

CONCEPTUALIZING THE LEARNING OF
FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS OF COLOR
IN TWO COLLEGE CLASSROOMS
DEDICATED TO THE STUDY OF HUMAN DIVERSITY

by

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ABSTRACT

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Dianne Grace Delima

While it is well established that White students have positive experiences in taking diversity courses, little is known about the experiences of first-generation college students of color in these courses. This study addressed this gap by examining the learning experiences of 10 first-generation college students of color in two diversity courses in a 4-year public university. The study aim was to explore whether and how these first-generation college students of color drew from their prior knowledge and experiences to engage with the courses' subject matter, and whether and how they used the knowledge gained in these courses in their lives beyond school.

This study was informed by a three-part conceptual framework emphasizing faculty teaching practices, sociocultural features of students' lives shaping their classroom learning, and transfer of knowledge from one learning site to another. I interviewed 10 first-generation college students of color, enrolled in one of two diversity

courses and observed their learning. I learned that participants drew from their classmates' prior knowledge and experiences to engage with and get a foothold on the diversity course content since often classmates' lives offered examples for new ways of thinking about diversity issues and concepts. Moreover, participants drew from their own prior knowledge and experiences to offer counterarguments challenging classmates' inaccurate views of class topics, thus relying on their lives as valuable resources for framing such arguments. Additionally, participants thought about how the knowledge they gained from the courses related to their lives beyond school; they did this by sharing knowledge with family members and friends as a way to expand their thinking of their world. They also used the knowledge gained from the courses to think about the circumstances of their neighborhoods, how to help their neighbors, and how to better support those they want to help in their future careers.

Recommendations were made for (a) new research on the experiences of first-generation college students of color in diversity courses, (b) changes in institutional policy toward supporting these students' learning in college classrooms, and (c) development of classroom (instructional) and institutional practices for supporting these students' learning.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this manuscript to my family. To my Lolas and Lolos who cared for me while growing up in the Philippines and who worked hard until their bodies could no longer take on the job; I only wish you got to see me finish this. To my mother, Georgia Pecho Delima, who has made several personal sacrifices for me and my family so that we could succeed in pursuing our dreams. Her extreme love and work ethic are the very definitions of selflessness and loyalty. To my father, Claro Delima, who taught me the importance of an education and has driven me to continue to learn and to achieve academically. To my sister, Clarisse Delima, whose continued support and care during my graduate school career has been monumental in the completion of this dissertation.

I also dedicate this manuscript to all young women immigrants who are inspired to dream big dreams. Who would have thought that a little girl from the Philippines could achieve this? I do this for you.

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D.G.D

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Globalization in the workplace and society demands that [undergraduates] be effective in understanding the issues surrounding diversity, value the impacts of diversity in their environments and develop the cultural competency to interact in these increasingly diverse work and social environments.

– UCLA Academic Senate on Arguments for a Diversity Course Requirement (as reported in Inside Higher Ed, April 13, 2015)

Diversity courses are often referred to as coursework that focuses on the history and experiences of various cultural, racial, ethnic, gender, socioeconomic, and religious groups in the United States and around the world (Nelson Laird, Engberg, & Hurtado, 2005). Such courses can be offered by a variety of program areas in the humanities, social sciences, and sciences. Higher education faculty and administrators have emphasized undergraduate students' learning of diversity, via diversity courses, due to their belief that such courses will encourage students to think about issues related to power, inequality, and marginalization. As the quote from a UCLA Academic Senate document, above, demonstrates, other learning benefits of diversity courses highlight the possibility that students become "effective" and "competent" in issues impacting diverse populations (Jaschik, 2015). The underlying assumption here is that students' learning of diversity can aid in their *thinking* about diverse peoples, issues, and viewpoints. Diversity

courses can help students improve their abilities to analyze and appreciate the lived experiences and knowledge of people throughout the world. Faculty also believe that diversity courses may provide students with opportunities to develop their abilities to interact with members of diverse populations and communities. Thus, in taking diversity courses, students can develop knowledge they can use outside of the classroom, especially in engaging with individuals of varied backgrounds and cultures.

Some scholars, however, have expressed doubts about the value of students' learning of diversity as represented in these courses. Some faculty at UCLA, for example, have argued that diversity courses might impact students of color negatively. They argue that by "exposing students to perspectives of other groups that differ from their own, the diversity course may give the students an opportunity to stay in their own identity group, [creating] a 'ghettoization' effect" (Jaschik, 2015, para. 11). For example, some faculty suggest that were students of color to only take diversity courses that relate to their own racial or ethnic background and experiences, they would not expand their learning of diversity. These faculty further warn that this clustering of students of color in diversity courses may undermine the aims that these courses seek to achieve. Such views highlight the contested nature of the term "diversity" and the need for greater clarity about the overall benefit toward students' learning in diversity courses.

I provide the aforementioned definition of what a diversity course is, and some arguments around whether diversity courses should be offered, to illustrate key points surrounding the value of such courses and to highlight how the aims of diversity courses may manifest as students learn subject matter content in these courses. In that regard, my study attempts to understand whether and how a particular subset of undergraduate

students—first-generation college students of color—learn the subject matter being taught in these courses. Below, I explain why a focus on first-generation college students of color in diversity courses is worthwhile.

Current Treatment of Students' Learning in Diversity Courses

A new approach to understanding the learning experiences of first-generation college students of color in diversity courses is needed for two reasons. First, the current literature on diversity courses in higher education often compares and contrasts the learning experiences of White students, students of color, and first-generation students in these courses (e.g., Bowman, 2009; Denson, 2009; Zúñiga, Williams, & Berger, 2005).¹ Drawing such sharp distinctions can mask more subtle variations and overlaps among them.

Second, the emphasis on contrasts among student groups displaces a different angle of inquiry: What goes on *inside* diversity courses? For example, we know that diversity courses yield some positive outcomes, including that they may foster the development of students' problem-solving and communication capabilities, positive or accepting outlooks on diverse populations, increased awareness of social issues impacting diverse populations, and increased political and social cooperation with diverse individuals (Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez, 2004; Hurtado, 2007; Nelson Laird et al., 2005).² Some scholars have also noted that in some cases, students who take diversity courses may not learn anything new or different in these courses than they do in other courses

¹ The literature has also considered the role of gender in students' learning in diversity courses (Bowman, 2009).

² I discuss these outcomes and my understanding of "capabilities" in Chapter II.

that they take. In order to explore further whether in fact this is the case—and if so, how such outcomes may come to be—we need to have a close look at the insides of diversity courses to assess whether students from diverse populations learn in them, and if so, what they learn or gain. This is a key aim of my study, though focused on the learning, in diversity courses, of first-generation college students of color.

The Need for a Better Approach to Students' Learning in Diversity Courses

I believe an understanding of the learning of first-generation college students of color in diversity courses may give us insight into whether and how their prior knowledge—or knowledge that students have acquired throughout their lives, based on their previous academic, social, and cultural experiences (thus, knowledge that shapes students' conceptions and preconceptions of subject matter, see Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000; Flavell & Wellman, 1975; Shulman, 2004a)—enters into their academic learning via their classroom experiences. Several K-12 researchers have addressed how prior knowledge can help students of color build mental bridges between what they already know and complex academic ideas (Ladson-Billings, 1996; Lee, 2007; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Moses & Cobb, 2001). However, with few exceptions (Ives & Castillo-Montoya, 2020; Neumann, 2014; Pallas & Neumann, 2019), this topic has not been widely addressed in higher education. A study that explores such issues in the context of higher education might further illuminate the potential contributions of students' learning in college classrooms.

Personal reasons have also prompted my study of first-generation college students of color. I have prior experience working with this population at the elementary school

and college levels, as a teacher, tutor, and student life advisor. Through this work, I have seen the potential for these students to make personal and cultural connections with the subject matter they are learning in the classroom. I am interested in exploring whether and how such connections may manifest themselves within subject-matter learning of diversity courses in college classrooms. I address the potential limitations of my prior experiences in Chapter III.

Second, I am interested in first-generation college students in particular because the higher education research literature tends to portray these students' experiences in a relatively negative light, without attending to the positive features of their backgrounds and how these may promote their learning. For example, in focusing mainly on these students' struggle in transitioning into college, and also on their low college retention rates, we are likely to overlook the value of these students' prior knowledge and experiences in promoting their learning (Brost & Payne, 2011; Choi, 2005; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2015). Only by considering the prior knowledge and experiences that these students bring into the classroom do we stand a chance to appreciate their positive attributes and the useful resources (e.g., prior knowledge) they may bring to their college experiences.

To summarize: Based on my prior experiences and my understanding of the extant research, I aimed to examine the learning of first-generation college students of color in diversity courses. The following thoughts, which undergird my research questions, guided this study:

- I suspect that first-generation college students of color bring valuable prior knowledge and experiences to the classroom as they learn the content of diversity courses.
- I suspect that something is happening in the classroom—as students engage with the content, as teachers support their efforts to do so, as students engage with their classmates about course content—that leads these students to make connections between their prior knowledge and their efforts to understand the subject matter of their diversity courses. Relatedly, I understand that not all prior knowledge can be helpful in students’ learning; but I suspect that some of the prior knowledge that students pull out from their life experiences will bear on their learning of subject matter in these courses.
- I suspect that diversity courses may help first-generation college students of color learn important knowledge that they can apply elsewhere in their lives.

With these conjectures in mind, this study explored the extent to which first-generation college students of color are finding meaningful learning experiences—or experiences in the classroom whereby learners purposefully integrate new knowledge into their existing knowledge (Novak, 1994, 2002)—in their diversity courses. It also considers selected dynamics, around the prior knowledge of first-generation college students of color, that is especially central to their learning.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided my research are as follows:

1. What can first-generation college students of color come to learn—for example, about diversity, themselves, their communities, and/or the world—in a diversity course?
 - a. What kinds of ideas and modes of thinking, offered in these courses, do they find to be meaningful? How might these ideas, or their presentation (for example, via instruction), be characterized?
 - b. What kinds of ideas and modes of thinking gained in these courses do they find to be most challenging? How might these ideas, or their presentation (for example, via instruction), be characterized?
2. What, if any, kinds of prior knowledge do first-generation students of color view as especially meaningful in their learning of subject matter in diversity courses?
3. What, if any, aspects of their learning of diversity content do first-generation college students of color identify as relevant to their current lives outside of class (e.g., on campus and in their communities)?

I close this section with further specification of the population with which this study was concerned: first-generation college students of color.

I define first-generation college students of color as non-White students (i.e., they may be African American/Black, Latino/Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American/Native Hawaiian) who seek to graduate from a baccalaureate institution. These students have at least one parent who has not received a baccalaureate degree from a 4-year accredited college or university. Some past studies have applied the first-generation label to college students whose parent(s) have no exposure to any

postsecondary education (e.g., Horn, Nuñez, & Bobbit, 2000; Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005). However, my definition includes students whose parent(s) had some exposure to some aspect of postsecondary education throughout their lifetime (e.g., from having been enrolled in a community college or vocational/technical college). I used a broader definition of first-generation college students of color because, by definition, parents with perhaps some—though limited (e.g., one year)—exposure to postsecondary education will have less knowledge about going to college than parents who complete undergraduate programs, thus earning a college degree; the former parents will have less to draw on, about going to college, than the latter toward guiding their children.

Chapter Conclusion

Diversity courses in higher education aim to develop students' understanding of diverse peoples and experiences in society. However, fulfillment of this aim is relative to each student enrolled in these courses, as varying life and college-going experiences can shape how individuals learn ideas related to diversity. My study sought to explore what one subset of the undergraduate population—first-generation college students of color—brought into their learning of diversity content, and what, if anything, these students gained (in terms of knowledge learned, or perhaps personal changes that students underwent) from enrolling in a diversity course. With this aim, I turn now to Chapter II, where I provide a review of the literature on diversity courses and first-generation college students' learning in these courses.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In the previous chapter, I presented my reasons for carrying out a study on the learning of first-generation college students of color in diversity courses. In brief, I hope to improve our understanding of these students' learning of subject matter in the diversity courses they are taking. To provide the background of available research on this topic, I now review higher education research on diversity courses and first-generation college students of color.

Literature Review Process

My literature review was based on research archived in the following databases: JSTOR, ERIC, Sage, Digital Dissertations, Project Muse, ProQuest, Education Full Text, Education Research Complete, and Teachers College Library Super Search. In addition to conducting these database searches, I examined the following journals: *The Journal of Higher Education*, *Research in Higher Education*, *The Review of Higher Education*, *Higher Education*, *Journal of College Student and Development*, *Harvard Educational Review*, and *Review of Educational Research*. I carried out the search in two parts. First, to identify and summarize research on diversity courses, I used the following terms: “diversity courses in higher education in the U.S.,” “ethnic studies,” “multicultural

studies,” “world studies,” “Black Studies,” “African American Studies,” “Latino Studies,” “Chicano Studies,” “Asian American Studies,” “LGBTQ Studies,” “Gender Studies,” “colleges,” “and universities.” In this iteration, I identified over 100 empirical journal studies, six books, and four reports on diversity courses in 4-year colleges and universities. Second, to identify and summarize research on first-generation college students of color in diversity courses, I used the following search terms: “first-generation college student of color in diversity courses” and “first-generation student of color teaching and learning in diversity courses.” Through this second phase, I identified 24 empirical journal studies that *only* discussed first-generation college students of color in diversity courses. There was no overlap between this second search and the first search.

My search of the literature led me to the following definition of diversity courses: courses that focus on students’ learning of various racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, gender, religious, national groups and individuals, as well as their experiences, cultures, and experiences (Nelson Laird, Engberg, & Hurtado, 2005). Some of these courses can examine a single population (e.g., African American History) or examine the intersection of identities and experiences (e.g., Race, Gender, Class, and Sexuality in Film). Topics of diversity courses ranged from U.S.-based (e.g., the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S.) to international (e.g., Indigenous Communities in South America, or Colonialism and the Slave Trade in the Caribbean) (Association of American Colleges and Universities [AAC&U], 2016). The research has shown that the aim of these courses is to expand students’ understanding of people who are different from themselves and to support their cultivation of empathy with diverse peoples (Chang, 2002).

I organized my review of the literature in two parts. Part I, *Diversity Courses in Higher Education: What We Know*, lays out the historical and political forces that have shaped these courses. This section also discusses the teachers of diversity courses and how these courses have been incorporated into the general education curriculum of colleges and universities and summarizes the criticism that these courses have attracted over the years. The section then outlines findings from extant research on students' learning in diversity courses, including review of studies identifying the differences in the learning experiences of White students, students of color, and first-generation college students of color. Overall, this section summarizes the ways whereby students' learning experiences in diversity courses can vary by student subgroup.

The research literature suggests that students who take diversity courses gain knowledge for thinking about and interacting with their peers and communities. However, the research literature also highlights what has not been studied to date, namely the subject-matter learning experiences of first-generation college students of color in diversity courses. As I explain later in this chapter, the pursuit of this topic requires a conceptual framework that differs from frameworks currently in use in higher education research. As such, I conclude this chapter with a *Conceptual Framework* (Part II) fit to the topic of my study.

Part I: Diversity Courses in Higher Education: What We Know

Part I summarizes the extant literature on diversity courses—its development in higher education, the teachers of these courses, and students' experiences and learning in them. I end Part I with a discussion of the limitations of the literature.

History and Incorporation of Diversity Courses in Higher Education

Diversity courses date back to the U.S. Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Empowered by the movement's social and political influence, college students began demanding academic coursework that focused on race, ethnicity, culture, and gender from the perspectives of marginalized populations (Brint et al., 2009; Butler & Schmitz, 1992; St. Clair & Kishimoti, 2010). The increased presence of faculty of color and women faculty during this period also spurred the inclusion of coursework on these topics (Gurin, 1999; Olzak & Kangas, 2008). Such academic demands from faculty and students set the groundwork toward inclusion of diversity content in the curriculum.

In 1968, San Francisco State University became the first institution in the United States to initiate the teaching and learning of diversity as a curriculum topic area by developing a model for higher education's implementation of courses that focused on race, ethnicity, culture, and gender. San Francisco State University formed the College of Ethnic Studies, which became the primary outlet for research on and teaching of diversity content (Ginsberg, 2008; Ravitch, 2005). The first diversity courses taught at San Francisco State University were interdisciplinary, though drawing on the disciplinary lenses of the social sciences and the humanities (Bataille, Carranza, & Lisa, 1996).

In 1978, the landmark Supreme Court case, *Regents of University of California v. Bakke*, laid the necessary groundwork for diversity courses to enter the general education curriculum and shape undergraduates' learning. In his concluding remarks for this case, Justice Lewis Powell affirmed that diversity is a compelling interest in the education of undergraduate students because it provides for the "robust exchange of ideas" and maximizes "the learning experience for all students" (Alger et al., 2000, p. 2). With this

ruling in place, higher education faculty and administrators began to create opportunities for expanding students' social and academic engagement with diversity on campuses across the United States. Such opportunities included the spread of diversity courses in the social sciences, humanities, and professional fields, such as law and medicine (Marbley, Burley, Bonner, & Ross, 2010; Meacham, 2009). During this period, faculty also engaged in concerted efforts to establish programs of study and departments focused on the experiences of historically marginalized groups (e.g., African American Studies, Latino Studies, Gender Studies, and Women's Studies), thus exceeding attention to courses alone (Hu-DeHart, 1993).

A key target for the location of diversity courses was the general education curriculum, viewed as the core of the undergraduate curriculum and often pursued by students in their first 2 years of college (Chang, 2002). Diversity courses entered the general education curriculum usually in one of two ways: (a) undergraduate students were required to take a designated diversity course (e.g., a course focusing on race, ethnicity, gender, or other social and group differences), or (b) they were offered "a wide range of approved [diversity] courses that [fulfilled] the diversity requirement" from which they could choose (Chang, 2002, p. 22). The aims of both versions were to provide undergraduate students with an academic and social understanding of the diversity that exists, and has historically existed, in society and to develop students' empathy for diverse peoples and cultures, and their abilities to engage with diversity issues and diverse populations.

Over the years, diversity courses rapidly increased. By 2015, 52% of baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral/research institutions in the United States had

implemented requirements for their undergraduate students to take a course on international diversity, while another 33% of these institutions required students to take a course on U.S. diversity (AAC&U, 2016). Diversity courses have also been cast as elective courses, or as courses taken voluntarily and falling outside general education and major requirements. This has had the effect of further expanding opportunities for undergraduate students to study and hopefully learn about diversity. In 2015, approximately 87% of baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral/research institutions had diversity courses designated as electives (AAC&U, 2016).

Although there has been massive growth in diversity courses in higher education, the faculty who teach these courses have been limited largely to early-career women faculty and faculty of color (Maruyama & Moreno, 2000; Peters-Davis & Shultz, 2005). Some authors have said this is because these faculty are more likely than their White male colleagues to have personal experiences that shape their academic interests in teaching these courses (Brayboy, 2003; Griffin, Bennet, & Harris, 2011; Griffin & Reddick, 2011). For this reason, women faculty and faculty of color teaching diversity courses are more likely to incorporate perspectives from diverse racial, ethnic, and gendered groups in their teaching (Maruyama & Moreno, 2000; Milem, 1997).

Diversity courses and the faculty who teach them have not been exempt from criticism. Critics of diversity courses have argued that because diversity courses emphasize learning about race and ethnicity, they encourage undergraduate students of color to isolate themselves socially from their White peers (D'Souza, 1991; Schlesinger, 1998). Critics have also argued that students may be indoctrinated into the politicized views of the faculty teaching these courses (Kimball, 1991; Stake, 2006). As such,

faculty have been accused of not encouraging students to think broadly about race and other factors bearing on social difference.

In response to such criticisms, a number of education scholars have argued that diversity courses provide undergraduate students of color and White students with opportunities to learn about the histories and experiences of people who are different from themselves, thus exposing students to ideas that expand their thinking of their world (for examples, see Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez, 2004; Sleeter, 2011). Moreover, advocates for diversity courses have argued that these courses provide undergraduate students with academic opportunities to develop their cultural, racial, and ethical understandings. Such opportunities can encourage students to become politically involved with issues that shape the lives and livelihoods of individuals of highly varied backgrounds—racially, culturally, religiously, linguistically, and in other ways.

The expanding literature on this topic further emphasizes the following positive outcomes of students, of all backgrounds, taking diversity courses: (a) the creation of a more positive campus climate; (b) the development of students' analytical and problem-solving capabilities; (c) cooperation with peers outside the classroom; (d) heightened civic engagement among students; (e) development of collaborative behaviors amongst classmates in learning diversity; and (f) increased awareness of students' personal beliefs and attitudes towards diversity. The following sections elaborates on these findings.

Campus Climate

Some scholars suggest that diversity courses on a college campus can communicate to students the institution's commitment to valuing students and faculty from different backgrounds and accepting, openly, the knowledge and experiences they

bring to the campus (Gurin, 1999; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Hurtado et al., 1998; Nelson Laird, 2011; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Students perceive their campus as having a positive climate when such academic and social commitments to diversity are present (Gurin, 1999; Mayhew, Grunwald, & Dey, 2005). Diversity courses can therefore be indicative of an institution's commitment to the diversity of views and experiences that exist on campus. They also can demonstrate an institution's awareness of the contributions of diversity to the campus culture and students' learning environment.

Development of Capabilities

Students' exposure to diversity content can also enhance their development of particular capabilities such as critical and contextual thinking.¹ For example, by encouraging students to learn about the histories and lived experiences of diverse populations in society (Cole & Zhou, 2014b; Hurtado, 2004, 2007), diversity courses are well positioned to push students to analyze and otherwise consider issues that impact these populations, comparatively and in nuanced ways (Bowman, 2010b; Goodman & Bowman, 2014; Hogan & Mallot, 2005; Johnson & Lollar, 2002; Stake, 2006). For example, students in diversity courses might learn about the social and political forces that gave rise to the Civil Rights movement and they might consider the long-term implications of policies invoked prior to and during this era. Students may also question the ways in which the language and practices of federal public education policies may have an impact on particular racial and ethnic groups in the United States. By pushing

¹ I use the term "capabilities" (rather than skills, functions, or capacities) because this term most captures the potential for a person to develop cognitive growth and moral character and reasoning (Nussbaum, 2000).

their thinking in such ways, students may learn to reason through how issues, such as the ones mentioned above, may arise and potentially impact people.

Related to this point, Pascarella, Palmer, Moye, and Pierson (2001) identified relationships between undergraduate students' abilities to think critically—which they defined as ways of thinking that help students assess an issue and provide sound reasoning as to its solution—and their experiences with diversity inside and outside the classroom.² The authors found that students who took a diversity course and had informal conversations with peers outside the classroom about topics of diversity were more successful than those who did not take the course in developing their critical thinking. The former also demonstrated greater awareness of issues that impact individuals and groups of diverse backgrounds. This study, along with others of this genre (e.g., Chang, 2002; Goodman & Bowman, 2014), provide useful support for the claim that diversity courses can impact students' development of critical thinking.

Students' development of capabilities, such as critical thinking, can also lead to their increased likelihood of getting better grades. For example, Herzog (2010) found that students who took a diversity course within their first year of college were also more likely to have better GPAs than their peers who had not taken a diversity course. This finding suggests that, when students are able to expand on their critical thinking

² The authors used data from the Wasbash National Study of Liberal Arts Education, a study of 949 students attending 17 4-year colleges and universities in the US, which utilized the CAAP Critical Thinking Test as its instrument for measuring students' critical thinking skills. The test is a "32-item, 40-minute multiple-choice test that measures students' skills in clarifying, analyzing, evaluating, and extending arguments. The Critical Thinking Test consists of four passages that are representative of the kinds of issues commonly encountered in a postsecondary curriculum. Each passage presents one or more arguments in a variety of formats, including case studies, debates, dialogues, overlapping positions, statistical arguments, experimental results, or editorials" (ACT CAAP, 2015, p. 2).

capabilities, they may be able to apply these same capabilities to other coursework while in college and thus do better academically overall.

However, the literature has also noted that on some occasions, students may demonstrate minimal or no gains in the capabilities (e.g., critical thinking) attributed to diversity courses (Bowman, 2009; Gottfreson et al., 2008; Pascarella et al., 2001). Three reasons have been offered for this. First, the way in which diversity is being taught may be inadequate (Lee, Williams, & Kilaberia, 2012; Loes, Pascarella, & Umbach, 2012; Pascarella et al., 2001). For example, if teachers are not providing students with sufficiently meaningful learning materials, then students may not be exposed to content that can expand their thinking around diversity. Second, students may not be provided with sufficient opportunities to engage in discussion with each other in the classroom about their views and experiences as they relate to the course content. Students who are not given opportunities to share their knowledge and experiences through peer-to-peer discussion or student-instructor dialogue may not become adequately engaged with the topic of diversity (Gurin et al., 2004; Hurtado, 2005; Tatum, 1992). Third, developing one's understanding of diversity is a process that is rarely accomplished in one class and in one semester; thus, a single diversity course may start a process of enhanced critical thought, but not see it through to conclusion (Bowman, 2009, 2010a; Case, 2007a, 2007b; Henderson-King & Kaleta, 2000). In order to encourage students to develop thoughtful and critical views that are substantiated by evidence and supported by meaningful analysis, instructors must provide them with sustained intellectual and social experiences for engaging with others and with ideas related to diversity (Tatum, 1992).

Civic Engagement

Some scholars also have suggested that, by taking a diversity course, students may become more civically engaged on campus and in their community (Astin, 1993b; Cole & Zhou, 2014b; Gurin et al., 2004; Lott, 2013). Civic engagement entails involvement, by individuals, with different communities toward improving their social, economic, and political conditions (Adler & Goggin, 2005; Ehrlich, 2000). This kind of engagement can occur as students taking a diversity course grow in awareness of issues impacting the lives and livelihoods of diverse individuals. They may then feel compelled to support these individuals in addressing, for example, political issues or social injustices in their communities (Zúñiga, Williams, & Berger, 2005). In further support of this finding, a study, carried out at the University of Michigan (Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez, 2004) found that students who engaged in curricular and co-curricular cross-racial dialogue developed “democratic sentiments” (p. 24)—or beliefs towards civic participation—that shaped their interests in promoting racial and ethnic understanding and cooperation on campus and in their community.

Cooperation With Diverse Peers Outside of the Classroom

Students who take diversity courses may also become more cooperative with peers who are different from themselves (Chappell, 2014; Engberg & Hurtado, 2011; Henderson-King & Kaleta, 2000; Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn, & Terenzini, 1996). Becoming “cooperative” entails students developing a sense of “communality” with their peers and developing openness to personally and socially sharing their experiences and perspectives with others, especially those unlike themselves (Martínez Alemán & Salkever, 2001, p. 112). Communality can lead students to “organize

themselves, communicate, exchange goods, arrange social services [and] determine formal protections [that] reflect the value of the realized individual for society” (Martínez Alemán, 2001, p. 383). By developing communality, students can advocate for social justice causes, such as ensuring equal pay or bringing awareness to the problem of police brutality. Such communal efforts demonstrate the extent to which students may apply what they learn from diversity courses to their lives outside of the classroom (Denson, 2009; Hall & Theriot, 2016).

It has been pointed out, too, that quite the opposite effect can result whereby students who take diversity courses become less cooperative with diverse peers (Case, 2007a, 2007b). Researchers have posited that this can occur among students who lack positive social interactions with peers—for example, by engaging in disruptive dialogues—outside of the classroom (Chang, 2001, 2002; Hurtado, 2005; Mayhew & Engberg, 2010). In having these negative experiences with their peers, students may become hesitant in engaging with issues concerning diverse populations.

Increased Awareness of Personal Beliefs and Attitudes Towards Diversity

Students’ learning about diversity, framed historically and politically, can lead them to shift their attitudes about issues such as immigration, education, and welfare for poor and marginalized peoples in the United States (Brown, 2016; Denson & Bowman, 2017; Engberg, 2004; Lake & Rittschof, 2012; Mayhew, Seifert, & Pascarella, 2012). By considering their personal beliefs and values in light of new understandings of diversity, students may become aware of their biases. They then may become motivated “to promote inclusion and social justice” among their family and friends, as well as in the campus community and society at large (Zúñiga et al., 2005, p. 674). In a study of 250

undergraduate students from a single higher education institution, Hogan and Mallot (2005) found that the students who had taken at least one diversity course focusing on gender, race, and ethnicity became more aware of the “prevalence of discrimination [and made] temporary improvements in reducing [personal] antagonism” (p. 122) in their personal lives and in their relations with peers. Thus, in learning about experiences and issues affecting diverse communities, students may undergo positive change in their prior beliefs and attitudes towards matters of diversity.

However, the literature has also suggested that students who took only one diversity course may experience no change or minimal change in their beliefs toward diversity (Bowman, 2010a, 2010b; Case, 2007a; Henderson-King & Kaleta, 2000). This may occur when diversity courses fail to create the disequilibrium needed to spur learners to develop new mental maps for thinking through topics and perspectives—in this case, about diversity—differing from those that they bring into class from their personal lives (Gurin et al., 2002; Piaget, 1971, 1975). Some students who take diversity courses may even develop negative attitudes toward diverse populations (Bowman, 2012; Case, 2007b). As these students learn more about the histories and experiences of populations different from their own, they may become more fearful of these groups and develop defensive behaviors towards them (Bowman, 2012; Case, 2007b). Such change towards negative and defensive behaviors suggests that, rather than question their prior beliefs, students may instead develop heightened awareness of their prior views and convictions.

Students Learning Diversity From Each Other

Scholars have suggested that peer-to-peer collaborations are important to how students learn subject matter related to diversity (Kilgo, Sheets, & Pascarella, 2015; Kuh,

2008; Nelson Laird et al., 2005). In such learning, individual students are not only responsible for their own learning but also for the learning of their peers in the classroom (Machemer & Crawford, 2007). Collaborations of these sorts may be spurred through small-group discussions, group projects, and study groups (Cabrera et al., 2002). In these contexts, the teachers often act as guides, asking students questions and facilitating peer-to-peer discussions related to diversity topics (e.g., racism, immigration, etc.) (King, 1990).

Students who learn diversity content in this collaborative manner appear to grow in their openness to their peers' opinions of the topics being discussed (often different from their own) and are apt to feel that they are in an inclusive community of learners (Garcia & Van Soest, 2000; Machemer & Crawford, 2007). In a study of 16 diversity courses (16 classrooms), Garcia and Van Soest (1999) found that students who engaged in peer-to-peer discussions about particularly challenging diversity issues, such as race and racism, developed a strong sense of respect for their classmates' opinions and experiences and gained an enhanced world view. In engaging in classroom collaboration with their peers, students developed greater openness to learning of diversity issues and topics from multiple and varying viewpoints.

In addition to pointing out some of what students may gain from enrolling in diversity courses, the literature also speaks to the differences in the learning experiences of students of color and their White peers enrolled in these courses. The next section discusses these differences, with attention to diverse students' learning.

The Different Learning Experiences of Students of Color and White Students

Research on the differences in the college-learning experiences of students of color and White students highlight the potential role that students' racial and ethnic identity and prior experiences can play in classrooms where the very subject of study is diversity (Castellanos & Cole, 2015; Denson, 2009; Gurin, Dey, Gurin, & Hurtado, 2004; Harper & Yeung, 2013). Villalpando (2002) explained this point as follows:

When an institution adopts policies and practices designed to foster multicultural perspectives in the curriculum and improve racial representation, it often focuses attention on the experiences of students of color, whose "difference" becomes a part of the curricular learning process and public discourse on campus. While this process seems to lead to positive outcomes for majority [White] students, students of color often become more alienated from the social and academic systems of the university environment as the legitimacy of their socio-historical experiences is debated within the context of multiculturalism and in an often hostile classroom environment. (pp. 126-127)

Here, Villalpando suggests that, although diversity courses focus content on the experiences and histories of people of color, students who can relate to these experiences (i.e., as people of color) may become socially and intellectually isolated. This may occur as the lives of students of color, and the histories of their communities, become topics for in-class debate rather than serving as starting points for and sources of learning. The end result can include very different experiences for students of color and White students, for example, as the lives and community histories of racially and ethnically different students are treated, instructionally, in different ways.

That said, the research suggests that White students tend to experience greater attitudinal changes and cognitive growth than students of color taking diversity courses (Doucet, Grayman-Simpson, & Wertheim, 2013; Goodman & Bowman, 2014; Jayakumar, 2008). When compared to students of color enrolled in the same diversity

courses, White students are more likely to develop greater racial tolerance (Engberg, 2004), show greater gains in problem-solving and logic skills (Cole & Zhou, 2014a), and become more motivated to do social justice work and engage in political activity at the local level (Denson & Bowman, 2017; Zúñiga et al., 2005). White students are also more likely than students of color to experience growth in their self-esteem, develop increased understanding of their life purpose, and be satisfied with college after having taken a diversity course (Bowman, 2009, 2010b).

These race-based differences in students' learning experiences in diversity courses may stem from the lack of engagement with the course content by students of color (Bowman, 2009, 2010b). To this end, some studies suggest that students' prior knowledge and experiences, such as holding low status in situations of inequity, can make a difference in their engagement with diversity course content that addresses matters of political power (Bowman & Brandenberger, 2012; Pascarella, Salisbury, Martin, & Blaich, 2012).³ Given that a majority of White undergraduate students have little exposure to diversity issues, such as inequity, prior to entering college, they may be learning more than students of color about such matters when taking a diversity course (Milem & Umbach, 2003). Because many students of color have had personal experiences and other forms of prior exposure to diversity issues and ideas, they are less likely to experience the kind of dissonance conducive to learning that White students often encounter with regard to diversity (Villalpando, 2002). Thus, students of color may not engage with the class materials, nor may they learn the class content in the same way

³ My understanding of "prior knowledge and experiences," which was briefly outlined in Chapter I, is the knowledge that students have acquired throughout their lives—from previous academic, social, and cultural experiences—which shapes their conceptions and preconceptions of subject matter (Bransford et al., 2000; Flavell & Wellman, 1975; Shulman, 2004a).

as White students. What looks “new”—and thus materializes as stimulating material to learn—for White students may be well understood already by students of color whose learning may need to be stimulated in different ways.

Another possible reason for differences in the learning experiences of White students and students of color enrolled in diversity courses pertains to the role of the social, political, and cultural contexts of the classroom and college campus (Villalpando, 2002). Factors such as the history of racial segregation in the institution, the campus climate toward students of color, campus and classroom demography, and the extent of social and intellectual interaction among students on campus and in classrooms (particularly between White students and students of color) with regard to topics of diversity may all play a role in the extent to which students of color engage in meaningful classroom experiences (Engberg, 2004; Garcia, Gillem, Szwajkowski, & West, 2005; Gurin et al., 2002; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, & Allen, 1998). Such factors shape whether and how students of color may feel included and valued as members of the learning community (Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998; You & Matteo, 2013).

How students of color benefit from diversity courses. To be sure, the literature has suggested that students of color can benefit from enrolling in diversity courses, although they are likely do so often in ways that differ from those of their White peers. For students of color, diversity courses may be places where they can learn about the contexts that have shaped their social and cultural identities and experiences, as well those of their extended families and communities (Packard, 2013; Solórzano et al., 2000). For example, students of color may be particularly receptive to and reflective on considerations of how race and prejudice have manifested throughout U.S. history and in

their own lives (Winkler, 2018). Such considerations, when placed in the context of broad and diverse scholarship, can yield positive gains for students of color, perhaps as they relate the subject matter they are studying to their lives.

Another important gain is the potential for students of color to develop networks with peers with similar cultural and social experiences (Muñoz, Jaime, McGriff, & Molina, 2012; Nuñez, 2011; Powell & Lines, 2010). Such networks can help students of color transition to the social life of the campus (Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, & Oseguera, 2008; Nuñez, 2009; Rendón, Garcia, & Person, 2004). By having the opportunity to connect their learning to their lives and to develop supportive friendships, students of color in diversity courses are more likely than those not enrolled in diversity courses to feel a sense of belonging on campus and be satisfied with their college experience (Villalpando, 2002). In turn, such satisfaction can help students of color develop their academic aspirations and motivate them to persist in their college education (Adams, 2005; Anderson, 2004; Chang, 1996; Maramba & Velasquez, 2012). I discuss these points, and others bearing on them, in the next section.

First-Generation College Students of Color Taking Diversity Courses

Two bodies of research on first-generation college students of color in higher education help put this topic in broader policy perspective: (a) research on the college-going patterns and experiences of these students, and (b) studies on the role of diversity courses in these students' overall college-going experiences. I elaborate on findings in this body of work bearing on the current study's research questions.

The college-going experiences of first-generation college students of color.

First-generation college students of color face two particular challenges in their college-

going experience. First, they are underrepresented (in numbers within the overall student population), meaning that there are few of them in 4-year colleges nationally (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2016).⁴ Oftentimes, first-generation college students of color have a difficult time finding a support system of peers to help them navigate the unfamiliar cultural and academic environment they have entered (Choy, Horn, Nuñez, & Chen, 2000; Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996). Second, these students often experience additional challenges related to their racial and cultural identities and experiences. These challenges include encountering and coping with racism and negative stereotypes voiced by White, non-first-generation students and faculty (Lundberg, Schreiner, Hovaguimian, & Miller, 2007; Rendón, 1992; Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, & Johnson, 2012; Terenzini et al., 1996; Ting, 2003). Due to such challenges, first-generation college students of color may gain a heightened consciousness of their status as being strangers to academe and of their identities as persons of color (Benmayor, 2002; Orbe, 2004; Phinney & Haas, 2003). The heightened consciousness can make first-generation college students of color feel socially and culturally isolated from their peers, faculty, and administrators, which can result in difficulties in integrating into the wider campus community.

⁴ In general, first-generation college students tend to enroll in 2-year institutions (i.e., community colleges or vocational and technical colleges) (Davis, 2010; Warburton et al., 2001). They comprise 50.4% of the public 2-year institution student population (NCES, 2011). Researchers explain this trend as stemming from first-generation college students' financial and familial situations (e.g., pulls to stay at home, or close to home, to save money and to help out one's family), and their state of academic preparedness (or having the skills and knowledge to take on the academic rigors and challenges of college learning) (Chen & Carrol, 2005; Davis, 2010; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Nuñez, & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Riehl, 1994).

Such challenges may influence the kind of academic support that first-generation college students of color need, ask for, and receive. For example, first-generation college students of color may hesitate to ask for academic assistance because they do not want faculty and academic advisors to view them through negative stereotypes, such as being “lazy” or “bad” students (Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998). Such stereotyping, which has been perpetuated by significant portions of the scholarly discourse, including in published work (e.g., Terenzini et al., 1996; Ward, 2013), can have a detrimental influence on the grades and academic progress of first-generation college students of color (Torres, Reiser, LePeau, Davis, & Ruder, 2006). Due to the personal and intellectual challenges they face upon entering college, first-generation college students of color are more likely than White students, whose parents completed college, to have lower grade-point averages (GPAs) in their first year in college (Stephens et al., 2012). Their academic performance in their first year may influence their time to degree and even their persistence to degree (Martinez, Sher, Krull, & Wood, 2009; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004).

First-generation college students of color in diversity courses. As I noted previously, while we know that White students are positioned to benefit, learning-wise, from taking diversity courses, we know relatively little about the range and kinds of gains that students of color and first-generation college students may experience. The few studies on this topic that I succeeded in locating suggested that first-generation college students of color who take diversity courses claim that these courses affirm and value their cultural identities and experiences. This suggests that these students may be making personal and cultural connections in their learning of diversity content (Villalpando,

2003). The literature has also indicated that first-generation college students of color enrolled in diversity courses may gain important academic capabilities, including learning to analyze text and participate in discussions. The research has also suggested that diversity courses help first-generation college students of color develop critical-thinking capabilities that they can apply to their academic work (Delgado Bernal, Alemán, & Garavito, 2009; Laden, 1999).

Another benefit that first-generation college students of color also reported with regard to enrolling in diversity courses was the development of friendships with peers and faculty in these courses. These students indicated that the faculty teaching diversity courses were typically more approachable and understanding than other faculty in their institution (Delgado Bernal et al., 2009; Laden, 1999; Villalpando, 2003). This may be so because the faculty teaching diversity courses often are people of color and have academic and personal interests in teaching diversity content (Griffin et al., 2011; Nelson Laird & Engberg, 2011). Additionally, due to the personal nature of the discussions that often occur in diversity courses, a sense of comradery and trust may develop among first-generation college students of color and other students in the class (Delgado Bernal et al., 2009), heightening these courses' relational outcomes. I note these points because first-generation college students of color who develop trusting relationships with peers and faculty are better positioned to receive support and guidance in facing the challenges they encounter in college than are others without such relationships (Delgado Bernal et al., 2009; Hao, 2011; Laden, 1999; Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004; Villalpando, 2003). By garnering such support, first-generation college students of color increase the likelihood

that they will thrive academically and socially on campus than they otherwise would without such support (Inkelas, Daver, Vogt, & Leonard, 2007; Lundberg et al., 2007).

Researchers have, therefore, pointed out a number of broad outcomes of diversity courses as described above; but few to date have considered, in detail, what happens in students' thinking as they encounter diversity content in class. Exploring students' learning more deeply, with such issues in mind, may enlarge our understanding of what diversity courses offer to first-generation college students of color, and through what means. My study is an initial step in this direction. I discuss further the limitations of the extant literature below.

Limitations of the Literature

Two limitations of the extant literature are worth pointing out. First, the extant research tends to combine many different kinds of students' diversity experiences into a single large category of diversity. For example, the research portrays taking a diversity course as *one* among several other "on-campus diversity activities" in which students may take part, such as engaging in diversity workshops, developing interracial relationships, and participating in multicultural events on campus—all with the aim of helping students value racial and cultural diversity as a positive attribute of daily life (Bowman, 2009; Cole & Zhou, 2014a, 2014b; Denson, 2009; Engberg, 2004; Gurin et al., 2004). By treating diversity courses as part of this broader category of "on-campus diversity activities," this approach can gloss over—or neglect—specific components, the most important of which, for the purposes of my study, is students' substantive learning of diversity content. Though usefully directed, the extant research largely obscures how

diversity courses, in and of themselves, contribute to students' development of cognitive capabilities, multicultural understanding, and civic engagement. I suggest that it is necessary to treat students' learning and experiences in diversity courses as comprising their own unit of analysis—exploring their dynamics as these may inform students' learning experiences. Second, the extant research does not treat classroom-based learning dynamics (and related teaching approaches) that may potentially contribute to students' ultimate gains in subject-matter understanding. As such, we have a limited view of what happens in the classroom, and especially how “what happens” may manifest in students' personal experiences in the classroom—as these may inform our own understanding of what students may gain.

In addition, the literature also suggests that first-generation college students of color who take a diversity course come to feel affirmed in their cultural identities and view their experiences as valid sources of academic knowledge. The extant research also suggests that students' prior experiences *may* shape their learning of content in diversity courses. However, we do not yet have a complete picture of *how* students incorporate their identities and experiences into their learning of diversity. Moreover, we have yet to understand what happens in such instances of learning (in terms of changes that students make in their thinking about themselves and their worlds) that leads students to relate the subject matter to their prior experiences. I posit that what is missing here is *how* these students' prior experiences—and their prior knowledge gained through their prior experiences—enter into the learning of the subject matter of diversity courses.

With these limitations of the literature in mind, I argue that we need a new framework for addressing the ways in which the prior knowledge and experiences of

first-generation college students of color enter into their learning of diversity. I draw on three frames from the learning sciences, philosophical and sociocultural studies of learning, and research on teaching practice as a way of conceptualizing my inquiry into these students' learning of diversity: teachers' pedagogical content knowledge, sociocultural perspectives on students' lives, and transfer of knowledge. I discuss these frames below.

Part II: The Need for a New Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework provides a researcher with lenses for making sense of prior research, data, ideas, and insights. Some have described it as helping make sense of research overall (Maxwell, 2013). My own conceptual framework helped me make sense of what first-generation college students can learn while taking a diversity course, whether and how their prior knowledge might enter into their learning in this course, and what these students might do (on-campus and in their personal lives) with what they learn from this course.

My conceptual framework was informed by insights from three frames:

(a) *teachers' pedagogical content knowledge*, (b) *sociocultural perspectives on students' lives* and (c) *transfer of knowledge*. The first frame, teachers' pedagogical content knowledge, introduces the pedagogical background for subject-matter teaching and highlights the teaching of core subject knowledge—or knowledge that can lead to students' foundational understanding of a topic or discipline (Shulman, 2004a, 2004b). The second frame, sociocultural perspectives on students' lives, addresses how the cultural context of people's lives can shape their learning experiences, as their prior

knowledge and experiences may enter into their learning of subject matter content (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). The third frame, transfer of knowledge, considers how knowledge, learned deeply in one site (a classroom where something new is learned originally), may come to be thought about and used in another site (in a later class, or at work, or in life) (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000).

Taken together, these frames contribute to my conceptualization of subject-matter learning for first-generation college students of color enrolled in a diversity course. This is because each frame considers students' lives as a central component of their learning of subject matter. Focusing on students' lives is important because understanding how students relate to subject matter on a personal level, particularly in matters connecting the content to their household and community, can provide insight into how they substantively learn and succeed in college.

Frame I: Teachers' Pedagogical Content Knowledge

My study focused on students' learning. However, students' learning is integrally linked to teaching and to subject matter (Bransford et al., 2000). *Teachers' pedagogical content knowledge* helped me to understand how the teaching of subject matter in diversity courses can be meaningful for first-generation college students.

Teachers' understanding of core subject matter knowledge has been thought of as a prerequisite of good teaching (Dewey, 1902; Heaton & Lampert, 1993; Shulman, 1986). For learning to occur, teachers must provide students with entrée to the specialized knowledge and ways of knowing—and to “knowledge-rich contexts”—that derive from teachers' subject matter expertise (Donovan & Bransford, 2005, p. 6). Such expertise involves factual and conceptual knowledge of subject matter. In this sense, subject matter

is a key element (some would say the key element) of what students learn in school and what teachers teach there (Neumann, 2009; Palmer, 2007). In the realm of K-12 policy and reform, such expertise has been considered an important aspect in the preparation of certified teachers and it also has been widely discussed by researchers and scholars involved in student assessment (Garet et al., 2001; Hill, Rowan, & Ball, 2001; Little, 1996).

Education scholars have long argued that subject-matter knowledge should not be the only component of good teaching (Shulman, 1986, 1988). These scholars have posited that teachers should have pedagogical abilities to explain core subject-matter ideas to novice learners (Bransford et al., 2000; Grossman et al., 1989). To teach in this way, teachers need to transform their subject-matter knowledge—typically through multiple iterations and in varying ways—toward making it accessible and understandable to learners of various backgrounds and various skill levels (Ball, 1988), and toward giving learners opportunities to understand it authentically, as subject-matter experts do (Pallas & Neumann, 2019). Teachers must also be receptive to and strategic in bringing relevant features of learners’ prior knowledge into meaningful interaction with the subject-matter ideas concepts being taught (Mishra & Koehler, 2006; Pallas & Neumann, 2019). Through such teaching, learners are positioned, and continuously repositions, so to more deeply understand the extent to which subject-matter knowledge manifests, or has been manifest, in their lives and how they may build on their prior knowledge for future learning in the subject or discipline (Dewey, 1902).

A significant concept arising from teachers’ and policymakers’ efforts to improve students’ learning—and by extension, teachers’ teaching—is *pedagogical content*

knowledge (Shulman, 2004a, 2004b). Pedagogical content knowledge combines teachers' knowledge of teaching (pedagogical knowledge) and their subject matter knowledge (content knowledge) into a conglomerate concept, combining both into knowledge, of teaching, that is unique to professional teachers. In the words of Lee Shulman (1986), who originally developed this concept, pedagogical content knowledge speaks to the ways that teachers "[represent] and [formulate a] subject that [makes] it comprehensible to others" (p. 9). He suggested that pedagogical content knowledge activates a combination of the teacher's knowledge of subject matter and the pedagogical moves that the teacher uses to build upon what students already know.

Through my research, the first lens allowed me to address whether and how teachers' pedagogical content knowledge appeared to frame the learning of first-generation college students of color in diversity courses, thereby forcing me to ask what students experienced as teachers enacted this teaching approach. Though I did not (and could not) study teachers' teaching, this frame nonetheless helped me see, to some extent, how students responded, in their thinking, to expert teachers' actions.

However, this frame did not go far enough in elucidating what happens on the learner side of teachers' actions (as noted, its focus is more on teaching). Nor did it go far enough in explaining *how* students' prior knowledge, specifically, responded to teachers' teaching practices. This was, of course, challenging to capture given that students in any one college classroom are likely to bring diverse prior knowledge into play as they learn. The second frame, *sociocultural perspectives on students' lives*, addressed what was missing from the frame of pedagogical content knowledge. I discuss the sociocultural frame in the next section.

Frame II: Sociocultural Perspectives on Students' Lives

The second frame, sociocultural perspectives on students' lives, helped me address the ways whereby students' culturally and socially shaped prior knowledge, including home and community knowledge, may be valuable resources for learning academic subject matter. I drew primarily from the concept of *funds of knowledge* to inform my work with this frame because it improved my ability to understand the prior knowledge that learners—in this case, first-generation college students of color in diversity courses—bring to their studies uniquely (Kim et al., 2016).

Many K-12 researchers have shown that students' prior knowledge is integral to their academic learning (Knight & Marciano, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1996; Lee, 2007; Moses & Cobb, 2001; Rose, 1989; Shulman, 2004). These scholars have demonstrated that students come to classrooms with knowledge that is informed by their lived experiences and that such knowledge, when tied to formal academic learning, can lead to meaningful learning experiences. Funds of knowledge, however, goes more deeply in that it addresses the historical and communal nature of knowledge and the ways whereby such knowledge can become embedded in daily household practice and thought.

Funds of knowledge, as a lens for understanding students' subject-matter learning, derives from the literature on sociocultural teaching and learning in K-12 schools and emphasizes the historical accumulation of cultural, social, and institutional knowledge within families and communities (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). The basic premise of funds of knowledge is that people's experiences provide them with knowledge that helps them navigate new social and institutional systems (González et al., 2005; Moll & González, 2004; Rios-Aguilar, Kiyama, Gravitt, & Moll, 2011). In its basic nature, funds

of knowledge, as a theory, emphasizes the extent to which learning is a social and interactive aspect of people's lives. As people interact within their immediate social networks (with relatives, neighbors, religious groups, and so on), they develop knowledge and practices pertaining to living and belonging in their immediate community (Moll et al., 1992).⁵ Over time, new social knowledge and experiences are formulated as individuals learn and live with and among others in particular ways. These additional sources of knowledge and experiences are, over time, thereby folded into their funds, or personal sources, of knowledge. These funds of knowledge are then shared and passed on to other members of the community (Velez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 2005). A community's funds of knowledge typically becomes part of members' livelihoods—their ways of being, socially, economically, culturally—and are integrated into the daily practices of individuals and families (Moll & González, 2004; Moll & Greenberg, 1990; Rosebery et al., 2001; Valdés, 2001; Velez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 2005).

Frame II, emphasizing a sociocultural view of students' learning, was useful for my study in that it gave me a lens for understanding whether and how students can draw from their lives to learn subject matter in a classroom, notably one devoted to the study of human diversity. This frame also allowed me to examine what it is about the nature of the classroom, including students' peer-to-peer interactions, that may help them connect their prior knowledge with new subject-matter ideas bearing on diversity as the core class

⁵ It is important to note that “community” in a funds of knowledge perspective does not speak to broad social groups (e.g., the Mexican American community, the African American community, etc.). Rather, “community” refers to those immediate individuals within one's life—parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, neighbors, and so on (Llopart & Esteban-Guitart, 2018). Another way to say this is that I do not use the term “community” in a macro sense, but rather as micro. In making this distinction, I am making the point that individuals' funds of knowledge are in no way reflective of an entire racial, cultural, or religious group.

subject matter. That said, with few exceptions (e.g., Kiyama, 2010, 2011; Kiyama & Rios-Aguilar, 2017), we know little about whether and how the funds of knowledge of diverse students enter into students' learning of subject matter in college classrooms.

One must now ask what happens as students take their learning about diversity, anchored in their lives, back out into their homes and communities. Below I present Frame III as a way to conceptualize how students may bring together their prior knowledge strategically with subject-matter learning, for use in other areas of their lives beyond the classroom.

Frame III: Transfer of Knowledge

The idea of transfer of knowledge can be thought about in one of two ways: (a) as students moving their personal and cultural knowledge to their learning in classrooms, or (b) as students moving their academic learning, gained in classrooms, outside of the classroom, into their communities and lives (Bransford et al., 2000). My use of the transfer concept emphasizes the latter view.

Transfer of knowledge derives from the early work of Edward Thorndike, an educational psychologist, who sought to understand how people learn content and develop intellectually throughout their lives (Thorndike, 1913; Thorndike & Woodworth, 1901). Thorndike found that students who had memorized the content of difficult subject matters, such as Greek and Latin, and had practiced their knowledge of this content (usually through written tests) did well on formal assessments of what they know about these subject matters. However, Thorndike also found that these students were challenged in transferring the content they had learned in order to do well on tests, to other situations, for example, to their learning in another class in the same time or in another

discipline. This occurred because, in initially learning and practicing the content, the students directed it, usually, toward carrying out a specific task in a specific context. As such, they did not understand the relevance of the new content to other situations and potentially to other tasks. The students who had presumably learned and tested well in a particular context were thus limited to where and how their acquired knowledge could be used.

Thorndike's work suggested that learning, confined to one site, leads to limited gains in deep subject-matter understanding that can move ultimately from site to site. To learn for deep understanding entails that students can *do something* with the knowledge they learned—they can explain the subject matter in their own words, provide examples of it, and demonstrate how it may be relevant in other academic areas or in a person's life (Campione, Shapiro, & Brown, 1995; Perkins, 1992). In other words, they can use it beyond the original site of learning. Thorndike (1913) referred to such learning as students making a “modifiable connection...between a situation and a response,” an observation which suggested that it is possible for students to learn particular subject-matter content in one context and extend it, or connect it, to another context (p. 2). To learn for understanding requires students to think about and re-interpret what they have learned in one site for use in relevant areas beyond that site (Bransford & Schwartz, 1999).

The transfer of knowledge from one context to others, beyond the original site of learning, suggests that students are thinking about the academic learning experiences that they have had across large spans of their lives. They develop the capacity to judge how such knowledge can be utilized in various situations, both inside and outside the

classroom (Broudy, 1977). Educational psychologists refer to this kind of thinking as *metacognition* (Flavell & Wellman, 1975). Metacognition refers to students' awareness of their "own cognitive processes" and their "active monitoring and consequent regulation and orchestration of these processes in relation to the cognitive objects or data on which they bear, usually in the service of some concrete goal or objective" (Flavell, 1976, p. 232). The idea behind metacognition is that students can develop an awareness of the knowledge that they have acquired by way of their academic learning. They may also begin to reflect on that knowledge and judge its possible expression and use in different, yet related, situations, whether academic or personal (Alexander, Murphy, Woods, Duhon, & Parker, 1997; Bransford et al., 2000). In this sense, metacognition supports transfer of learning from site to site and across the spaces of students' lives.

Frame III was helpful to my study in that it highlighted two essential areas of students' learning experiences: (a) movement of students' knowledge from course to course, and (b) use of the knowledge gained in their classes to students' lives beyond school. I used this frame to help me conceptualize what first-generation college students of color may do with subject-matter knowledge and subject-matter-based ways of thinking, which they gained in diversity courses, in their lives more broadly.

Transfer of knowledge, used alone, has its limitations. For one thing, students may be challenged in perceiving how their learning of new ideas might be relevant to settings beyond the classroom (Salomon & Perkins, 1989). Further, we do not yet know enough about the kinds of learning that stimulate transfer. The transfer lens is helpful to my study but it is incomplete on its own.

Summary of Conceptual Frames

I viewed no frame, in and of itself, as sufficient to address the problem I posed for my study—around understanding the learning of first-generation college students of color in diversity courses. However, viewed together, the frames did help me to consider whether and how teachers' pedagogical content knowledge (Frame I) can help with transfer of knowledge (Frame III) as a key teaching aim. They also helped me consider how knowledge from students' cultures and lives (Frame II) might interweave with academic knowledge that students gain in classrooms, only to return later in renewed forms to students' broader lives outside of class (Frame III). Thus, viewed together, these frames supported my inquiry into how the lives of first-generation college students of color can inform their learning in the diversity courses.

Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the history of diversity courses, along with research on students' gains from and experiences in them. I also discussed the limitations of the extant literature and showed how my study would address these, notably by providing insights on what and how first-generation college students of color learn in these classes. I also presented a three-part framework for conceptualizing the learning of first-generation students of color in diversity courses. To explain further the development of my study, I present my research design and methods in the next chapter.

Chapter III

DESIGN AND METHOD

In this chapter, I lay out my study's design and methods. Below, I discuss my rationale for site selection, sampling, and data collection. I also present my strategies for human subjects' protection and data analysis.

In brief, I carried out this study in two classrooms in a public 4-year higher education institution. Interviews were the main source of my study data. Classroom observations and documents from primary and secondary participants supplemented the interview data.

Before I begin, it is important to note that I have taken great care in masking the identities of the school and participants in this study. As such, the names of the school, courses, and participants are pseudonyms. I also do not name the larger metropolitan area in which Davian is located. The pseudonyms used to mask the real course titles were chosen so as to reflect the course content without revealing the course's true name or any identifiable information about the school or the participants.

Research Perspective

For this study, I drew from a constructivist approach to inform my study's design and choice of methods. A constructivist approach aims to understand the experiences of

individuals within their particular contexts (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). It views people's realities as shaped by their social interactions and experiences in specific times and places. It is concerned with understanding how a person perceives their current circumstances in relation to those interactions and experiences. In addition, a constructivist approach understands that, given their prior experiences, people bring particular and often unique interpretations, and ways of interpreting, to their current circumstances (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). In this sense, the researcher understands that, although similar in their background demographics (e.g., a group of students of color in a 4-year public institution), each study participant has unique views on their present experiences. Thus, a constructivist approach was appropriate for my research as it provided me, as the researcher, a way to elicit from participants their unique understandings of their learning experiences within a particular classroom context—in this case, one of two diversity courses in a 4-year public institution.

Furthermore, I recognized that the study's primary participants would likely be going through distinctive life experiences, given their first-generation college status; family members likely have minimal background resources to guide them. The students would likely be undergoing experiences in diversity courses through which they would learn about their historical, political, and cultural identities, thereby gaining insights into their world and their place in it (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). They also would be developing academic skills that could help them succeed while in college (Delgado Bernal, Alemán, & Garavito, 2009). My goal as the researcher was to explore how the participants constructed their experiences at this particular point in their lives (i.e., as a

first-generation college student enrolled in a diversity course in a 4-year public institution) (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

With this approach in mind, I utilized interviews, participant observations, and document analysis to pursue my research questions. I drew on these methods because they permitted me to examine a number of “specific case[s] in great detail” and to learn from each—and from them all—to inform broader theory (Erickson, 1985, p. 37). Below I explain the study’s design and methods.

Site Selection: Institution

To identify the institution that would situate my study, I used a purposeful selection strategy whereby I deliberately chose institutions with the participants and contexts needed for me to garner the “information that is particularly relevant to [my] research questions” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 97). Purposeful selection thus allowed me to narrow the scope of my site selection to a campus meeting particular criteria pertaining to my research questions (Creswell, 2007).¹ Guided by this design strategy, I determined that a fitting site for my study was a 4-year highly diverse public higher education institution serving first-generation college students and offering diversity courses as part of undergraduate students’ diversity requirement in the general education curriculum.² I considered a college or university to be a highly diverse institution if it serves a student body composed of different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups and is at least 50% non-White (Castillo-Montoya, 2013; Hurtado & Alvarado, 2015). Also, the site had to

¹ I discuss these criteria below.

² First-generation college students are more likely to be enrolled in public colleges and universities than in private ones (Engle & Tinto, 2008).

have at least 30% of its student population self-identify as first-generation, as this is the national average of first-generation college students of color enrolled in 4-year public institutions (Cataldi, Bennett, & Chen, 2018). To identify potential campus-level study sites reflecting these institutional criteria, I searched online for public 4-year colleges and universities that I could access via public transit. With this list of potential sites, I looked online for their institutional report, which often has data on student enrollment and demographics. Through this process, I chose Davian College (a pseudonym, as previously noted) to serve as the institutional site for my study. Below I briefly describe Davian College.

Davian College is a large metropolitan college in the East Coast.³ In Fall 2018, the college enrolled almost 13,000 undergraduate students. Institutional data for this period showed that approximately 70% of the full-time faculty (tenure-track professors, lecturers, and instructors) and approximately 60% of the part-time faculty (adjuncts) identified as White. Over half of the faculty body (full-time and part-time) identified as female. Slightly more than half of the faculty at Davian were part-time.

In 2018, about 90% of the undergraduate students were receiving some sort of financial aid. Almost 80% of those receiving financial aid were on Pell grants. According to Davian's institutional report, a majority of the undergraduate population (approximately 70%) were female and about 40% were enrolled as part-time students. Over half of the school's student population identified as Hispanic or Latino, while approximately one-third identified as Black or African American. Less than 10% of the

³ The institutional data that I provided, drawn from public sources, were aggregated and rounded to limit identifiability of the institution to the extent possible.

student population identified as either White or Asian. Over half of the student population was comprised of traditional-aged undergraduate students (between the ages of 18 and 24), and the remainder of the students were over the age of 25. Almost all of Davian's undergraduate students were from the metropolitan area in which the college is located. Almost 20% of the students at Davian were transfer students—that is, students who began their postsecondary education at another institution and came to Davian at a later time to finish their bachelor's degree. Over half of the undergraduate population of Davian was considered to be first-generation college students.

Davian offers a wide array of academic programs and majors—including global and ethnic studies, journalism and communication, computer science, sociology, and psychology. At the time of the study, about 50% of the students enrolled at Davian majored in one of the social sciences or in applied areas (e.g., business, accounting). Almost 40% of the student body majored in a health and human sciences field, for example, nursing or health services. In addition to their major courses, Davian undergraduates were required to take one diversity course within each of the five areas of the general education curriculum: international cultures, American cultures, arts, morals and values, and science. From this set, Davian students could take courses in a variety of topics—for example, Caribbean studies, African American history, the art and artists of Latin America, philosophy and justice, and ancient science explorations. Davian students could take a combination of lower-level (introductory) and upper-level (seminar, course-intensive) diversity courses to fulfill a graduation requirement in the general education curriculum.

Site Selection: Diversity Courses

The diversity courses that served as the primary study sites featured humanities and social sciences content. These courses offered content focusing on race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and religious differences.⁴ I utilized the criteria from Table 1 to help determine the diversity courses that would be the sites for my study. Later in this chapter, I describe the courses that became the sites for my study.

Table 1. *Criteria for Selecting Diversity Courses*

Disciplinary Area	N	Criteria
Humanities	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course in history, arts (music, theater, visual arts), English, or literature as part of the general education curriculum. • Examines human diversity from the perspective of racial, ethnic, gendered, and/or religious groups in the U.S. and around the world. • Examples: History of Latin American Indigenous Peoples, Black Traditions in American Music, Literary Expressions of Women in Asia.
Social Science	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course in sociology, political science, economics, geography, or linguistics. • Examines human diversity from the perspective of racial, ethnic, gendered, and/or religious groups in the U.S. and around the world. • Examples: Introduction to the Politics of Latin America, Introduction to the Sociology of Global Change, and Non-Western Government.

⁴ While some science courses at Davian also could have been used as study sites, given their diversity content, I narrowed my search to the social sciences and humanities so as to better focus my study on epistemologically similar concepts and modes of thought. Future work could include comparison to a science-based diversity course.

Site Entrée: Institution and Courses

After having fulfilled the IRB requirements for Teachers College, I developed a plan for entrée at Davian by contacting a professional peer who I hoped might guide me to appropriate authorities to request permission to conduct the study. I explained to my contact the purpose of my study and explained how Davian fit the institutional criteria for the study. My contact introduced me via email to the chief academic officer of Davian. Upon this contact, I provided this administrator with an explanation of the purpose of my study, Davian's fit in the study criteria, the study's confidentiality protocol, and the kinds of courses and participants targeted (Appendix A). Upon the recommendation of this individual, I sought the approval of Davian's IRB office for entrée. Following appropriate review by Davian's IRB, I was given permission to conduct my study on campus.

To identify faculty and diversity courses that fit the criteria of this study, I searched Davian's online course catalog and faculty profiles to create a qualifying subset (relying on preset criteria). I vetted this list, for accuracy, with my professional contact at Davian and sought from this contact additional recommendations of potential faculty and courses. Guided by the list of faculty and courses that I gathered through this search process, I reached out to each faculty member identified via email, phone, and in-person communication to ask for their permission to conduct my study in their classes (Appendix B). From these efforts, I first recruited Professor Grace Farrol (as previously noted, all names are pseudonyms), who then recommended her colleague, Oluko Imoye, to be part of the study. I began observation of Professor Farrol's course on the first day of the semester. I joined Professor Imoye's course 3 weeks after the semester began. I observed Professors Farrol and Imoye's classes at least once a week during the 15-week

semester. Below I provide a brief profile of the faculty and the diversity courses each of them taught.

**Diversity Course 1: Historical and Contemporary
Narratives of African Americans: From Slavery to Present Day**

Grace Farrol, the professor of this course, has been on the faculty of Davian College for over 20 years, first starting at Davian as an adjunct and then returning as a tenure-track professor after graduating with her doctorate in English. She taught Narratives of African Americans for over a decade. This course was listed as one of the diversity courses that students can choose to take to fulfill the diversity requirement at Davian. In the semester during which I observed this class, over 20 students were enrolled. Over half of the students in the class were taking it to fulfill the college's diversity course requirement, while a third were taking the course as a requirement for their major. The rest of the students were taking the course either out of general interest in the topic or because they had read or heard positive reviews from other Davian students about Professor Farrol's teaching and courses. The students in this class ranged in degree level, from first-year to senior undergraduate students.

When I asked Professor Farrol what she hoped her students would get out of her class, she stated that she wanted her students to gain "an understanding that there's this massive body of work that people left for them [her students] to read." In this sense, Professor Farrol hoped that her students would make the connection between the texts written by historical and prominent African American figures and how such texts may still be relevant to her students' lives today. Towards this end, Professor Farrol structured the content of the course so as to take students through a timeline; she started with the

early works of 19th century African American authors and artists and ended with prominent works of African American singers and writers in the present time.

In the first few weeks of the semester, students examined the narratives (e.g., poetry, short stories, songs) that were written by freed and enslaved Africans. The class also examined texts from newspaper articles that were written by White slave owners in the 19th century. Professor Farrol sought to have students contrast the White slave owners' narratives with those of freed and enslaved Africans. In the middle of the semester, students examined the mid-20th century writings of African American writers like Langston Hughes, Ralph Waldo Ellison, and James Baldwin. In the last few weeks of the semester, students read and discussed contemporary narratives that prominent African American artists and writers produced. During this latter part of the semester, the professor drew from recent popular music by African American artists. Professor Farrol often chose to highlight African American musicians based on the social and political statements embedded within their song lyrics and music videos. The professor also utilized popular social media outlets, like YouTube, to demonstrate ways for students to explore contemporary narratives by African Americans. She also encouraged her students to compare and contrast the words and format of the various authors and artists they studied (e.g., poetry, novels, sonnets, songs, and paintings), and to imagine how the work of these authors and artists might still speak to students' lives in the present day.

Professor Farrol approached her teaching by first getting a sense of students' thinking about the subject matter she would be teaching. She claimed that her "students already come with a lot," and thus what they know already, or have been exposed to, may inform their understanding of the subject matter. Because of this, she encouraged her

students to share, via class discussions and student-led facilitation, ways whereby the topics of the course were relevant to the lives of the students themselves, as well as to the lives of their family members, friends, and neighborhood acquaintances.

Diversity Course 2: The African American Community: Organizational Views and Experiences

Oluko Imoye, the professor for this course, had been at Davian for almost a decade. Professor Imoye had taught the African American Community course for over 5 years. In the semester during which I observed this course, less than 20 students were enrolled. This course was listed as an upper-level course and designated as a requirement for students who are majoring in African American and Black Studies at Davian. All the students enrolled in this course were taking it as a requirement for their major. The majority of the students were juniors or seniors, and the class also included a handful of sophomores. Females comprised the majority of the class; only two males were enrolled.

Per the course's requirement, students were to volunteer for at least 5 hours a week at an organization that largely served the African American community. Examples of organizations that students selected included: a mentoring services organization that helps African American youth, a community center that teaches basic life skills courses to men who have been recently released from incarceration, and a local government office that provides federal resources (e.g., tax filing assistance, healthcare guidance) for those living in public housing. The class readings were drawn primarily from Amos Wilson's (1998) book, *Blueprint for Black Power*. This book presents conceptual arguments with regard to how African American and Black community organizations may negate predominantly White and upper-class power structures. Though this content,

Wilson provides an organizational framework of use to African American and Black organizations in defining their structure so as to empower the populations they serve. In the text, Wilson details the organizational structure of African American activist organizations, such as the Black Panther Movement and the National of Islam, emphasizing their functions within the African American community. Throughout the semester, Professor Imoye also brought into class several local community activists and organizers to discuss the structure, mission, and goals of their respective organization toward showing students how the concepts and ideas discussed in Wilson's book may take shape in practice. Professor Imoye stated that one of his goals for this class was for students to “essentially [match]—it's essentially matching theory with what they're seeing on the ground, in the community.” In this sense, Professor Imoye encouraged students to be aware of how the concepts and ideas discussed in Wilson's book may manifest themselves in the organization in which they carried out their volunteer assignment.

Professor Imoye stated that his teaching approach for this class was “culturally-centered,” as he brought in texts, ideas, and concepts that he viewed as central to the lives of students, particularly those identifying as people of color. Professor Imoye reported that he wanted to shape the diversity course curriculum so that students can “look at stuff that should be central to [their] lives [and that] isn't always part of the [college] curriculum.” To this end, Professor Imoye brought into the course the works of scholars, activists, and artists that he viewed as foundational to students' learning about community organizations supporting people of color. He also said that he often gave students the space and time in class to “try ideas out” with each other and “to let them

[the students] work things out.” As such, he wanted students to share their own prior knowledge and experiences and to tie these back to the core ideas of the course.

Participant Sample: The Students Whose Learning Was to Be Studied

I used a criterion-based selection process to narrow down my list of potential primary (focal) participants ($n = 10$) for this study (Palinkas et al., 2015). This approach aims to identify “information-rich” participants who can provide knowledge and insight into the research aims of my study (Palinkas et al., 2015, p. 534). I also included secondary participants ($n = 31$) who provided helpful data of a more contextual nature. Table 2 below provides a broad overview of my final participant sample with attention to what and how participants contributed to the overall study. I elaborate further on components of this overview in the following sections.

Table 2. *Study Sample*

Participants	Description
Primary (focal) participants $n = 10$	First-generation college students of color enrolled in one of the two diversity courses I observed during the semester. These students were observed, participated in interviews (formal and informal), and voluntarily provided assignments carried out in the course.
Secondary participants (students) $n = 31^5$	Other students enrolled in one of the two diversity courses. These students only took part in the classroom observation part of the study.
Secondary participants (faculty) $n = 2$	Professors who were teaching one of the two diversity courses during the semester. These professors were interviewed, observed, and provided documents (i.e., CVs, syllabi) as part of this study.

⁵ Two students did not consent to being observed in the class and they are not accounted for in the 31 total secondary participants.

Primary Participants: First-generation College Students of Color

As noted in Chapter I, I defined a first-generation college student as one who has at least one parent who has never enrolled in a baccalaureate-granting institution and has not attained a baccalaureate degree (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). I defined a first-generation college student of color as one who self-identifies as being both a first-generation college student and is non-White (i.e., student may identify as African American/Black, Latino/Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American/Hawaiian Native). If participants identified themselves as biracial (e.g., White and African American), I only included them as primary participants if they considered themselves to be a person of color; thus, the participant self-identified as a person of color. I included both immigrants to the United States and native-born individuals in my definition.

Process for inviting primary participants. I invited primary participants (focal students) and their classmates (secondary participants) after requesting and receiving permission from the course instructor to do so. For both Professors Farrol's and Imoye's courses, I asked if I could have some of their class time to make a brief announcement to their students. In this announcement, I explained my study; informed the students of my study's aims; and asked for their permission to observe, take notes, and record their class sessions (Appendix C). I also provided students with the opportunity to ask me any questions or discuss any concerns they might have regarding their involvement in this study. Then, I distributed a Teachers College and Davian IRB-approved consent form that described the study and their involvement (i.e., being observed and audio-recorded during class sessions) (Appendix D). I asked students to read through the consent form and fill it out; I also gave each student a copy of the form to take home. I then asked the

students to fill out a questionnaire that solicited the following data: academic major, age, year in school, hometown, current housing situation (on-campus or off-campus), and gender (Appendix E). This questionnaire also asked students to identify their race and ethnicity and parents' education level. The list of racial/ethnic identities included: Latino/Hispanic, African American/Black, Asian, Caucasian/White, Pacific Islander, and other. Students who did not identify with any of the listed identities were able to write in an identity (e.g., biracial). The two questions of students' racial/ethnic identity and parental educational level helped me identify first-generation college students of color in the class.

Based on responses to the consent form and questionnaire, I identified and reached out (via email and in-person) to 16 first-generation college students of color across both diversity courses (eight from each of the two courses) and invited them to participate in my study (Appendix F). If I did not hear back from that initial group of students, I followed up with them in person the following weeks during the next class session. Out of the initial outreach of 16, I confirmed 10 first-generation college students of color who would be primary participants in this study. Participants were distributed unevenly across the two classes: seven students from the social science course and three students from the humanities course. Over the following weeks, I scheduled interviews with each person via email or in person. During the semester, I rescheduled several interviews due to students' work and school schedules, as well as unforeseen personal circumstances that arose. Before their first interview, primary participants signed a second Teachers College and Davian IRB-approved consent form that outlined their

further involvement in my study (i.e., interviews and sharing of documents) (Appendix G).

The demographics of my primary subject sample can be summarized as follows: the 10 primary participants were all first-generation college students of color. Five of the 10 participants identified, in whole or in part, as being of Latina/o background. Five of the 10 identified, in whole or part, as being of African or African American background. One individual represented another race/ethnicity, also being a person of color. As the listing suggests, one individual was more than one race/ethnicity, and therefore was double-counted. The 10 participants varied by age, with five of the 10 being in their late-teens or very early 20s, two being in their mid-20s, and three in their late 20s or early 30s. All but one student participant were upper class students (junior or senior year). Six of the 10 participants were transfer students.

Secondary Participants: Faculty

It is important for me to emphasize that my study was about students' learning of subject matter pertaining to the topic of diversity. However, to understand this, I needed also to look at how their teachers were supporting or advancing the students' learning of this topic. I defined teaching broadly as the design and implementation of instructional activity directed at students' learning of subject matter—in this case, diversity content. For the two faculty in this study, I paid attention to whether and how they considered students' backgrounds, experiences, and identities as part of their teaching. I utilized these data to establish background around how teachers go about shaping their students' learning of diversity in their classrooms.

Process for inviting faculty. With the list of faculty (from my online search and suggested by my contact), I reached out via email to two faculty at a time (one in the humanities and one in the social sciences), informed them of the purpose of my study, and inquired about their potential involvement. In this initial contact, I described what their participation would entail: two formal interviews (one to be carried out at the beginning of the semester and one at the end of the semester); being observed teaching once a week (possibly more); post-observation conversations if/when possible (maybe one to three per participant); and providing me with their syllabus, curriculum vitae, and, if applicable, academic publications. I also scheduled phone calls and dropped by the faculty's office hours following this initial contact. After reaching out to a total of five faculty who were teaching diversity courses during the semester I collected data, Professor Farrol agreed to participate. As previously noted, she then recommended her colleague, Professor Imoye, as a potential participant for this study. I followed the same procedure described above for contacting Professor Imoye. After speaking in-person with both faculty, I asked them to sign the Teachers College and Davian IRB-approved consent form (Appendix H).

Secondary Participants: Other Students

Although not the main focus of my study, the classmates of the primary participants, if agreeing to participate in the study, served as secondary participants in that their interactions with the primary participants (10 focal students) would have some influence on what I learned from the 10 featured students. As mentioned above, during my first visit to each of the diversity courses, I asked all students for their permission to be audio-recorded and observed as part of my study. I also asked these students to fill out

the questionnaire (see Appendix E), the results of which helped me understand key elements of the backgrounds of the students in each of the diversity courses. In all, 31 students across both diversity courses consented to being observed and audio-recorded as secondary participants.⁶ In all, the study included 41 students (primary and secondary participants). I observed the students in each course at least once a week over the 15-week semester, which amounted to approximately 38 hours of classroom observation across both courses.⁷

Data Collection

The data in this study included interviews (transcripts), observations (field notes), and documents. In the next section, I describe these data and the methods I used to collect them.

Interviews

I conducted semi-structured interviews with first-generation college students of color and with the faculty who taught them in diversity courses. I used a semi-structured guide for these interviews. Below I discuss the interviews that I conducted for the primary and secondary participants.

Interviews with primary participants. I conducted two formal, semi-structured interviews per primary participant—the focal first-generation college students of color.⁸

⁶ I turned off audio-recording and did not write observation notes pertaining to comments made in class by the two students who did not give consent for study participation. These two, thus, do not show up in my data.

⁷ My attendance each week also depended on national holidays and school closures due to storm warnings and Spring Break.

⁸ Due to scheduling conflicts and school closures, I was only able to interview one of the primary participants once. His interview took place near the end of the semester.

I used a semi-structured interview guide to support my posing of questions to each participant, but I also added in questions in the moment, as needed, to gain clarification (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009) (Appendix I). I also included in the second interview additional questions based on my classroom observations and questions in reference to the class work they shared with me (Appendix J). Each interview lasted approximately 1 hour to 1½ hours and were audio-recorded and transcribed. Interview One, which was conducted near the beginning of the semester (approximately in Week 2 or 3), focused on these students' lives before coming to college and their current experiences in college. This background information helped me understand how participants were giving meaning to their experience in the diversity course (Seidman, 2013). Interview Two, which I conducted towards the end of the semester (around Week 12 or 13), focused on students' experiences in their diversity course, including what they learned from the course and what they believe they will do (or are already doing) with what they learned. These two formal interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for data analysis.

I also conducted several brief (10-15 minutes) informal interviews with most of the primary participants throughout the semester.⁹ The purpose of these interviews was to deepen my understanding of students' experiences in class, comparing what I saw to what they experienced. These interviews provided me with insight into participants' thinking and learning about the content addressed in class and how the content might relate to their lives outside of school. The informal interviews took place after class while I walked with one or two participants to their next class or toward their bus or train as they

⁹ Two primary participants were consistently unavailable after class for post-observation, informal interviews; I did conduct the informal interviews with 8 of the 10 participants.

headed for home or work. Given the spontaneous nature of these interviews, they were not audio-recorded; instead, I wrote notes immediately after each interview.

After each formal and informal interview with the primary participants, I wrote field notes. These notes helped me develop follow-up questions for upcoming interviews and helped me develop ideas for analyzing the interview data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Interviews with secondary participants (faculty). I conducted two semi-structured interviews with the faculty of the diversity courses. The first faculty interview, conducted at the beginning of the semester, focused on an instructor's background including their personal and educational history, and how they thought about their diversity course (e.g., the course design, choice of course materials, and course content) (Appendix K). The second interview, conducted at the end of the semester, focused on the faculty's thoughts about their students and students' learning with attention to how faculty got to know their students and whether having this knowledge influenced how and what they taught in the diversity course (Appendix L). I also asked questions that drew specifically on my classroom observations, and I added any follow-ups derived from my ongoing analysis of data from the first interview. Each interview with faculty lasted between 1-1½ hours and were audio-recorded. These formal interviews with faculty were transcribed for data analysis.

I also conducted two additional informal interviews with each of the faculty members. I held each of these informal interviews after a class session as the course instructor headed toward their office or to a meeting or to catch a bus or train home. These informal interviews with faculty helped me gain insight into their thoughts on their students, their students' learning, and their teaching immediately as a class session ended.

I was unable to audio-record these interviews, but I did take notes while we were walking or sitting in their office.

Observations

As noted, I observed a whole class session with primary participants (focal first-generation college students of color), their peers, and the faculty in each of the two diversity courses at least once a week for 15 weeks during the Spring semester. Professor Farrol's class lasted a little under 1½ hours each week, while Professor Imoye's class lasted almost 3 hours each week. The purpose of these observations was to allow me to see and hear first-hand how the focal students engaged with the subject matter of diversity as they interacted with their peers and instructors about it in class. I utilized an observation guide that helped me document the conversations and behaviors that I believed were relevant to my research questions (LeCompte & Priessle, 1993) (Appendix M). The observation guide for my study focused on what primary participants were doing and saying in response to the class activities (e.g., discussion of texts, audio, videos, discussions topics, etc.), as well as the instructor's responses to students' participation. I also wrote up my observation-based field notes after class; these detailed particular situations I saw and believed would help me address my research questions, but also included my reflections on the session observed (Seidman, 2013). Each class observation was audio-recorded. A few class sessions, either a portion of a class or a full class session, were transcribed. The class sessions I chose to transcribe were sessions I viewed as bearing on my research questions.¹⁰

¹⁰ I did not transcribe portions of class sessions that included guest speakers.

Documents

I collected documents from first-generation college students of color and faculty to supplement the interview and observation data. The documents provided me with additional data for addressing my research questions (Bowen, 2009). I asked each of the primary student participants to provide me voluntarily with any ungraded documents they felt comfortable sharing, such as midterm papers, final papers, and class presentations. I used the documents from these primary participants to understand better what they said to me in their interviews and what I saw and heard in the class observations.

The documents that I collected from faculty included curriculum vitae, class syllabi, assignment handouts, and course readings. I used the syllabi to follow the course readings to help me understand the content of course discussions each week. Table 3 below summarizes the data collection for each of the participants involved in my study.

Human Subjects Protection

My study was designed to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of each participant. To meet this requirement, I completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) training and certification on January 25, 2017, as required by the Teachers College Institutional Review Board (IRB). I also took courses that emphasized the ethical and legal dimensions of research and read extensively on this topic of the protection of research participants. I received IRB approval from Teachers College and Davian College, the institutional site for my study. I received informed consent from each participant and provided each with a copy of the Participant's Rights form.

Table 3. *Outline of Data Collection and Participants*

	Interview: Formal, Semi- Structured	Interview: Informal (post-observation)	Observation	Documents Collected and Analyzed
PRIMARY PARTICIPANTS First-Generation College Students of Color Enrolled in a Diversity Course (n = 10)	Three per participant: • Early semester • End of semester	Two to four each participant	Whole class session; once a week	Class work
Data Collection	Audio-recorded; field notes	Audio-recorded; field notes	Audio-recorded; field notes	Ungraded essays, in-class projects, etc.
Data Form	Transcripts; field notes	Transcripts; field notes	Transcripts; field notes	Documents
TOTAL	20 Interviews	17 Interviews	Once a week	6 Documents from 3 participants (2 each)
SECONDARY PARTICIPANTS Faculty teaching the diversity course in which primary participants are enrolled	Two per participant	Two	Once a week	CV; Course syllabi; course assignments
Data Collection	Audio-recorded; field notes	Audio-recorded; field notes	Audio-recorded; field notes	Online resources; Collect from participant
Data Form	Transcripts; field notes	Transcripts; field notes	Transcripts; field notes	Documents
TOTAL	4 Interviews	Two Interviews	Once a week	6 Documents from both faculty (2 each)
SECONDARY PARTICIPANTS Other students enrolled in the diversity course with the primary participants	---	---	Once a week	---
Data Collection	---	---	Audio-recorded; field notes	---
Data Form	---	---	Transcripts; field notes	---
TOTAL	0 Interviews	---	Once a week	---

Ensuring Confidentiality

Before collecting any data, I assured all participants confidentiality in my treatment of data they provided, and in all presentations and publications of the research

findings. Toward this end, I assigned a code to each participant and the site, thus masking all names and other identity-revealing information (e.g., locations associated with participants and sites, names of friends and family, role titles, etc.); I created codes that readers could not track back to participants' identities. I applied these codes to all durable records of data collected from each participant and site (recordings, interview transcripts, field notes, documents). I kept the code list and any data associated with the participants and the site in a secure location to which I alone had—and will continue to have—access. I also assured participants that I would keep “off the record” any information—collected via interview, observation, or documents—that they would like to have handled in this way; I asked them to point out such data either through the course of our interaction or at a later time. I also made sure that the individuals transcribing my interviews adhered to a confidentiality agreement to ensure that identities of participants and the site would remain confidential and private, thus never shared with others.

Continuous Confirmation of Consent

Before collecting any data from participants, I informed them of the potential risks and benefits of participating in my study. For all participants, I completed the process of informed consent before I collected any data. The consent form provided details of my study, any potential risks and benefits involved, how their information and data were to be stored, a timeline for their involvement, and how I would use the findings of the study for conference presentations and publication.

Minimizing Risk

I judged this study as unlikely to put any of the participants at risk of psychological or physical harm. However, I acknowledge that my asking participants to share aspects of their personal background (e.g., family history and educational experiences), their identity (i.e., racial and ethnic identities), and educational experiences could prompt them to recall some uncomfortable experiences. In order to maintain the participants' safety, well-being, trust, and ease through the study, I assured them that they were not obliged to answer any of my questions, nor were they obliged to participate in any aspect of the study with which they felt uncomfortable. I assured the participants that I sought to better understand teaching and learning in diversity courses and that I did not seek to evaluate their academic efforts or work in their courses. For example, if students did not want to share their work with me, they were not obligated to do so. Moreover, during an interview, if a student or faculty member did not want to answer a question I asked, I moved on to the next question. I reassured the participants that I would mask the data they provided so that they would not be identifiable in any study products.

Data Analysis

Organization and Preliminary Analysis of the Data

I began to analyze the data while I was in the field. Throughout this process of analysis, I reviewed the data that I collected to understand how participants described and enacted their learning of subject matter in their diversity courses. After data collection concluded, I re-listened to the audio and re-read notes and transcripts multiple times. During this process, I created a memo that documented those portions of the data that I

believed were responding to my research questions. I then created “buckets” and “sub-buckets” for these data that exhibited a clear trend. I distinguished each bucket and sub-bucket from others by placing data related to each on separate Word documents. By separating these buckets and sub-buckets, I saw how individual interview transcripts and observations spoke to one another in either consistent or contradictory ways. I often emptied out, replaced, or filled in the contents of these buckets as I revisited and reflected on the ways in which each of them responded to the aim of this study.

Next, I developed analytic questions to understand further the significance of the data in each bucket. Researchers can use analytic questions to pose questions to the data relative to how a data analyst view them to be responding to the research questions of the study (Neumann & Pallas, 2015). I used analytic questions to interrogate each individual interview and observation transcript and how it related to the aims of my research. In this way, I was able to be on “ground level” with the data, probing individual pieces of data to consider how each responded to my research questions (Neumann & Pallas, 2015, p. 168). Through this process, I generated the following analytic questions:

1. How does this student describe her/his use of classmates’ prior knowledge as part of her/his learning in the diversity course?
 - a. How does this student’s own prior knowledge and experiences interact with classmates’ prior knowledge and experiences *and* her/his learning of class content?
 - i. How does this student offer her/his prior knowledge and experiences as counterexamples that challenge her/his classmates’ prior knowledge and experiences to understand a particular issue or topic?

- ii. How does this student offer her/his prior knowledge and experiences as examples that connect to her/his classmates' prior knowledge and experiences to understand a particular issue or topic?
2. How does this student describe the ways in which the diversity course has shaped the way they interact with their families, friends, and other members of their immediate social network outside of school (e.g., coworkers, church members, etc.)?
 - a. To what extent and how does this student describe the ways in which the diversity course has changed the way she/he thinks about their neighborhood and city?
3. To what extent and how does this student describe the ways in which the diversity course has shaped her/his career aspirations?

Guided by these analytic questions, I then developed codes and sub-codes using NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software. The codes and sub-codes I generated highlighted the relevant pieces of data that responded to each of the analytic questions above (Neumann & Pallas, 2015). For example, to code for Analytic Question 1, I developed the code, "connecting to classmates' prior knowledge in learning," to indicate how participants utilized their classmates' prior knowledge as a way to think about class topics and ideas. Related to this code, I developed a sub-code called "connecting own prior knowledge to classmates and to learning" to tag all descriptions in which participants reported drawing from their own prior knowledge and experiences to connect to their classmates and to the topic they were discussing in class. I continued this process of generating codes and sub-codes until I exhausted the possibility of so doing, achieving

analytic saturation (Birks & Mills, 2015). Through this process of coding, I yielded 16 codes that isolated 414 data references across the 10 primary participants.

After coding the data, I identified themes. To do this, I looked for repetitive occurrences in the coded data references (Bernard, Wutich, & Ryan, 2017). I specifically looked for instances in the coded data references whereby participants reported on the ways in which prior knowledge (either their own or of others) shaped their learning of diversity content. I also searched for descriptions that showed how participants' learning of diversity was shaping other areas of their lives outside of school. From this search, I identified three themes that I believed best responded to the research questions of this study: (a) students drawing from their classmates' prior knowledge and experiences to engage with the diversity content; (b) students drawing from their own prior knowledge and experiences to engage with the diversity content; and (c) students drawing from the diversity content to relate it to their lives outside of school. In the next chapter, I discuss these themes with supporting data and in greater depth.

From these themes, I created emerging propositions. Propositions are claims that “speak to both the nature of the phenomenon of study and more traditional concerns about the likelihood of its appearance in the population sampled” (Neumann & Pallas, 2015, p. 168). Propositions are thus generalized statements about the research findings—or general statements pertaining to their meaning (often theoretically)—that may apply to similar scenarios beyond the data collected for a specific study (Neuman & Pallas, 2015; for an example, see Neumann, 2006). I generated propositions by comparing the themes of my study to the findings of extant research on the learning experiences of first-generation college students of color in diversity courses. The propositions emerging from

this study may thus point to the kinds of shared experiences these students have in their learning of diversity content, and what it means to learn diversity, especially from the perspective of students' reliance on their prior knowledge, a special concern of my study. The propositions for this study are also presented in the next chapter.

Study Limitations

In designing my study, I selected the best possible methods for producing trustworthy research claims that could provide insight into the learning of first-generation college students of color in diversity courses. However, I recognize that this study also presents some strategic and methodological limitations. I describe each of these limitations in detail below.

Researcher Standpoint

The researcher's standpoint—or a researcher's beliefs and prior experiences—can shape how that researcher interprets the data (Olesen, 2005). My own standpoint stems from my experience as a woman of color, as a first-generation immigrant, and as an educator and administrator who has worked with first-generation college students and students of color at various educational levels (from elementary school to college). Through these experiences and my graduate education at the University of Arizona and Teachers College, I have developed ideas and opinions about the learning experiences of students of color and first-generation college students, particularly as these pertain to equity in provision of learning opportunities for these students. These ideas and opinions, if not carefully considered, might inadvertently bias my analysis of data. For example, I might seek to explain students' experiences in a way that highlights my prior views on

equity in learning rather than taking a more distanced stance on what students say, thus testing my own beliefs. However, I also understand that, because my study participants and I do, in fact, share common experiences, my research standpoint might accomplish quite the opposite: It might help me, as the researcher, grasp the learning experiences of primary participants in ways that others, without my background, might not be able to (due to differences between their prior understandings and those of participants). In this sense, what may appear to exert undue bias on findings may also contribute in substantive ways.

In order to guard against potential bias and identify how my researcher standpoint influences my study, I regularly reflected in my field notes on the ways in which my views may have shaped the way I was analyzing the data (Johnson, 1997). This entailed continuously questioning and writing about how the preconceptions I had of qualitative research and students' learning may have impacted how I viewed what was happening in the class observations and interviews. Additionally, I subjected my data and data analysis process to peer review by other doctoral students in the Higher and Postsecondary Education program at Teachers College. I also sought advice from my dissertation committee and other education scholars during conferences. This process of peer review and consultation helped me uncover potential alternatives for understanding the data (Guba, 1981; Johnson, 1997).

General Applicability

My study focused on the learning experiences of first-generation college students of color enrolled in two diversity courses in a highly diverse 4-year public institution on the East Coast. As such, the findings from my study may not be applicable to every

college learning situation or to all first-generation college students of color. However, I believe that the findings generated by this study, which are discussed in the next chapter, yielded theoretical propositions—about what first-generation college students of color learn and experience in diversity courses—that subsequently may inform how researchers, faculty, and administrators think about these students, their learning and teaching, and their larger learning environments.

Trustworthiness of Findings

Trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to the degree to which the researcher can defend and provide credible explanations for the emerging patterns, themes, findings, and propositions emerging from the study (Golafshani, 2003; Guba; 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). Trustworthiness is an issue for qualitative researchers because their work often does not happen in a controlled environment and does not utilize well-defined and widely used scientific or statistical metrics with attention to probability distributions, frequency of assessment, and related standards for understanding a phenomenon (Kreiman & Maunsell, 2011; Krippendorff, 2003; The National Academy of Sciences, 2005). However, qualitative researchers do consider the overall nature and intricacies of the phenomena of interest in developing accurate and insightful responses to their research questions (Creswell, 2007). As such, qualitative researchers must carry out accurate portrayals of the phenomena of interest and report emerging findings in ways that limit researcher bias to the very best of their abilities (Shenton, 2004). Below, I outline the steps I took to achieve trustworthiness.

Triangulating Data

I engaged in data triangulation, or the collection and cross-examination of multiple forms of data, as a way of achieving trustworthiness (Golafshani, 2003). Although I collected data on a particular phenomenon (the learning of first-generation college students of color in diversity courses), triangulation included an assessment of the extent to which data on that phenomenon, from different sources or collected through different means, compared and contrasted with each other. For example, I often made notes of what I saw during my observations and compared what I saw with what the participants shared with me during the interviews. In doing this, I was able to check for consistency and inconsistency among patterns derived from variously sourced data. I also checked for consistencies and inconsistencies across data from different sources (or collected by varying means) by reexamining the data and my methods at multiple points throughout the collection and analysis process. Going through these steps helped me “maximize the validity” of data collected in the field (Denzin, 1978, p. 304).

Identifying Disconfirming Data

In order to generate research claims that are defensible and grounded in the data, researchers need to search intentionally for disconfirming data (Neumann & Pallas, 2015). The presence of some disconfirming data, in otherwise consistent data patterns, raises questions about the accuracy and consistency of research claims (findings). It is thus important for researchers to address disconfirming data pointedly in order to achieve trustworthiness. To identify disconfirming data, I “carefully and purposively...[searched] for examples [in the data] that disconfirmed expectations and explanations” (Johnson, 1997, p. 284). By looking for disconfirming data, I addressed the possibility that my

researcher standpoint and preconceptions about the data might have played a role in my findings and analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

I looked for disconfirming data by reviewing my sources of data for my study (transcripts, audio, and observation and field notes) several times. If and when disconfirming data arose, I made a note of it and examined the full context (e.g., the class topic of discussion during a particular session, the participants' interactions with peers in the classroom that day) that shaped the way I was seeing the data. In doing so, I was utilizing all my data resources to cross-examine and corroborate data patterns and eventual findings.

Peer Review

As discussed above, I asked peers to provide critical feedback on my data analysis in process. To do this, I shared a data pattern and emerging analytical questions with peer doctoral students in the Higher and Postsecondary Education program to garner feedback on how well my analysis cohered. I also shared drafts of the data patterns and analytical questions with those on my dissertation committee. Such feedback provided me with another means of cross-checking my research with colleagues who were knowledgeable of the field of higher education.

Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented my strategy for identifying study participants and sites, data collection, human subjects' protection, data analysis, and trustworthiness. The next chapter presents my study findings.

Chapter IV

FINDINGS

My goal for this study was to understand the classroom experiences of 10 first-generation college students of color; the 10 students were enrolled in one of two diversity courses I observed through this study. I explored the extent to which these students may draw from their funds of knowledge—their historically and socially accumulated knowledge and practices—in order to learn subject matter in their diversity course. I also explored if these students utilized the knowledge they gained from their diversity course in other areas of their lives outside of school (in their homes and communities), and to the extent possible I considered the form that such knowledge utilization took. To this end, the research questions I outlined in Chapter I guided my consideration of three areas of learning for first-generation college students of color in diversity courses: (a) the kinds of learning experiences that first-generation college students of color had in diversity courses; (b) the extent to which the knowledge they gained from the class shaped how they view themselves and their world (in their homes and neighborhoods); and (c) the ways in which prior knowledge may come into their learning in the classroom.¹

¹ As I outlined briefly in Chapters I and II, I understand prior knowledge to mean the knowledge that students have acquired throughout their lives, from previous academic, social, and cultural experiences, which shape their conceptions and preconceptions of subject matter (Bransford et al., 2000; Flavell & Wellman, 1975; Shulman, 2004a; see also Pallas & Neumann, 2019).

To address my research questions, I collected data from two secondary participants (the faculty members teaching the two courses) and 10 primary participants that included interviews, class observations, and class assignments, all with the aim of understanding the degree to which the first-generation college students of color in the two study classroom sites drew from their prior knowledge to engage with diversity-based subject matter.² Then, I developed themes that demonstrated repetitive occurrences in the data that responded to my research questions. From this process, three broad themes strongly emerged across all 10 focal participants and in both classes: (a) students engaging with the diversity content by drawing from the prior knowledge and experiences of classmates; (b) students engaging with the diversity content by drawing from their own prior knowledge and experiences; and (c) students using the diversity content outside of school.³ These themes then led me to develop propositions, or generalizable statements about the findings that may be observed in other scenarios outside of my study. I discuss these themes and their related propositions below.

Theme 1: Students Drawing from Classmates' Prior Knowledge

Theme 1: Study participants drew from their classmates' prior knowledge and experiences to make sense of the content of the diversity course.

² For the remainder of this chapter, I refer to the subject matter that instructors taught in these courses as “diversity content.” As I outlined in Chapter III, for the two diversity courses that were part of this study, “content” included first-person narratives from freed slaves and prominent African American authors, such as James Baldwin and Langston Hughes (as was the case in the Narratives of African American course) and concepts pertaining to the organizational structure of African American activist and community organizations, such as the Black Panther Movement and the Nation of Islam (as was the case in the African American Community course).

³ It is noteworthy that themes and propositions, reported in Chapter IV, were equally pronounced for the two classrooms despite their including different students who were taught different forms of disciplinary knowledge by different teachers.

In Chapter III, I discussed how the two faculty members of each diversity course approached their teaching. During our interviews, both faculty stated that they facilitated discussions whereby students shared how course ideas have manifested in their own lives. The students connected to these ideas by, for example, relating how popular song lyrics are informed by current political and social contexts (as was the case in the Narratives class) or by discussing community organizations with which they developed a familiarity while growing up (which happened in the Community course). Through the exchanges that followed, the student participants gained new insight into the particular subject matter being taught, just as the instructors had hoped. Yet, in doing so, these students gained something else as well: insight into the lives of their classmates. I offer this observation, a finding of this study, to highlight an expanded view of the value of students' prior knowledge in early engagement with course ideas—namely, that what a student articulates as their own prior knowledge may be as valuable to a peer as to the person who generated that prior knowledge in the first place. I elaborate below.

The study's 10 primary participants reported that the knowledge and experiences that their classmates brought up in class, as linked to the diversity content being taught, were helpful to their learning. The former is what I refer to as prior knowledge (per Bransford et al., 2000). While learning sciences-based educational research recognizes that students learn by drawing on their own prior knowledge, considerably less emphasis has been placed on the related yet different phenomenon of students drawing on others' (in this case, their classmates') prior knowledge, as spoken in class, to advance their learning. The prior knowledge and experiences of classmates, thus, provide an important resource for first-generation college students to grasp the diversity course content—

mainly that classmates may draw from each other's lives (inasmuch as from their own) for support, including ways of thinking and making sense of new course content.

Participants further noted that their classmates' prior knowledge and experiences helped them relate to the content of the class on a personal level. For example, participants stated that their classmates explained course concepts and topics, like racial identity and political lobbying, in ways that they could easily grasp in that they typically used language, popular culture, and current events to help explain their thoughts about the content. Participants also stated that hearing and thinking through classmates' explanations of the course content was helpful to them because classmates re-interpreted concepts and topics by using real-life examples to which participants could relate. Below I provide case examples from my study that highlight this theme.

Case Examples for Theme 1

Valeria, a senior in the African American Community course, reported that her classmates' prior knowledge and experiences were helpful to her understanding of the book assigned for the class, *Blueprint for Black Power* by Amos Wilson—a volume that, she explained, could be difficult to understand due to the complex concepts and language the author used. Valeria stated that one topic in particular from *Blueprint* that continues to confuse her is the role of special interests in the formation of government policies: “I feel like that was very frustrating to learn about, and at the same time confusing because I still don't 100% understand how it works.”⁴ Nonetheless, Valeria claimed that her

⁴ In brief, Wilson argues that special interests are institutionalized ways for the “ruling elite [to] control access to or possession of key material and social resources, physical force, social activities and skills, and positions of authority which permit it to acquire and maintain power over subordinate classes who are denied significant access to them” (p. 157). Wilson argues that the function and process of special

classmates' prior knowledge and experiences, as they came up during class discussions and presentations, helped her make sense of the book, as she was connecting it to happenings in the world with which she is familiar:

The discussions [with my classmates] are what makes it [the course content] stick for me the most because the reading [of *Blueprint for Black Power*] is a little intense and difficult to, um, uh, peel the layers 'cause there's just so much. And so the discussions, it really, um, allows people to put into their own words and give, um, their own, like, examples from past experiences and things that they can relate to. So just hearing other people's perspectives on the chapters [from the reading] really allows me to remember it. And the discussions that they [her classmates] bring up are always, um, are always very insightful because sometimes I may not think that way. I think everyone's really open to different ideas and interpretations, which is good 'cause we take, um, we can add onto, um, whatever it is that we had in our minds 'cause I think everyone's really, uh, um, willing to give their opinions and take in other opinions.

Valeria credited her classmates' prior knowledge and experiences as useful components of her understanding of the course text. For example, to explain special interests, the topic that Valeria was confused about, a classmate talked about the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), a nonprofit organization that collaborates with legislators to draft and customize policy proposals for their state. This classmate previously viewed YouTube videos about ALEC and shared them with the class to show an example of special interests. In sharing this example, Valeria's classmate summarized: "ALEC hands it [bill proposals] to legislatures, they're [ALEC] just making their jobs easier. You don't have to read through it, you don't have to write up the proposal yourself." By listening to her classmate present ALEC as an example of special interests, Valeria gained an understanding of how the "ruling elite," per Wilson's terminology, can shape policy: "No matter if you're a millionaire, you're still answering,

interests are to preserve the status quo in the government, and thus policies reflect the maintenance of power to the elite few.

at the end of the day, to someone [who is part of the elite] that's taking care of like, the like—a big part of whatever it is that you own.” For Valeria, a classmate’s use of YouTube to talk about ALEC helped her get a foothold on the idea of special interest in today’s society. In this instance, the classmate offered what Valeria referred to as “very insightful” bits of her prior knowledge which served to introduce her to a new and otherwise unfamiliar course idea.

In a similar manner, Sorayda, a junior enrolled in the Narratives of African Americans course, explained that she appreciated how her classmates willingly introduced their prior knowledge and experiences during class sessions, especially as they related to the topic of the day. For example, in a particular class discussion on the 20th-century Great Migration of African Americans, one of Sorayda’s classmates used his knowledge and experiences with visual arts to interpret Jacob Lawrence’s 1940 art piece, *Migration Series*—a 60-panel series of artwork that depicts the African American migration from the American South to other parts of the United States. In presenting on the *Migration Series*, Sorayda’s classmate frequently asked the class “What do you see?” as they looked through frames of Lawrence’s work together. Then, Sorayda’s classmate asked the students to look closely at selected nuances of each frame. He did this by asking whether they could make out the symbolism of the triangle that, he pointed out, was embedded within different parts of the series. “The diamond and triangles symbolize migrating together,” he stated in explaining this point.⁵ This example, along with the

⁵ According to Lemke (2008), Jacob Lawrence was one of a few artists in the 1920s and 1930s who engaged in artmaking that depicted the African diaspora. In *Migration series*, Lemke argues that Lawrence used triangle shapes (for example, in a depiction of a flock of birds moving in the same direction as a group, or people walking in unison to make a triangle shape) as a way to “[foreground] people on the move [and] to emphasize the aspect of mobility” (p. 131). Thus, the triangle shape in the *Migration series* symbolized the unity of movement for African Americans.

classmates' interpretation, helped Sorayda improve her understanding of African American migration within the United States. She recalled:

When we give, like, presentations ourself [*sic*], talking to ourselves is more easier because then we understand each other. And then if we have, like, questions, we're like, "Oh, what does this mean? Why did you choose this?" And then we, um, we comprehend each other like—like with the guy with the visual arts thing, he was like, "Oh, I chose this image because it shows this, this and this." And everybody went, "Oh, that's a good understanding as to why." It gives like a more easier comprehension instead of, like, [the] professor just standing, like, in front, talking quickly through everything.

Since he was well-versed in visual arts, Sorayda's classmate was able to break down the finer details of the *Migration* series that several others in the class did not see or understand—like the portrayal of the triangle. The classmate explained the artwork from points of view and in words that Sorayda said she could "comprehend." Through her classmate's prior knowledge and experiences, Sorayda said that she came closer to grasping key course content.

Summary of Theme 1. All 10 primary participants reported that through discussions in which classmates shared selected parts of their prior knowledge and experiences, they gained—largely introductory—understanding of the content of their diversity course. Having classmates' "examples from [their] past experiences," as Valeria reported, offered participants with opportunities to gain new insights into ways of interpreting and understanding the course content. Similarly, the examples and explanations offered by classmates provided participants with entry ways into their thinking through otherwise unfamiliar ideas. Thus, their classmates' prior knowledge and experiences—including their previously developed ways of knowing related material—shaped how participants experienced the learning of the content in their diversity course.

Proposition I. *First-generation college students of color in diversity courses may draw from their classmates' prior knowledge and experiences as one way to learn (or to begin to learn) the subject matter of the diversity course.*

First-generation college students of color may be able to grasp the content of the diversity course in which they enrolled via their classmates' renditions of their own prior knowledge and experiences. This proposition highlights an important point that has not, to date, been discussed in the extant literature on first-generation college students of color in diversity courses, and also in some broader treatments of students' learning in college.

In Chapter II, I outlined the research that showed how peer-to-peer collaborative learning can influence students' experiences in diversity courses. Students in diversity courses who engaged in collaborative learning, through small-group discussions or on shared projects, tended to view their classroom environment as inclusive of all students' opinions (Garcia & Van Soest, 2000; Machemer & Crawford, 2007). This can occur as students in these courses take the lead in facilitating discussions on difficult diversity topics, like race and racism in society. The case examples above offer an even deeper look into how students in diversity courses may engage with classmates toward some understanding of the subject matter. Proposition I suggests that first-generation college students of color may draw from their classmates' prior knowledge and experiences to gain some—initial or introductory—understanding of subject matter. In this view, the field's understanding of the utility of prior knowledge in teaching expands beyond the interaction of a teacher and her students (e.g., Ball, 2001; Bransford et al., 2001; Shulman, 1986) so as to include, in a revised view, selected interaction with classmates.

Theme 2: Students Drawing From Their Own Prior Knowledge

Theme 2: To challenge classmates' prior knowledge, when viewed as inaccurate, study participants often drew on their own prior knowledge and experiences.

Most participants (6/10) often drew from their own prior knowledge and experiences to deepen their engagement of the diversity course content. They reported that they drew from their own prior knowledge and experiences to offer counterexamples that challenged some classmates' preconceived views of class topics, especially those they considered to be inaccurate. Examples include classmates' views of why they believe social inequalities exist in low-income communities or the aims of African American activist organizations. In drawing on personal counterexamples, participants appeared to claim that their own knowledge and experiences were powerful resources for supporting their questioning of classmates' inaccurate prior knowledge. Such interactions also appeared to spur participants' thinking about their own personal connections to the subject matter at issue. I discuss case examples below.

Case Examples for Theme 2

Faith, a senior enrolled in the African American Community course, claimed that the most challenging aspect of the course was her classmates' views of issues that countered her own prior knowledge and experiences. When I asked her for one example whereby her classmates' prior knowledge and experiences differed from her own, in ways that led her to question their conclusions, she recalled a class discussion on the topic of African Americans living in low-income housing. In this instance, one classmate asserted: "Well, um, they [African Americans] don't care about their communities

anyway. All they want to do is complain about not having heat and not having hot water. They don't care about anything.” This class discussion was particularly personal to Faith because she has lived her whole life in a low-income housing community. Faith recounted:

Just the other views of people who may not understand cer—certain con— contexts or things that are happening within low-income communities. So if you come from—so we can be, we can both be from the same race, but you might come from a different class. So now there's classism. So you might not necessarily understand the issues that someone else who's from a lower class has experienced. So your views would be different. You'd be more judgmental, you'd be more, you know—so just hearing their mindset towards people from low-income communities, um, like, kind of, like they, they, they, um, self, [that] they're self-made victims, kind of like that. Those kind of ideas. But you know, if you've [“you” in this case refers to a classmate] been upper middle class all your life, you necessarily wouldn't understand the situations and the struggles of someone who comes from a family that, you know, grew up in poverty. So you wouldn't necessarily understand that. So that was frustrating.

Having spent her life in a low-income African American community, and knowing it well on a personal level, Faith shared that the class conversation on this topic led her to experience the viewpoints of classmates, whose spoken prior knowledge reflected unfamiliarity with this particular milieu of the African American community. In this instance, she recognized that, even though some of her classmates are of “the same race” as herself, they can differ in experience and viewpoints on issues of social class.

Faith continued to share her frustration with through this particular discussion, as classmates neglected to attend to insights about social inequality that were well ingrained in her own first-hand knowledge of them:

How are these communities created? Why are there so many children born into poverty? Why, why is it that these things are happening? Um, I just think they [her classmates] did not necessarily have an understanding, so they just passed judgment, and it just frustrated me because I'm like, “I don't want them [her classmates] to walk out into the world with these views.” So, you know, it's just like the frustration that people have with low-income communities without

necessarily understanding, like, that was just so personal to me. So it was just frustrating, you know. Especially because I grew up low-income, and it's, like, I'm working really hard. For me, I feel like—well, I'm kind of the example of, you know, what it's like to grow up in a low-income community, but also, you know, try to fight for your education.

During our interview, Faith shared that this class discussion spurred deeper questions relevant to her and her classmates' future learning of this topic—for example, she asked, “How are these communities created? Why are so many children born into poverty?” She did not openly pose these questions in class, but, upon talking through this moment during our interview, these questions could prompt further “understanding” on the topic for her and her classmates.

Later on in this same conversation, Faith shared with me that this particular discussion with her classmates was an “Aha!” moment for her, as she realized that in the future she would need to find ways to share aspects of her own experience with others. To emphasize this point, Faith stated: “You know, when I get my master's or my PhD, I still always have to have the empathy and that connection with my people. No matter how high I climb. And it's just, it's not my people as in African Americans, it's my people as in people who are low-income.” In making this statement, Faith appeared to say that her prior knowledge and experiences are aspects of her life that she wants to continue to share in social or academic settings where people may not be as familiar as she is with the life of low-income communities. Faith claimed that sharing these aspects of her life with others will help her maintain her connection with her own community and her background.

Similarly, Ashley, a junior in the African American Community course, also found some of her classmates' prior knowledge and experiences related to class topics as

being at odds with her own. Ashley recalled an instance when the class discussed activist organizations. Through this class discussion, students shared their views on the Black Lives Matter Movement, an activist organization that began in 2013 to campaign against violent and racist acts towards African Americans. Ashley claimed that this discussion was difficult for her due to one classmate's viewpoint in particular:

One of, like, the classes to—we was [*sic*] debating about, um, whether people should say “Black Lives Matter” or “All Lives Matter.” And I was just like, “What?” Like, I was, like, “you—” I’m, like, I was, like, and she was the other Black woman, too, so I’m, like, I don’t understand how you can say people should say “All Lives Matter” because Black people wouldn’t say “Black Lives Matter” if people knew all lives matter. So it’s, like, you taking away from that, even though you’re a Black woman. But I was, like, “You’re [an] African American and Black Studies major,” so I was, like, that didn’t make sense to me. But I’m just, like, “Okay.” But that stood out to me because I was, like, sometimes people could be in a major and be in the, um, field or in—at a cert—certain intellectual plan but still buy into certain biases of, like, still, like, their mind is still kind of corrupt in a certain ways [*sic*]. So I was just, like, yeah, no. Like, we was kind of going back and forth and the professor’s like, “Okay, moving on.” I’m just, like, “No, you can’t say that.” And every person has, like, a reason to why they think the way they think and, like, the beliefs of what lead to that type of thinking so I just, like, it would be interesting to try to, like, kinda, like, not only dissect but, like, find the root of why she thinks that “All Lives Matter” should be instead of “Black Lives Matter.”

Ashley stated that she was taken aback at how an African American student majoring in African American and Black Studies could not understand what she understood, namely police violence towards African Americans. By talking through this particular moment in class, Ashley realized that, although she and her classmate had the same “intellectual plan,” or similar academic interests, her classmate still had “certain biases” that framed her thoughts about the African American experience. Ashley suggested that these biases may hinder her classmate from fully understanding the role of the Black Lives Matter Movement in standing up to police violence against African American communities. Ashley also appeared to suggest that, as a student majoring in African American and

Black Studies and as an African American herself, her classmate should have been more knowledgeable of and empathetic towards the daily experiences of African Americans. Despite this moment of disagreement, Ashley was “interested” in further understanding “the beliefs of what [led] to [her classmate’s] type of thinking” on this particular discussion. In gaining this understanding, Ashley appeared to say that she can gain insight into the “root of” the disagreement on this issue.

Summary of Theme 2. Like Faith and Ashley, several other students participating in this study drew from their prior knowledge and experiences to offer and formulate counterexamples to and counter-arguments against their classmates’ prior knowledge and experiences about the meaning of a course topic, particularly if and when they saw their classmates’ thinking as inaccurate. These participants also stated that they themselves would like to understand better what informed their classmates’ viewpoints on these topics. Were they privy to such insight, they might better understand how their classmates thought about these topics.

Proposition II. *First-generation college students of color may draw from their own prior knowledge and experiences to challenge a classmate’s preconceived ideas about the course content.*

First-generation college students of color may connect relevant aspects of their lives to engage with the diversity course content, and, with regard to these cases presented here, to challenge the views of classmates whose views of a course topic they believed to be inaccurate. In this case, the prior knowledge of one student countered that of the other. This proposition expands our understanding of how the prior knowledge and

experiences of first-generation college students of color enter into their learning in diversity courses.

In Chapter II, I reported that first-generation college students of color feel culturally and socially validated and affirmed in their diversity courses as they encounter the stories, ideas, and concepts related to the histories of people of color. The finding reported by Villalpando (2003) suggests that such validation and affirmation may occur, at least in part, as students see links between their own past experiences—and the knowledge (perhaps of self, community, and/or other facets of life) embedded in those prior experiences—and the course content. Proposition II explains the avenues whereby this may happen—for example, as students draw out prior knowledge to counter inaccurate ideas presented by classmates. The analysis so far has responded, as best as possible, to the question of how first-generation college students of color engage with subject matter in light of their prior knowledge. It has not yet addressed my final research question: How do students apply the new knowledge, derived through interactions like those above, to their lives, perhaps outside of school? For that, we turn to the next theme.

Theme 3: Students Using Their Learning Outside of School

Theme 3: Study participants used what they learned from the diversity course to understand their past, current, and future lives outside of school.

All 10 of the participants claimed that they used the knowledge they gained from their diversity course for thinking about issues in their lives outside of school. This came through in three ways: First, as study participants read about and discussed topics pertaining to the lives of diverse populations in the United States today, and especially

related to people of color (e.g., housing discrimination, treatment of women of color, etc.), they became conscious of the social interactions and conditions of those closest to them—their parents and close friends. Second, the knowledge that participants gained from the diversity course also led them to see differently the living conditions and daily interactions of people in their own neighborhoods and cities. This happened, for example, when participants realized how community engagement and organizational structures can make a difference in the lives of their neighbors and communities. Third, as they gained new insights into their own lives outside of school, participants began to think about how they might use the knowledge they gained from the diversity course in a future job or career. Participants thus used knowledge acquired through the diversity course to think about their lives outside of school, including in their present contexts and in their future careers and lives. I discuss these patterns below.

Pattern 3.1

Participants shared the knowledge they gained from the diversity course with family and friends.

Most study participants (7/10) stated that they shared new knowledge they gained from the course with family and friends when they saw that such knowledge was relevant to their lives. Participants claimed that this sharing of knowledge was one way for them to discuss with family and friends how concepts from the course, such as those pertaining to social class, racism or gender roles, manifested in their lived day-to-day experiences. In sharing relevant diversity-related concepts and ways of thinking, participants claimed that they were broadening their family and friends' understanding of their world and that

they too were making connections between what they saw and experienced in their world and the concepts gained in class.

Case examples for Pattern 3.1. Faith, the student who said that she often drew from her prior knowledge to provide counterexamples useful in challenging classmates' prior ideas, also claimed that when, in class, she heard or read about topics that applied to her personal or family life, or the lives of her friends, she would share her insights with her best friend and mother. Faith claimed that talking about topics with these two people, to whom she was very close, helped them understand the political or economic situations they were all in.

When asked why she shared such knowledge with her friends and family, Faith stated:

I always text my best friend. Um, she's, she is, um, applying for her PhD right now. So I always text her about different things. Um, me and her, we relate because we come from low-income communities, but we're trying to climb up that social ladder. And we're trying to, you know, become, become the, the person that kind of breaks the, uh, that just breaks the, the cycle in our family, you know, and create something new. So whenever I learn something here [in the diversity course], I'm always able to tell her, you know. Right now she works for the government, so she's like a minority there. So she's always grateful to have that kind of information [from the diversity course]. And my mom too, she watches the news a lot, so she's always talking about policies and things like that. So whenever I bring information from this class to it, she's like, "Oh, you know, and that makes so much sense. Because I was just watching CNN," or "I was just watching this." And so she's able to make the connections.

Faith often shared new knowledge with her best friend and mother when she saw that such knowledge had some relevance for their lives. Because Faith and her best friend had similar upbringings, sharing the new knowledge was a way for them to reflect on the social, political, and economic factors that have shaped their lives and that continue to shape their lives at the present time. With her mother, Faith discussed "information from

[the] class,” such as government practices that lead to policymaking, and how they can manifest in their current context, as these might apprise her mother on what she saw on the daily news. Through such discussions, Faith stated that her mother often was “able to make the connections” between current events and ideas from the diversity course. Thus, Faith shared the knowledge she acquired in the diversity course with family and friends when she recognized the relevance of that knowledge to the lives of persons especially close to her.

Similarly, Valeria, who, earlier in this chapter, shared why she found her classmates’ prior knowledge and experiences helpful to her learning in her diversity course, also shared that she often talked about what she learned in class with close friends and family. In asserting this, Valeria recalled Amos Wilson’s argument in *Blueprint for Black Power*, a text that analyzes how government policies shape the financial and educational positions of particular racial and social class groups in the United States. Valeria stated that ideas like this one, from her diversity course, led her to see that many of “these policies are not meant for us [who are not born into] generational wealth.”⁶ Valeria further detailed insights pertaining to these class topics with her two close friends:

I have these two friends that I always talk to them about it [the diversity course]. Like, I told you about, last time I told you my friend that she’s very, um, poor as well. Low-income, grew up in the projects, got a scholarship to a private university and, like, got a job in finance and she quit ‘cause she knew that the White elites were putting pressure on her just ‘cause she was a person of color, and she could tell the difference of how they would treat her versus how they would treat, like, her White colleagues. Um, so they’re very—I always like, um, try to show them [my two friends], like, mention, or, like, share with them new books that we’re reading. So—oh, and, and also I have a friend that, um, that

⁶ Generational wealth refers to the accumulation of wealth and financial assets over several generations within particular families and households (Munro, 1988).

she's not very, like, woke or into, like, African American and Black Studies, but I'm always, like, trying to teach her about stuff 'cause she's, um, sometimes she just feels like she, she, she hasn't accomplished enough. And I'm like, "You know, this is not your fault." So I do try to pass on the knowledge to anyone or everyone I can.

Valeria stated that she "[passed] on the knowledge" she was gaining in the diversity course (for example, about policies that differently shape people's financial and social positioning in U.S. society) to her two closest friends in an effort to broaden their understanding of their experiences at work or their current financial standing. In doing so, Valeria sought to help them see that the challenges that they have encountered throughout their lives may not have been their "fault," but may have been influenced by broader institutional structures that they could not control.

In addition, Valeria talked with her brother, when she could, about how government policies can at times disadvantage low-income communities of color. She had these conversations with him because, as she said, "his theory was that people need to stop being lazy and work for their success or for their wealth," and he supported politicians espousing similar rhetoric:

Yeah, my brother was a huge Trump supporter. And it was crazy because I'm, like, first of all he [brother] didn't go to college, he doesn't like school. So we're very opp—we're like totally opposite people. Um, he didn't like school because he went to a really, like, bad high school where the academics was [*sic*] crazy. And I'm, like, lecturing him, he's so much more understanding. Like, I keep reinforcing it. I keep bringing it up and I keep, like, sharing, like, links with him or books with him.

Valeria said that she made efforts to share course resources, like "links [and] books," with her brother as supports for their discussions. She said that these materials and conversations may inform her brother of the rhetoric that often undermines the daily lives of low-income communities of color. Valeria also appeared to suggest that her

interactions with her brother may lead him to gain some “understanding” of the content of the political narratives that bear on his life.

Summary of Pattern 3.1. The cases of Faith and Valeria exemplify a larger pattern in the data: seven out of the 10 study participants described sharing knowledge they gained in the diversity course with persons close to them. They described themselves as doing so especially when they felt that something they learned in the diversity course was relevant to the lives of family members and friends—for example, with potential to improve their understandings of how they are treated at work. Participants also suggested that they hoped their family and friends would make some adjustments to their outlook on their lived and daily experiences, and that they would be able to connect diversity-related concepts to their own everyday conversations and interactions with others (at work or with extended family and friends).

Theme 3 (focused on how participants used their learning in their diversity course to understand their past, current, and future lives) reflects two additional patterns, presented below as Pattern 3.2 and Pattern 3.3.

Pattern 3.2

Participants drew from the knowledge they gained in the diversity course to understand their neighborhoods and cities.

All 10 of the participants reported that the knowledge they gained from the diversity course gave them new insights into their neighborhoods and cities. They said that as they learned about the history and policies shaping the current social and economic experiences of people of color in the United States (e.g., history of racial discrimination, housing and schooling segregation, etc.), they started to see their

surroundings differently, thereby viewing the social interactions and daily practices of people in their neighborhoods and cities in new ways. For example, some participants reported becoming aware of the poor quality of their neighbors' homes (particularly as they compared their neighborhoods to more affluent areas of their city), while others reported becoming increasingly aware of inequities in gender roles (particularly so for women of color). Participants drew from the knowledge they gained from the diversity course to think about their nearby milieus—the relationships, neighborhoods, and cities in which they live and work. Below, I discuss particular cases wherein participants spoke specifically about how the course content changed their views and thinking about their neighborhoods and cities.

Case examples for Pattern 3.2. Zapora, a senior enrolled in the African American Community course, stated that she enrolled in the diversity course because she hoped to apply ideas she expected to gain there to her work in a local community that holds personal meaning for her. Zapora used her fieldwork experience (a required component of the course) to volunteer in a religious sanctuary that was central to her personal life. As a part of her work, Zapora provided sanctuary members with social, cultural, and spiritual resources fitting to their unique needs. Zapora further framed her fieldwork experience as an opportunity to consider how course ideas—for example, community empowerment—might spur change in her sanctuary: “The whole point of the, of the course is to empower the community.” In effect, Zapora used a significant course assignment—the fieldwork—to uplift a community that was central to her life.

Further, drawing on classmates' reporting on their own fieldwork experiences, Zapora gained additional insight into other organizations that are helping to improve

people's lives in various communities in the city in which she lives. She discussed this point during our interview, stating: "Like, to see the people doing that [community] work. I never even thought about like, 'Oh, that's an avenue of, like, people [that] need help.'" Having insight into these other organizations, beyond her sanctuary community, spurred Zapora's desire to engage in additional volunteer work with different communities around the city.

Relatedly, Aku, a senior enrolled in the African American Community course, carried out her fieldwork assignment by performing a variety of services for an organization, managed by her landlord. The organization provided housing and financial programs and counseling for low-income families in and around its vicinity. As she became increasingly involved in her fieldwork experience, Aku learned about the organizational practices that could also be applied to advance her and her neighbor's well-being. This insight gelled for Aku, especially as she and her classmates read Amos Wilson's *Blueprint for Black Power*—the required book for the diversity course:⁷

Mine [her fieldwork] [was in] my, my landlord's building. Like, I feel, like I'm at least contributing to my neighbors [in the building where I live]. That's one thing. And then I'm understanding several things. Like, why my, my, my landlord's organization is structured [as it is]. I didn't understand initially. Like, usually, when I get to my—initially, in my apartment building and there were things that were not going right, I used to get mad. Like, after I joined them [her landlord's organization], and I understood why it's something like that [landlord's organization is structured to be efficient in helping residents]. Now, I understand. It's opened my mind to certain things. And from talking to the deputy director of the organization [where I'm doing my fieldwork] I had in-depth information for understanding how the organization works.

⁷ Some comments on *Blueprint for Black Power*, the text that influenced Aku: The author, Amos Wilson, offers the view that local government policies can disadvantage low-income communities of color, for example, by putting limitations on the funding resources that community organizations can have. To ameliorate this situation, Wilson suggests that community organizations, particular ones serving African Americans, must deconstruct these policies and tap into overlooked economic institutions, like mutual funds and bonds, as alternatives for financial empowerment.

Drawing from her fieldwork experience, and informed by Wilson's text, Aku reported that she slowly "understood why" it is that her own and her family's housing conditions "were not going right." Aku further derived "in-depth information," as she put it, on how an organization can work to help communities of color with their housing needs despite the limitations in funding available to them.

In another case, Isaac, a first-year student enrolled in the Narratives of African Americans course, stated that the stories of freed and runaway slaves, which he read in the first two weeks of the semester, were important lessons for him. Isaac said that the readings helped him understand the "detail[s] of how African Americans were treated, and because of slavery this is how African Americans are portrayed and discriminated [today]." Isaac credited these lessons as helping him identify situations in his everyday life when racial discrimination was occurring:

When you're, like, in public, like, you can see, like, some people, you know, like, discriminating, and stuff. Like, it brings light to it, like, me, me being in this class, like, helped me understand, like, you know, this is how people treat each other. Like, I've seen it [racial discrimination]. But being in this class helped me, like, understand it more, and be, like, "Oh, this is why, you know, these people are acting like this towards each other." [And knowing these things], it'll probably, like, help me prepare for like, you know, what's to come, in, like, in certain situations, [to] understand a situation where, you know, racial discrimination is actually happening.

In the diversity course, Isaac was introduced to historical ideas framing the beginnings and unfolding of racial discrimination in the United States, including the policies and narratives that, even today, perpetuate such discrimination. After getting a foothold in these ideas, Isaac grew in his understanding of the nature of racial tensions existing in his city and neighborhood. Isaac credited the knowledge he gained from the diversity course

for expanding his newly realized awareness of situations around him reflecting racial discrimination.

Summary of Pattern 3.2. All 10 study participants stated that their diversity course exposed them to historical and conceptual ideas, such as community and organizational structure or racial narratives, that led them to see their surrounding neighborhoods in new ways—for example, with attention to the existence of inequity and discrimination, or with new awareness of resources, previously unseen, that were nonetheless available for improving livelihoods. Having engaged with such ideas—and seeing them first-hand in their fieldwork assignments—participants described themselves as prepared to lead in making positive changes in their community. Specifically, they became more forthright in their efforts to improve the daily lives of the people representing their community.

I turn now to Pattern 3.3. as an extension of Theme 3, which attends to how participants used their learning, in their diversity course, to understand their past, current, and future lives.

Pattern 3.3

Participants drew from the knowledge gained in their diversity course to think about their future jobs and/or careers.

Most participants (9/10) shared that they were certain as to what their degree majors would be at the point they entered Davian. Participants also had some idea as to the kinds of jobs and careers they wanted to pursue after graduating, having thought about these jobs or careers in some depth as they took classes in their major area of

study.⁸ Most participants (9/10) wanted to pursue jobs and careers that would allow them to give back to their communities (e.g., by becoming a teacher or social worker) or to help people who were experiencing difficult life circumstances (e.g., by becoming a lawyer or counselor). In their concluding interviews with me at the end of the semester, all 10 participants reported that the diversity course had, in their views, provided them with helpful knowledge—about how organizations function to help communities of color (as was the case in the African American Community course) or about how the racial identities of African American artists are expressed in their storytelling and artmaking (as was the case in the Narratives of African Americans course)—for launching the lives ahead of them, including their jobs and careers. Below, I provide participant cases that demonstrate these points.

Case examples for Pattern 3.3. Elena, a junior enrolled in the Narratives of African Americans course, said she wants to become a social worker after she graduates from Davian. During one of our interviews, she mentioned that she hopes to work with incarcerated youth because she “wanted to do something more [in a career] that was, like, helping people.” Because of the kind of work she hopes to enter in the future, Elena grasped onto concepts in her diversity course speaking to the formation of racial identity. A course reading that was particularly touching to Elena was “Letter to My Son” by Ta-Nehisi Coates, who described what it means for his son to be a Black man living in the United States in the 21st century. In discussing this text with me, Elena stated:

The stuff by Ta-Nehisi Coates and stuff like that, even though I, like, I mean, I lived through the era so I can identify with it. But, like hearing somebody who’s Black and, like, um, the story that he wrote to his son, you know, um, in—you can

⁸ Isaac was the only participant in this study who matriculated into Davian as Undecided in a degree major.

like, I guess not identify, but understand, like, how people feel within this country, even though I do know. [And knowing these stories] can help me in like working with other people, like [...] and, like, you apply that, certain people you could understand, like, how they feel a certain way.

As an Afro Latina, Elena came into the diversity course with a rough understanding, derived from life experiences, of race and of racial identity, the latter representing self-perception of shared identity with a particular racial group (e.g., African Americans, Latina/os, etc.) (Helms, 1990). Elena's exposure to the works of Ta-Nehisi Coates, W.E.B. DuBois, Ralph Ellison, and others—each describing their daily social experiences as African Americans—expanded her views on the histories and stories of people of color in the United States. In our interviews, Elena said that engaging with ideas from the course, “like double consciousness [from Dubois] and invisible man [from Ellison],” helped her frame her future as a social worker in that their writings helped give words to her reasons for engaging in work that supported incarcerated youth.

Similarly, Harold, a junior enrolled in the African American Community course, aspired to become a youth sports counselor after graduation from Davian. He was drawn to becoming a youth sports counselor because he was an athlete and had been for most of his life. He also saw and experienced the personal and social benefits of sports and teamwork for young people of color growing up in his city. Harold stated that the lessons he gained from the diversity course, related to community engagement, helped him formulate his approach to working with youth in the future. In particular, these lessons helped him frame the idea of sportsmanship as a person being part of a larger community, one composed of teammates' families and friends:

I think it [the diversity course] will help me towards my [career in] counseling because I don't feel that, you know, being, well, you know, being like a, an individualistic thinker helps, helps Black people now. Like, it's pretty much all

about you, you know, get for yourself, right. Don't care about this person, you know, focus on you. And that's good in some parts, but not all the time, you know. So I feel like this class is helping me see, like, why being that, that, being that collective person will help me towards my counseling, being, "Hey listen, you know, help your brother out, you know, like, he's going through a lot, she's going through a lot," you know. "Help out this, this, uh, elderly person, you know, this is, like, your grandma," you know, like, see it that way, don't see it as some random stranger, you know, like, we're all, we're all family, you know, we're all family, you know. Just share that kinda love, you know.

For Harold, "being [a] collective person" framed his thinking for his future work as a youth counselor. He hoped to expand common conceptions of teamwork to include participation by teammates' families, all as part of a vision of what it means to succeed as a whole.

Alongside his classmates, Harold read and thought deeply about the text *Blueprint for Black Power*, attending especially to Amos Wilson's argument that, for African American-led organizations to thrive and be effective, they must include the local community in their decision-making process; thus, in Wilson's view, organizations need community involvement and support to succeed. Harold grabbed onto this argument, asserting that being part of a team means that individuals are part of a collective within which each team member helps others, while also helping the community as a whole. It is in this way, primarily, that the community may position itself for success. Harold saw this idea as underpinning his future work in counseling youth in the future.

In yet another instance of how the diversity course framed students' conceptions of their future lives, we return to Valeria, in the context of a class discussion, as she shares what she sees as her options with her teacher, Professor Imoye. The discussion begins as one of Valeria's classmates brings up that, as a student majoring in African American and Black Studies, she feels an urgency to pursue a career through which she

will be able to give back to her community. Hearing this, Professor Imoye shared with the class his own experience about figuring out his future career path during his own undergraduate studies:

This is kind of an age-type thing, but eventually you get to the point where—well eventually you get to the point where you can imagine the urgency to get stuff done ‘cause you realize you’re not gonna be here forever. But, you know, at a certain point, too, you also realize that things will—sometimes you just have to take your time and let things happen. You know, what I’ll, what I’ll tell, what I’ll tell you is I got, um, in my first go around as an undergraduate I had this incredible urgency to get stuff done and, you know, I failed a couple classes early on. You know, dropped one or two [classes], partially because I was badly advised and, you know, it was really just a, you know, it was really [me] just taking [classes] randomly including the last courses that I had no business being in.

Valeria then jumped in, stating that, like Professor Imoye, she often strongly felt an urgency to help her community in active ways and she worried that she might not be doing enough to help those in her world. However, Valeria also shared that she was coming to realize that she did not have to be on a single particular path to make a difference in the world; rather there was room to think of options:

You know, you don’t really have to save the world because the small things also count like being, um, an educator. So that was really helpful for me because I just kept feeling like I had to save the world, [laughs] but I didn’t know in what major way. But I forgot that educat—people like them [educators], that are doing, you know, a small thing, a small thing really covers a lot of ground.

When Valeria and I later talked, she stated that through this conversation, which involved the full class, she had affirmed her decision, made a year earlier, to make a degree change—from nursing to African American and Black Studies. Like Harold, Valeria shared that, for her, a significant take-away from the diversity course—and one that would guide her future career—was the commitment of helping a whole community

rather than just an individual. From this lesson, Valeria was able to envision the kind of career she wanted to pursue:

This is kind of why I wanted to change career paths is because of this class. Because we learned in a chapter [from *Blueprint for Black Power*] that in order for the, um, people of color to succeed you have to target more than just one individual. Because I can meet you today and, you know, I can change your life, but it's not the same as me joining an organization that's gonna target multiple lives and again be the gift that's going to keep on giving. As to, like, you, you might be a great person, but then again you might just take your wealth and just use it for yourself. As to, like, different—if you impact different people they have a more, there's more, um, likely chance for, um, for, like, the knowledge to be, um, spread. And if I'm an educator, and I can, like, impact the youth and teach them this knowledge that I'm learning, that I can, you know—that we can have more people that are conscious about, um, color complex or racial inequality, et cetera. Yeah, so it was this class that made me want to be a professor.

Valeria reported that insights from the course validated her decision to change majors and pursue a new career path. She grew stronger in her commitment to help people of color—possibly through activities like community organizing, or by helping young people develop in their racial and ethnic identities.

Valeria was initially drawn to a nursing major because she saw it as a way to help others, and she had an interest in science while in high school. In describing her decision to change majors, Valeria explained that as a nurse, she would only be helping one person for a few minutes at a time. What Valeria really wanted to do for the full length of her career was to help a large number of people, thus maximizing the potential for bringing good in the world. Valeria said that the African American Community course helped her realize that a career as an educator would be her way to help a whole community of people. As a future professor, she would be able to “spread” knowledge, as she stated, to many people who, if she taught them well, might succeed in improving the well-being of communities of color.

Summary of Pattern 3.3. Virtually all participants in this study (9/10) stated that they wanted to pursue careers that would help people in some way; thus, they came to pursue careers as lawyers, counselors, social workers, or teachers. They stated that their diversity course provided them with ideas, about the power of community involvement and of their own awareness of their racial identity, that could inform whatever career they pursued. In this way, their careers could be directed to uplifting or helping their own communities or others like them. Both diversity courses thus provided participants with lessons that helped them think about their future lives outside of school, including their future jobs and careers.

The three patterns for Theme 3 that I described above culminate in two propositions which I present below.

Proposition III. *First-generation college students of color may use the knowledge they acquired in the diversity course in their lives outside of school.*

First-generation college students of color may come to see that the ideas they are exposed to in a diversity course—ideas like racial identity development and community uplift and engagement—can widen their understanding of their lives and the broader social contexts of their world. Those ideas, about diversity, can also inform the understandings of people close to them (their families and friends) and their neighborhoods and cities.

Proposition IV. *First-generation college students of color may use the knowledge they gained in the diversity course to think about their future jobs and careers.*

First-generation college students of color may draw from the knowledge they acquired in their diversity course to inform their choice of a job and career with attention

to what their future could yield for their families and communities in as much as for themselves.

Propositions III and IV broaden our insight into what first-generation college students of color may gain from diversity courses. As discussed in Chapter II, we know that White students often become more civically and politically involved in their local and campus community after taking a diversity course (Gurin et al., 2004; Zúñiga et al., 2005). This happens because, in taking the diversity course, these students became aware of the issues and policies—like those bearing on immigration, racial equality in the workplace and the like—that impact underrepresented communities, shaping them and their conditions of life. Yet, up to now, researchers have neglected to attend to how students who are not members of the majority population—in this case, first-generation college students of color as a unique population—experience diversity courses: what they learn in them, how they learn, and ultimately, whether and how they use their learning outside the classroom. This study is a first step towards understanding these aspects of the experiences of first-generation college students of color in diversity courses.

Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented data provided by 10 first-generation college students of color who took one of two diversity courses (African American Narratives or African American Community) at Davian College. These findings indicated that first-generation college students drew on their classmates' and their own prior knowledge to engage with the subject matter of their diversity course. These findings also showed that these

students used the knowledge they gained from their diversity course outside of school.

The findings from this study culminated in four propositions:

- *Proposition I:* First-generation college students of color in diversity courses may draw from their classmates' prior knowledge and experiences as one way to learn (or to begin to learn) the subject matter of the diversity course.
- *Proposition II:* First-generation college students of color may draw from their own prior knowledge and experiences to challenge a classmate's preconceived ideas about the course content.
- *Proposition III:* First-generation college students of color may use the knowledge they acquired in the diversity course in their lives outside of school.
- *Proposition IV:* First-generation college students of color may use the knowledge they gained in the diversity course to think about their future jobs and careers.

The first-generation college students of color involved in this study made meaningful connections to the subject matters to which they were exposed in their diversity courses. They forged these connections through knowledge that they drew from their own lives and from the lives of their classmates and communities. In the end, these students described themselves as seeking to return enriched knowledge to the individuals and groups to which they were familiar. In the next chapter, I discuss the implications of this study for practice, policy, and research.

Chapter V

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, I discuss my conclusions and recommendations for future work on first-generation college students of color and their engagement with their diversity course subject matter. I begin this chapter by revisiting my research questions, then briefly summarize the study findings. I then offer insights into the study's implications for research, policy, and practice.

Revisiting My Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to understand the degree to which first-generation college students of color drew from their lives to engage with and make sense of the subject matter of their diversity courses. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What can first-generation college students of color come to learn—for example, about diversity, themselves, their communities, and/or the world—in a diversity course?
 - a. What kinds of ideas and modes of thinking, offered in these courses, do they find to be meaningful? How might these ideas, or their presentation (for example, via instruction), be characterized?

- b. What kinds of ideas and modes of thinking gained in these courses do they find to be most challenging? How might these ideas, or their presentation (for example, via instruction), be characterized?
2. What, if any, kinds of prior knowledge do first-generation students of color view as especially meaningful in their learning of subject matter in diversity courses?
3. What, if any, aspects of their learning of diversity content do first-generation college students of color identify as relevant to their current lives outside of class (e.g., on campus and in their communities)?

The four propositions emerging from this study respond to these questions. The first proposition speaks to how first-generation college students of color may draw from their classmates' prior knowledge and experiences to gain some understanding of the diversity course subject matter (pertains to Research Questions #1 and #2). The second proposition demonstrates how these students may draw from their own prior knowledge and experiences to develop counterarguments that respond to inaccurate views voiced by their classmates about diversity-related concepts (speaks to Research Question #2). The third and fourth propositions show us that first-generation college students of color may use the knowledge they gained from their diversity course in their lives outside of school, in their homes and conversations with family and friends, as well as in their thinking about future jobs and careers (speaks to Research Question #3). Below I summarize the study findings.

Summary of Findings

My study highlighted that at the core of participants' experiences in diversity courses was *subject matter knowledge*. As reported in Chapter IV, my study revealed that first-generation college students of color engaged with the courses' subject matter in two ways: (a) through their interaction with classmates' prior knowledge and experiences, which provided real-world examples and diverse viewpoints for understanding subject matter ideas; and (b) through consideration of their own prior knowledge and experiences, which served as the source for their development of counterexamples and counterarguments to classmates' inaccurate views on subject matter ideas. First-generation college students of color also drew on the knowledge they acquired from their diversity courses to better understand their own lives outside of school, in their current contexts (with family and friends), or in the future (in a job or career).

Participants reported that they drew from their classmates' prior knowledge and experiences to gain some understanding of the subject matter of their diversity courses. They stated that their classmates' prior knowledge and experiences provided them with relatable examples that helped explain the complex ideas and topics covered in class. In these instances, classmates often drew from their lived experiences, prior understandings of course ideas, and current understandings of the world to re-interpret the course subject matter so that they and their classmates would better understand academic content. As such, participants grew in their awareness of the relevance of the subject matter to their own and their classmates' lives.

As noted above, participants stated that they drew from their own prior knowledge and experiences to make arguments counter to their classmates' viewpoints

on class ideas. As such, participants came to see their prior knowledge and experiences as reliable sources of knowledge for challenging others' (in this case, classmates') misconceptions of knowledge central to their lives and communities and, in fact, about them.

Participants also claimed that the subject matter of the course led them to think about their lives outside of school in three ways. First, participants reported that they shared the knowledge they gained from the diversity course with their family and friends, particularly if that knowledge had bearing on their lived and current experiences. Participants shared such knowledge with those closest to them because they wanted to broaden their family members' and friends' understandings of the social, historical, and political structures that shaped (and continue to shape) their lives. Second, participants claimed that the knowledge they gained from the diversity course expanded their ways of thinking about people in their neighborhoods and cities. For example, participants stated that the knowledge they gained from their diversity course offered them insights into the racial and economic structures that have shaped the daily experiences of their neighbors. Third, participants stated that they gained valuable ideas from the diversity course that they can apply with the people they foresee themselves working with them in the future. Some of the participants also stated that the diversity courses helped them envision the kinds of jobs or careers they can pursue in the future. The knowledge that participants gained from their diversity course thus played a role in their thinking about their current and future lives outside of school.

The findings from my study contribute to our understanding of how first-generation college students of color engage with and understand the subject matter of

diversity courses, and how they may use their learning in those courses in their homes and communities. My findings may open up opportunities for higher education researchers and policymakers to explore further the degree to which first-generation college students of color engage with subject matter knowledge, both inside and outside the classroom.

Implications for Research

The findings of my study suggest the following directions for future research:

First, a follow-up study with a larger sample of first-generation college students of color could be conducted in institutions of varying type and character (e.g., private, predominantly White, research-oriented, or liberal arts focused). In considering a larger study sample across various kinds of institutions, researchers may gain insight into how different student demographic configurations and campus cultures play a role in the classroom experiences of first-generation college students of color taking diversity courses. They may also come to better understand the variety of ways whereby students use their subject matter knowledge outside of school.

Second, the current study may be further expanded to explore the long-term influence of these students' engagement with diversity course content, that is, beyond their undergraduate experiences. In pursuing such a longitudinal study, researchers may gain further insight into the ways that first-generation college students of color continue to think about and enact their learning of diversity topics and ideas in their lives beyond college.

The pursuit of these two areas of study may provide higher education researchers and stakeholders with further understanding of how first-generation college students of color learn in diversity courses and what they can do with the knowledge gained from these classes in their lives outside of school.

Implications for Policy

Higher education leaders can develop and implement policies that can provide current and future faculty with the support they need to develop teaching practices that incorporate knowledge relevant to their students' lives into their teaching. For example, higher education leaders could invest in the development and growth of teaching support centers on campus. These teaching centers could provide faculty with the resources and learning opportunities they may need to develop the kinds of practices that consider students' prior knowledge and experiences as part of the teaching and learning of subject matter. This may involve supplementing learning centers' capacities currently to offer such support.

Higher education leaders can also develop and implement policies that can support first-generation college students of color in relating their learning and career endeavors to their lives outside of school. Higher education leaders may believe that campus-based tutoring centers and career services, as currently constructed, already serve to accomplish this. However, research shows that most undergraduate students underutilize such services (Ciscell, Foley, Luther, Howe, & Gjosedal, 2016; Collins & Sims, 2006; Fouad et al., 2006). Higher education leaders need to use institutional policy

to reframe these services so that they bear more directly on students' academic lives *and* their lives outside of school.

Implications for Practice

Based on the findings and emerging propositions of this study, I offer three implications with regard to the improvement of teaching practice:

First, participants found that their own and their classmates' prior knowledge and experiences played an important role in their learning of subject matter in the diversity course, enhancing their understanding of course content, and expanding their points of view. Based on this finding, I recommend that in their teaching, faculty integrate opportunities for students to share and reflect upon the relationship of their prior knowledge and experiences to the course subject matter.

Taking up this teaching approach requires that faculty develop pedagogical practices that merge their subject matter expertise with students' lives. This requires significant learning on the part of faculty accomplished, often, on the job. I recommend that higher education leaders carefully consider how institutional practices can be reframed to support current and future faculty in learning and developing pedagogical practices for identifying and using students' prior knowledge and experiences in their subject-matter teaching.

Lastly, the participants in my study saw how the knowledge they gained from their diversity course could be useful to them outside of school, within their homes and communities, and in their thinking about future jobs or careers. This finding suggests that first-generation college students of color think about the applicability of subject-matter

knowledge outside of school. For first-generation college students of color, who often are more likely than their White, non-first-generation peers to drop out of college (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2015), having the opportunity to see their learning as beneficial to their broader lives outside of school may be a way to engage them in their college-going experiences. I thus recommend that faculty and higher education leaders tap into students' lives outside of school to better understand how these students develop in their academic identity, and to consider, based on this, implications for enhancing their overall college experiences and persistence to degree.

I will close with implications for first-generation students of color themselves: My study helps to make the case that these students enter college classrooms—and in this case, diversity classes—with valuable prior knowledge and experiences that can inform how they engage with and understand the academic subject matters at issue. As such, I offer three sets of recommendations for the students themselves. First, for students poised to enroll in diversity courses: I would tell these students that they are exceedingly well positioned to learn a great deal—importantly, from what they know already and also from their classmates' lives. I would recommend that they draw, freely, on personal sources of knowledge such as these, given their value for academic learning. Second, for students already enrolled in a diversity course: I would urge these students to recognize that they can benefit, academically, from drawing on knowledge, indeed, from their own and classmates' lives, but also from the lives of their immediate and extended families, and their out-of-school friends, their neighbors and their communities; it matters that the students learn that their lives, from home and community, need not be separate from their lives in school. Lastly, for students completing diversity courses: I would advise these

students to utilize the insights they gained from these courses to raise community awareness of the political, social, and economic factors that have historically shaped the lives of community members. Thus, what these students gain from diversity courses may shape how they come to interact with others in their homes and neighborhoods, whether that be through volunteer work or political activism, or other forms of engagement for the larger good.

Closing

My prior experiences as an educator and administrator who worked with first-generation college students of color shaped my interest in pursuing a study of their experiences in diversity courses. The first-generation college students of color that I encountered in my work often acknowledged the ways in which their engagement with diversity issues in the classroom provided them with insight into their lives on- and off-campus. I also noticed that first-generation college students of color who took diversity courses were often involved in extracurricular activities that further engaged them in issues related to diversity. For example, some were motivated to participate in student groups dedicated to advancing the interests and clarifying the identities of particular racial or ethnic groups, or they became involved in supporting communities that were experiencing challenging financial or social hardships. Such experiences led me to wonder if first-generation college students of color may be gaining *something* of interest and potential utility—to the students themselves and to their communities—from the content of diversity courses.

Later, as I examined the research literature on undergraduate students' experiences in diversity courses, I noted, quickly, that first-generation college students of color were often left out of the scholarly discussion. A limited body of research addressed their learning in these courses. As I pointed out in Chapter II, the limited research that I did find reported that first-generation college students of color were indeed experiencing some positive gains in taking diversity courses. However, the research stopped short of attention to the question of what and how these students learn in diversity courses, with implications for what might be done to improve such learning. As I wrote earlier, I wanted to better understand how these students engaged with the subject matter of diversity courses, how they brought their prior knowledge and experiences into the courses, what their learning experiences in these courses were like, and how the diversity courses appeared to influence their lives beyond school. These were the underlying inquiries for this study and to which my findings speak. Much more needs to be uncovered. I hope that future research, policy, and practice will take up the initial insights I present here toward improving these students' learning and lives.

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Appendix A

Email to High-Level Institutional Official [To Be Designated]

Dear _____,

My name is Dianne Delima, and I am currently working on my doctoral dissertation at Teachers College, Columbia University. My dissertation, entitled *A Funds of Knowledge Approach to Learning in Diversity Courses for First-Generation College Students of Color*, attempts to understand the learning experiences of first-generation college students of color enrolled in diversity courses. I seek to understand what these students may be incorporating from what they already know, from their lives and from prior schooling experiences, into their learning of diversity. I will also be considering what the students do with what they learn from diversity courses, particularly on this college campus and in their home communities. Through this study, I hope to glean insights about the knowledge and experiences that first-generation college students of color draw on toward their learning of diversity.

[Name of Institutional Contact] has recommended that I speak to you because, as the [Title of the Official] of [Name of Institution], you may be able to grant me permission to enter [Name of Institution] during the 2018-2019 academic year to interview and observe first-generation college students of color enrolled in diversity courses and also the faculty teaching these diversity courses. I have identified [Name of Institution] as a potential research site because it is a high-diversity institution and one whose general education curriculum offers diversity courses.

Please note: I have fulfilled the Institutional Review Board (IRB) application for Teachers College, Columbia University, which is required of me in order to carry out this study. I will need a letter with your permission to complete my IRB application. The participants and research site involved in this study will be kept confidential and they will not be revealed in any study report.

I greatly appreciate your assistance in my research efforts. I will be reaching out to you again next week to follow up on your permission to enter [Name of Institution] for this study. If you have any questions in regards to my study, I am more than happy to speak with you in-person or over the phone. Please do not hesitate to contact me at any time. You may contact me through my email or phone number, both listed below. Thank you for your time and I hope to hear from you soon.

Best,

Dianne Delima

Ed.D. Candidate, Higher & Postsecondary Education

Teachers College, Columbia University

Email: dd2583@tc.columbia.edu, Phone: 559-361-5015

Appendix B

Invitation to Participate Email to Faculty

Dear _____,

My name is Dianne Delima, and I am currently working on my doctoral dissertation at Teachers College, Columbia University. My dissertation, entitled *A Funds of Knowledge Approach to Learning in Diversity Courses for First-Generation College Students of Color*, studies the learning of first-generation college students of color enrolled in a diversity course. I seek to understand what these students may be incorporating by way of what they know already—from their personal lives and from prior schooling experiences—into their academic learning of diversity. I also will be considering how first-generation college students of color use their learning in diversity courses outside class, particularly on this college campus and in their home communities.

I am writing to invite you to participate in my study as the faculty member who is teaching [Name of Diversity Course] in [Name of Institution]. Your participation in my study would involve my observation of your [Name of Diversity Course] during the Spring 2019 semester of the current academic year. With your own and your students' consent, I will audio record class sessions, and take notes of what goes on in class as well. Also, I will invite you to participate in two interviews, each lasting approximately an hour and a half. I may also ask to interview you for a brief period after some of the class sessions I observe—these informal interviews should last only 10-15 minutes. The interviews will serve as a way for me to understand your educational background and your thinking about your class and students. I also ask that you share a few documents with me, including the syllabus for [Name of Diversity Course] and your CV.

Your participation in this study will contribute to improved understanding of teaching strategies that can advance the learning of first-generation college students of color.

If you choose to participate, please know that your identity and the information you share with me will be kept confidential. Any information that I share about you or your teaching, in academic presentations and publications, will mask your name and the names of any institutions or persons that you associate with. Also, your participation in this study is voluntary and you can choose not to participate in any of the activities I have asked of you. I will be happy to explain confidentiality issues further in a meeting with you or by way of a phone conversation.

Thank you very much for taking the time to consider my invitation. I will be reaching out to you again next week to follow up on your possible interest in participating in this study. Alternatively, please email me directly at dd2583@tc.columbia.edu with your response or any questions you may have. I would be delighted to speak with you in person or by phone. I can be reached by phone at 559-361-5015.

Thank you again for your time and consideration. I look forward to being in contact with you soon.

Best,
Dianne Delima
Ed.D. Candidate, Higher and Postsecondary Education
Teachers College, Columbia University

Appendix C

Script for the Announcement to the Class

Hello,

My name is Dianne Delima and I am a doctoral student in the Higher and Postsecondary Education program at Teachers College, Columbia University. I am currently working on my doctoral dissertation and I am here today to ask you all if you would be willing to take part in my research study.

My Study:

My study, entitled *A Funds of Knowledge Approach to Learning in Diversity Courses for First-Generation College Students of Color*, aims to understand what first-generation college students of color learn from taking diversity courses. My study will look at what students of color who are first in their families to go to a four-year college are learning in diversity courses like this one, and how these students incorporate what they know, from their lives and also from their prior schooling experiences, into their academic learning. A diversity course, like the one you are in right now, often covers topics about the history, experiences, and culture of diverse racial, ethnic, religious, and gendered groups in society. My study will also look at what first-generation college students of color do with what they learn from diversity courses outside the class—for example, elsewhere on campus or in their home communities. I am conducting this study because I want to help researchers, policy makers, and faculty members better understand what students, and especially first-generation students of color, learn in classes like this. Knowing that will help faculty and college leaders better support the learning of all students.

Their Participation

I am here to ask you all for your permission for me to observe your class approximately once a week. I will be sitting in the back of the class and will take notes about the class activities, and I will also be audio recording the class sessions. My observations in this class will in no way influence your grade for this class, as I am here simply to observe. In a couple of minutes, I will be passing around a document that explains what your participation in this study means in more a more detailed way. The document also asks for your consent for me to observe you in class and to audio record what goes on in class.

Consent:

I will be audio recording this class because this will help me listen back to things pertinent to my research that happen during the class sessions. I will also be having these class sessions transcribed so that I can read through, in much more detail, the kinds of conversations you all have in this class. I will also be taking notes on my computer or by hand so that I can remember what happens in class. To observe you all and to take notes and audio record, I will need to have everyone's permission. The document that is being passed around shows the options for your permission for my audio recording and taking notes. As you can see, if you do not want to be included in a recording, you can say, "No" and I will be sure that your voice gets erased from the recording and that you do not show up in any of the transcriptions. Also, if you should say something in class that you do not want appearing in a report, just let me know and I will mark that as such in my notes. I will then revise the transcript accordingly.

Use of Data

As you will see, the document I am passing around also explains what the audio recorded information and notes will be used for. I will be using them to write about learning in diversity courses much like this one. The papers I write will be presented at conferences and will be published in journals and books. I will use the information that I gain from your class sessions to tell other faculty members, administrators, and researchers about the kinds of teaching and learning moments that can happen in diversity courses. Hopefully, this research will help strengthen teaching for students like yourself, and also increase support for the teaching of diversity.

Confidentiality

Please know that, along with not using your name in any of the reports, I will also be keeping all of my notes, the recordings, and transcripts, as well as many of the documents, in my password-protected computer, and no one else will have access to it, or to any of the study materials. I will keep hard-copy materials in a locked file cabinet in my home and no one will have access to those materials. I am instituting these practices to protect your privacy and confidentiality and that of all other class members.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in my study is completely voluntary, and you can tell me at any time that you do not want to be part of it. I am the only one who will know who is participating in this study, and who is not.

Additional Participation

I also want to let you know, as a heads up, that I will be asking a few of you to participate in additional activities related to this study as a way for me to understand better what I am observing in your class. These additional activities, if you are willing to participate in them, will involve interviews with me, and also, possibly, sharing some of your classwork with me. In these additional activities, your participation also would be fully voluntary and you could choose not to participate in any of them, with no penalty.

Benefits and Risks

Although there are no direct benefits for your participation in my study, there may be ways whereby you indirectly benefit. For example, by talking about your experiences in this class, you may come to understand better what and how you are learning from this course. This is because you may be able to reflect back on ideas that you are learning in this class, especially those that are meaningful and helpful to you. However, I also understand that some people are a bit uncomfortable with having someone observe them in a class. I promise that I will do my best to not be a distraction while I observe you all.

Questionnaire

If you agree to participate in this study, I ask that you also please fill out a very brief questionnaire. This questionnaire will help me know a little bit more about you as individuals. The information you provide in this questionnaire will be confidential and I will be the only one who sees your responses to this questionnaire.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or talk to me after class.

Thank you for taking the time and consideration.

Appendix D

Informed Consent for All Students in Diversity Course

Protocol Title: A Funds of Knowledge Approach to Learning in Diversity Courses for First-Generation College Students of Color

Principal Investigator: Dianne G. Delima, Ed.M., Teachers College, Columbia University
dd2583@tc.columbia.edu

INTRODUCTION

You are being invited to participate in this research study called “A Funds of Knowledge Approach to Learning in Diversity Courses for First-Generation College Students of Color.” The aim of this study is to understand the learning experiences of first-generation college students of color in what are commonly referred to as diversity courses. Diversity courses focus on the history and experiences of various cultural, racial, ethnic, gender, socioeconomic, and religious groups in the U.S. and around the world. By seeking to understand the experiences of first-generation college students of color in these courses, this study aims to better understand the personal and cultural knowledge they may bring into such diversity courses as well as the new academic ideas they may encounter. This study also seeks to understand, as well, whether and how first-generation college students of color then use their academic learning, from a diversity class, outside of class—on campus and in their home communities. Findings from this research have the potential to inform how researchers, faculty, and administrators go about supporting and improving the teaching and learning experiences of first-generation college students of color.

You qualify to take part in this research study because you are currently enrolled in [NAME AND NUMBER OF DIVERSITY COURSE]. The researcher will observe you and others in the diversity course in which you are enrolled at least once weekly, and she will take notes, either on a computer or by hand, about what goes on in class: the classroom setting, what the instructor says and does, what students say and do, the subject being studied, and anything else happening in the classroom that pertains to students’ learning. These observations will also be audio recorded and will be transcribed, in whole or in part.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?

This study is being done to determine what first-generation college students learn in diversity courses, and how they may use what they learn on campus and in their home communities. This study serves as the researcher’s doctoral dissertation in the Higher and Postsecondary Education Program at Teachers College, Columbia University.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO IF I AGREE TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

If you decide to participate, you will be observed in class at least once a week throughout the Spring 2019 semester. The purpose of these observations is to allow the researcher to see and hear how students engage with the subject matter of diversity as they interact with their peers and instructor about it. The observations will be of full class sessions and will be audio recorded. The audio recordings will then be transcribed, in whole or in part. The researcher will also be taking notes, either by hand or on her laptop, during these observations. You will be given a pseudonym or false name or a de-identified code in order to keep your identity confidential.

You will also be asked to fill out a questionnaire. This questionnaire will take about five to ten minutes to complete. The researcher will pass out this questionnaire during her first observation of your class and you may fill it out during the class session and return it to the researcher by the end of the class session. This questionnaire asks about your background, which will give the researcher information about you and the other students in the class. The questionnaires will be stored in a locked file cabinet and only the researcher will have access to them.

Your participation in the research, as described above, is voluntary, and you may agree to participate, or decline participation in the observations and/or questionnaire. You are free to decline to have the researcher take notes of what you say or do in class—for example, the researcher will not write down any of your comments or actions in her observation notes. You are also free to decline to having your voice be audible in the audio recordings that the researcher will be listening to—for example, by requesting that your voice and comments be erased from the audio recording. You may also withdraw from the study at any given point.

WHAT POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

This is a minimal risk study, which means the harms or discomforts that you may experience are not greater than you would ordinarily encounter when taking a college course. However, there are some risks to consider. You might feel uncomfortable being observed or knowing that your words and actions in class are being recorded. Although the researcher will strive to the utmost to protect your confidentiality and privacy, it is possible that elements of who you are may inadvertently show through in quotes of things you say, in descriptions of the student demographics, and/or in descriptions of and quotes from classroom activities, including class conversations and discussions; these may appear in public reports that the researcher publishes. The researcher will abide by your requests to mask particular statements that you make and to limit description of your background, demographics, and other features of identity. The researcher will not present or in any way divulge your name or the names of others you mention, your instructor's name, the name of your university, or the unique name of the diversity course in public reports of the study. The principal investigator is taking precautions to keep your information confidential and prevent others from discovering or guessing your identity. She will, for example, use a pseudonym or code instead of your real name. She also will

keep all information and data pertaining to this study on a password protected computer and locked in a file drawer.

WHAT POSSIBLE BENEFITS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study.

WILL I BE PAID FOR BEING IN THIS STUDY?

You will not be paid to participate. There are no costs to you for taking part in this study.

WHEN IS THE STUDY OVER? CAN I LEAVE THE STUDY BEFORE IT ENDS?

The study is over at the end of the semester, at the last class session, when the researcher has completed observation of your diversity course. You can leave the study at any time.

PROTECTION OF YOUR CONFIDENTIALITY

The researcher will keep all written materials locked in a cabinet in her home. Any electronic or digital information (including audio recordings) will be stored on a computer that is password protected and to which the investigator has sole access. What is on the audio recording (of the class in session, and interviews) will be written down (transcribed) and the audio recording will be destroyed at the end of the study. All written data (transcripts, observation notes, field notes, documents, questionnaires) will be masked with codes and pseudonyms, and thus no real names will be used. Participant lists will be filed separately and will remain in a secure (password protected) location in the researcher's home. Please note that regulations require data to be kept for at least 3 years after the completion of the study.

For quality assurance, the study team, the study sponsor (grant agency), and/or members of the Teachers College Institutional Review Board (IRB) may review the data collected from you as part of this study. Otherwise, all information obtained from your participation in this study will be held strictly confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by U.S. or State law.

HOW WILL THE RESULTS BE USED?

The results of this study will be published in journals, chapters, and books, and will be presented at academic and professional conferences and meetings. Your name and other features of your identity will be removed from all data the researcher includes in such reports before publication and/or use for educational purposes. This study is being conducted as part of the dissertation of the principal investigator; the dissertation also is a public document.

CONSENT FOR AUDIO RECORDING

Audio recording is part of this research study. You can choose whether to give permission to be recorded. If you decide that you do not wish to be recorded, you will still be able to participate in this study.

_____ I give my consent to be recorded

Signature

_____ I **do not** consent to be recorded

Signature

WHO MAY VIEW MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY

___ I consent to allow written and audio recorded materials to be viewed at an educational setting or at a conference outside of Teachers College, Columbia University.

Signature

___ I **do not** consent to allow written and audio recorded materials to be viewed outside of Teachers College, Columbia University.

Signature

The researcher will also be hiring professional transcribers to transcribe audio recordings. The transcribers will sign a non-disclosure form that outlines that they will keep the audio recordings on a password protected or locked location (either on a password protected computer or locked drawer/file cabinet), that all files (audio and transcription) will be deleted once the project has concluded, and not disclose to anyone, in any form, any information they have **obtained by way of reading or hearing data provided in the recordings, unless required by law.**

___ I consent to allow audio recorded materials to be listened to and transcribed by a professional transcriber outside of Teachers College

Signature

___ I **do not** consent to allow audio recorded materials to be listened to and transcribed by a professional transcriber outside of Teachers College

Signature

WHO CAN ANSWER MY QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY?

If you have any questions about taking part in this research study, you should contact the principal investigator, Dianne Delima, at dd2583@tc.columbia.edu.

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you should contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (the human research ethics committee) at 212-678-4105 or email IRB@tc.edu. Or you can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120th Street, New York, NY 1002. The IRB is the committee that oversees human research protection for Teachers College, Columbia University.

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS

- I have read and discussed the informed consent with the researcher. I have had ample opportunity to ask questions about the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits regarding this research study.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw participation at any time without penalty to future student status or grades or student services that I would otherwise receive.
- The researcher may withdraw me from the research at her professional discretion, especially under conditions in which the researcher believes that I am experiencing extreme distress or discomfort.
- If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue my participation, the researcher will provide this information to me.
- Any information derived from the research study that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- Identifiers will be removed from the data. De-identifiable data may be used for future research studies, or distributed to another investigator for future research without additional informed consent from the subject or the representative.
- I should receive a copy of the Informed Consent document.

My signature means that I agree to participate in this study

Print name: _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Appendix E

Student Questionnaire

My study aims to understand your learning experiences in [name of diversity course]. Through this work, I hope to provide insight for the academic community as to the knowledge and experiences that students draw from to inform their learning. If you are interested in participating in my study, I would greatly appreciate your responses to the questions below. If you do not feel comfortable or are unable to respond to some of the questions asked, feel free to leave them blank.

Please note that your participation is voluntary and that any information that you provide in this questionnaire will be kept confidential. The information that you provide in this questionnaire will be masked in order to maintain your privacy. The information that I use from this questionnaire will not be using your real name and the name of the institution you are enrolled in (I will give you and the school a made-up name).

If you have any questions or concerns, you can contact me, Dianne Delima, at dd2583@tc.columbia.edu.

GENERAL INFORMATION

First Name: _____

Last Name: _____

Telephone Number: _____

Email: _____

Age: _____

Gender: _____

I identify myself as (please check all that apply):

Latina/o, Hispanic

Caucasian, White

African American, Black

Pacific Islander

Asian

Not listed (please write down identity here): _____

I was born in (write down city and country):

[If not born in the U.S.] I moved to the U.S. when I was (age): _____

I consider my hometown to be (write down name of city or town): _____

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

The name of my high school was _____,
located

in (name of city and state) _____.

I started college in (choose one): Fall Winter Spring Summer

I started college in the year: _____

My current year in [Name of College] is (choose one that applies to you):

Freshman (1st year)

Sophomore

Junior

Senior

I transferred to [Name of College] from (please write down name of college where you were previously) _____ as a _____ (Freshman, Sophomore, etc.)

My major is (If "Undeclared," write "Undeclared"): _____

I currently live (choose one): On-Campus Off-Campus

I have taken (write down number) _____ diversity courses while in [Name of College].

I enrolled in [Name of Course] because (please check all that apply):

- I am interested in the topic of the class
- I am interested in the professor teaching the class
- I've taken classes with this professor before and I like her/his classes
- It's a requirement for my major
- It's a requirement for graduation (as part of the general education requirement)
- I take it as an elective class that is offered as part of a major/general education requirement

PARENTS' OR GUARDIANS' BACKGROUND

My dad(s) (or male guardian(s)) are originally from (name country of origin):

The highest degree of education that my dad(s) (or male guardians) received was (please check one that applies):

- Community (or junior) college
- Technical or vocational college (in a trade school)
- Some four-year college, but he(they) never graduated
- Four-year bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Doctoral degree (Ph.D., Ed.D., M.D., J.D.)

My mom(s) (or female guardian(s)) is(are) originally from (name country of origin):

The highest degree of education that my mom(s) (or female guardians) received was
(please check one that applies):

- Community (or junior) college
- Technical or vocational college (in a trade school)
- Some four-year college, but she(they) never graduated
- Four-year bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Doctoral degree (Ph.D., Ed.D., M.D., J.D.)

Appendix F

Invitation to Participate Email to Potential Primary Participants

Dear _____,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study per your response to the consent form that I distributed in class. As I mentioned to your class on the day I visited, my study seeks to understand what first-generation college students of color learn in diversity courses, and how they may be applying what they learn on campus and in their home communities. The results of this study should inform efforts for supporting these courses and for improved teaching in them.

I am writing now to invite you to participate in the next part of my study. If you agree, you will continue to be observed in your class, but in addition, you will participate in three interviews that I will carry out with you. These interviews will focus on your life and your learning in the class. Each interview will last approximately two hours. The interviews will take place at different times this semester, all on campus. I may, at times, also ask you some questions after I observe you in class. These conversations after class may last for up to 15 minutes. Also, if you feel comfortable doing so, I will invite you to share with me a copy of the ungraded versions of your class assignments—that is, assignments without the professor's marks or grades on them.

Please note that your involvement in this study will in no way impact your grade in your course. I will ensure that what you share with me during the interviews will be confidential. The observations and any documents you share also will be treated confidentially, and I will be the only one who will have access to this information. As I mentioned, I will be writing reports and giving presentations resulting from this study; the study is my doctoral dissertation which also is published. In these reports and other publications, and in presentations, I will never use your real name or the name of your university or of persons that you associate with. To preserve your privacy, I will do my utmost to mask identity markers that may be associated with you. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you can choose to not participate in any of the activities I have asked of you.

If you agree to participate in this portion of my study, please let me know by _____ [DATE], by emailing me at dd2583@tc.columbia.edu.

Thank you so much for considering this invitation. If you should have any questions about participation and what it would entail, please feel free to email me at the above address at any time. I will be happy to respond by email and/or arrange a phone call or an in-person meeting on campus with you.

Thank you,
Dianne Delima
Ed.D. Candidate
Higher and Postsecondary Education
Teachers College, Columbia University

Appendix G

Informed Consent for Primary Participants

Protocol Title: A Funds of Knowledge Approach to Learning in Diversity Courses for First-generation College Students of Color

Principal Investigator: Dianne Delima, Ed.M., Teachers College, Columbia University
dd2583@tc.columbia.edu

INTRODUCTION

You are being invited to participate in this research study called “A Funds of Knowledge Approach to Learning in Diversity Courses for First-Generation College Students of Color.” The aim of this study is to understand the learning experiences of first-generation college students of color in what are commonly referred to as diversity courses. Diversity courses focus on the history and experiences of various cultural, racial, ethnic, gender, socioeconomic, and religious groups in the U.S. and around the world. By seeking to understand the experiences of first-generation college students of color in these courses, this study aims to better understand the personal and cultural knowledge they may bring into such diversity courses as well as the new academic ideas they may encounter. This study also seeks to understand, as well, whether and how first-generation college students of color then use their academic learning, from a diversity class, outside of class—on campus and in their home communities. Findings from this research have the potential to inform how researchers, faculty, and administrators go about supporting and improving the teaching and learning experiences of first-generation college students of color.

You qualify to take part in this research study because 1) you are currently enrolled in [NAME OF DIVERSITY COURSE]; 2) you are a first-generation college student; and 3) you self-identify as a person of color. Approximately 10-14 students and two professors, spread across two classrooms in this university, will participate in this study. Your participation will take about eight (8) hours of your time, spread across the semester.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?

This study is being done to determine what first-generation college students learn in diversity courses, and how they may use what they learn on campus and in their home communities. This study serves as the researcher’s doctoral dissertation in the Higher and Postsecondary Education Program in Teachers College, Columbia University.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO IF I AGREE TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

If you decide to participate, you will be interviewed two to three times, each time for two hours, and you will be observed in your diversity class at least once a week. The researcher may also include up to six brief and informal interviews after some classes.

All interviews will be conducted by the researcher. In the two-hour interviews, you will be asked to discuss your schooling experiences from throughout your life, the role of

your family and community in your learning, your college learning experiences so far, and your experiences in the diversity course in which you are currently enrolled. Other questions may be included depending on data analysis in process. As noted above, after some class sessions, the researcher might briefly interview you further to ask about your thoughts about the day's class session. These additional brief interviews (up to six throughout the semester) should not last more than 15 minutes apiece.

The long and brief interviews will be audio recorded, when possible, and transcribed. After the audio recording has been transcribed, the audio recording will be deleted. If you are willing to participate in the interviews but do not want to be audio recorded, the researcher will turn off her recorder and will instead write down notes about what you say. In all cases, to preserve your confidentiality, you will be given a pseudonym, or false name or a de-identified code, in order to keep your identity confidential. Interviews will take place in a location (to be designated) on campus.

The researcher will be observing you, your classmates, and the professor while you are in your diversity course, taking notes (either by hand or on a computer) on how the class proceeds, what happens, what the professor does, and what you and your classmates do and say, including how you interact with each other during class. The class sessions, observed by the researcher, will be audio recorded; they will then be transcribed, in whole or in part.

Finally, the researcher will invite you to share copies of ungraded class assignments that you carry out throughout the semester (that is, assignments that you submit to the professor but without the grade or the professor's marks on it). The researcher will not be grading, or in any way evaluating, these assignments. It will be your decision whether to share your assignments with the researcher.

Your participation in the research, as described above, is voluntary, and you may agree to participate or decline participation in the interviews, observations, the sharing of completed assignments, and/or class audio recordings. You are free to decline to have the researcher take notes on what you say or do in class. You are also free to decline having your voice be audible in the audio recordings—for example, by requesting that your voice be erased from the audio recording. In interviews, you may decline to respond to any question the researcher asks.

If you agree to participate in this research, as described above, you may request at a later time that particular things you say or do in class—for example, on a certain day—be left out of any of the written notes, transcripts, or audio recordings, or that they not be included in reports of the research. In interviews, you can decline to respond to any of the questions asked, or you can ask the researcher not to make public certain aspects of what you tell her. To make such requests, you may speak to the researcher or send her an email.

You may also withdraw from the study, or parts thereof, at any given point. Your professor will not know about your decision to participate or not participate in the observations, interviews, document collection, and/or audio recording.

WHAT POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

This is a minimal risk study, which means the harms or discomforts that you may experience are not greater than you would ordinarily encounter when taking a college course. However, there are some risks to consider. You might feel uncomfortable being observed or knowing that your words and actions in class are being recorded. You may also feel uncomfortable sharing certain schooling experiences with the researcher. Although the researcher will strive to the utmost to protect your confidentiality and privacy, it is possible that elements of who you are may inadvertently show through in quotes from your interviews, in transcribed segments of class discussions, in descriptions of classroom activities, or in descriptions of background and demographics; these may appear in public reports that the researcher publishes. The researcher will abide by your requests to mask particular statements that you make and to limit description of your background, demographics, and other features of identity. The researcher will not present or in any way divulge your name or the names of others you mention, your instructor's name, the name of your university, or the unique name of the diversity course in public reports of the study. The principal investigator is taking precautions to keep your information confidential and prevent anyone from discovering or guessing your identity, such as using a pseudonym instead of your name and keeping all information on a password protected computer and locked in a file drawer.

WHAT POSSIBLE BENEFITS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study.

WILL I BE PAID FOR BEING IN THIS STUDY?

You will not be paid to participate. There are no costs to you for taking part in this study.

WHEN IS THE STUDY OVER? CAN I LEAVE THE STUDY BEFORE IT ENDS?

The study is over when data collection is complete—this means that the last class session of the semester has occurred and you have completed the last long and short interviews with the researcher, and the researcher has completed document collection of the assignments that you are willing to share. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

PROTECTION OF YOUR CONFIDENTIALITY

The researcher will keep all written materials locked in a cabinet in her home. Any electronic or digital information (including audio recordings) will be stored on a computer that is password protected and to which the investigator has sole access. What is on the audio recording (of the class in session, and interviews) will be written down (transcribed) and the audio recording will be destroyed at the end of the study. All written data (transcripts, observation notes, field notes, documents, questionnaires) will be masked with codes and pseudonyms, and thus no real names will be used. Participant lists will be filed separately and will remain in a secure (password protected) location in the researcher's home. Please note that regulations require data to be kept for at least 3 years after the completion of the study.

For quality assurance, the study team, the study sponsor (grant agency), and/or members of the Teachers College Institutional Review Board (IRB) may review the data collected from you as part of this study. Otherwise, all information obtained from your participation in this study will be held strictly confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by U.S. or State law.

HOW WILL THE RESULTS BE USED?

The results of this study will be published in journals, chapters, and books, and will be presented at academic and professional conferences and meetings. Your name and other features of your identity will be removed from all data the researcher includes in such reports before publication and/or use for educational purposes. This study is being conducted as part of the dissertation of the principal investigator; the dissertation also is a public document.

CONSENT FOR AUDIO RECORDING

Audio recording is part of this research study. You can choose whether to give permission to be recorded. If you decide that you do not wish to be recorded, you will still be able to participate in this study.

_____ I give my consent to be recorded

Signature

_____ I **do not** consent to be recorded

Signature

WHO MAY VIEW MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY

___ I consent to allow written and audio recorded materials to be viewed at an educational setting or at a conference outside of Teachers College

Signature

___ I **do not** consent to allow written and audio recorded materials to be viewed outside of Teachers College Columbia University

Signature

The researcher will also be hiring professional transcriptionists to transcribe audio recordings. The transcriptionists will sign a non-disclosure form that outlines that they will keep the audio recordings on a password protected or locked location (either on a password protected computer or locked drawer/file cabinet), that all files (audio and transcription) will be deleted once the project has concluded, and not disclose to anyone, in any form, any information they have **obtained by way of reading or hearing data provided in the recordings, unless required by law.**

___ I consent to allow audio recorded materials to be listened to and transcribed by a professional transcriber outside of Teachers College, Columbia University.

Signature

___ I **do not** consent to allow audio recorded materials to be listened to and transcribed by a professional transcriber outside of Teachers College, Columbia University.

Signature

WHO CAN ANSWER MY QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY?

If you have any questions about taking part in this research study, you should contact the principal investigator, Dianne Delima at dd2583@tc.columbia.edu.

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you should contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (the human research ethics committee) at 212-678-4105 or email IRB@tc.edu. Or you can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120th Street, New York, NY 1002. The IRB is the committee that oversees human research protection for Teachers College, Columbia University.

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS

- I have read and discussed the informed consent with the researcher. I have had ample opportunity to ask questions about the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits regarding this research study.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw participation at any time without penalty to future student status or grades or student services that I would otherwise receive.
- The researcher may withdraw me from the research at her professional discretion, especially under conditions in which the researcher believes that I am experiencing extreme distress or discomfort.
- If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue my participation, the researcher will provide this information to me.
- Any information derived from the research study that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- Identifiers will be removed from the data. De-identifiable data may be used for future research studies, or distributed to another investigator for future research without additional informed consent from the subject or the representative.
- I should receive a copy of the Informed Consent document.

My signature means that I agree to participate in this study

Print name: _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Appendix H

Informed Consent for Faculty

Protocol Title: A Funds of Knowledge Approach to Learning in Diversity Courses for First-Generation College Students of Color

Principal Investigator: Dianne G. Delima, Ed.M., Teachers College, Columbia University
dd2583@tc.columbia.edu

INTRODUCTION

You are being invited to participate in this research study called “A Funds of Knowledge Approach to Learning in Diversity Courses for First-Generation College Students of Color.” The aim of this study is to understand the learning experiences of first-generation college students of color in what are commonly referred to as diversity courses. Diversity courses focus on the history and experiences of various cultural, racial, ethnic, gender, socioeconomic, and religious groups in the U.S. and around the world. By seeking to understand the experiences of first-generation college students of color in these courses, this study aims to better understand the personal and cultural knowledge they may bring into such diversity courses as well as the new academic ideas they may encounter. This study also seeks to understand, as well, whether and how first-generation college students of color then use their academic learning, from a diversity class, outside of class—on campus and in their home communities. Findings from this research have the potential to inform how researchers, faculty, and administrators go about supporting and improving the teaching and learning experiences of first-generation college students of color.

You qualify to take part in this research study because you have taught diversity course for at least two semesters and you currently teach a general education diversity course in the [NAME DISCIPLINE]. Two faculty and 10 to 14 first-generation college students of color will participate in this study. Your participation will take about four (4) hours of your time, spread across the semester, to complete.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?

This study is being done to determine what first-generation college students learn in diversity courses, and how they may use what they learn on campus and in their home communities. Since learning is closely tied to teaching (teaching aims to support students’ learning), it is important, also, to understand teachers’ intentions and actions as these may frame students’ learning experiences. This study serves as the researcher’s doctoral dissertation in the Higher and Postsecondary Education Program in Teachers College, Columbia University.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO IF I AGREE TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

If you decide to participate, you will be interviewed two times and you will be observed in your diversity class at least once a week.

The interviews will last approximately an hour and a half and will be conducted by the researcher. During these interviews, you will be asked to discuss your background (for example, personal and educational background), how you think about the course (e.g. the course design, choice of course materials, and course content), and your thoughts about your students and their learning (for example, how you get to know your students and whether having this knowledge of your students influences how and what you teach in the diversity course). Other questions may be included depending on data analysis in process. After some class sessions, the researcher might also briefly interview you about your thoughts about the class session of the day. These brief interviews (up to three throughout the semester) should not last more than 15 minutes apiece.

The long and brief interviews will be audio recorded, if possible, and transcribed. After the audio recording is written down (transcribed), it will be deleted. If you agree to participate in interviews but do not wish to have the interviews be audio recorded, but the researcher will write notes of what you say instead. You will be given a pseudonym or false name/de-identified code in order to keep your identity confidential. All interviews will take place on campus, for example, in your office or elsewhere on campus.

The researcher will also be observing your class and the students in it at least once a week. The researcher will observe how the students interact with the topics of the class, with their peers, and with you as the teacher. The class sessions that the researcher observes will be audio recorded, and the researcher will be taking notes, either by hand or on her laptop, during the class session. The audio recordings of the class sessions will then be transcribed, in whole or in part.

Finally, the researcher will ask if you can share selected documents. These will likely include your CV, class syllabus, assignment sheets and guides, and some course readings. The researcher will use these documents to better understand your background and to follow along with the class discussions and assignments.

Your participation in the research, as described above, is voluntary, and you may agree to participate, or may decline participation in the interviews, observations, sharing of documents, and/or audio recording. You may decline to respond to particular questions asked of you in interviews. You may also withdraw from the study at any time.

WHAT POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

This is a minimal risk study, which means the harms or discomforts that you may experience are not greater than you would ordinarily encounter when teaching your college courses. However, there are some risks to consider. You might feel uncomfortable being observed or knowing that your words and actions in class are being recorded. You may also feel uncomfortable sharing certain experiences pertaining to your teaching or students' learning with the researcher. Although the researcher will strive to the utmost to protect your confidentiality and privacy, it is possible that elements of who you are may inadvertently show through in quotes from interviews or class discussions

and/or in descriptions of the classroom activities or portrayals of features of your background; these may appear in public reports of the study. The researcher will abide by your requests to mask particular statements that you make in interviews and to limit description of your background, demographics, and other features of your identity. The researcher will not present or in any way divulge your name or the names of others you mention, your students' names, the name of your university, or the unique name of the diversity course in public reports of the study. The principal investigator is taking a variety of precautions to keep your information confidential and prevent readers from discovering or guessing your identity. For example, in referring to your actions in teaching, she will refer to you via a pseudonym rather than using your real name. She will keep all information on a password protected computer and in a locked file drawer.

WHAT POSSIBLE BENEFITS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study.

WILL I BE PAID FOR BEING IN THIS STUDY?

You will not be paid to participate. There are no costs to you for taking part in this study.

WHEN IS THE STUDY OVER? CAN I LEAVE THE STUDY BEFORE IT ENDS?

The study is over when data collection is complete—this means that the last class session of the semester has occurred and you have completed the last long interview with the researcher, and she has completed collection of your documents. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

PROTECTION OF YOUR CONFIDENTIALITY

The researcher will keep all written materials locked in a cabinet in her home. Any electronic or digital information (including audio recordings) will be stored on a computer that is password protected and to which the investigator has sole access. What is on the audio recording (of the class in session, and interviews) will be written down (transcribed) and the audio recording will be destroyed at the end of the study. All written data (transcripts, observation notes, field notes, documents) will be masked with codes and pseudonyms, and thus no real names will be used. Participant lists will be filed separately and will remain in a secure (password protected) location in the researcher's home. Please note that regulations require data to be kept for at least 3 years after the completion of the study.

For quality assurance, the study team, the study sponsor (grant agency), and/or members of the Teachers College Institutional Review Board (IRB) may review the data collected from you as part of this study. Otherwise, all information obtained from your participation in this study will be held strictly confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by U.S. or State law.

HOW WILL THE RESULTS BE USED?

The results of this study will be published in journals, chapters, and books, and will be presented at academic and professional conferences and meetings. Your identity will be

removed from all data the researcher includes in such reports before publication and/or use for educational purposes. This study is being conducted as part of the dissertation of the principal investigator; the dissertation also is a public document.

CONSENT FOR AUDIO RECORDING

Audio recording is part of this research study. You can choose whether to give permission to be recorded. If you decide that you do not wish to be recorded, you will still be able to participate in this study.

_____ I give my consent to be recorded

Signature

_____ I **do not** consent to be recorded

Signature

WHO MAY VIEW MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY

_____ I consent to allow written and audio recorded materials to be viewed at an educational setting or at a conference outside of Teachers College

Signature

_____ I **do not** consent to allow written and audio recorded materials to be viewed outside of Teachers College Columbia University

Signature

The researcher will also be hiring professional transcriber to transcribe audio recordings. The transcriptionists will sign a non-disclosure form that outlines that they will keep the audio recordings on a password protected or locked location (either on a password protected computer or locked drawer/file cabinet), that all files (audio and transcription) will be deleted once the project has concluded, and not disclose to anyone, in any form, any information they have **obtained by way of reading or hearing data provided in the recordings, unless required by law.**

___ I consent to allow audio recorded materials to be listened to and transcribed by a professional transcriber outside of Teachers College, Columbia University.

Signature

___ I **do not** consent to allow audio recorded materials to be listened to and transcribed by a professional transcriber outside of Teachers College, Columbia University.

Signature

WHO CAN ANSWER MY QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY?

If you have any questions about taking part in this research study, you should contact the principal investigator, Dianne G. Delima at dd2583@tc.columbia.edu.

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you should contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (the human research ethics committee) at 212-678-4105 or email IRB@tc.edu. Or you can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120th Street, New York, NY 1002. The IRB is the committee that oversees human research protection for Teachers College, Columbia University.

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS

- I have read and discussed the informed consent with the researcher. I have had ample opportunity to ask questions about the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits regarding this research study.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw participation at any time without penalty to future student status or grades or student services that I would otherwise receive.
- The researcher may withdraw me from the research at her professional discretion, especially under conditions in which the researcher believes that I am experiencing extreme distress or discomfort.
- If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue my participation, the researcher will provide this information to me.
- Any information derived from the research study that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.

- Identifiers will be removed from the data. De-identifiable data may be used for future research studies, or distributed to another investigator for future research without additional informed consent from the subject or the representative.
- I should receive a copy of the Informed Consent document.

My signature means that I agree to participate in this study

Print name: _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Appendix I

Interview Guide for Primary Participant First Interview

Interview Guide:**Primary Participants-STUDENTS****EARLY SEMESTER (first interview)****DURATION OF INTERVIEW: 2 Hours Max****DATE AND TIME OF INTERVIEW:** _____**LOCATION OF INTERVIEW:** _____**PARTICIPANT CODE:** _____**BEFORE BEGINNING:**

- Restate purpose of my study: My study aims to understand your learning experiences in [name of diversity course]. In this research, I will look at what and how you may be incorporating what you already know, from your life and from prior schooling experiences, into the learning of diversity. I will also be looking at what you do with what you learn from diversity courses, particularly on your college campus and in your home communities. Through this work, I hope to provide insight for the academic community as to the prior knowledge and experiences that students draw from to inform their learning, and what impact these students' learning in diversity courses can have on the campus community and in their home communities. You are participating in this interview because you have been identified as a first-generation college student of color in [name of diversity course]. This interview should last about two hours.
- Restate confidentiality and privacy: I will do my utmost to preserve your confidentiality and privacy. I will never mention your name, the name of the college, the name of the class, and the name of your professor in anything I publish or present, for example, at professional meetings. That said, because I am deeply involved in watching you in your class and in talking with you, it is possible that someone reading a research report could glean your identity, especially locally, for example someone at the college or one of your friends and family members. All data will be stored without identifiers in them, and will be held in fully secured locations. I'd like to audio-record you, but at any time you want me to turn off the recorder, just let me know, and I'll be happy to do so. At any point, you can tell me that something you have said should not be quoted or discussed in detail in any final report; I'll be happy to comply with your request. Your participation is fully voluntary. You can withdraw from the study at any time, and you can decline to respond to any question that I ask you. You can also ask me to turn off the recorder at any time you like.

Do you have any questions for me at this time?

May I turn on the recorder? ____ yes ____ no

I. Background Information

I would like to start out with some background information about you. This background information will help me learn about your experiences growing up and going to school before college.

Let's start with what your responses to the questionnaire that you filled out in class.

**Based on the questionnaire, I have you as currently [freshman, sophomore, junior, senior] and majoring in [name of major] – are these correct?

Did you transfer from a different school or college?

And you are currently living [on-campus or off-campus], correct?

**What activities do you have going on outside of school, for example a job or volunteering?

[If needed: How long have you been involved in this (these) activity(-ies)?]

II. Hometown/Community/Family

I also have your hometown as being [name of hometown]. Is that correct?

**What was it like growing up in [name of hometown]?

Has your family always lived in [name of hometown]?

[If needed: if not, what were the other places you lived? How long did you live in these places before your family settled in [name of hometown]?)

I'm going to ask you a few more questions about your family:

How many siblings do you have?

Does your extended family (aunts, uncles, cousins) also live in [name of hometown]?

[If no: what other cities/states/countries does your family live in?]

****Was your family part of a community, for example, a church, neighborhood group, or something similar to that?**

[If yes: can you tell me about that community experience? Is your family still involved in that community?]

****Where did most of your friends, from your hometown, live?**

[If needed: So would you say that most of your friends lived around your neighborhood?]

III. K-12 Schooling

I'm going to transition now to asking you a few questions about your experiences going to school before college

****First, I'm going to ask about your elementary school: Where did you go to elementary school? What was that like for you?**

****How about your middle school – what was that like for you?**

****And in high school, how was that experience for you?**

****What kind of student were you while you were in K-12?**

[If needed: Do you feel like you were a different kind of student at different stages of school? Why do you think these stages were different for you?]

Now I want to talk a little bit about the things you learned in school.

****What subject did you like the most? What was it about that subject that you liked?**

**I know you've had a lot of teachers along the way from elementary through high school. Is there a teacher that sticks out in your mind as a memorable teacher? What makes them memorable for you?
[Follow up: What was their teaching like? What subject(s) did they teach?]

**Are there any other teachers that were memorable for you?
[Follow up: What was their teaching like? What subject(s) did they teach?]

**Who else from your school—or maybe a school counselor or a coach—are memorable to you?

Let's talk about _____ [one person at a time].

**What is it about _____ that makes her/him memorable to you?

IV. Applying to College

I'm now going to ask you a couple of questions about applying to college.

**Why did you decide to apply to [name of College]?
[If needed: How did you get the idea to apply to [name of College]? When was that?]

**Was there someone who, perhaps, encouraged you to apply to [name of College]?
Who was that person?
[If needed: what relationship do you have with this person? Why did s/he want you to apply to [name of College]?]

When you applied to [name of College], did you already know what major you wanted to be in?
How did you decide on a major?

V. Experiences in College

Now I'm going to ask you a couple of questions about your experiences in college so far.

**How would you describe—let's say to a friend or close family member—what [name of College] is like?

**What would you tell [name of friend/family member] about what it's been like for you so far here at [name of College]?

Let me go on to another question, still about your experiences of college:

**What is a memory you have about your first day in a college class? What was the topic of the class?

**Tell me a little bit about the professor of [name of class]? What was s/he like?

**What about your classmates in [name of class]? How would you describe them?

**What is a memorable class you've had so far in [name of College]? What makes this class memorable for you?

Any other memorable classes? Let's talk about them one at a time.

VI. The Diversity Course

This semester you've enrolled in a diversity course entitled, [name of Diversity Course], taught by [name of Professor].

**Why did you decide to enroll in this course?

[If needed: So what is it about this course that led you to choose it, say, rather than something different?]

**When you looked over the syllabus for this class on the first day, which ideas or topics or readings, or maybe something else, struck you as exciting, or that really piqued your interest?

[Follow up: Why the idea/topic/book of _____ ?]

[If "none" response: why do you think none of the syllabus material seemed interesting or exciting to you?]

**Were there some topics or ideas that you were not as interested in reading or talking about as part of the class? Why?

What do you hope to learn from [name of Diversity Course]?

**The word “diversity” is used to describe this course [and the kinds of topics and ideas in it]. I would like to get a sense as to how, at this time, you would define “diversity.” What does that word mean as you see it?

VII. Conclusion

What other courses aside from [name of Diversity Course] are you taking this semester? Are these other courses part of your major or GE requirements?

Ending: This is the conclusion of our first interview. Thank you for taking the time to talk with me. Do you have anything else to add or any other questions before I turn off the recorder?

Thank you.

Appendix J

Interview Guide for Primary Participant Second Interview

Interview Guide:**Primary Participants-STUDENTS****END-OF-SEMESTER (second interview)****DURATION OF INTERVIEW: 2 Hours Max****DATE AND TIME OF INTERVIEW:** _____**LOCATION OF INTERVIEW:** _____**PARTICIPANT CODE:** _____**BEFORE BEGINNING:**

- Restate purpose of my study: My study aims to understand your learning experiences in [name of diversity course]. In this research, I will look at what and how you may be incorporating what you already know, from your life and from prior schooling experiences, into the learning of diversity. I will also be looking at what you do with what you learn from diversity courses, particularly on your college campus and in your home communities. Through this work, I hope to provide insight for the academic community as to the prior knowledge and experiences that students draw from to inform their learning, and what impact these students' learning in diversity courses can have on the campus community and in their home communities. You are participating in this interview because you have been identified as a first-generation college student of color in [name of diversity course]. This interview should last about two hours.
- Restate confidentiality and privacy: I will do my utmost to preserve your confidentiality and privacy. I will never mention your name, the name of the college, the name of the class, and the name of your professor in anything I publish or present, for example, at professional meetings. That said, because I am deeply involved in watching you in your class and in talking with you, it is possible that someone reading a research report could glean your identity, especially locally, for example someone at the college or one of your friends and family members. All data will be stored without identifiers in them, and will be held in fully secured locations. I'd like to audio-record you, but at any time you want me to turn off the recorder, just let me know, and I'll be happy to do so. At any point, you can tell me that something you have said should not be quoted or discussed in detail in any final report; I'll be happy to comply with your request. Your participation is fully voluntary. You can withdraw from the study at any time, and you can decline to respond to any question that I ask you. You can also ask me to turn off the recorder at any time you like.

Do you have any questions for me at this time?

May I turn on the recorder? ____ yes ____ no

I. Diversity Course Experiences

Now that you've been in [name of Diversity Course] for a few weeks, I'd like to ask you a few questions about your experiences in it.

****You have been studying a lot of ideas and topics related to diversity, such as [INCLUDE A COUPLE OF CLASS TOPICS HERE]. Is there one topic that you have studied that stands out in your mind? Could you tell me about it?**

[Follow up: Why does [INSERT PARTICIPANT'S WORDS HERE] stand out to you?]

****Why does (INSERT PARTICIPANT'S WORDS HERE) stand out to you?**

[Another way to say this: Why do you find (INSERT PARTICIPANT'S WORDS HERE) important?]

Any other ideas or topics or assignments that stand out to you? Let's talk about them one at a time.

****Is there anything about this class that has been really challenging for you so far? Why has (INSERT PARTICIPANT'S WORDS HERE) been challenging?**

****Is there a particularly memorable moment from this class so far that stands out for you? Can you tell me about it?**

[If yes: what is it about that moment/session that is so memorable for you?]

Are there any other memorable moments from class that stand out for you? Let's talk about them one at a time.

****If you were to describe [NAME OF PROFESSOR]'s teaching of this class to a friend, how would you describe it?**

[If needed: is there something specific about how [name of Professor] teaches that helps you with understanding the ideas or topics in the class? Can you tell me more about that?]

****What is a particular class experience—for example, an in-class discussion with classmates or a lecture by the professor—that has helped you in learning the topics and ideas of the class?**

What kinds of examples did your professor use to help you understand the topics and ideas of the class?

****Sometimes we can use something from our lives outside of school—for example, things we have learned at home, like from our parents or relatives—to help us better understand new ideas that we learn in the classroom. Can you think of an experience from your home life or from things you do with friends, or maybe from your community, that have helped you make sense of something you are studying in class?**

[Follow-up: what was it about [INSERT HERE PARTICIPANT'S WORDS ON EXPERIENCE] that helped you connect with what you were learning in the classroom?]

****What's one thing that you studied in this class that you might still be thinking about—let's say, a couple of years from now?**

[Follow up: what is it about [INSERT HERE PARTICIPANT'S WORDS] that makes it stand out for you?]

[IF NEEDED: What is one thing that you studied in [name of Diversity Course] that stands out for you?

[Follow up: Why do you think you'll be remembering that [INSERT HERE PARTICIPANT'S WORDS]?]

I have asked you this question before but I'd like to do so again and see what you think given that you are now nearing the end of the class:

****If you were to describe [NAME OF PROFESSOR]'s teaching of this class to a friend, how would you describe it?**

[If needed: is there something specific about how [name of Professor] teaches that helps you with understanding the ideas or topics in the class? Can you tell me more about that.]

****I have asked this question before as well, but I want to see how you are thinking about this now: During class, I noticed that you talk and interact with your classmates in [INSERT HERE ABOUT HOW PARTICIPANT TALKS/INTERACTS WITH CLASSMATES DURING CLASS]. What is it about talking and interacting with your classmates [IF KNOWN, USE CLASSMATES' NAMES] in this way has helped with your learning of the different subjects in this class?**

****Has there been anything you have learned or experienced from this class that you have found to be really thought-provoking?**

[If needed: Has there been anything that you'd describe as challenging or difficult for you to work through?]

[Follow up: Why do you think (INSERT HERE PARTICIPANT'S WORDS ON CHALLENGES) have been particularly challenging to you?]

How would you compare your learning in this course to other courses you were enrolled in this semester?

II. Diversity Courses Outside of the Classroom

****Sometimes what we learn in one class can be helpful in our learning of other topics in other classes. Is there something that you learned in this class that has been helpful to you in any of the other classes you have taken this semester?**

[Follow up: What is it about (INSERT HERE PARTICIPANT'S WORDS ON CLASS CONTENT/ACTIVITIES) has been helpful or useful to you?]

****Sometimes what we learn in a class can also help us with our understanding or thinking about things outside of the classroom, for example in our own lives with our families or in our work. Is there one thing you have learned in this class that has been helpful to your life outside of school?**

[If yes: What is it? Why has it been helpful?]

Are there other things that you learned in [name of Diversity Course] that have been helpful to your life outside of the classroom? Let's talk about them one at a time.

****Years from now, what do you think you will remember about this course?**

[If needed: Are there any particular ideas/topics that have you learned from this class that you will remember? If so, what were they?]

****Why do you think you will remember [INSERT HERE PARTICIPANT'S WORDS ON IDEAS/TOPICS]?**

[Follow-up: What is it about [INSERT HERE PARTICIPANT'S WORDS ON IDEAS/TOPICS] that makes it stay with you? Can you give me examples?]

Are there things that you learned in class that, in the future, you would like to continue thinking or learning about?

[Follow up: What it is about (INSERT HERE PARTICIPANT'S WORDS ON IDEAS/TOPICS/ACTIVITIES) that makes you want to learn more about it?]

III. [INSERT HERE FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS FROM INTERVIEWS AND OBSERVATIONS]

IV. Conclusion

**Now that the course is nearing its end, how would you define diversity now?

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experiences in [name of Diversity Course]?

Appendix K

Interview Guide for Faculty First Interview

Interview Guide:**Secondary Participants-FACULTY****BEGINNING OF THE SEMESTER (first interview)****DURATION OF INTERVIEW: 1.5 hours max****DATE AND TIME OF INTERVIEW:** _____**LOCATION OF INTERVIEW:** _____**PARTICIPANT CODE:** _____**BEFORE BEGINNING:**

- Restate purpose of my study: My study aims to understand the learning experiences of first-generation college students of color enrolled in a diversity course. I will be looking at what these students may be incorporating from what they already know, from their life and from prior schooling experiences, into their learning of diversity. I also will be considering what students in your class do with what they learn from diversity courses, particularly on this college campus and in their home communities. It's hard to study students' learning without understanding the teaching that is connected to it. Thank you very much for allowing me to do that. My study hopes to provide insight for the academic community as to the prior knowledge and experiences that students draw on to inform their learning, and what impact these students' learning, in diversity courses in particular, can have on their learning generally, and possibly on their lives. You are participating in this interview because you have been identified as the professor on record for the [name of diversity course]. This interview should last about an hour and a half.
- Restate confidentiality and privacy: I will do my utmost to preserve your confidentiality and privacy. I will never mention your name, the name of the college, and the name of the class in anything I publish or present, for example, at professional meetings. That said, because I am deeply involved in observing you in your class and in talking with you, it is possible that someone reading a research report could glean your identity, especially locally, for example someone at the college or one of your friends and family members. To further secure the data, I will store them without identifiers, and will hold them in fully secured locations. I'd like to audio-record this interview.
May I do so?
_____ YES. NO. _____

[IF NO: That's fine. I will then just take notes by hand.]

[IF YES: Any time you want me to turn off the recorder, just let me know, and I'll be happy to do so.]

At any point, you can tell me that something you have said should not be quoted or discussed in detail in any final report; I'll be happy to comply with your request. Your participation is fully voluntary. You can withdraw from the study at any time, and you can decline to respond to any question that I ask you. You can also ask me to turn off the recorder at any time you like.

Do you have any questions for me at this time?

May I turn on the recorder? ____ yes ____ no

I. Background Information

To give me some context in the present, I'm going to start off with asking you a few questions about your current role now.

**I have your title as _____

Your home department is _____.

**Do you have any other roles in other departments or institution at this time?
[If yes: Which are those]?

Do you hold any administrative or service responsibilities at [name of Institution]?
What are those?
[If needed: How long have you had these responsibilities?]

Are you teaching any other courses this semester? What are the names of those courses?

What is the level of students in this course—for example, undergraduate, graduate?
[FOR UNDERGRADUTE: What level are the undergraduate students at—for example, first year or 3rd year students?]

Typically, courses address the needs of certain curricula for the institution. How does this course fit into the various curricular and structure of majors in [NAME OF COLLEGE]?

[IF NEEDED: For example, is this course part of the general education curriculum? Is it part of the program of study for a major in a certain field of study? Or does it fit into another curriculum besides these?]

**How long have you been at [name of Institution]?

Were you at another institution before coming to [name of Institution]?
[If yes: when were you at the other institution? And what roles did you have there?]

II: Background: Personal

Now, let's start by talking about your life and schooling prior to becoming a faculty member.

**Where did you grow up?

**What was school like for you growing up?

**As we look back on the teaching we experienced, some of our teachers stand out as especially memorable. Does one of your own past teachers stand out that way in your memory?

**Now, I'm going to transition to asking you some questions about college. Where did you go for undergrad and what was your major?

**What was college like for you?

**Same question here about memorable teachers: Does any college teacher stand out as especially memorable?

[Follow up: What made this professor/instructor memorable for you?]

Are there any other memorable faculty you had as an undergrad? Let's discuss one at a time.

III. Graduate School

Now that we talked a little bit about your undergraduate experience, let's discuss your graduate school experiences.

**I see from your CV that your discipline is _____ [DOCTORATE IN]. Is that correct?

So within [DISCIPLINE], what was your specialization when you were in graduate school?

**What drew you to study [INSERT HERE SPECIALIZATION]?

**In what ways, if at all, does [INSERT HERE SPECIALIZATION] show up in your teaching or work with students here in [name of Institution]?

Are continuing your work in [INSERT HERE SPECIALIZATION] from grad school in other ways?

IV. About Your Diversity Course

Let's transition to talking to you about your [name of Diversity Course].

**How many times have you taught [name of Diversity Course] here at [name of Institution]?

**Have you taught a course similar to [name of Diversity Course] elsewhere?
[If yes: where did you teach this course? How many times did you teach it before coming to [name of Institution]? What kind of course was this—a general education course, a major course, etc.?)

** I know that diversity courses can mean different things in different institutions and manifest differently. How did you get into teaching [NAME IN DIVERSITY COURSE] as part of [INSERT HERE WHAT PARTICIPANT SAYS DIVERSITY COURSE IS PART OF (GE, MAJOR, ETC. FROM ABOVE QUESTION)]?
[Follow up: Why did you get into teaching [NAME OF DIVERSITY COURSE] as part of [INSERT HERE PARTICIPANT'S WORDS]?)

How, if at all, has your teaching of [name of Diversity Course] changed since you first taught this course in [name of College]?

****Instructors often have big ideas that they emphasize in their course. What's one big idea that you want your students to understand by the end of the course?
[Follow up: Why did you select [INSERT HERE PARTICIPANT'S WORDS] as an idea to emphasize?]**

****How do you go about teaching [INSERT HERE PARTICIPANT'S WORDS ON BIG IDEA EMPHASIZED IN THE COURSE]?**

V. About Your Teaching

I want to transition now to asking you a few questions about your teaching.

****How would you describe yourself as a teacher?**

****Is there anything else about your teaching that makes it characteristic about you as a teacher?**

****Can you tell me about a particular experience you may have had—for example, an instance in the classroom with a student—that, as you see it, shaped the way you teach your students now?**

****What is one way you get to know the students in your class?**

****Are there any other ways you get to know your students? Let's talk about them one at a time.**

VI. Conclusion

We have now reached the conclusion of our interview. But before I end...

Is there anything else you would like to add about you as a teacher and your teaching of [name of Diversity Course] that you would like to tell me at this time?

Thank you again very much.

Appendix L

Interview Guide for Faculty Second Interview

Interview Guide:**Secondary Participants-FACULTY****END-OF-SEMESTER (second and last interview)****DURATION OF INTERVIEW: 1.5 hours max****DATE AND TIME OF INTERVIEW:** _____**LOCATION OF INTERVIEW:** _____**PARTICIPANT CODE:** _____**BEFORE BEGINNING:**

- Restate purpose of my study: My study aims to understand the learning experiences of first-generation college students of color enrolled in a diversity course. I will be looking at what these students may be incorporating from what they already know, from their life and from prior schooling experiences, into their learning of diversity. I also will be considering what students in your class do with what they learn from diversity courses, particularly on this college campus and in their home communities. It's hard to study students' learning without understanding the teaching that is connected to it. Thank you very much for allowing me to do that. My study hopes to provide insight for the academic community as to the prior knowledge and experiences that students draw on to inform their learning, and what impact these students' learning, in diversity courses in particular, can have on their learning generally, and possibly on their lives. You are participating in this interview because you have been identified as the professor on record for the [name of diversity course]. This interview should last about an hour and a half.
- Restate confidentiality and privacy: I will do my utmost to preserve your confidentiality and privacy. I will never mention your name, the name of the college, and the name of the class in anything I publish or present, for example, at professional meetings. That said, because I am deeply involved in observing you in your class and in talking with you, it is possible that someone reading a research report could glean your identity, especially locally, for example someone at the college or one of your friends and family members. To further secure the data, I will store them without identifiers, and will hold them in fully secured locations. I'd like to audio-record this interview.

May I do so? _____ YES. _____ NO.

[IF NO: That's fine. I will then just take notes by hand.]

[IF YES: Any time you want me to turn off the recorder, just let me know, and I'll be happy to do so.]

At any point, you can tell me that something you have said should not be quoted or discussed in detail in any final report; I'll be happy to comply with your request. Your participation is fully voluntary. You can withdraw from the study at any time, and you can decline to respond to any question that I ask you. You can also ask me to turn off the recorder at any time you like.

Do you have any questions for me at this time?

May I turn on the recorder? ____ yes ____ no

I. About the Diversity Course

Now that your course is at its end, I want to now ask you some questions about how you thought the semester went for you and for your students.

****Thinking back on the semester, how do you think your course went?**

What are you most happy or pleased about with regard to how the course went this semester?

Was there an instance in class that you experienced as especially challenging?
[If needed: Why do you think [INSERT HERE PARTICIPANT'S WORDS] was especially challenging?]

**** How do you think the course went for the students in your class?**
[If needed: What do you think that your students got out of this course? In other words, what did they learn?]

****Do you feel that students engaged with the ideas you taught as you hoped that they would?**
[Follow up: In what ways did they do so?]

****What didn't happen in this class that you wish would have happened?**

****If you could do that part of the course over again, what would you consider doing differently? [Follow up: Why would you do [INSERT PARTICIPANT'S WORDS] differently?]**

Let me ask that question now with a different emphasis:

**** Of all the things that you presented, for students' learning, in the class, which idea, or which topic, or which way of thinking, do you hope they'll recall, let's say five years from now?**

[Follow up: Why that [INSERT PARTICIPANT'S WORDS]?]

****Sometimes in teaching, professors learn or realize something that's new or different for them. This may be a small or large insight. Is there anything that you yourself learned, or even came to realize, in teaching this semester?**

****You just talked about gaining some insight on [INSERT PARTICIPANT'S WORDS ABOUT TEACHING] this semester. What about the learning of your students—did you learn anything new about that?**

Will you be teaching this class again?

[If yes: When? Would you make any changes the next time you teach it?]

****II. INCLUDE QUESTIONS HERE ABOUT OBSERVATIONS FROM COURSE**

I now want to ask you some questions about things I observed while you were teaching your class.

Appendix M

Observation Guide

RQ 1: What can first-generation college students of color come to learn—for example, about diversity, themselves, their communities, and/or the world—in a diversity course? What kinds of ideas and modes of thinking, offered in these courses, do they find to be meaningful, difficult, or helpful towards their learning of diversity content and their learning of things outside of the classroom?

RQ 2: What, if any, kinds of prior knowledge—drawn from their schooling experiences, and cultural, social, community, and familial practices and expectations—do first-generation students of color view as especially meaningful in their learning of subject matter in diversity courses?

RQ 3: What, if any, aspects of their learning of diversity content do first-generation college students of color identify as relevant to their current lives outside of class (e.g. on campus and in their communities)?

Class Topic/Materials:	Class Code:	Instructor Code:	Date:	Time:

Date:

Diagram of the Classroom Space:

Time Stamps	Observation Notes *what are the teacher and students doing/saying?	Self and/or Method Notes *Dianne's Questions to Self: What are some things you see that you would like to follow-up with participants? EXPLAIN WHAT IT IS ABOUT WHAT YOU SEE THAT MAKES YOU WANT TO FOLLOW-UP AND WRITE THEM AS QUESTIONS