understand that racism is embedded into societal structures such as higher education. Traditional recruitment techniques meant to attract people of color are not meant to benefit people of color but are meant to benefit the institution and the people at that institution. Blair’s take on recruitment practices puts the focus on the individual. Recruiting for diversity centers on the most marginalized. Traditional recruitment practices have the potential to harm marginalized people by putting them into a position that might not be best for them. As Blair said, she makes sure to foster a supportive relationship regardless of whether or not that student chooses her institution because the focus is on helping marginalized people rather than
simply increasing diversity numbers. Program administrators must recognize that they are not the experts when it comes to recruitment. Even program administrators with the best intentions may be doing unintended harm. This is why including people of color in recruitment efforts is so important. Embedded racism often goes unnoticed by the privileged.

Mark’s comments seem to support Blair’s ideas of direct involvement in the recruitment of students of color. He commented on how prospective students having students of color to talk to during the recruitment process would be helpful, but it’s important to be able to speak with students who don’t feel an obligation to say good things about the department. Mark would like students to have access to other students who don’t necessarily have an official assignment with the department.

It's also helpful to be able to actually talk to students and not necessarily, you know, the graduate assistant for the department. Because you're going to get a very specific kind of response from them. Just like having people of colors’ emails, you know, like maybe there's a list of students of color who are okay with being contacted by prospective students of color. They don't necessarily hold a position on campus because when I was a graduate assistant I felt comfortable being upfront with people and talking to them about my experience in the program, but you do feel like a kind of pressure especially if you’re employed by the program to present a certain view of the program.

Similar to Blair, Mark spoke about the value of a sincere personal relationship in the recruitment process. Mark was not interested in the institutional message. He wanted
personal contacts from people who did not feel obligated to speak positively about the
program. Like Blair, Mark valued having a sincere personal contact who can be trusted
whether or not the student decided to attend the institution. For program administrators,
this may mean stepping back from the recruitment process and allowing students to
develop genuine personal relationships with prospective students whether or not the
prospective student chooses to attend the administrator’s institution. This also means
managing the messaging of the department less and focusing on inclusivity more. This
will allow your students who are involved in the recruiting process to give honest
answers that reflect well on the program.

Some institutions are actively trying to have diverse representation at their
recruitment events. The institution where Dr. Lovelace works tries to have as much
representation as possible at recruiting events:

We're having students come in: males, females, white, African American. We try
to have it be as representative as possible to have [prospective students] be able to
talk to the [current students] and to have [current students] field questions and to
tell their stories. I think that the best thing that we can do for whomever we have
as prospective students of color or students of diversity of any type is to make
sure they’re represented.

Administrators should make a concerted effort to include the ideas of their
underrepresented students in their recruitment activities rather than just using them as a
diverse face to show that diversity exists on their campus. Blair, for example, has been
able to take her ideas about a more personalized and supportive form of recruiting and
apply them in a real world setting. This has successfully brought in diverse representation to her campus. Instead of directing recruitment efforts with no input from the type of students program administrators want to recruit and retain, administrators should intentionally solicit ideas, recommendations, and experiences of students of color already in their programs to create a supportive recruitment program that doesn’t exploit or tokenize students to simply increase the number of students of color, but actively seeks advice and council from students of color in an effort to create an inclusive program. However, program administrators should be wary of possible burnout of students of color who may be asked to do too much to support program recruitment efforts while also dealing with school assignments, work obligations, and more. A possible solution to this could be tuition waivers or even payment to students for their time rather than expecting students to volunteer their time. This leads to a bigger issue, which is how do TPC programs pay for such efforts? When asking for money from department heads, deans, and upper level administrators, program administrators are often told, “We don’t have any money.” Taking small steps at first and keeping good records can be key here. If a program administrator can get a few student volunteers to give a small amount of time and then show a positive effect from that effort, upper level administrators will be more likely to give more money the next time they are asked.

Creating Inclusive Messaging

Once TPC administrators have overcome institutional barriers and involved faculty and student advisory groups in their recruiting efforts, administrators should begin focusing on the message they are communicating to students. The first message should be to explain what technical and professional communication is. technical and professional
communication appears to still be relatively unknown as an academic field. Prospective undergraduate students have a hard time identifying the field and most often seem to choose to study TPC only after discovering it at their college and university rather than enrolling at an institution with the intention to study it. This issue is especially compounded for students from marginalized backgrounds who often lack the influence from a mentor to point them toward a TPC program (Dayley & Walton, 2018). Alice talked about the need to clear up misconceptions about TPC as a field to appeal to the interests of prospective students.

I guess it's really just trying to appeal to their interest. I mean, a lot of times if you don't enjoy writing or you don't have analytical nature about you, this field’s not going to be something for you. But it's really just trying to figure out individual interest and focusing on that. A lot of times when I say “technical communications,” people automatically think I'm in computers. They don't think writing, they don't think copy editing, they don't think about any of that stuff, so they don't-they don't get the field. But if you're able to kind of connect it to things within their lives and that might apply to them, it might garner interest. Using taglines like “do you enjoy persuading; do you enjoy creating lists” might stand out to certain people. I think you might catch a few people who hadn't really thought about, you know, this degree.

Mary also mentioned the need to clear up misconceptions and explain to prospective students what TPC actually is.

I think my advice would just be to take the approach that [TPC] is not what you
think. Don't let them fool you. It's not-it's not necessarily writing instructions and textbooks. It's not what you think. Really, you're limited by your imagination. I mean, I could find a job pretty much anywhere by just explaining “Listen, this is what I can do for you and your customer base or your employees,” or wherever they need help being able to explain what I'm capable of doing. I just don't think people know what it is.

One way to increase the recognizability of TPC as an academic field for prospective students is to go out to local high schools and tell students about it. Even if each professor in the department could commit to visiting one high school per year it would make a big difference in increasing the recognizability of TPC programs and would, perhaps, influence a student from a marginalized background to discover a field that matches her talents and aptitudes and has strong job prospects.

Along with letting students know that TPC academic programs exist, interview participants pointed out that program administrators should describe the advantages of obtaining a TPC degree. Charlotte said:

I think specifically [my institution] should be going out there and saying look at us. Not only do we have this one-of-a-kind program here, but we’ve got an active alumni pool so they could literally go look for people who graduate from our department. [Graduates] get jobs. They get good jobs. So you show [prospective students] that it's a career path and you show them that success, but you've got to go into the school. I think the other thing that tech programs could be doing is telling students the cool thing about technical communication, is a technical writer
can be anything right now.

Louisa also said that administrators should talk to prospective students about real job opportunities they can have after graduation.

I guess like mentioning some of the things you can do with your English major. I really wish, for me, I wish it was spoken about more, but I would definitely recommend that they mention what a person can do with an English degree. Like the articles I get, for example, for a car company or something. There has to be somebody writing articles about whatever it is. Maybe just like show how it applies to the real world.

Dr. Hodgkin echoed Charlotte’s and Louisa’s sentiments by also mentioning the importance of explaining potential job prospects to prospective students:

I think tech comm is attractive to a lot of people of color because it's an area of liberal arts that provides us a marketable skill. I've gotta admit, I've been in the game a little bit. I'm gonna take some contract jobs during the summer because it's something that I can do. I think you look at African American history you'll see that it's something we've always been interested in—owning businesses. And so, if you're selling your program to people of color, it's cool to have the courses in diversity but you also need to tell them what they can do, what they can get out of the program. Not just to work in the IT industry or to work at Apple or Dell or wherever. They may want to start a business.

For most, going to college is mainly about a future career. This is especially true for students trying to move out of a lower socioeconomic group. For a student who has had
to justify her/his choice to go to college rather than immediately look for employment, it’s important to choose a major with solid job prospects. By focusing messaging on potential career opportunities, TPC program administrators can highlight technical and professional communication as an attractive field for those who need financial stability after graduation.

**Changing Department Culture**

Each TPC academic program has its own culture and established way of doing things. One example is the format of a master's degree thesis or PhD dissertation. These scholarly works typically follow a specific set of norms. There is little variation in the process and format of one thesis or dissertation to the next. When students want to do something out of this norm, they may be scolded or criticized. One example of how TPC program administrators can think outside of the box and use inclusive practices to enrich their programs was shown in a recent dissertation completed by Temptaous McCoy at Eastern Carolina University (McCoy, 2019). In her dissertation, McCoy uses African American Vernacular English in several places, and includes a digital chapter on the cultural phenomenon of TRAP Karaoke to show the value of black epistemologies in technical and professional communication. Because McCoy was allowed to bring her own cultural experience into her dissertation project, she was able to expand and enrich the experience of all involved and challenge established norms that may have limited other students of color.

As program administrators begin to encourage new ideas that challenge white cultural norms, some inclusive barriers will be lifted and more people will be able to participate in the scholarly conversation. Scholarship will be opened to new ideas, and
these new ideas will lead to new knowledge which is the goal of scholarly activity. This type of inclusive behavior doesn’t need to be limited only to a dissertation or thesis. Program administrators can expand this idea to every programmatic activity including developing curriculum, creating and refining degree programs, and even departmental social activities.

However, when program administrators begin implementing inclusive practices, such as McCoy’s previously discussed project, they will likely encounter challenges. For example, if a program has few faculty members from underrepresented backgrounds, there will be few or no faculty members familiar with topics, genres, or vernacular that students may want to incorporate into a work such as a thesis or dissertation. Also, upper-level administrators may push back against new ideas especially when traditional ideas and behaviors have always been “good enough.” Administrators can begin addressing these challenges by purposefully hiring faculty from diverse backgrounds. However, stubborn administrators that are not open to change may pose a greater threat. TPC program administrators may consider addressing this challenge by simply taking small steps forward and documenting progress and positive outcomes which can be presented to upper-level administrators as evidence of the benefits of inclusive practices.

Similar to McCoy’s idea of challenging genre norms in major milestone assignments, another way interview participants suggested to increase diversity and inclusion in TPC academic programs was for programs to be willing to change the social norms and culture of their programs. Bill said:

There's so much research that shows that oftentimes it's just an issue of culture
when students of color or students from some kind of minority culture are in the classroom. They're often viewed as being at a deficit in some way. Oftentimes they just think in a different way or they bring some kind of other asset to the classroom or to whatever the rhetorical or classroom situation is. I think sometimes we get so stuck in our one mode of “this is what a good scholar does,” whether that's a good tech writing scholar or a good scientist or whatever, that we fail to kind of see the ways in which students who think differently may be able to help grow the field or expand the ways we think about our field.

As Bill stated, students who don’t necessarily follow typical academic norms are actually an asset in the classroom. Technical communicators need to be able to understand their audience in order to communicate effectively. The more exposure a TPC student had to different ways of thinking, the better s/he will be when designing communication to be effective for specific or general audiences.

Program administrators need to accept that students of color may not follow some of the cultural norms of the academy. Administrators who are interested in inclusion need to make a conscious effort to lead their programs and departments towards deliberately identifying the ways in which cultural differences are dismissed. Program administrators can do this by intentionally building coalitions with marginalized people associated with their TPC program and department. Program administrators should seek out opinions and advice from people with diverse backgrounds who are stakeholders in the program including students, faculty, staff members, and other administrators. This can take the form of formal advisory groups, electronic surveys, informal conversations, or any variety of communication methods. Program administrators should remember that
seeking knowledge from marginalized people in TPC academic programs should not be a one-time activity but should be a regular occurrence that carries on indefinitely. Initially, such conversations may not yield significant results, but as trust is built over time, insights will likely be brought out that will change every aspect of the program.

An effort like the one described above is not purely altruistic. As Bill said, making space for students from different backgrounds may help expand the way TPC students, faculty, and administrators think about contemporary issues in the field. Creating inclusive spaces for students of color will allow students to bring new ideas and new ways of thinking to TPC programs. In an effort to remove barriers for students from underrepresented backgrounds, some TPC programs are trying to implement strategies to increase inclusiveness. Dr. Carson described changes made to their graduate admission process to address inclusion in their program:

We don't ask for GREs; we don't ask for certain things that... might turn off students of color because they seem rigged... which can be really intimidating especially for first-generation students whether they're students of color or identify as white first-generation students in grad school. It's extremely intimidating so we don’t ask for some of these things that might cause students to select themselves out of the running who might not apply.

Removing barriers such as standardized test requirements is one possible way to make a program more inclusive for students (Jencks & Phillips, 1998). Another way to increase inclusion in TPC programs is by including diverse scholarly voices in program curriculum. This means intentionally including the writing of people of color in course
reading assignments and lectures. Maria suggested some introspection when program administrators create their program curriculum:

What orientation or perspectives are your program privileging right now? Who's on your reading list for your comps? Is it all dead white guys? Whose voices are you including? That says a lot about whose voices and opinions you think matter.

Maria’s suggestion to include diverse voices in program curriculum could be a good start for many programs; however, changing the curriculum can be difficult. Virginia related an experience one of her faculty mentors had when trying to change program curriculum to include diverse voices:

I actually had a professor who wanted to create a class of children's literature but from African American writers or authors of color. She wanted to do that, but because [my university] wants to do things for the basketball team, the funding for the class was cut. I feel like there are teachers who try certain things, but with the university, other things come first and sports is one of them. So I would say it's kind of like a losing battle almost. Because [this city] is such a sports city, the sports want something the sports are gonna get it, regardless of if they're cutting funds from other departments that actually need it.

Virginia’s perception is that increasing diversity in the curriculum at her institution is very low on the priority list. Instead, she sees money put into things like athletics and not into the education she and the other students in her department are paying for. When ideas to increase inclusion are not supported in a department, students, like Virginia, notice—especially when other activities and programs seem to get more consideration,
higher priority, and more funding. This lack of priority and funding seems to be an especially difficult problem for humanities departments, such as English, which is where most TPC programs are housed (Dayley & Walton, 2018). With more funding and higher status in the university, English departments and TPC programs could certainly do more to increase inclusion. However, there is little to no guidance regarding ways in which program administrators can accomplish this. Future research projects on the status of English departments and their tendency to receive lower funding could prove useful not only for English departments and TPC programs in general, but also for efforts aimed at diversity and inclusion.

Another way interview participants suggested TPC program administrators can change the culture of a department is to shift focus away from simply bringing in a diverse group of students to focus specifically on inclusion within the current student body. In other words, increase inclusion in TPC programs by focusing on student retention and support. Dr. Williams mentioned this specifically:

I think there's a lot of focus on recruitment in terms of diversity. So how do we get people of color into our programs? I think what administrators can do is focus on retention and support. Because the thing is, people of color in academia, there's not that many of us so we talk to each other. So, if I know that my friend has gone to a program who is a person of color and has not been supported I'm not gonna want to go to that program. So, while people might focus on recruiting, I think focusing on support and retention so important. Supporting students when they get to the program. Supporting them as they do their project. Supporting them in their field. Supporting them when they graduate. Continuing that sort of
sustainable line of mentorship can actually really help recruitment efforts because we talk to each other and when we identify violent places we tell each other. It's not to say like all people of color know each other, but we have trained ourselves as a survival strategy to reach out to other people of color who are at places that we’re thinking of going and saying “How this has been for you?” That really does influence the decisions that we make about going places. I think the biggest advice I would have is for administrators to focus on how they're supporting the people of color who are already there. Those people of color will talk to the people of color who are not there but are somewhere else and we’ll know that your program is great about supporting people of color and therefore encourage other people to apply to that program. I think one of the arguments that people make is “Well we just didn't have any applicants that were diverse,” and it's like “Well, support people who are diverse, support diversity, and those applicants will come because those things don't go unnoticed.”

One way TPC program administrators can follow Dr. Williams’ advice would be to include students of color in departmental decisions and initiatives. This can include decisions about hiring, curriculum development, activities, and the types of clubs and organizations the department supports. Inclusion can also mean including the voices of students of color in decisions regarding the recruitment of new students into academic programs. This could be done by forming a student advisory committee. Program administrators could work with the registrar’s office to create a list of students from diverse backgrounds. The criteria could include many factors such as race and ethnicity, gender, disabilities, and several kinds of non-traditional students such as older students
and first-generation students. The students on this list would receive a special invite from the department head to participate on the advisory committee. Some form of incentive could be offered for participation such as a tuition waiver, scholarship, or even just a free breakfast at meetings.

Program administrators who form such a group should make sure there are regularly scheduled meetings with this group or they may risk making this kind of group ineffectual. However, there are several cautions program administrators should be aware of when using this kind of approach. These include overburdening students, especially students from underrepresented backgrounds, in an effort to get their input and putting pressure on students to think about oppressive practices when this may be traumatic or simply something they do not want to do. Program administrators can mitigate some of the negative effects of the creation of advisory committees by making sure they are clear that this is a purely voluntary activity, stating that there will be no consequences for not participating, and by making sure to check in with participants regularly to assess possible burnout.

**Recommendations**

In an effort to give readers actionable takeaways from this research project, the following section contains recommendations for TPC faculty and administrators regarding the creation of more diverse and inclusive academic programs. These recommendations are based on the reported findings from the interviews in this study.

**Recommendation 1: Designate a recruitment officer**

If a TPC program is interested in taking the steps necessary to create an effective
and targeted recruitment program, the first step is to designate someone to be in charge of recruitment efforts. Program administrators should either create a new position or designate a current faculty member as the program’s director of recruitment. There are several ways this may be done. The program could hire a new staff member with a reduced teaching load with a specific job description outlining recruitment duties. Administrators could also identify a current faculty member and reduce her/his teaching load with the intent of spending extra time working on recruitment initiatives. If the intent of the program is to increase diversity and inclusion, program administrators should strongly consider hiring a person of color for this position.

**Recommendation 2: Create a student recruitment advisory council**

Instead of trying to perform all recruitment activities themselves, TPC faculty and administrators should create an advisory council that works with program administrators in their recruitment efforts. This council should include a diverse group of students representing a variety of backgrounds and experiences. This council could be advised and facilitated by the program’s recruitment officer. Administrators should keep in mind that the students in this group should not be treated as monoliths and that their intersectionality will be a strength in the context of group decision-making.

All ideas regarding recruitment activities should be brought before this group. For example, if a new recruitment brochure is being designed, the advisory council should be involved in every aspect of the design process. What will the brochure say? What will the representation of students look like? Who will the brochure be given to? This will help identify areas of interest convergence and help administrators understand cultural contexts they may not be aware of. The advice of this council should be taken very
seriously. Program administrators should keep in mind that they have a very narrow perspective and that traditionally white middle and upper class values dominate the academy. Although not every idea presented by this council will work, trying new ideas brought forth by students of differing backgrounds fosters inclusiveness and will give students a sense of ownership of the program.

Along with assisting in recruitment ideas and activities, a diverse student recruitment advisory council could help program administrators identify areas where a program is not inclusive for students from underrepresented backgrounds. Students from diverse backgrounds can help identify areas where whiteness is an oppressive norm and help break that norm to allow for other ideas, beliefs, and conceptions. Administrators should give over some of the property rights of their programs and allow for students from diverse backgrounds to leave their mark on the program, making it more welcoming for future students.

**Recommendation 3: Community outreach**

With a recruitment officer in place, and a diverse and active student advisory council functioning, TPC programs can begin more effectively reaching out to prospective students. There are several ways this could be done.

1. Faculty and students can look for talented writers in entry-level courses and specifically invite them into the major at the university.

2. Recruitment officers can reach out to local high school teachers to inquire about strong writers who may be interested in a TPC major. Recruitment officers could
then reach out to these students directly, similar to how fine arts professors search for talent for their ensembles or how college coaches reach out to athletes.

3. TPC program recruitment personnel can identify local companies and organizations that would benefit from educated technical and professional writers. A partnership could be formed to train employees through a TPC degree program.

Perhaps the most important part of an outreach program is to educate people about the existence of technical and professional communication as a potential field of study. Most TPC students do not know that a TPC major exists or what a professional communicator does before matriculating (Dayley & Walton, 2018). By simply getting outside of the confines of the campus, program administrators will be able to spread the word about technical and professional communication and its potential employment opportunities for strong writers and communicators. Recruitment officers and TPC administrators can specifically focus on geographic areas where they know there will be a higher concentration of people from diverse backgrounds. This may be difficult as administrators may encounter different values and norms in these areas than the ones they are used to. This is where a diverse student advisory council can be helpful. Administrators should keep in mind that different social and cultural norms are what they are looking for when trying to create an inclusive environment.

**Recommendation 4: Don’t rely on admission offices or others to recruit students**

Program administrators are very busy. They likely have a full plate even without worrying about recruiting new undergraduate and graduate students. However, especially when thinking about diversity, neglecting recruitment can be detrimental. There are
several things program administrators should remember when considering recruitment activities.

1. Prospective students are generally unaware of TPC academic programs. The same can be said of admission and advising offices. Taking the time to educate admission officers and academic advisors will empower them to direct students to the TPC program at their respective institutions.

2. When program administrators are not directly involved in recruitment activities, they remain unaware of which students are choosing their programs, why they are choosing their programs, and how their programs may be excluding individuals from diverse backgrounds.

3. If a TPC program traditionally has a very low percentage of students from diverse backgrounds, that is unlikely to change without direct intervention and effort.

Even if recruitment is traditionally handled by an external office or groups of people, there are still things program administrators, faculty, recruitment officers, and students can do to attract students to TPC programs. These include outreach initiatives as discussed above as well as focusing on fostering inclusion.

**Recommendation 5: Focus on Inclusion**

Creating a more diverse academic program isn’t just about recruiting a diverse group of students. A much greater problem in colleges and universities than lack of diversity is in retaining and graduating the students of color they already have. Getting students through the door is ineffective at best and actively harmful at worst if students are not getting out with a degree and mutually constructed competencies that go with it. A student advisory
council can help begin to identify gaps in inclusion by pointing out areas where embedded whiteness has created an exclusionary environment.

Another way to foster inclusion is to hire faculty members who identify as persons of color and to support those faculty members. These faculty members can also help identify areas of exclusion as well as support students of color; however, this kind of work is labor intensive. Departments need to hire more than just one person of color (i.e., cluster hire) and should consider the work and effort needed to support students when assigning teaching, research, and service loads.

**Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research**

The following section discusses the limitations of the research discussed in this dissertation and offers recommendations for future research regarding diversity and inclusion in TPC academic programs.

**Limitations**

There were several limitations to the present study that may have affected the results. The first is that the number of participants in the study were limited. As with most qualitative research, the number of participants was not enough to yield generalizable results. However, as more studies like this one emerge, researchers will begin to get a clearer picture of the challenges persons of color face when enrolling in TPC academic programs.

Another limitation in this study is that all participants were either current TPC students or graduates of a TPC program. These students are successful in persisting in their programs which means they have likely had a good experience and would have
fewer criticisms related to exclusionary practices. Students who have dropped out of TPC programs were not included in this study. This means that this study is missing data from those who may have had experiences which compelled them to leave their TPC program.

The present dissertation is also broad in its scope. Future research projects may benefit from working with a narrower group. Undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty members are all at different stages in their academic careers, and each has a different set of experiences. In conducting this study, I noticed that each of these groups have very different perspectives and narrowing the scope to just one of these groups may yield more detailed qualitative results.

All of the participants in the study were studying or working at 4-year institutions. The experience of students at community colleges is likely very different. Study participants from institutions outside of the United States may also have a very different experience than the students in the present study.

Each of the participants in this study knew beforehand that the study was about diversity and inclusion. They likely deduced that the study would focus on the benefits of diverse and inclusive environments and they may have altered their answers because of this knowledge. It’s possible that participants either said things they knew I would want to hear or that they altered their answers intentionally to downplay the effect being from a diverse background had on their college experience.

**Recommendations for future research**

As discussed in Chapter two, research related to diversity and inclusion in TPC programs is still relatively rare. There is still much to be done to begin to understand the
effect of systemic racism on TPC academic programs and how this type of embedded exclusion affects the industry as a whole. Conducting more studies like the one done in this dissertation is one way researchers can progress knowledge in this area. Researchers need to continue to talk with more people of color to gather their stories and continue to identify patterns which may result in improvements in TPC programs and departments.

To address one of the major limitations of this study, students who have dropped out of TPC programs can be contacted to learn about their experiences in the program and why they left. This information may be difficult to get and would require cooperation from the university registrar's offices as well as carefully thought out questions to avoid possible trauma. The results of this kind of research project could yield very interesting results regarding why students leave TPC programs, and offer recommendations for changes that make programs more inclusive.

A more targeted study focusing specifically on the undergraduate experience or specifically on the graduate experience may help yield more generalizable results. In a study with a broad scope focusing on undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate populations, it may be difficult to ascertain what factors affected the population most. A more focused study could help identify more specific issues in a more specific population.

In the future, researchers should begin narrowing in on the experiences of people of color at different kinds of institutions, such as community colleges and people working in the industry at various companies and organizations. It may also be beneficial to conduct a longitudinal study following a group of students as they progress through
college and into a professional career.

**Conclusion**

When I was an admissions counselor, the people employed in our admissions office often talked about how we wanted to recruit a diverse class of students to our institution. We would hold events focused on specific groups of students trying to convince them to enroll in our institution. However, we never talked to students of color about their experiences, what made them decide to attend the institution, and what kind of exclusionary practices existed at the university. We avoided high schools in poorer areas because they didn’t have as many “college bound” students. We focused our recruitment efforts on those who understood the social and cultural norms of higher education. Never did we think about how we could alter our practices to make our university more inclusive and better able to support students of color.

Technical and professional communication is an ideal field to lead in issues of social justice. Technical communicators communicate complex information in a way that the reader can understand. They focus on audience and understanding. Essentially, they change the way information is communicated so that the intended audience can understand and take action to accomplish their own goals. They make the information more inclusive. TPC program administrators can do this in their programs. Program administrators should not make assumptions and avoid talking to constituents as we did when I was an admission counselor. They can seek out people of color who might benefit from a degree in technical and professional communication and remove barriers to allow them to enroll if they choose. TPC program administrators can talk to their current students about how to make programs inclusive. Most importantly, they can recognize the
valuable talents and skills students from underrepresented backgrounds bring with them, and design a program where those skills are valued and nurtured. They can create a place where different ideas, values, and cultures influence TPC academic programs in a positive way. Then these programs, in turn, will influence the field as a whole, completing the purpose of technical and professional communication—to effectively connect with any intended audience.
References


jump. Here’s what the data tell us. Retrieved from

https://www.chronicle.com/article/After-2016-Election-Campus/242577


of Research, Evaluation and Communication, National Science Foundation.

Bertrand, M., & Mullainathan, S. (2004). Are Emily and Greg more employable than
Lakisha and Jamal? A field experiment on labor market discrimination. American

Blackmon, S. (2004, October 7). Which came first?: On minority recruitment and
retention in the academy. In J. Dubinsky, & R. Judy (Eds.), Pathways to
Diversity. Paper presented at The 31st Annual Meeting of the Council For
Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication, Purdue University, West
Lafayette, IN (1-3).

technical and scientific communication: Toward a practical and dialogic validity.
Technical Communication Quarterly, 5(2), 125-149.

Blyler, N.R. (1998). Taking a political turn: The critical perspective and research in
doi:10.1080/10572259809364616

considerations in child advocate reports. Rhetoric, Professional Communication,


programs and student motivation in technical and professional communication.

*Programmatic Perspectives, 10(2), 5-47*


DeCuir, J. T., & Dixson, A. D. (2004). “So when it comes out, they aren’t that surprised that it is there”. *Educational Researcher, 33*(5), 26–31


family interactions, child aggression, and teenage aspirations. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly (Wayne State University. Press)*, 55(3), 224-249.


Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press.


Moore, K. (2013). Exposing hidden relations: Storytelling, pedagogy, and the study of


doi:10.1207/s15427625tcq1501_2


Curriculum Vitae

CHRISTOPHER M. DAYLEY
PO BOX 158 • MILLVILLE, UT 84326 • 702-353-9052 • CHRIS.DAYLEY@USU.EDU

BIOGRAPHY

Chris Dayley is a PhD candidate in Technical Communication and Rhetoric at Utah State University. Chris has over 12 years of professional experience in higher education and his scholarly work has been featured in the academic journals Technical Communication Quarterly and Programmatic Perspectives. Chris’ research focuses on issues of social justice with a specific emphasis on diversity and inclusion in technical and professional communication (TPC) academic programs. Chris also has teaching experience in a wide variety of media including face-to-face, online, and interactive broadcast courses.

EDUCATION

Ph.D. in Technical Communication and Rhetoric
Dissertation: Diversity and Inclusion in Technical and Professional Communication Academic Programs
Committee:
• Rebecca Walton (Chair)
• Ryan Moeller
• Avery Edenfield
• Jessica Rivera-Mueller
• Christy Glass

M.Ed. in Higher Education Administration
University of Nevada Las Vegas (Aug. 2007-Aug. 2009)

BSW in Social Work
University of Nevada Las Vegas (Aug. 1998-Dec. 2006)

AWARDS

2019 ATTW Research Methods Workshop Travel Award (National Award)
2017 ACM SIGDOC Graduate Student Research Competition Travel Award (National Award)
2016 English Department Scholarship

PUBLICATIONS (Independent Anonymous Reviewers)

Dayley, C. (2019). Student perceptions of diversity in technical and professional communication academic programs. Technical Communication Quarterly, Accepted for publication.


CONFERENCE

**ACADEMIC CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS**


**PROFESSIONAL CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS**


a career in testing? presented at the National College Testing Association conference. Scottsdale, AZ.


TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Utah State University, Logan, UT

ENGL 1010 Introduction to Writing: Academic Prose
Students learn skills and strategies for becoming successful academic readers, writers, and speakers. The course also teaches students how to read and write critically, generate and develop ideas, work through multiple drafts, collaborate with peers, present ideas orally, and use computers as writing tools.

Delivery methods:
• Concurrent Enrollment (high school course for college credit) via Interactive Video Conference (IVC)
• Online (developed course)

ENGL 2010 Intermediate Writing: Research Writing in a Persuasive Mode
Students learn writing of reasoned academic argument supported with appropriately documented sources. The course focuses on library and Internet research, evaluating and citing sources, collaboration, and oral presentations based on research.

Delivery method: Online (developed course)

ENGL 3080 Introduction to Technical Communication
Students are introduced to a variety of technical documents and technical writing techniques which focus on improving students' written and oral communication skills.

Delivery methods:
• Face-to-Face
• Blended Broadcast
• Online (developed course)

**USU 1010 University Connections**
This course provides an environment of challenge and support to help new students make a successful transition to USU. Class curriculum and activities provide an environment wherein students become familiar with the broad academic, social, and cultural opportunities offered by USU and the surrounding community.

Delivery method: Face-to-Face

**University of Nevada Las Vegas, Las Vegas, NV**

**LCE 231 Ethical Leadership Experience**
A survey of fundamental leadership theory and skills. Students apply knowledge gained from the course directly to their roles as leaders on and off campus.

Delivery method: Face-to-Face

**Invited Guest Lectures:**

**University of Arkansas Little Rock**
Survey Research Methods (Spring, 2016)
Invited by: Joanne Liebman Matson

**Utah State University**
Quantitative and Technical Material (Fall, 2015)
Invited by: Emily January Petersen

Social Change and Professional Communication (Fall, 2015)
Invited by: Rebecca Walton

Responsive Web Design & Technical Communication (Spring, 2014)
Invited by: Rebecca Walton

Analyzing Cover Letter Examples (Summer, 2013)
Invited by: Emily January Petersen

---

**SERVICE**

**Committee Participation**

**Student Recruitment Committee** (Oct. 2013 – May 2015)
Utah State University (English Department)

**Academic Action Committee** (Sept. 2011 – Dec. 2013)
Utah State University

**Retention Committee** (Sept. 2011 – Sept. 2012)
Utah State University

**ADA Compliance Committee** (Sept. 2011 – Sept. 2012)
Utah State University

**Alternate Admissions Committee** (Aug. 2010 – May 2011)
University of Nevada Las Vegas

**Service to the Field**
CPTSC Conference Volunteer (Fall, 2015)
Logan, UT

ATTW Conference Proposal Screening (Fall, 2012)
Logan, UT

Professional Service

Governing Board Member (2019-Present)
National College Testing Association

Online Proctoring Standards Development Committee (2019-Present)
National College Testing Association (Co-Chair)

Growth and Outreach Committee (2018-Present)
National College Testing Association

Community Service

Assistant Scoutmaster (Scouts BSA) (2016-2019)

Facilitator

WORK EXPERIENCE

Testing Center Manager June 2016-Present
Utah State University Academic and Instructional Services Logan, UT

• Provide management and visionary leadership for large testing center serving the entire campus community and approx. 30 branch campuses
• Supervise 1-3 full-time staff members and 30-50 student staff members
• Manage annual budget of $300,000-$500,000

E-Learning Support Coordinator April 2015-June 2016
Utah State University Academic and Instructional Services Logan, UT

• Collaborate with student service campus partners to develop, implement, and assess programs and services to support E-learner success, retention, and completion
• Develop new and innovative services to support students taking online courses.

Student Services/Recruitment Coordinator May 2011-April 2015
Utah State University Regional Campuses and Distance Education Logan, UT

• Lead all student service efforts for distance education students, serving approx. 12,000 students
• Develop and administer student support programs
• Serve as the Distance Education Liaison on the University Student Services Directors Council
• Oversee the activities of 20+ academic advisors throughout Utah
• Coordinate Regional Campus and Distance Ed. recruitment and retention efforts
• Develop, publish, and track student surveys, implement improvements based on data
• Create, advise, and coordinate Regional Campus and Distance Ed. Student Government
Admission Counselor  Aug. 2007-May 2011
UNLV Office of Admissions  Las Vegas, Nevada

- Plan and conduct recruitment events, marketing strategies and travel to assigned areas
- Coordinate and facilitate recruitment presentations to prospective students and families
- Evaluate applications and assist prospective students through the application process
- Develop marketing materials (print and electronic) for the university
- Manage a group of student workers focused on using electronic media for recruitment
- Counsel and advise prospective international students
- Develop and implement a recruitment plan for high-achieving students
- Coordinate the University’s Faculty Senate Alternate Admission Committee