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Student Perceptions of Multicultural Awareness Development Through Participation  
in a Multicultural Living-Learning Community

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Education  
in Educational Leadership

by

Shalauna Miller

Committee in charge:

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December 2014

The dissertation of Shalauna Miller is approved.

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Cynthia Hudley, Chair

September 2014

Student Perceptions of Multicultural Awareness Development Through Participation  
in a Multicultural Living-Learning Community

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by

Shalauna Miller

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## VITA OF SHALAUNA MILLER

September 2014

### **EDUCATION AND CREDENTIALS**

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- B.A., Audiology and Speech Language Pathology, University of Northern Colorado – May 1998

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- Associate Director December 2012 to present  
Orientation Programs and Parent Services, University of California Santa Barbara
- Publicly represent the campus to over 9500 new freshman and transfer students, and their parents/family members.
  - Responsible for various aspects of the program including coordinating with the college Deans on academic requirements, planning and implementing student staff training, evaluation and development of student and parent presentations, working with faculty members to offer sample lectures, and communicating with key campus departments (parking, media services, etc.) about programmatic needs.
  - Coordinate recruitment and selection of Orientation student staff members.
  - Supervise a full-time career staff member responsible for implementing summer programming for students and parents, and oversight of the day-to-day operations of the Student Resource Building.
  - Supervise 34 student staff members who introduce new freshman, transfer students, and their families to the campus community including vital resources, academic information and course registration.
  - Plan, implement and evaluate the annual New Student Convocation including coordinating with the Chancellor's Office on faculty communications, arranging campus departments and off-campus vendors, securing entertainment, coordination of student assistants and all logistical arrangements for the event.

- Assistant Director June 2007 to December 2012  
Orientation Programs and Parent Services, University of California Santa Barbara
- Oversight of all aspects of the program including reservation of campus facilities, involvement of campus faculty and staff, coordination of audio/visual needs, and responding to any unforeseen changes to the printed schedule.
  - Responsible for the day-to-day operations of the Student Resource Building Information Center including student staff recruitment, hiring and training.
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Counselor

August 2005 to June 2007

Educational Opportunity Program, University of California Santa Barbara

- Worked in a retention-based model to provide guidance and support to over 600 first generation/low-income students related to educational, personal, cultural familial and identity development.
- Counseled students on academic policies, financial aid, housing concerns, career development, emergency funding sources and other personal matters.
- Mentored students in the development of problem solving skills and measurable goal setting as it relates to personal and cultural values.
- Served as a representative of EOP during campus events such as Spring Insight, Summer Orientation and High School Group visits.
- Collaborated with multiple student affairs offices to develop and implement program services to students.
- Hired, trained, supervised and evaluated 12 student staff Peer Advisors.
- Coordinated and implemented a team-based concept with the Peer Advisors to provide on-site department support services and programs to students living in the residence halls.
- Created and oversaw allocations of an annual budget of \$36,000.
- Supervised 16 Resident Assistants and 150 program participants in a two-week summer residential program designed to aid students in the transition to the university.

Assistant Student Leadership Coordinator

June 2004 to August 2005

Housing and Residential Services, University of California Santa Barbara

- Served as a member of the management team responsible for selecting, electing, training and advising student leaders in the residence halls.
- Directly advised 40 Residence Hall Leaders on developing policy, allocation of budget monies and programming initiatives serving an on-campus population of 4700 students.
- Assisted in the creation and implementation of student programs that support areas of academic success, community development, alcohol and other drug awareness, body image issues, diversity appreciation, self-awareness and conflict resolution.
- Advised the Residence Halls Association in the management of a \$250,000 yearly budget.
- Worked with sub-groups of residence hall leaders who serve as peer advisors through programs such as the HIV/AIDS Safer Sex Peers, the Health Advocacy Chairs and the Multicultural Awareness program.

Resident Director

August 2002 to June 2004

Housing and Residential Services, University of California Santa Barbara

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- **Multicultural Facilitator:** UCSB Orientation Staff Training (2007-present), UCSB Women's Basketball team and coaches (2008-2010)
- **Presenter:** UCSB Orientation Parent Program (2012 – present), UCSB Orientation Student Program (2007-2012), National Orientation Directors Association Annual Conference (2011), Education 20: Introduction to the University (2008), National Association of College and University Residence Halls Annual Conference (2005), Student Leadership Training (2003-2005), Upper Mid-West Region – ACUHO (2001)
- **Staff Advisor:** AIDS Sensitivity Awareness Project (2005-2007), National Association of College and University Residence Halls (NACURH) Conference Delegation (2005), PACHURH Conference Delegation (2004), Pacific Affiliate of College and University Residence Halls (PACURH) Regional Conference Delegation (2003)
- **Teaching Assistant:** Education 20: Introduction to the University (Spring 2003 and Winter 2004)
- **Team Initiatives Facilitator:** Tropicana Gardens Resident Assistant Selection Process (2005-2009), Women's Program Winter Retreat (2006), Chicano/Latino Staff Retreat (2005), Residence Halls Association Winter Retreat (2004)

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- Honorary Inductee National Residence Hall Honorary (2002)
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#### **PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS**

- National Orientation Directors Association (NODA) 2007 – present: Annual conference committee member (2009), annual conference attendance (2007, 2008, 2011, 2012), regional conference attendance (2009, 2012, 2013)
- American College Personnel Association-International (ACPA) 2000 – present: National conference attendance (2002, 2003, 2004, 2007)
- Upper Mid-West Region of the Association of College and University Housing Officers (UMR – ACUHO) 2000-2002: Regional conference attendance (2000, 2001, 2002)

## ABSTRACT

### Student Perceptions of Multicultural Awareness Development Through Participation in a Multicultural Living-Learning Community

by

Shalauna Miller

The purpose of this study was to better understand how students perceive participation in a multicultural living-learning community to be an influence on their development of multicultural awareness. This question was explored by examining the following research questions, why do students select to live on the Multicultural Hall, what experiences do students identify as valuable to the development of their multicultural awareness, how does participating in the Multicultural Hall foster relationships among students from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and how do students describe the influence of these relationships on the development of their multicultural awareness. Fourteen students who lived on the Multicultural Hall in 2012-2013 were interviewed using an in-depth, semi-structured interview model. Interviews transcripts were examined using a Consensual Qualitative Research approach. Archival documents prepared by the Multicultural Hall Resident Assistants were also reviewed. Intergroup contact theory was used to evaluate and analyze

participant responses and information contained in the archival documents. Results of the study revealed that students who actively participated believed that participating in the Multicultural Hall contributed to their development of multicultural awareness. Student participants identified that living in a community of diverse others that was inclusive, and supportive of cross-cultural learning and understanding were important factors in their multicultural awareness development. Additionally, the value of developing friendships with diverse others was noted by students as important in developing multicultural awareness.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Residence halls have been part of the college and university landscape since the inception of higher education in America (Rudolph, 1935/1990). Living in residence halls has been shown to have a positive influence on students' academic and intellectual growth, degree persistence, social integration and belonging, and civic engagement and responsibility (Astin, 1985; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1998). More recently, departments of residential life have tried to enhance residential living through the implementation of learning communities.

Generally, learning communities are defined by several common characteristics, including group enrollment in courses, a shared thematic focus, and common extracurricular interests. Not all learning communities possess all of these characteristics, and some learning communities include a residential component (Inkelas & Weisman, 2003; Love & Tokuno, 1999; Shapiro & Levine, 1999; Zhao & Kuh, 2004). A living-learning community (LLC) is a learning community with a residential element. This study examined an LLC with a thematic focus on multicultural awareness. For this study multicultural awareness was defined as understanding one's own cultural experiences and beliefs, learning about the cultural experiences and beliefs of diverse others, and understanding how characteristics of self and others can work together successfully to create a thriving diverse society.



## **Living Learning Communities**

Implementation of LLCs in their current format began appearing in the 1980s as one way institutions devised to improve the overall undergraduate experience (Stassen, 2003; Zhao & Kuh, 2004). LLCs are intended to holistically integrate in-classroom experiences and out-of-classroom experiences for undergraduate students through the incorporation of academic and social programming. Through the marriage of the curriculum and co-curriculum, students are encouraged to link in-class learning to outside-of-class experiences. This integration allows LLCs to provide greater opportunities for students to interact with faculty members, campus staff, and peers in meaningful ways dictated by the specific focus of the LLC (Garrett & Zabriskie, 2003).

A guiding principle of LLCs is to create an environment that assists students with the academic and social transition to the university (Love & Tokuno, 1999; Pascarella, Terenzini, & Blimling, 1994). LLCs are intended to create a sense of belonging and community among LLC participants and with the greater campus with an end goal of supporting students as they move through their college experience (Lenning & Ebbers, 1999). Altogether LLCs are designed to encourage active engagement in learning, cooperation among peers, and a sense of community (Cross, 1998; Garrett & Zabriskie, 2003). The multiple goals for LLCs are grounded in the understanding that students who feel connected socially and who believe they are equipped to succeed academically are more likely to persist at the university (Tinto, 1998).

One way residence life programs make an effort to address the needs of diverse communities is through culturally-themed LLCs. These culturally-themed LLCs seek to address the social and educational needs of communities of color through intentional cultural, social, and academic programming. The evolution of culturally-themed LLCs has now come to include the implementation of multicultural LLCs which are broader than a single ethnic or cultural group and focus on challenging stereotypes and prejudice by providing students opportunities to engage with and learn from diverse others. This study examined student interaction in an LLC with a specific focus on multicultural awareness.

### **The Multicultural Hall**

Overseen by the University's department of residential life, the Multicultural Hall (MH) is a thematic LLC option offered to students who live in university-owned residence halls at a large public institution on the west coast. Conceptualized in 2004, the MH was developed as a response to an observed lack of racial and ethnic diversity in the campus residence halls. The intent of the MH was to increase the racial/ethnic diversity in residence halls by creating a community that was more inviting to students of color. The department of residential life anticipated, based on past experience with culturally specific LLCs, that a multicultural hall would assist with the recruitment and retention of students of color (S. Rice, personal communication, February 2004). This model was first available as an LLC in the fall of 2005 and is currently offered in three residence hall locations.

The goal of the MH is to provide students an opportunity to “explore social issues through a variety of activities where students will examine their own beliefs, discuss them with others, and look at how we all interact with one another” (R. Donerson, personal communication, March 29, 2012). This expectation is consistent with literature that has found that opportunities for peer interaction contribute to college students’ appreciation of difference and openness to diversity (Hu & Kuh, 2003; Longerbeam, 2010; Pike, 1999). Through peer interaction, students may gain an understanding of the experiences of others in relation to one’s own experience and begin to see the world from a different perspective (Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner & Christ, 2011). Activities that take place on the MH are designed to provide such opportunities for students with the goal of increasing understanding of intercultural dynamics and developing a continuous interest in learning about intercultural topics and issues (R. Donerson, personal communication, March 29, 2012).

Generally MH activities, or programs, fall into three broad categories: community development, passive programming, and active programming. The office of residential life establishes the number of activities that are to be offered per quarter by the Resident Assistant. Community development activities (CDAs) are designed to build community and establish connections among MH participants (R. Donerson, personal communication, May 24, 2013). Some examples of CDAs include meals together in the dining commons, shared hiking trips in the local community, and movie nights. Passive programming is the sharing of information through the use of bulletin boards or posters that will engender students’ thinking about diversity and

multiculturalism (R. Donerson, personal communication, May 24, 2013). The third type of activity, active programming, comprises interactive events that seek to engage students with one another and the community in an educational way (R. Donerson, personal communication, May 24, 2013). Active programs can take many forms ranging from attending campus or community events, taking field trips, or participating in service projects. Active programs include activities planned and executed by the MH Resident Assistant specifically for MH participants. Prior research suggests that the variety of interaction as well as the quality of interaction contributes to students' development of multicultural awareness (Pettigrew, 1998). By offering a variety of activities, MH participants have multiple opportunities to interact across contexts with their MH peers.

As with traditional residence halls, the MH has a Resident Assistant (RA) who is supervised by a Resident Director, an employee of the office of residential life, which oversees the day-to-day operation of the residence hall. The RA is tasked with developing MH relevant programming. In addition to the standard 120-hour RA training, the MH RA attends two additional in-service trainings for LLC RAs that are designed to provide an in-depth understanding of the purpose of LLCs, establish programming requirements beyond that of the traditional RA, and discuss ways to work with campus resources (R. Donerson, personal communication, April 10, 2012). During these in-service trainings, LLC RAs plan programming and community building around the thematic focus of their specific LLC (R. Donerson, personal communication, April 10, 2012).

Each RA is responsible for hosting programs throughout the year; given the goals of the MH, programs planned by the MH RA must be geared toward multicultural awareness, and intercultural topics and issues. The MH also has at least one assigned faculty/staff mentor who is responsible for collaborating with the RA. The mentor plans one program or event per quarter related to multicultural awareness and values; the mentor also holds quarterly office hours in the residence hall on the MH (R. Donerson, personal communication, March 29, 2012).

### **Intergroup Contact Theory**

To examine the impact of living in an LLC with a specific focus on attitudes toward diversity, Intergroup Contact Theory provides a useful lens. Intergroup contact theory proposes that learning about the experiences of out-group members and developing and participating in shared experiences on an equal status footing with out-group members can foster a more positive perception of intergroup interaction. Viewed through the lens of contact theory, intergroup interactions represent opportunities to challenge preconceived stereotypes that contribute to prejudicial attitudes and behaviors (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

Early contact theorists identified four conditions necessary for intergroup contact to be successful: participants must have equal status within the group, the group must be working toward a common goal, work toward this goal must be in the spirit of cooperation, and the formation of the group must be sanctioned and supported by authorities (Pettigrew, 1998). Current models of intergroup contact theory have articulated four processes that occur during successful intergroup contact

which lead to attitude change: learning about diverse others, changing behavior based on information learned from interacting with diverse others, developing an emotional connection and relationship with diverse others, and generalizing these experiences and knowledge to larger contexts (Pettigrew, 1998). Among these four processes, developing emotional connections with out-group members appears to be critical in generating contact effects that lead to generalization of successful intergroup experiences across varying contexts (Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew et al., 2011). Through affective ties, most notably friendships, stereotypes and prejudices can be challenged and changed by blurring the boundaries between in-group and out-group (Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew et al., 2011).

Intergroup contact theory highlights the value of long-term contact and shared experiential activities in developing affective ties and breaking down prejudices and stereotypes (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Extended intergroup contact allows for opportunities to experience close interactions across contexts and creates an environment where individuals feel safe to self-disclose, and share their histories and experiences with others (Pettigrew, 1998). Intergroup friendships, which may form through these sustained and meaningful interactions, have been shown to be a potent factor in influencing positive multicultural attitudes (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Pettigrew, 1998). Merely having out-group friends may not be enough to moderate out-group prejudice. For friendships to broadly change multicultural attitudes, individual out-group members must be acknowledged as typical of the greater out-group population (Brown &

Hewstone, 2005; Pettigrew, 1998). By recognizing out-group members as both friends and typical members of their own ingroups, a broader appreciation of the value of multicultural experiences on our diverse society may be achieved. Collectively, for intergroup contact to succeed in increasing awareness, contact should occur both intrapersonally, through own group identification and self-disclosure, and interpersonally, through sustained contact and friendship development (Brown & Hewston, 2005).

Programs such as LLCs provide long-term and sustained contact among residents, and thus Intergroup Contact Theory would say they are ideal venues for supporting the growth of intergroup friendships. Opportunities for intergroup contact in this setting abound from structured and planned events or activities to informal socialization among students. Using intergroup contact theory to examine the influence of the Multicultural Hall can inform the degree to which activities, events, and social interactions supports college students' development of multicultural awareness.

### **Rationale for the Study**

Among culturally themed LLCs, the MH is unique. The majority of culturally themed LLCs focus on one specific cultural group. The MH, in contrast, provides a setting for students of many differing backgrounds and experiences to learn from and share with one another the experiences of living in a diverse world. This study was interested in determining what effects students perceive, if any, the MH had on their development or growth in multicultural awareness and understanding.

Assessment of LLCs is wide spread; however much of the assessment focuses on institutional measures of success such as retention rates and GPA, as well as positive academic behaviors such as in-class participation, effective study habits, visits to professor office hours, demonstration of critical thinking, and application of knowledge (Inkleas & Weisman, 2003; Inkelas, Vogt, Longerbeam, & Owen, 2006; Stassen, 2003). Students' perceptions of their experiences in LLC programs are not typically included in program assessment. Rather, the higher education literature typically presents global measures of students' overall satisfaction with the LLC experience. Measures of student perceptions of their experience, if included at all, typically focus on curricular components of LLC participation (Hlyva & Schuh 2004; Li, McCoy, Shelley, & Whalen, 2005). Students' perceived experiences, or personal and social outcomes as a function of living on an LLC are only minimally visible in the current literature.

### **General Research Question**

Using intergroup contact theory as a lens, this study examined how students perceive participation in the MH to be an influence on their development of multicultural awareness and understanding. Very little research on LLCs with a cultural focus has directly asked students their perceptions of participation in the LLC. This study contributes to the literature by examining an LLC model that is not well studied and also contributes student participants' voices to that literature. Because the MH is designed to encourage a range of interpersonal and intrapersonal interactions and attitudes, an understanding of students' experiences on the MH adds



to our understanding of the types of programs that students perceive to influence their multicultural awareness and understanding.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

To place the current study in the context of the existing literature, this review is divided into three sections. The chapter begins with a discussion of factors that influence college students' development of multicultural awareness. The next section addresses students' development of multicultural awareness through participation in living-learning communities (LLCs). The final section examines multicultural awareness development among students who participate in multicultural-themed housing environments.

### **Factors Influencing College Students' Development of Multicultural Awareness**

As society becomes increasingly diverse, preparing college students to become engaged participants in a diverse community has taken on new and greater importance. Thus, providing students opportunities to interact thoughtfully with diverse others is an important dimension of the college student experience in the twenty-first century. It is not enough for these interactions to occur in the classroom setting (Anderson, MacPhee & Govan, 2000; Zuñiga, Williams & Berger, 2005); they must also occur through co-curricular activities and student initiated interactions (Engberg, 2007; Saenz, Ngai & Hurtado, 2007).

**Experiential activities.** The interactions that students report as significantly meaningful to their multicultural awareness development occurs in experiential activities that allow students to interact with diverse others through shared multiculturally related experiences (Anderson, MacPhee & Govan, 2000; Zuñiga, Williams & Berger, 2005). Anderson, MacPhee and Govan (2000) examined this

concept when they asked college students to describe the curricular experiences and course assignments that most contributed to their increased multicultural awareness and how these experiences influenced their interactions with people different from themselves. They sampled current (sophomore through graduate student) and former undergraduate students ( $N = 128$ ) from courses taught with no distinct diversity curriculum but instead had infused multicultural themes throughout the course content. These courses were offered across various departments and disciplines (i.e. Apparel and Merchandising, Education, Human Development, Nutrition, Occupational Therapy and Sociology). Students, both current and former, reported that interactive and experiential course assignments such as simulations, role-plays, group projects, and internships promoted greater exploration of one's own feelings, attitudes, motivations, and self-awareness around multicultural topics (Anderson, MacPhee & Govan, 2000).

These findings are supported by the work of Zuñiga, Williams, and Berger (2005). They analyzed survey data collected from undergraduate students ( $N = 597$ ), ranging from freshmen to seniors, living in residence halls where Project Mosaik, a diversity initiative, had been implemented. The students were surveyed in Fall 2000 and again in Spring 2001. Respondents who participated in diversity related coursework, diversity awareness programming in residence halls, and informal activities with diverse others rated themselves more likely to reduce their own use of stereotypes and biased language and more likely to work with others in the future to promote inclusion and social justice. Experiential opportunities, such as those

surveyed in this study appear to increase students' self-reported motivation to take action toward reducing prejudice and promoting inclusion (Zuñiga, Williams & Berger, 2005). The identification of experiential activities as one factor that influences the development of multicultural awareness is consistent with the premises of intergroup contact theory. Recall that contact theory suggests that for intergroup contact to be successful, the group must be working cooperatively toward a common goal (Pettigrew, 1998). Experiential activities provide just such an opportunity.

**Informal interactions.** Informal contact also seems to have a significant impact on students' multicultural awareness in intergroup interactions (Engberg, 2007; Saenz, Ngai, & Hurtado, 2007). Saenz, Ngai, and Hurtado (2007) explored factors that predict positive and meaningful cross-racial interactions among college students with the aim of identifying factors necessary for achieving positive intergroup interactions. Using longitudinal data from a multi-campus national research project, the Preparing Students for a Diverse Democracy Project, students were surveyed at college entry and again at the end of the second year. Saenz, Nagai and Hurtado (2007) examined survey responses that explored the extent to which participants engaged students of other racial/ethnic backgrounds in informal settings such as “dining/sharing meals, having discussions about racial/ethnic relations outside of class, sharing personal feelings/problems, studying/preparing for class, socializing/partying, having intellectual discussions outside of class, and attending events sponsored by other racial/ethnic groups” (2007, p. 10). The final sample ( $N = 4,380$ ) was very diverse and included 686 Asian students, 224 African American

students, 388 Latino students, and 3,082 White students. Findings revealed that a student's propensity to engage in intergroup interactions in informal settings was one of the strongest predictors of multicultural awareness (Saenz, Ngai & Hurtado, 2007). Although White students are overrepresented in this study, findings clearly point to specific types of out-of-class, informal experiential opportunities that may encourage growth in multicultural awareness for all students.

Using the same survey data from the Preparing Students for a Diverse Democracy Project, Engberg (2007) examined the influence of the events of September 11, 2001 on students' development of a pluralistic orientation. Pluralistic orientation was defined as an ability to understand and appreciate experiences outside of one's own cultural frame, to have one's own ideas and beliefs challenged, and to work cooperatively in diverse groups toward a common end. To measure pluralistic orientation, students' responses ( $N = 4,697$ ) were examined for 1) participation in campus facilitated diversity experiences (i.e. co-curricular activities and diversity courses), 2) frequency with which students had positive or negative interactions across race, and 3) frequency of participation in events surrounding September 11<sup>th</sup> (attending panel discussions or vigils, participating in blood donation, etc.). Of the final student sample 49% were female, 16% were Asian Pacific American, 6% were African American, 8% were Latino, and 69% were White. Engberg found that students who were actively involved in diversity related co-curricular activities as well as campus events related to September 11<sup>th</sup> were more likely to engage in positive intergroup learning and interactions. Results also indicated that intergroup

dialogue served as a powerful tool for bringing college students from diverse social and cultural groups together to promote communication and coalition building, necessary skills for working and living in a multicultural world (Engberg, 2007).

### **Developing Multicultural Awareness through Living-Learning Community**

#### **Participation**

Research on college student development has long emphasized the importance of developing relationships and finding a sense of belonging for students' academic and social success at the university (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Tinto, 1998).

Relationship building and sense of belonging appear to have an influence on positive multicultural awareness development (Domzi, 2008; Johnson et al., 2007; Longerbeam, 2010; Pike, 2002; Stearns, Buchmann & Bonneau, 2009). LLCs can provide opportunities to support these ends.

**Finding a sense of belonging among diverse others.** One of the inherent goals of LLCs is to offer students a way to connect with their peers and develop a sense of belonging. Using data collected from the 2004 National Study of Living-Learning Programs (NSLLP), Johnson et al. (2007) examined students' background characteristics, residence hall environments, and perceptions of the transition to college as variables to predict sense of belonging. Sense of belonging was evaluated based on student agreement to the following items: "I feel comfortable on campus", "I would choose the same college over again", "My college is supportive of me", "I feel that I am a member of the campus community", and "I feel a sense of belonging to the campus community" (Johnson et al., 2007, p. 529). The final sample ( $N =$

2,967 freshmen students) consisted of 493 African American, 1,002 Asian Pacific American, 334 Hispanic/Latino, 367 Multiracial/Multiethnic, and 771 White students. Johnson et al. (2007) found that students' perception of a socially supportive and inclusive residence hall environment was an important predictor for sense of belonging across all racial/ethnic groups. From student responses, a socially supportive residence hall was one where people of different races/ethnicities, religions, and sexual orientations were appreciated and where people helped and supported one another. These findings make evident the important role that residence halls play in creating an environment where students feel a sense of belonging.

To understand students' perceptions of informal learning experiences through participation in an education-themed LLC, Domizi (2008) interviewed six LLC participants who completed a shared course assignment. The participants consisted of four White females, one Hispanic female and one male of Indian descent. Students perceived benefits that went beyond educational experiences to include an appreciation of diversity. Study participants reported that the relationships built through LLC participation led to feelings of inclusion and belonging. Students felt that shared informal interactions among LLC peers created a deeper understanding of the value of learning from diverse others and lead students to challenge their own values and beliefs. Witnessing some members of the LLC participating in this type of personal exploration encouraged and supported other students to do the same (Domizi, 2008). The sample size for this study was markedly small, but these results may indicate that building relationships among students from diverse backgrounds

provides opportunities for individual learning and growth. An LLC specifically designed to promote such growth and self-awareness may be especially effective in cultivating feelings of belonging in a culturally diverse group of students.

Although LLCs were designed to provide students a sense of belonging, Talbert and Boyles (2005) found that outcomes do not always match these intended goals. Talbert and Boyles (2005) explored students' accounts of their experience participating in a freshmen learning community through semi-structured interviews. Six students, two African American females, three White females and one White male, were asked to share their perceptions of what it was like for them to be a first-year college student, their choice to participate in an LLC, and their experiences living on the LLC. Although not explicitly stated, it appears that the interviews took place at the end of the students' first semester in college. Student responses echoed several of the positive themes found in the literature on LLCs, but themes of alienation and isolation from the greater campus, and at times within the freshmen learning community itself were also present in the data. Students identified that participating in the LLC delayed their engagement with the greater campus community, which led to feelings of isolation from this community. From these students' accounts there was a lack of urgency to explore campus life, join student organizations, or look for social interactions outside of the LLC. They saw this delayed engagement as a downfall of LLC participation noting that as the semester progressed, and they grew tired of interacting only with other LLC participants, it was difficult to make inroads into already established student organizations or friend



groups outside the LLC. Even more detrimental to students' sense of belonging were feelings of isolation within the LLC. Study participants noted that when they were unable to build the types of social connections that lead to feelings of belonging within the LLC, participation in the LLC was especially isolating. The sample size was small and limited to six students, making it difficult to conclude that the experiences of these six students were representative of the total freshmen learning community population. Still, the Talburt and Boyles (2005) study points to the importance of creating intentional opportunities for students in an LLC to develop a sense of community and belonging, both within and outside of the LLC, in order to encourage experiences that promote multicultural awareness among students.

**Sustained interactions with diverse others.** Positive interactions among students from differing backgrounds and experiences support openness to diversity (Pettigrew, 1998). When these interactions occur in the daily routines of campus life, students have multiple opportunities to experience intercultural connections in real and meaningful ways (Longerbeam, 2010; Pike, 2002; Stearns, Buchmann & Bonneau, 2009). LLCs offer students such sustained opportunities to relate to one another in many facets of daily life: living, dining, class attendance, campus and LLC event attendance, and informal socializing.

Using contact theory as a framework, Longerbeam (2010) examined aspects of the campus environment that contributed to students' openness to diversity, defined as awareness and appreciation of difference. Using data collected from the NSLLP, Longerbeam looked specifically at civic engagement, participation in

culturally-based student organizations, overall residence hall climate, and LLC characteristics as moderating factors to students' ( $N = 12,241$ ) openness to diversity. In the final sample most students identified as White (77%) followed by Asian American (11%), African American (5%), multiracial (4%) and Hispanic (3%). Student respondents were primarily in their first or second year of college (85%). Openness to diversity was significantly associated with environments that supported peer interactions. LLC participation specifically supported peer interactions, primarily through extended interactions across formal and informal contexts. These extended interactions with diverse others appeared to enhance students' cross-cultural friendship development and created a long-term willingness to continue to be open to learning about others' beyond their time living on the LLC (Longerbeam, 2010).

Another examination of students' living arrangements (Pike, 2002) similarly found that LLC living was positively related to openness to diversity. Using the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ), Pike surveyed freshmen students ( $N = 502$ ) living off campus (14%), living in traditional residence halls (33%) and living in LLCs (53%) to determine the effects of students' living arrangements on their openness to diversity. In the sample 73% were female and 8% identified as students of color. Students' openness to diversity was assessed using a five-item scale focused on questions related to learning from diverse others and the value of diverse viewpoints. This scale included questions such as: "I enjoy talking with people who have values different from mine because it helps me understand myself and my values better", "Learning about people from different cultures is a

very important part of my college education”, “Contact with individuals whose background is different from my own is an essential part of my college education” (2002, p. 290). Pike found that living on-campus, in traditional residence halls or LLCs, was positively related to openness to diversity. However, students participating in LLCs reported incidents of positive intergroup interaction with greater frequency than their traditional residence hall peers (Pike, 2002). These results may be attributed to the intentional nature of LLCs to provide opportunities for students to be introduced to a wide variety of ideas, viewpoints, and life perspectives across settings, and frequent and sustained interactions among diverse peers, which encouraged friendship formation among LLC participants.

Stearns, Buchmann and Bonneau (2009), using Contact Theory as a framework, investigated the formation of interracial friendships among college students. Data were collected using the Campus Life and Learning Project survey, which was administered to first-year freshmen students in the summer preceding the start of their first year and again near the end of their first year. The survey was conducted with two cohorts of freshmen students in 2001 and 2002. As one part of the pre and post survey, students were asked to provide information, including race, on up to eight of their closest friends (excluding immediate family members). Information about closest friends was then used, in conjunction with other survey items, to determine the extent to which residence halls, classrooms and extracurricular activities contribute to cross-racial friendship formation in the first year of college. Using only survey responses from those students with pre and post

survey data ( $N = 800$ ) it was revealed that the residence hall living environment was the strongest predictor for cross-racial friendship formation. This was especially true for students rooming with someone of a different race or ethnicity and for those students living without a roommate. Based on the premises of Contact Theory, Stearns, Buchmann and Bonneau (2009) concluded that the intimate, informal and prolonged nature of student interactions with diverse others in a residence hall setting contributed to the formation of positive cross-racial friendships and connections. These connections and friendships may serve as an important foundation from which students can learn about and explore topics of multiculturalism.

The importance of sustained intergroup interactions on one's development of multicultural awareness is consistent with contact theory. Contact theory contends that time and extended contact across varied settings lead to sharing of experiences and development of friendships that increase multicultural understanding (Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew et al., 2011). LLCs by nature, offer students sustained interactions with one another and across multiple contexts of daily campus life.

### **Students' Multicultural Awareness Development in Multicultural Living Environments**

While LLC participation may support students' development of multicultural awareness, relevant studies have typically been conducted on LLCs that are not designed specifically to address multicultural themes. Therefore, understanding students' perceptions of participation in a multicultural-focused LLC seems an important next step, as this area of literature is limited. Research conducted by Akens

(2002) and Hlyva and Schuh (2004) are perhaps the only studies that have looked at college student perceptions of participation in multicultural-focused LLC's.

Hlyva and Schuh (2004) conducted a qualitative study to learn how students perceived their experiences living in a cross-cultural LLC where U.S. domestic and international students lived on the same residence hall floor and enrolled in three common courses. The study posed three research questions, including what role did the learning community play in students' transition to university life, how did participation in a cross-cultural LLC enhance cross-cultural awareness and understanding, and how did students perceive their LLC experiences in general (Hlyva & Schuh, 2004). At the conclusion of the first semester, nine LLC students were interviewed in two focus groups. The group of U.S. domestic students consisted of four female and two male students. The international student focus group consisted of two male and one female student. U.S. domestic and international student participants were not identified by racial background or country of origin.

Students reported varying reasons for joining the cross-cultural LLC. International students expected that participation in the LLC would assist in their transition to the university, and to living and studying in the U.S. Conversely, U.S. students joined the cross-cultural LLC to learn about different cultures (Hlyva & Schuh, 2004). Interestingly both international and U.S. students reported that they were initially dissatisfied with the cross-cultural learning they experienced in the LLC. Domestic students were disappointed that there was a high degree of cultural similarity between international and U.S. students; international students seemed to

quickly conform to U.S. culture and customs. On the other hand, international students were frustrated that when domestic students supposed the international students' experiences to be similar to their own, they perceived the U.S. students to be uninterested in learning more about them and their lives (Hlyva & Schuh, 2004). International students also reported holding predetermined ideas about American college students. They initially assumed that U.S. domestic students were only interested in socializing and partying and were not as committed to academic success as international students (Hlyva & Schuh, 2004).

At the start of the LLC experience it appeared that preconceived stereotypes among both domestic and international students hindered the creation of cross-cultural friendships, which in turn limited cross-cultural learning (Hlyva & Schuh, 2004). However, as students lived on a residence hall with diverse others and with roommates from another culture, over time they learned about others' experiences through hall interactions and course assignments. These cumulative experiences served as a catalyst to create cross-cultural friendships, and through these relationships students' stereotypes were challenged. The majority of focus group participants felt at the conclusion of their time on the LLC that they had become more culturally aware through the experience and, if given the option, would participate in the LLC again (Hlyva & Schuh, 2004).

To gain an understanding of what LLC participation meant to students 2-3 years after the experience, Akens (2002) interviewed ten students, in two focus groups, who participated in an LLC designed to provide first year students a smooth

transition from high school to college. While this LLC was not designated specifically as a multicultural hall, the institution where this LLC exists has a student population consisting of 63% students of color and 36% international students. As such, the LLC was an environment consistent with what a multiculturally-themed LLC might look like on a less diverse campus. Of the ten participants five were female, six were international students, six were juniors, three identified as Black, two as Hispanic, and four as Multiracial.

Akens (2002) sought to explore the long-term impact of LLC participation by asking students to reflect on what they most and least enjoyed about the LLC, how the experience of living on the LLC compared to expectations of the LLC, how the LLC impacted their first-year experience, which LLC specific events or activities helped shaped their first-year, and how LLC involvement impacted their overall college experience. Four main themes emerged in the data that described how LLC participation impacted the students' overall college experience: community, involvement, identity, and academics. Students reported that what they most valued were the community and relationships that were formed through participating in the LLC. Through these relationships students felt safe to explore their own values, beliefs and identities while learning about and considering the experiences of diverse others (Akens, 2002). Students noted that over the course of the LLC experience they developed more meaningful and mature relationships and were challenged to explore their own experiences through the lens of others' experiences. From the LLC experience students identified an ongoing interest in learning about others'

experiences and establishing relationships with a wide array of people throughout their college career (Akins, 2002).

This brief review of the literature strongly suggests that LLCs can play an important role in the promotion of multicultural awareness. LLCs offer opportunities for participants to engage in experiential activities and intergroup dialogue, two important elements that have been identified by contact theory as influences on the development of multicultural awareness. Furthermore, LLCs provide a space for students to engage with one another across multiple contexts and through extended interactions that create a sense of community among peers. These environments support the creation of friendships, which, according to intergroup contact theory, can be highly effective in promoting multicultural awareness. Relevant to this study, and what is not as evident in the literature, is an understanding of students' perceptions of how multicultural-themed LLCs support multicultural awareness. Understanding student perspectives is essential in designing experiences that encourage multicultural awareness and understanding.

### **The Current Study**

For this study multicultural awareness is defined as understanding one's own cultural experiences and beliefs, learning about the cultural experiences and beliefs of diverse others, and understanding how characteristics of self and others can work together successfully to create a diverse society. Multicultural awareness is an essential component of living and working in a diverse world. Research strongly supports the benefits of LLC participation on students' development of multicultural



awareness. However, many studies of LLC's were conducted with more general programs; only a few studies have examined LLCs that are specifically focused on multicultural awareness. The proposed study aims to contribute to the existing literature through the examination of an LLC with a specific multicultural focus. Literature that provides student perceptions of their experience living on multicultural focused LLCs is growing but remains limited. Therefore, a second goal of the proposed study is to add student voices to our understanding of the experiences associated with living on a multicultural-themed LLC.

Finally, among culturally themed LLCs, the Multicultural Hall (MH) is unique in that it is devoted specifically to the development of multicultural awareness rather than focusing on a singular culture. The current study will thus further contribute to the body of literature around LLC participation and students' perceived growth in multicultural awareness through examining an LLC model specifically designed to encourage and support this goal.

**Research Questions.** Using the lens of intergroup contact, this study will examine students' perceptions of the influence of Multicultural Hall participation on their multicultural awareness development by examining the following research questions. Why do students select to live on the MH? What experiences do students identify as valuable to the development of their multicultural awareness? How does participating in the MH foster relationships among students from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds? How do students describe the influence of these relationships on the development of their multicultural awareness?

### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

This study utilized qualitative research methodology. Data were collected through student interviews and review of archival materials. This chapter includes a description of the setting, study participants, data collection procedures, and data analyses techniques.

#### **Setting**

Data for this study were collected from one residence hall floor within a four-year, public university on the west coast. The university is a residential campus with an undergraduate student population of 18,700. Of the approximately 5,000 freshmen students, 92% lived in university-owned residence halls during the 2012-2013 academic year. Boomer Hall is one of eight university-owned residence halls and is comprised of two towers, north and south. Boomer Hall is a suite style residence hall with 2-3 residents per room and 4-5 residents per 2-bedroom suite. Two Resident Assistants are assigned to each of the 11 floors and a small social lounge is located in the elevator lobby of each floor.

In total, Boomer Hall houses approximately 1,500 freshmen residents and is the largest university-owned freshmen residence hall. Boomer Hall South Tower, where the one floor designated as the MH is located, houses 769 total residents. There are three MH LLCs available to students living in university-owned housing; however, the MH in Boomer Hall South Tower hall was selected specifically based on the characteristics of the residents (i.e. first-year freshmen and first time living in college residence halls).

During the 2012-2013 year, the MH was comprised of 80 students, 51 female and 29 male. Of the students living on the MH, 88% identify as persons of color, 11% identify as white/Caucasian and 1% declined to state. All students living on the MH were between 18-19 years old. In order to take part in LLCs, students self-selected to participate when they submitted their housing contract. A majority, 86% of the 2012-2013 MH students indicated that they preferred to live on the MH as their first or second choice and 10% did not preference the MH, or any other LLC, when submitting their housing contract. This site was chosen due to proximity to the researcher and the researcher's access to the population sampled.

### **Sample Selection and Participants**

Student participants were recruited from the 2012-2013 MH roster obtained from Housing and Residential Services. To interview those students who represent a wide range of experiences on the MH a purposeful sampling technique was employed (Merriam, 2009). All students on the MH were given the opportunity to voluntarily participate. The study participants represented a diverse group of students who lived on the MH. Of the 14 students interviewed, 12 were females and 2 were males. Five self-identified as Chicano/Latino, 4 as bi- or multi-racial, 2 as Asian, 2 as White and 1 as African-American (Table 1). Seven of the students are first-generation college students.

Table 1  
*Participants and Demographics*

Student	Gender	Age	Race/Ethnicity, Nationality
Amelia	Female	19	Latina, Mexican
Brian	Male	19	White
Catalina	Female	19	Latina, Mexican
Daniella	Female	19	Chicana/Latina, Mexican
Kami	Female	19	White, Armenian
Leo	Male	20	Bi-racial, Mexican/White
Lisa	Female	20	Asian, Korean
Maria	Female	19	Bi-racial, Portugese/Nicaraguan
Olivia	Female	19	Black/African-American, Nigerian
Phoebe	Female	20	Bi-racial, Taiwanese/White
Rosa	Female	19	Chicana, Mexican
Selena	Female	19	Bi-racial, Mexican/El Salvadoran
Suzie	Female	19	Asian, Japanese
Yesenia	Female	19	Latina, Mexican

### **Procedure**

Students were invited via email to participate in a one-on-one interview with the primary researcher. Those who agreed to participate received additional information from the researcher via email regarding the nature and purpose of the study. Information about the structure of the interview was shared, including that the

interview would be recorded, that the participant may request the recording be stopped at any point during the interview, and that the participant may request an audio copy and/or transcript of the interview.

The interviews provided an in-depth exploration of students' perceptions of the ways in which MH participation influenced their multicultural awareness development (Merriam, 2009). Interviews were conducted in the researcher's private office at a time convenient to the student's schedule. The researcher and the student participant were the only individuals present at the time of the interview. Interviews lasted 30 to 50 minutes. To begin, but prior to recording, student participants were asked to sign a consent form and complete a demographic questionnaire. Participation in the interview was entirely voluntary. Interview data were collected through digital audio recording and researcher notes.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription service. Transcripts were then checked for accuracy by the primary researcher. Student participants were given the option to review the transcript of their interview. To ensure confidentiality, individual participants were given a pseudonym, which was used throughout the study. The demographic questionnaire and interview notes were kept in a locked file cabinet in a locked office only accessible to the researcher. Interview digital recordings, electronic copies of interview transcripts, list of pseudonyms, coding key, and electronic versions of data analysis were stored on the researcher's personal computer which is password protected.

**Archival Documentation.** Archival documents describing MH RAs plan of action, goals for the year, and activities and programs that took place on the MH during academic year 2012-2013, were also reviewed. Examination of documents in qualitative research is a useful tool in expanding and supporting data collected from student interviews (Yin, 2009). These documents were used to evaluate the types of experiences in which MH residents had the opportunity to participate and served as a secondary source of information about students' experiences living on the MH. These documents were kept in a locked file cabinet in a locked office only accessible to the researcher.

Archival documents were written and maintained by the MH RAs. These documents include information regarding the types of programs planned and executed by the RAs for the students living on the MH during the 2012-2013 academic year. Information in the documents outlines the purpose and goal of each programmatic event, and is broken down into the three broad activity types discussed previously: community development, passive programming and active programming. No information is recorded in these documents that identifies MH students or study participants. The primary researcher obtained copies of original documents from the Boomer Hall Resident Director, an employee of the Office of Residential Life, who supervised the MH RAs and oversaw the implementation of floor events, activities, and programs.

## **Interview Protocol**

The interview protocol used a semi-structured, open-ended format allowing for the researcher to understand the students' lived experiences and meaning making through MH participation (Brenner, 2006; Kvale, 1996). The interview protocol questions were derived from literature on contact theory and factors identified in previous research that appear to influence students' multicultural awareness development (see appendix). Questions were scripted, however openness to changes in the arrangement of questions was allowed in order to follow up on answers given and stories told by the student participants (Kvale, 1996; Merriam, 2009). Demographic information collected included age, race/ethnicity, gender, hometown, high school attended, and first-generation college student status. These demographic data served to provide a broader understanding of the backgrounds of the study participants.

Interview questions were clustered around topics important to intergroup contact theory as they related to the research questions identified for the current study. The foundations of contact theory emphasize the importance of group cooperation in working toward a common goal, equal status within the group, and sanctioning of the group by authorities (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Pettigrew, 1998). Contact theory goes on to highlight the value of shared experiential activities and learning about the experiences of diverse others in multicultural awareness development (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Contact theory also underscores the significance of affective relationships with out-

group members, most notably friendships, in the development of multicultural awareness (Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew et al., 2011).

Using these premises as a guide, questions began by focusing on students' motivation for selecting to live on the MH over another LLC or on a traditional residence hall floor. Questions then moved to asking students to identify MH activities/experiences, if any, they believed to be of value to their multicultural awareness development. Next, student participants were asked to describe their relationship with the Resident Assistants and the extent to which these authority figures supported the students' multicultural awareness development. The final interview questions focused on relationships built through MH participation and how, if at all, these relationships influenced students' development of multicultural awareness. The full interview protocol is included as an appendix.

### **Data Analysis**

Using a Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) approach, and intergroup contact theory as a lens, the research team comprised of the primary researcher and six undergraduate research assistants first explored the data by reading through the same two transcripts independently and taking notes on emergent themes, concepts, or ideas that were responsive to this study's research questions. The research team then came together to come to consensus on coding categories based on themes independently identified within the data (Merriam, 2009). The primary researcher and two research assistants analyzed and coded each of the remaining transcripts. This was done to determine the elements of MH participation students perceived to



influence their multicultural awareness development. The research team then conducted a third analysis of the interviews in a manner similar to that described above to identify and code themes that emerged unrelated to MH participation but still relevant to the students' multicultural awareness development. The full set of codes was examined to create an understanding of how students perceived their development of multicultural awareness.

Finally, cross-case analysis was used to compare interviews and categorize important themes identified by the students regarding multicultural awareness development (Hill, Thompson & Williams, 1997). Cross-case analysis is intended to deepen both understanding and explanation of the results, and divide the data by thematic codes across all cases to search for patterns and corroborate evidence thus enhancing the findings (Hill, Thompson & Williams, 1997; Yin, 2009).

Archival documentation was reviewed by the primary researcher to expand understanding of the types of activities that took place on the MH. The documents were content analyzed for themes and trends in activities related specifically to multicultural awareness development for MH participants. This preliminary analysis was then compared to students' interview responses and the agreed upon interview coding themes to gain a greater appreciation of how these activities fit into a larger scheme of students' MH experience and development of multicultural awareness.

**Research Team.** To meet the methodological requirements of CQR and for reliability purposes a research team was assembled to assist in the coding and analysis of the interview data. As noted, the research team included the primary researcher

(female, multi-racial) and six undergraduate research assistants: one African American, one Latino, one Bi-racial and three White. Of the six research assistants, four were female and two were male. To code the interview transcripts the research team met as a group weekly for 10 weeks.

The research assistants were provided readings about CQR and intergroup contact theory to give context for work with the current study. To gain a greater understanding of CQR and prepare for data analysis of this study, the research team reviewed practice transcripts not associated with the current study. These practice transcripts had been coded using the CQR method and provided a framework to understand how coding is achieved using this methodology. The team participated in a discussion of the practice transcripts and an overview of the theoretical framework and current research project.

To establish coding categories for the current study all research team members read the same two interview transcripts. Once coding categories were established, the primary researcher and two research assistants reviewed and coded the remaining transcripts. Each team of three (primary researcher and two research assistants) then came together to agree on the codes for the transcript. Disagreements were resolved through discussion and review of the definitions of the agreed upon coding categories. The results of each coded interview transcript were compared and discussed in the larger seven-person research team to insure consistency in the final analysis.

Once consistency was established, the research team looked across cases to

understand emergent themes relevant to students' development of multicultural awareness. During this stage of analysis the research team consisted of five individuals: the primary researcher, three female research assistants and one male research assistant. The team continued to meet weekly for an additional 10 weeks.

## Chapter Four: Results

The purpose of this study was to understand students' perceptions of the influence of living on the Multicultural Hall (MH) on their development of multicultural awareness. Results of this study are discussed within the framework of intergroup contact theory. Presentation of findings has been organized around the research questions: a.) why students selected to live on the MH, b.) experiences identified by students as valuable to their multicultural awareness development, c.) how participating in the MH fostered relationships among students of diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and d.) how students described the influence of these relationships on their development of multicultural awareness. Categories within the research questions are labeled by the frequency of occurrence in the data (general, typical, and variant). *General* refers to categories referenced by 10 to 14 participants ( $n = 14$ ), *typical* refers to categories referenced by 9 to 5 participants, and *variant* refers to categories referenced by 2 to 4 participants. Categories endorsed by only 1 participant were considered *rare* and were not included in the final results (see Table 2 for categories and frequencies). Archival document analysis is integrated into the write up where relevant.

Table 2  
*Research Question, Categories and Cross Case Analysis Frequencies*

Research question and categories	Frequencies
Why students select to live on the MH	
Diverse community	General
Initial apprehension of diverse community	Typical
Shared value of learning about diverse experiences	Typical
Fitting in by finding similar others	Variant
Experiences valuable to students' development of multicultural awareness	
Inclusive community established by the RAs	General
Sense of belonging	Typical
Participating in programs planned by the RAs	Typical
Informal interactions among floor mates	Typical
How participating in the MH fostered relationships among students of diverse backgrounds	
Relationships with diverse others	General
Relationships with similar others	Typical
No significant relationships developed	Variant
Influence of diverse relationships on students' development of multicultural awareness	
Learning about diverse experiences	General
Change of perception about the experience of others	Typical
Increased confidence in interactions with diverse others	Typical

## **Why Students Selected to Live on the Multicultural Hall**

In order to determine students' motivation for selecting to live on the MH, study participants were asked to first describe their reasons for selecting to live on the MH. All participants (100%) in this study selected to live on the MH when completing their housing contract. Results from the study indicate that students selected to live on the MH because they wanted to live in a diverse community. Additionally, students described their desire to live with others who shared a similar value of learning about diverse experiences. Some students selected to MH in hopes of finding a place where they could fit in by finding others who shared similar cultural backgrounds and experiences.

**Diverse community.** Twelve of fourteen participants (86%) identified that living in a diverse community was one of the reasons they selected to live on the MH. Data revealed two major reasons students reported a diverse community was important to their selection on the MH: living in a diverse community would be different than what they had previously experienced and a diverse community would be similar to what they had previously experienced. Ten of fourteen (71%) desired a diverse community because it would be different from their previous experience. Yesenia expressed her excitement for selecting to live on the MH as a way to gain exposure to people and communities outside of what she had previously experienced.

“I was really excited to get to know different people from different backgrounds, especially because everybody where I come from is pretty much

the same, and when I selected the multicultural floor it was – I was aware of the fact that it was going to be a new experience just because I’m so used to being around the Latino community.”

Rosa held a similar expectation when selecting to live on the MH. She believed it would provide her the greatest possibility of being exposed to experiences outside of what she had previously known.

“So I just wanted the most diverse experience possible, especially where I lived because I would be surrounded by different people every single day because they're [living] on my floor.”

Olivia expressed how she thought living on the MH would benefit her experience as a college student. She specifically chose the MH for the purpose of living among a diverse community of people.

“Honestly, coming to Santa Barbara, I’ve known about the demographic, how it’s mostly white, and I went to a mostly white high school, elementary school, and middle school. So, I was really sick of it. Not sick of it – I just didn’t want that in my life and I wanted to live with multicultural people or people who weren’t white. So, I was going to do the Black Scholars Floor but then I didn’t want to and I didn’t want to be all on one floor, of one ethnicity, being that I’m not from a black neighborhood or black traditional family, I felt like I wasn’t comfortable enough to be on the Black Scholars Floor. So, I chose the multicultural floor because it was a mixture.”

The second reason revealed in the data for selecting to live on the MH was a desire to live in a similar community to what was previously experienced. Two participants (14%), Brian and Leo, identified that they selected the MH so that they could continue to live in a diverse community; something both experienced growing up in their hometowns. Brian felt that by living in a diverse community he would feel more at home in his first-year of college.

“I grew up in a really multicultural community. I grew up in Fresno. And it’s really just a big melting pot there. We have any kind of race you could think of. The minorities are the majority I guess in Fresno. And I figured if I lived on the floor I would feel more like home in a more multicultural setting.”

Leo expressed his desire to continue learning about the experiences of others. He felt that selecting the MH would provide this opportunity.

“And then – because there were five options I put the multicultural floor because actually the town that I come from, Fairfield, it was in the Huffington Post last year, it was deemed to be one of the most diverse towns in the whole country. And I come from a mixed race family. I like learning about other people’s cultures and that’s how it is at home, so I liked the idea of it.”

**Initial apprehension of living among diverse others.** Several participants, seven of fourteen (50%), revealed that while they were excited to live in a diverse environment they had some initial apprehensions about living on a hall where so many different cultures were coming together in one community. Two groups emerged in the data identifying an initial apprehension of living in a diverse



community. The first was students identifying as Latino. Among these seven participants who expressed initial apprehensions five (71%) identified as Latino. Daniella described her concerns of the potential for cultural incongruence among such a diverse group of people.

“I thought maybe some of the differences they [other students living on the MH] would have like, I don't know. That concerned me maybe because in their cultures something that isn't viewed as the same way as in my culture, we would be like clashing. That was my concern.”

Rosa took these concerns a bit further identifying her unease about how she would respond to such a new experience.

“I think the only thing that I thought about was it [living with a diverse group of people] was gonna be a huge culture shock. How would I react to different situations? I guess. What if I say something that might offend someone else, or something that dealt with like religion, or politics? I don't know, just anything in a conversation that I don't think about, or I'm saying, and it makes someone else feel bad, stuff like that. So I just thought, "I'm going to have to be conscious about what I'm saying sometimes." The risky subjects, but that was it. I was more excited I think, than nervous.”

The second group that identified initial apprehensions of living in a diverse community were students who previously experienced being a minority within a group. There were two students (29%) who expressed their concerns of not being welcome in the community. Of the Brian's initial anxiety was based on previous

experiences with feeling isolated in groups where he was one of very few people who identify as White.

“Well, a lot of times I’m concerned with being I guess outcast for being White because that has happened before to me even in Fresno. It just always seemed like whatever race is the minority is the one that’s being secluded I guess no matter what the environment is.”

Maria shared a similar concern as she had previously struggled with fitting in as a bi-racial individual.

“There was one concern, which was that maybe only one ethnicity group would decided to be a part of it [the MH]. I thought that I would be a minority again. And that was one of the reasons why I wanted to be a part of it was to not feel like a minority all the time. And feel like I really couldn’t relate to the majority of the people that I’ve been around my whole life. So yeah, I guess I was just a little worried that I would feel that way again.”

**Shared value of learning about diverse experiences.** In the interviews, students identified their expectation that others would share a desire to learn, ask questions, listen to the experience of others and dialogue about multicultural topics. Five of fourteen (36%) participants stated that having a shared value of open-mindedness toward learning about diverse experiences was important in their selection to live on the MH. Suzie shared that she selected the MH not only for the diverse community but because she values conversation and dialogue about topics

that pertain to multiculturalism. By selecting the MH she hoped to meet similar minded people.

“I would also say another reason why I picked it was that I figured that if other people were also picking that, then they would be open to having discussions about diversity and race and ethnicity or just like more accepting of someone that’s also of a minority status. So I guess its more open-minded people in general.”

Kami joined Suzie in expressing her hopes at finding similar minded individuals living together on one floor.

“So pretty much I thought the people would be more accepting, smarter, not to do stuff like that [offensive behaviors]. Because they, too, understand how someone would feel if that happened to them or was said to them.”

Yesenia was excited about the idea of different people coming together to learn about others’ experiences.

“Even though we were all coming from different backgrounds, different cities, states, countries, perhaps, we all wanted to get to know different cultures and we were open to it.”

**Fitting in by finding similar others.** Finding people with shared cultural backgrounds and experiences was also important for some students who participated in this study. Four of fourteen (29%) commented that they hoped to find at least one other person who they could relate with in this way. Although Kami expressed that

she was excited about living in a community of diverse others, she also hoped that she would meet someone who shared her cultural background.

“And I thought like going with the multicultural hall I would meet another Armenian. I think living with them [students of similar background] is just like the same level of comfort you receive back home.”

Selena also desired to find at least one other person she could relate to in order to feel safer on campus.

“UCSB has one of the most, the same ethnicity, like mostly Whites and Asians, and I just wanted to fit in more, I guess, so I chose it [the MH] as sort of a comfort.”

Two of the bi-racial/cultural participants, Maria and Phoebe, conveyed their desire to connect with others who shared the experiences of being bi-racial/cultural. They believed doing so would help them fit in with the community in ways they had not previously experienced. Maria, whose cultural background is Portuguese and Nicaraguan, described being mislabeled as White when she identifies as bi-cultural. She hoped that finding similar others would help her fit in with the community.

“And ever since we were younger I lived in a very predominantly White neighborhood and community. And my family is very different culturally than that. Like, you could categorize me under White because I'm half European, but the culture of my family is very different than the traditional American White families. So I think that I wanted to kind of be around people that were more like me, I guess. Because being a part of a

predominately White high school it's pretty difficult for me to find my niche, like who I could relate to. I'm two different cultures, maybe somebody else is something like that. Basically, I just want to see who else is out there.”

Phoebe, whose father is White American and mother is Indigenous Taiwanese, spent most of her life growing up in Taiwan. She described her desire to meet other bi-racial/cultural students as a way to find others she could relate to and who could relate with her experience.

“I was hoping that there would be more people like me, the same background growing up in like either in a different country but having a different identity, like a third-culture kid basically so I was hoping there would be students who would relate – that I could relate to.”

While some students had some initial apprehensions of living amongst diverse others, most identified living in a diverse community as a central reason in selecting to live on the MH. These findings are corroborated by intergroup contact theory which posits that extended interaction with diverse others is important in learning about out-group experiences, which may lead to changed perceptions and generalization across contexts (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Similarly, students' recognition of the importance of shared values in learning about diverse experiences is supported by contact theory's premise of the importance of working toward common goal with a spirit of cooperation in understanding and appreciating diverse experiences (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Pettigrew, 1998). It is not surprising that students also noted a desire to fit in by

finding others with similar cultural backgrounds and experiences. As first-year college students, fitting in and finding friends is among a top concern so it is not uncommon for this to be a priority for students as enter the university environment.

### **Experiences Valuable to Students' Development of Multicultural Awareness**

In discussing the experiences that students perceived as valuable in developing multicultural awareness three topics emerged as salient to achieving this aim. Students noted the importance of the community that was established by the Resident Assistants (RAs) as a safe and welcoming space where learning could occur. Additionally, students shared that participating in hall activities (programs) planned by the RAs served to increase their knowledge of others' experiences. Finally, students offered insights into the importance of informal interactions with their floor mates in developing multicultural awareness. Many of these findings are supported by information found in the archival documents.

**Inclusive community established by the RAs.** As detailed in the archival documents, creating a welcoming environment where students felt safe to be themselves, to ask questions, to make mistakes and to learn from one another was a primary focus of the MH RAs. This was accomplished through establishing the community expectations of respect for all experiences and viewpoints, and challenging students to learn about the experiences of others while simultaneously sharing one's own story and perspective. Floor meetings (a meeting called by the RAs and attended by all floor members) were an important part of establishing these community expectations. In these meetings topics of using inclusive language, and

working through conflicts with dialogue and understanding were addressed.

It appears from the interview data that these expectations were met. Eleven of fourteen (79%) students identified that the community established on the MH was an important factor in their development of multicultural awareness. Selena expressed how the use of inclusive language assisted in her becoming more aware of others' experiences.

“So I learned a lot, too, about like how to be, like, socially aware of everybody. And one of the main things was like stereotypes, or inclusive language. Like she [RA] always encouraged us to say “y’all” or “you all” instead of “you guys”.”

Kami shared a similar view regarding the impact of learning about inclusive language on her overall development of multicultural awareness.

“But yeah, definitely the meetings had the most effect. Like if I hadn't gone to those meetings, I wouldn't have known a lot of the things that– or I wouldn't – yeah. I wouldn't have been or thought the way I do now.”

Rosa identified that participating in the floor meetings played a significant role in increasing her multicultural awareness.

“I think the informational floor meetings [increased multicultural awareness development] because they had a whole presentation set up. They [RAs] wouldn't present it to us like a formal, just reading off the slides kind of thing. They would be more explaining to us; more like a teaching experience, if we had any questions, like pull from your own experiences. I remember once we

were talking about discrimination in the workplace against different ethnicities. So I think those type of meetings where we can all just share different experiences from us, I thought those were the most helpful. You got to see everyone else's point of view. So I thought that was interesting. I thought those were the best events for that [learning about others' experiences].”

Olivia shared the impact of a floor meeting not only on her awareness of others' experiences but as a starting point for the community to begin building relationships with one another.

“So, after that [discussion about word choice], someone said, “I was sexually assaulted.” It was just a really powerful moment for the first day of moving in and that was when I – I always knew that I like multicultural stuff but that's when I was like, Yeah, I'm for openness and awareness and rights, I'm for - I always knew that I was, but this is where I learned why I was. So, yeah, it was at a meeting, but it wasn't supposed to be – everybody was crying at the meeting, and that's when we first sort of starting clicking – not like separating into cliques, but as a whole floor, we were turning really close.”

***Sense of belonging.*** By establishing a solid foundation of community expectations the RAs were able to create a community where students felt they belonged and a space where they were safe to explore topics of multiculturalism and diversity. As discussed in the archival documents it was a desire of the MH RAs to create a community that felt like a family. From interview data this goal appears to



have been accomplished. Seven of fourteen (50%) of participants noted that living in a supportive community contributed to their sense of belonging and gave them the opportunity to learn about diverse experiences in a safe environment.

Phoebe expressed her feelings of support and acceptance as she learned about experiences outside of her own.

“My hall last year we became a really close-knit family. Certain topics made people uncomfortable, but it’s good to know that you’re in a safe environment where you can talk about uncomfortable topics and there are topics that I personally never thought of before. Like I didn’t personally experience racism, but it was nice to have people just educate you in that area and not point any fingers because I feel like a lot of times when people are talking about topics like racism, I felt this finger-pointing a little bit so it’s like your curiosity so I wanted to know what was going on, but yeah, I felt supported.”

Yesenia shared that for her the best thing about living on the MH was finding acceptance on the floor.

“The best thing was just forming the bonds with everybody on your floor. How we all accepted each other.”

Maria believed that her time on the MH was pivotal not only in learning about others’ experiences but also in her own identity development.

“Greatly, I think [MH contribution to sense of belonging]. It was probably the make it or break it of whether I would feel accepted. Because a lot of the time the people that I encounter at UCSB are like, worlds different from the people

that I encountered specifically on my floor. And I feel like if I had lived anywhere else I would have still continued to struggle with identity and not really feeling a part of, you know, being able to relate to people and be a part of that family that I really made while I was on that floor.”

Daniella identified that the MH was a place where she could come and be her full self, a feeling that was not often experienced in the greater campus community.

“The best thing [about living on the MH] was that it would be going back to my dorm and feel like I fit you know because not everybody was the same. I feel like on campus, sometimes you can feel like you don't fit, you don't see in any big lecture halls you don't see a lot of people who look like you or who share the same experiences like you do. So I thought that was good.”

**Participating in programs planned by the RAs.** Planning and implementing hall activities, also known as programs, is an important job function of all RAs. The MH RAs were charged with focusing their programming around issues of multiculturalism and diversity. These programs were well documented in the archival documents. In it the RAs listed the programs offered to the MH residents as well as the purpose and goal behind each program. Careful thought was put into the timing and topic of each program. For example a Lunar New Year program was presented around the time of the 2013 Lunar New Year. This program not only celebrated the traditional New Year of many cultures around the world it also educated participants about the Lunar New Year tradition and brought to the forefront the hegemony of holidays represented in the U.S. and the neglect in recognizing culturally relevant

traditions and practices in our society.

Data collected from student interviews corroborates the information shared in the archival documents. Nine of fourteen (64%) noted that participating in programs planned by the RAs as having a significant impact on their multicultural awareness development. Some programs served to educate students about the experiences of diverse others and conversely brought to light similarities shared between people of different backgrounds. Amelia noted her surprise at participating in Crossing the Line (an exercise where participants disclose various part of their identity to a group) and finding commonalities with people she thought were very different from her.

‘I think the crossing line one [program] was probably the one that had the biggest impact on me because people – we’re, kind of, selfish and we don’t – sometimes we don’t tend to realize how similar we are to other people and our experiences. So it was – even – good or bad experiences – you rarely see that. People share those, too, as well as – even though they’re different from you – different skin color or culture, belief, religion – we were all just as one.’

Similarly, Maria found that a program on micro-aggressions (subtle discrimination) gave her a perspective into the experiences of others she had not previously understood.

“I really feel the event with the micro-aggressions was one thing that we did – we had all these other kind of awareness events that took place, but I had already been more aware of it. Whereas, that was the one that taught me something new and made me – kind of opened my eyes up to the fact that

everything you say to a person really does matter. And you have to be very careful about the words you choose because you don't know who you could affect. So that was pretty interesting to me.”

Other programs were designed to be more casual in nature while continuing to expose students to experiences outside of their own. Brian shared that one program in particular, Open Mic Night, gave him a new perspective into his floor mates' cultural expression through performance.

“The open mic night definitely [increased his multicultural awareness] because people were able to just go up and share a part of themselves with everyone else, you know in multiple different forms of expression I guess and it was interesting to see a multicultural presentation like that because you could see people's backgrounds in their performances.”

Catalina recalled a particular program that initially seemed to be only a hike to the beach but turned into much more as students shared personal experiences with one another.

“The hike that I said that we took [increased her multicultural awareness] just because everyone, or most people spoke about their backgrounds and why they came here. Some people mentioned family, some people mentioned hardships that they've gone through. And I think that really reflects what they believe in, how they've been brought up, their background, their culture. It's all intertwined. I believe by them just sharing their own experiences that opened my eyes to other people's experiences.”

**Informal interactions among floor mates.** As evidenced in the archival documents and student interviews, the MH RAs worked hard to develop a community where students felt comfortable with one another to share their experiences and engage in dialogue around multicultural topics even when the RAs were not present. Eight of fourteen (57%) identified that informal interactions among floor mates was also important in their multicultural awareness development. Suzie offered that these interactions gave her an unencumbered opportunity to learn about others' experiences.

“I would say the informal ones [interactions among floor mates]. That we not only had no structure so we were able to talk about things we were interested in but also that we had no time constraint.”

Leo also felt that these types of interactions provided an opportunity to learn from one another in a more informal environment.

“When you're back on your floor it's a more casual environment. Maybe there were some things in the vibe. You can get kind of a more casual – you can be more casual tone, you're willing to share things – there was – I guess there was like a couple like key things – like a couple of things that I learned or experienced that I definitely didn't know before.”

Yesenia found that through informal interactions she was not only able to learn about the experiences of others she also began to find commonalities among her diverse peers.

“I personally think that the one [experience] that influenced me more was not the planned activities that RAs would have, but just the spontaneous activities that we would plan together just randomly. It made me realize that even though we all come from different backgrounds we’re still interconnected, especially after the conversations that I would have with a lot of my floor mates. Some of us would have the same issues growing up even though I might be Mexican and the other person might be Korean or something. We had the same similar issues, maybe, with family was very strict growing up or same, kind of – I would think, oh, I felt judged in my school sometimes or in my community, especially when I lived more surrounded by white people. I felt judged because I’m Mexican. And then somebody would be like, oh, well, I’m white, but most of the people around me were Latino, so I felt judged for being the white one. And it’d be, kind of, like, whoa – I was like we’re both – we’re different, but we have the same experience.”

Likewise, Daniella noted that by spending informal time with her suite mates she was able to develop an understanding that though every person has differing experiences they all shared the experience of being first-year college students.

“Talking with my suite mates also, made me a little bit more [multiculturally] aware. Because we were all different ethnicities; my roommate she was Cambodian and another one was African-American, and my suite mates were, one was Latina, one was Mexican, and one was Asian. And so I didn't know by being here [as a university student] all together, you know that moment

when you realize we're so different from each other yet we're still all here [at the university].”

The foundations of contact theory emphasize the importance equal status within the group and sanctioning of the group by authorities (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Pettigrew, 1998). Extended intergroup contact allows for opportunities to experience close interactions across contexts and creates an environment where individuals feel safe to self-disclose and share their experiences with others (Pettigrew, 1998). Students' revelation of the significance of the inclusive community established by the RAs on multicultural awareness development falls inline with these notions. Too, students' disclosure that participation in programs planned by the RAs assisted in their multicultural awareness development is supported by the assertions of contact theory, which highlights the value of shared experiential activities and learning about the experiences of diverse others in multicultural awareness development (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Students' assertions of the importance of informal interactions among peers are also substantiated by contact theory. There is value in long-term contact in informal settings in breaking down prejudices and stereotypes (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

### **How Participating in the Multicultural Hall Fostered Relationships Among Students of Diverse Ethnic and Cultural Backgrounds**

Students were asked to discuss the relationships they developed on the hall. To determine the frequency with which students developed relationships with diverse

others participants were asked to identify if these relationships were with people of similar or different cultural backgrounds and experience than their own. Results showed that most students identified that the relationships they developed were with people from different backgrounds and experiences. Some students identified that they developed relationships with both similar and different others. Two participants disclosed they developed no significant relationships on the hall.

**Relationships with people from diverse experiences or backgrounds.**

When students were asked to describe if the relationships they developed were with people with similar or different cultural experiences or background from their own, ten of fourteen (71%) described that their relationships were with diverse others. Kami noted that she developed relationships with those from different backgrounds but that in this diversity she found acceptance.

“I don’t even think one of them has, well no one has the same background as me. But since every single one of us in the circle is different, then it’s like everyone gets along. No one in the group is the same as another person in the group. Everyone is just different, like different backgrounds, religions, the way we think about certain things, it’s great.”

Maria’s experience was similar in that her friend group was comprised of many different backgrounds but this did not prohibit the development of meaningful relationships.

“But every single friend that I have come in with contact with, or every single friend that I’ve made on that floor, has been of different ethnicities and



different backgrounds. Even though there are things that I can still relate to them on, it's almost like no matter what every single person is just from a different thing, and it didn't really matter what ethnicity we were."

Olivia shared her appreciation for having a diverse friend group that was also committed to multicultural awareness.

"So, it was very, very diverse. It's a really beautiful thing to see our friends have so much different ethnicities and come together because I think what makes us different – and we are all unique in the fact that we are all very – not only are we all these different ethnicities, but we are all aware [of multiculturalism]."

Amelia too enjoyed the opportunity to develop relationships with diverse others and expressed the value of learning from one another.

"And then it's nice that we can share a relationship like that [learning from one another]. And my Korean roommate – she's taking Spanish, so she'll come and ask me for help and it's just nice. And then sometimes I ask – even though I'm not taking Korean – I ask her to just teach me a couple words. I met my boyfriend on my floor. He's Vietnamese and I still go over to his [parents] house. So it's just nice being able to learn from everybody."

**Relationships with people from similar backgrounds.** In contrast six of fourteen (43%) students disclosed that the relationships they developed were with people of similar backgrounds. All students who shared that they developed friendships with similar others identified themselves as Chicana/Latina. Catalina

sums it up best when she recognizes shared experiences as what drew her to create these friendships.

“For some reason they're similar. Yeah, my two roommates are both Mexican. I don't really know why, but it just – I guess – well, obviously because we have the same culture and speak the same – Spanish and stuff, but it just happened like that somehow. And also because they were [living] across from me, so I guess, also, because of that we were really close to each other distance wise. So – yeah, I think that also made a difference.”

However, upon further examination, four of the six identified that they had developed relationships with diverse others in addition to their similar others relationships. Rosa noted that her friend group was comprised of a variety of individuals, some who happened to share her cultural background.

“Half of us were Hispanic, so I think that's part of the reason we became close was because we had shared experience. But then the other half was from different backgrounds.”

Yesenia too found that her friend group was a mix of individuals from similar and different backgrounds and experiences.

“I feel like the ones that I'm extremely close to, as I am with my roommate she's from a very similar background from mine. But a lot of my other really close friends that I met on the floor were very different, as in people wonder why we're friends or how we get along. But we still really like each other and we understand each other.”

**No significant relationships developed.** Two students, Brian and Lisa, disclosed that they did not develop significant relationships on the hall. Brian entered the university with a close friend group from high school but noted that if he had to do it over again he would be more actively involved in making friends on the hall.

“I would just make sure I was more involved with everyone else and make sure I was closer with my roommates because even with my roommate, it was just a hi and bye basis. We didn’t really talk other than that. And I wish I would have been able to make more friends on the floor.”

Of the students interviewed Lisa was the only one to state that the MH did not meet her expectations. She was minimally involved in programs or with her floor mates. She openly admitted that she did not meet anyone on the hall that she would call a friend.

“To be honest I have a very strict definition of friend. I would call the people I met more friendly acquaintances.”

Contact theory underscores the significance of affective relationships with out-group members, most notably friendships, in the development of multicultural awareness (Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew et al., 2011). Students’ development of out-group relationships while participating in the MH is aligned with the concepts of contact theory. Among the processes of intergroup contact, developing emotional connections with out-group members appears to be critical in successful intergroup experiences across a variety of contexts (Pettigrew, 1998: Pettigrew et al., 2011). It is not surprising that a number of students found friendships among similar others as

55% of the total MH participants self identified as Chicano/Latino. It seems understandable then that these students would find relationships and friendships with people who share similar cultural backgrounds and experiences. Contact theory also supports the idea that for intergroup contact to succeed, contact should occur both intrapersonally, through own group identification and self-disclosure, and interpersonally, through friendship development with out-group members (Brown & Hewston, 2005).

### **Influence of Diverse Relationships on Students' Development of Multicultural Awareness**

Students were asked to identify the ways in which they felt their multicultural awareness development was influenced by the diverse relationships they created while living on the MH. According to the data from this study, learning about diverse experiences was the most prominent influence on students' development of multicultural awareness. Additionally, students described how having diverse relationships lead to a change of perception about the experiences of others. Finally, diverse relationships increased students' confidence in interactions with diverse others outside of the MH.

**Learning about diverse experiences.** In the interviews ten of fourteen (71%) students identified that they had developed relationships with diverse others. Among these ten students all (100%) identified that learning about diverse experiences was a significant influence of the relationships on multicultural awareness development. Phoebe discussed that her diverse friend group exposed her to cultures and

experiences that she had not previously experienced.

“Before living on this floor, I did not have any Latino friends but then it was interesting because you can see that it’s not just Mexican-Americans. There’s Guatemalans, there’re people from Ecuador, you know, so it was interesting to have friends that are even though they all identify as Chicanos/as but they have like completely different backgrounds.”

Amelia shared how learning about the experiences of diverse others not only gave her new insights but also helped her to interact with diverse others beyond her friend group.

“I feel like it has made me more aware of people and how different we are, but still the same at the same time. And it’s just – it’s interesting to know – because I know lots of people say, oh, Asians and some – Filipino’s are – some don’t categorize themselves like they categorize themselves as Pacific Islanders. So now I know that. It’s nice that we can learn from each other. I learned a lot from them –my friends – how to talk to certain people – and then it’s nice – because I can start conversations with other people because of the knowledge that I’ve learned from them [friends].”

Maria took this one step further and shared that what she has learned about her friends’ diverse experiences helped her to be a better friend.

“It helped to kind of just have a broader spectrum of people and backgrounds. That really like – I was really only exposed to White or Mexican cultures where I come from. And there is so much more out there. I had never even

met an Armenian person and now my best friend is Armenian. And their culture is very different. And I've kind of had to – you know, as their friend giving them advice, sometimes your advice is not what they need because they have a different background. So I've had to learn how to understand who the person is and what their situation is first. And kind of be a friend to them and give them advice as a friend would according to the person that they are and their background, and everything.”

Catalina was able to see how tying together the lessons she learned about inclusion with learning about others' experiences helped her to be more open-minded to diversity.

“So I believe by them [friends] just sharing their own experiences- that really opened my eyes to other peoples experiences. I really liked the fact that I learned about making-being aware of making others feel included, of just opening my mind to other things.”

**Change of perception about the experiences of others.** Six of the ten students (60%), who reported a diverse friend group, found that their perception of the experiences of others had changed because of the influence of their diverse friend group. Suzie openly shared how building relationships with diverse others changed her preconceived ideas about the experiences of others, namely international students.

“ Another positive thing that I got was it changed my idea and stigma that I had around international students. There were several international students on our floor. It totally got rid of this idea in my head that, you know, not

necessarily was formed by me but of society's idea of a foreign person that they're not fluent in English. They have these horrible accents that you can't understand. That totally got rid of my idea of that."

Catalina also revealed that some of her own past behaviors were unintentionally insensitive to the experiences of others. Interacting with diverse others on the MH made her more aware of these behaviors and she is sharing what she learned with others.

"So I think it just made me more aware of the way that I speak, the way that I act- maybe before I had bad habits that I didn't know were bad. I feel bad about this now, but I know there's little fashion stores back home. And for some reason- I don't know why-but everyone calls them Spanish Chinita stores, which means Chinese stores. But now that I go back home- I'd never call them that. I just call them fashion stores. And I tell my parents and I tell my family, don't call them that. It's not what it is. Just the small the different small things that we do that we don't know they're bad. But just because we're used to them we just do them and I want to change that."

Maria discovered that by interacting with her friends she developed an awareness and appreciation for the experiences of others that allows her to develop more meaningful connections with others.

"I've just become more aware of just kind of how no matter what everyone has a different story. And you can't go around thinking that you know everyone just by the way that they seem to you. There's a lot more – you got

to dig a lot deeper. And every new – before I would just kind of be friends with them because we relate to something together, whatever, yeah we're friends. But now I feel like I like to get know people more deeply. And really just understand who they are as a person, so I can really interact with them on a deeper level and actually have a better connection with them.

Daniella found that her interactions with friends increased her understanding of the nuance of culture and the way culture influences how people interact with one another and support one another through experiences.

“My mentality about culture has changed. I've seen that culture has a lot of aspects to it that we don't sometimes consider so we stay in our own culture, sometimes prefer to have set different meanings of it. And I think we may need to see the big picture and the small details in it. I know that we all have different cultures and we all have different experiences, but we all have a lot of similarities. And I think that cultures have been divided and they shouldn't be that way, it should be think of our similarities and how we can help each other.”

**Increased confidence in interactions with diverse others.** Another way that diverse friend groups influenced multicultural awareness development was through increasing students' confidence in interacting with diverse others outside of the friend group. Five of ten (50%) students who identified a diverse friend group, reported that because of their interactions with diverse friends they were able to more confidently interact with diverse others across multiple settings. Amelia noted that prior to living



on the MH she was nervous in groups of people different from her but after her experience she is able to interact comfortably and with confidence with diverse others.

“I think, it [having a diverse friend group] just made me feel less scared to approach others, take more chances – because before, if I were to go to a room full with white people, or Asians, or just somebody from a different culture I would be – I would feel really inferior – really scared. I would be really quiet. I’m usually not quiet. So it made me feel more comfortable to be myself and being around others, especially because where I come from – I wasn’t – it wasn’t like that. So that’s one of the main reasons why I would – why I used to be really shy around different people – like, one group of people and just me I would feel really scared, but now I’m way more comfortable and I can speak up and not feel so secluded.”

Similarly, Suzie found that interacting with her friends made her more comfortable around diverse others and also in talking about topics of multiculturalism.

“I would say that it just got me comfortable not only just being in general with being around people with different backgrounds and different cultures but also being comfortable with talking about it. For some people just being around someone who is like of a different color, that’s like very uncomfortable, you know. That’s not something I came in with, but it was something that being on the floor with helped a lot to be more comfortable.”

Yesenia found that her confidence in interacting with diverse others extended into the classroom environment.

“Like I said before, how in my community when it just was – I was more surrounded by Caucasians, white people I would be kind of like, oh they're judging me because I'm Mexican. I'm a different skin color – things like that. But after living on the multicultural hall with my friends I'm just, like, so what? I'm different and – but I, kind of, had the mindset that everybody was judging at every single second and because – for that reason they weren't going to accept me. And now I'm just not afraid to debate with somebody else in class about something, so it helped me become way more comfortable. I don't feel shy. I don't feel – I don't care if anybody judges me. I'm just, like, I'm different. That's okay. You should accept me if I accept you, but if not, then that's cool.”

Selena shared that prior to living on the MH she had always been apprehensive around White people. After meeting her friends and having her MH experiences these feelings changed and she counts White people among her group of friends.

“I mean, at first I guess you could say I was really shy towards them [white people]. And I didn't really want to, like, I don't know. I didn't want them to see me as different. Now I have a lot of close friends that are white, and I've gotten to know a lot of them. And a lot of them are really great.”

Intergroup contact theory proposes that learning about the experiences of diverse others can foster a more positive perception of intergroup interaction

(Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Students in this study established that learning about the experiences of their diverse friends served to increase their multicultural awareness by exposing them to new ways of seeing the world. These opportunities for learning then led to a change of perception in the experiences of others. Intergroup interactions represent unique opportunities to challenge preconceived stereotypes that contribute to prejudicial attitudes and behaviors in the safety of trusted others (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Through friendships, stereotypes and prejudices can be changed, thus allowing intergroup experiences to be generalized beyond the original contact group to other out-groups (Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew et al., 2011). This study's participants found this to be true as they developed greater confidence in interacting with out-group members beyond the MH.

Previous research has demonstrated the importance of intergroup contact on multicultural awareness development. This study seems to indicate that for these students living in a community that was committed to the shared objective of developing multicultural awareness was an important factor in the success of achieving this goal. Students' discussion of the caring community that was created on the MH brought to the forefront the significance of having a sense of belonging among diverse others in developing multicultural awareness, a notion that is supported in the literature (Johnson et al., 2007). Additionally, students in this study shared the ways with which relationships with diverse others supported their development of multicultural awareness. Students reported that learning about diverse experiences in the context of trusted relationships was an important factor in

increasing their understanding of the experiences of others. Students commented that by learning about diverse experiences in this environment they were able to expand their understanding of diverse experiences to other contexts. Results from this study are consistent with literature on students' multicultural awareness development (Longerbeam, 2010). Extended interactions with diverse others leads to the development of cross-cultural friendship which, in turn, creates a willingness to continue to learn about others' experiences beyond their time living on the MH (Longerbeam, 2010). Overall, it appears from this study that students perceive the MH to have achieved, for most interviewees, the goal of creating opportunities to understanding one's own cultural experiences and beliefs, learn about the cultural experiences and beliefs of diverse others, and begin to understand how together these experiences created our diverse society.

## **Chapter Five: Discussion**

Among culturally themed LLCs, the Multicultural Hall (MH) is unique. The majority of culturally themed LLCs focus on one specific cultural group. Conversely, the MH provides a setting for students of differing cultural and ethnic backgrounds and experiences to learn from and share with one another the experiences of living in a diverse community. Because the MH is designed to encourage a range of interpersonal and intrapersonal interactions and attitudes, an understanding of students' experiences on the MH contributes to an understanding of the types of programs that students perceive to influence their multicultural awareness and understanding. Using intergroup contact theory as a lens, this study examined how students perceive participation in the MH to be an influence on their development of multicultural awareness and understanding. For this study, multicultural awareness was defined as understanding one's own cultural experiences and beliefs, learning about the cultural experiences and beliefs of diverse others, and understanding how characteristics of self and others can work together successfully to create a diverse society.

### **Why Students Selected to Live on the Multicultural Hall**

To understand students' perceptions of the influence of the MH on their multicultural awareness development it was first important to understand why students selected to live on this particular hall. In this study, all student participants self-selected to live on the MH in their housing contract. Findings revealed that one of the primary reasons students selected the hall was the desire to live in a diverse

community. Some sought this type of community because it was familiar and they believed that it would aid in feelings of comfort as they began their new life as a college student. Others selected the hall because a diverse community was not what they had experienced in their hometowns and they wanted a different experience as they entered the university. These findings support intergroup contact theory, which identifies extended interaction with diverse others as an important tool to learn about out-group experiences, which may lead to changed perceptions and generalization of new perceptions across contexts (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Interestingly, although all students selected to live on the MH some were hesitant about living in a diverse community. Some had concerns of cultural incongruence while others were concerned about fitting in and finding community. However, in retrospect, most students who had initial apprehensions identified the diversity of the community as having a significant impact on their development of multicultural awareness.

Regardless of motivation it appears that students entered the MH with an innate desire to live in a community of diverse others with the expectation of learning about multicultural experiences. They believed that by living in such an environment they would meet others who shared this desire and who shared similar values of learning about topics of diversity and multiculturalism. Students' acknowledgement of the significance of shared values in learning about diverse experiences supports contact theory's premise of the importance of working toward common goal with a spirit of cooperation in understanding diverse experiences (Brown & Hewstone,

2005; Pettigrew, 1998). It is not surprising that a few students identified that they would feel more comfortable living among diverse others if they were also able to also find similar others to connect with in the community. Feelings of comfort and safety are important in creating a space where development can occur.

Exposure to experiences outside of one's own is inherently important for developing multicultural awareness. A diverse community provides just such an environment. Equally, valuing the experience of living in a diverse community broadly and finding value in multicultural experiences is another important step in developing multicultural awareness. Students who participated in this study were primed for such an experience to occur and although some students experienced initial apprehensions about living in such a diverse community they remained open to the possibilities that awaited the experience.

### **Experiences Valuable to Students' Development of Multicultural Awareness**

Establishing an inclusive community was a primary goal of the MH RAs. Findings indicate that student participants believed this goal was achieved. Contact theory highlights the significance of equal status groups for achieving multicultural awareness and sensitivity (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Pettigrew, 1998). More than any other factor, students reported that the inclusive nature of the community was critical in their development of multicultural awareness. Because the RA's explicitly promoted the value of inclusion for all experiences and backgrounds, students felt comfortable in the community to freely express themselves. The resultant sense of belonging facilitated the creation of a safe space where students could ask questions

and talk openly as they explored topics of multiculturalism without fear of shame or humiliation in the learning process. It is clear from the findings that community matters significantly in the development of multicultural awareness. Without feeling safe within the community, students could not possibly feel comfortable in sharing their stories or challenging each others' preconceived prejudices or stereotypes.

It was not only the environment that impacted students' development of multicultural awareness but also the people with whom they lived and interacted. Because the hall represented a community of inclusion, students felt comfortable with one another to engage informally without the presence of the RAs. Contact theory identifies the value of informal contact with diverse others in breaking down prejudices and stereotypes (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Students recognized that informal interactions among peers were some of the most impactful opportunities to understand the experiences of others. They noted that the inclusive community created by the RAs was critical to becoming familiar and comfortable with floor mates in order to engage in informal discussions about others' experiences and topics of diversity and multiculturalism.

The MH RAs offered a variety of hall activities designed to increase students' awareness of diverse experiences, and students identified that these activities aided in their multicultural awareness development. Contact theory asserts that participating in shared experiential activities and learning about the experiences of diverse others influences multicultural awareness development (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Some students noted that the information



shared in the programs gave them information on a culture or tradition that they had not previously been aware of. However, most students acknowledged that these programs served two purposes, to learn about the experiences of diverse others and to understand that there are shared experiences among individuals regardless of group membership.

The data suggest that creating a safe, welcoming and inclusive community is among the most important factor in supporting students' development of multicultural awareness. In doing so, students are able to form trusted relationships with others that lead to informal interactions where topics of multiculturalism and diversity can be discussed unreservedly. Equally important are opportunities to participate in activities that expose students to experiences outside of one's own where understanding of differences as well as similarities can take place.

### **Relationships Among Students of Diverse Ethnic and Cultural Backgrounds**

In the development of multicultural awareness relationships, most notably friendships are important (Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew et al., 2011). It is through extended, positive personal contact with diverse others that awareness and understanding can begin to occur. A majority of student participants in this study identified that they developed relationships with diverse others. Some students developed relationships with both similar and diverse others. Contact theory recognizes the importance of both in-group and out-group relationships (Brown & Hewston, 2005); for intergroup contact to succeed, contact should occur through in-group identification and self-disclosure and through friendship development with out-

group members (Brown & Hewston, 2005). All of the students who reported friendships with both in-group and out-group members identified as Chicana/Latina. This is not surprising as a majority of 2012-2013 MH participants identify as Chicano/Latino. It is understandable then, due to proximity to similar others coupled with exposure to others from different cultural backgrounds, that Chicano/Latino students would have a greater opportunity to develop friend groups that consisted of both similar and diverse others. Only two Chicano/Latino identified students stated that their friends were entirely other Chicano/Latino students. However, these two students still believed that living on the MH supported their multicultural awareness development. Perhaps participating in activities and discussions with out-group members can influence multicultural awareness development, even when friendships with out-group members are not established (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

Only two participants disclosed that they developed no significant relationships on the hall. Both attributed this lack of friendships with hall mates to having pre-established friend groups with students from outside the MH. Each of these students admitted that they had minimal involvement in hall activities and limited interaction with people from the MH. It is unsurprising that they did not feel that participating in the MH influenced their development of multicultural awareness. Based on intergroup contact theory, for multicultural awareness to occur one must be engaged with out-group members across contexts and in multiple ways through experiential activities, dialogue, and friendship development (Brown & Hewstone, 2005;

Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). If these elements do not exist, either by structure of the community or by individual choice, then it is difficult for multicultural awareness development to occur.

### **Processes of Students' Development of Multicultural Awareness**

Contact theory contends that friendships provide opportunities for stereotypes and prejudices to be challenged by presenting new insights into diverse experiences (Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew et al., 2011). Friendships provide space for students to more deeply understand the experiences of others. Further, the deep emotional connection that exists in friendships affords individuals an opportunity to understand diverse experiences in more profound ways and allows intergroup experiences to be generalized beyond the original contact group to other out-groups (Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew et al., 2011). In the confines of a friendship, students felt comfortable to share their own experiences and to ask questions about the experiences of others. They were less afraid to make mistakes and therefore took greater risks in their own learning as they developed trusted relationships with out-group others.

Learning about diverse experiences can lead to changes in perception about the experiences of others. Intergroup interactions represent unique opportunities to challenge preconceived stereotypes that contribute to prejudicial attitudes and behaviors in the safety of trusted others (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). In the context of the friendship experiences of others can be heard from a perspective that may otherwise be thought of as unique or frivolous. Students readily acknowledged the impact of learning about their friends' experiences on multicultural awareness

development. Hearing friends' stories brought to the forefront the diversity of experiences that exist and served to challenge preconceived ideas about those experiences.

Several students noted an increase in self-confidence as a component of their multicultural awareness development. It was through friendships with diverse others that they became more self-assured in interactions with out-group members beyond the confines of the MH. Students identified greater assurance in classroom settings when contributing to discussions surrounding topics of diversity and multiculturalism. They discussed feelings of comfort in attending campus events and conferences the focused on multicultural themes. They talked about feelings of confidence as they navigated the university interacting with out-group members through day-to-day interactions. Perhaps most importantly, students felt greater confidence in recognizing the unique contributions everyone brings to the campus community because of their own backgrounds and experiences.

### **Additional Themes**

Two themes emerged in the data that did not specifically address the research questions. They were desire to educate others and desire to continue learning about multicultural topics. These themes appeared to support and give credibility to students' multicultural awareness development by demonstrating what students are taking away from the experience of living on the MH.

**Desire to educate others.** Nine of fourteen (64%) students identified that out of the experiences and lessons they learned on the MH came a desire to share this

knowledge with others. Selena commented that she felt compelled to stand up for others in insensitive situations.

“There would be times where I would have to be like “Oh, hey, you know, you said that, and maybe that other person didn’t say anything to you, but I could tell it hurt them.” So I would have to step in and, and say something about it because just it didn’t feel right not to.”

Similarly, Kami noted that she felt it important to bring issues of inclusion to the attention of those who might not have been aware that they comments they made were offensive.

“And me and my friends were visiting another floor [when an insensitive comment was made], we would tell them, say “You know, that’s not okay.” We would definitely be the ones to call them out on it, to tell them why it’s offensive. It was almost everything Betty and Julia had taught us that were so wrong or so offensive. And like we had to tell them how it was not okay.”

Phoebe approached educating others in a different way by inviting her friends to participate in the hall activities planned by her MH RAs.

“Yeah, my closest friends, like best friends in college, they’re not from my floor. I mean my roommate is, but I was also involved in a Christian club on campus so I spent a lot of time with them. It was always fun telling them about the events. For example, if there’s salsa night, I’m like “you guys wanna come” and it’s cool because they get to learn about all these other cultures through me

even though I don't necessarily understand the culture more than they do, but I do have access to these events."

**Desire for continued learning about multicultural topics.** Five of fourteen (36%) students acknowledged that living on the MH inspired them to continue learning about the experiences of others and topics of multiculturalism and diversity. Yesenia commented that her experience on the MH lead her to explore multicultural student organizations.

"I want to be around people of different backgrounds more often. So I started looking to clubs and orgs that are also multicultural. I'm positive that I'm going to join a multicultural sorority, just because of the fact that it's multicultural. I've really done my research on it so I'm, like "okay, that's what I want to do". And also, I've looked into other organizations that also have members are all of diverse backgrounds. There was another sorority that I looked at and it was a black based sorority, but I was, like, "okay, I'm not black", but I was like, "I'd be into new experience – get to know those girls."

Phoebe stated that by living on the MH she is more open to take a variety of courses that discuss topics of diversity and multiculturalism.

"I don't know if it's because of my hall or my RAs or just because it's multicultural, but I think whenever I take classes and they address culture – because I'm in Anthro 2 now but I also took Middle Eastern studies, Asian-American studies – so when I'm taking those classes, I go in with more of an open mind I guess so that's definitely – academically, like being on the

multicultural floor, it's helped me to do better in the class just because I have more of an open mind and learn a lot more and be more interested and curious in what the courses have to offer instead of just oh, it's just another class I have to sit through.”

Rosa expressed that her experience living on the MH was so positive that she selected to live on another LLC with a mostly international student population.

“And it [living on the multicultural hall] made me want to meet even more people. Because of it, I chose the Global Living Experience house [LLC] now to meet different people also. I know that the people who live there, I hope most of them were also interested in that [developing multicultural awareness], and for that reason they're living there.”

These themes serve as an indicator in understanding the extent with which students are integrating their MH experiences into settings beyond the hall. It seems clear from these findings that students are implementing the multicultural awareness they developed in the ways intended by the goals of the MH. Students are taking the multicultural knowledge they gained, sharing it with others, and continuing to seek out opportunities for their own learning and growth (Akens, 2002).

### **Limitations**

There are several limitations to this study that must be noted. Findings from this study cannot readily be generalized to other settings or student populations, as students were drawn from a single institution. A larger sample drawn from multiple settings will be necessary to enhance our understanding of the effects of this type of

LLC on students' multicultural awareness development. Equally, a more diverse set of participants may have provided a broader perspective of effects. The sample is biased toward the experiences of Chicano/Latino students, as they made up 43% of this study's total sample. Additionally, all students participating in this study selected to live on the MH. The process of self-selection to live on a LLC of this nature suggests that these students may have been primed for the experiences and opportunities to develop multicultural awareness. Finally, interviews took place one year after students moved onto the MH. The retrospective nature of the study should be acknowledged, as participants were asked to recount their experiences many months removed from the experience of living on the MH.

Another limitation is that a single one-time investigation does not allow for adequate assessment of students' development of multicultural awareness. Further research should be longitudinal in nature and follow students from the time students select a residence hall (MH or something else), through the year of living on the residence hall, and into the year or years that follow to understand the lasting effects of MH participation on multicultural awareness development. Similarly, this study looked at one cohort of students. The participants' experiences were certainly influenced by the environment and community that existed on the MH at time of participation and can be expected to differ for other students in other years. Another opportunity to investigate the effects of the MH on students' multicultural awareness development would be to follow multiple cohorts over multiple years to determine if the goals of the MH are being met. Finally, the experiences of students who did not



select to live on the MH will be valuable in understanding the unique effects of the MH when compared with a population of students who did not select a multicultural residence hall.

### **Implications for Practice and Recommendations**

The value of MH participation on students' development of multicultural awareness appears to be supported by the findings of this study. The 2012-2013 MH created opportunities for students to build meaningful connections with one another that lead to involvement in hall activities, informal interactions with floor mates, challenging discussions and an overall sense of community. It was in this environment that students developed awareness of multiculturalism in ways they had not previously experienced. If a goal of residential life programs is to create living environments where students feel safe, included and capable of learning about the experiences of diverse others, offering programs like the MH is important.

From the interview data it is clear that RAs matter. The RAs selected for the MH must set expectations of inclusivity and respect for all experiences in order to create a space where questions can be asked and mistakes can be made without fear of judgment or ridicule. Additionally, RAs must be willing to lead by example through sharing their own experiences, challenging students to think critically about multicultural topics and addressing any form of cultural insensitivity within the community. It seems that when RAs are deeply connected to and value multicultural awareness development they are able to create an experience that will have long lasting effects for the students. It is important then that careful selection practices be

implemented in choosing the RAs for this type of living-learning community.

Additionally, supplementary training may need to take place to ensure that the RAs are adequately prepared for the endeavor of leading students through the process of multicultural awareness development.

Student engagement is a vital component in multicultural awareness development. It is important then that students feel as if they are a part of the community, begin to form friendships and participate in formal and informal hall activities. As indicated in this study, students who do not feel connected to others within the community are also those who less often engaged in the activities that other students said led to a greater multicultural awareness. Although the responsibility lies with each student to be an active member of the community, RAs serve as an important first step in creating opportunities for relationship building to occur during the early stages of community formation.

It is not possible from this study to know if students living on other LLCs or on traditional residence hall floors are developing multicultural awareness, but the goals of the MH to increase students understanding of diverse experiences and thus developing multicultural awareness is working. The experiences and lessons of the MH would be valuable for all students, not just those living on the MH. It seems then that it would be beneficial for more students to have access to these types of living environments. Offering more MH housing and creating communities that include a mixture of students who have selected to live in such an environment and those who

have not may provide greater opportunity for exposure to topics of multiculturalism and diversity.

In this scenario the RAs would have to be very intentional about their expectations of the type of community they hoped to create. Supplemental RA training around topics of group facilitation, multicultural discourse and conflict resolution would need to be implemented. On the floor, additional time would need to be spent building a community of trust before starting to challenge students' preconceived stereotypes, but the benefits may outweigh the risks. In the very least the value of a community that honors all experiences and has an expectation of inclusivity seems to be an important function of creating space for students to learn, and this is a concept that could be included by every RA on every floor with every resident.

### **Summary**

Research on LLCs with a multicultural focus is limited, and research that has directly asked students about their perceptions of participation in this type of LLC is even more limited in the literature. The intent of this study was to better understand how students perceive participation in the MH to be an influence on their development of multicultural awareness and understanding. The results of the study revealed that students who actively participated believed that participating in the MH contributed to their development of multicultural awareness. Student participants identified that living in a community of diverse others that was inclusive and supportive of cross-cultural learning and understanding were important factors in

their multicultural awareness development. Additionally, the value of developing friendships with diverse others was noted by students as important in developing multicultural awareness. The principles of intergroup contact theory are supported by the findings from this study. This study contributes to the literature by examining an LLC model that is not well studied. Perhaps more importantly it adds student participants' voices to that literature. Suzie summarizes the experience of living on the MH best.

“I would say that living on the multicultural floor keeps it [multicultural awareness] constantly alive. It's not just something that happened last year and I forget about. With my friends, by having discussions, by going to events, and wanting to go to events that are talking about or addressing diversity issues; it keeps it alive and it's not just something that happened and I forget about it.”

From Suzie's statement and the experiences shared by all the student participants, the MH in 2012-2013 was a community that left a lasting impact on students, one that they will carry with them throughout their college experience and beyond.

Appendix  
Student Interview Protocol

Thank you for taking time to meet with me today and for agreeing to participate in my study. The purpose of this interview is to help me understand how participation in the Multicultural Experience Hall may have influenced your multicultural awareness development. This interview will be recorded, and the information shared here will be kept confidential and used for research purposes only. You may ask to stop the recording or the interview at any time. Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. Please tell me why you selected the MCEH over another LLC or a more traditional residence hall floor.
  - a. Tell me more about your own cultural background and experiences.
2. What were your expectations of living on the MCEH?
  - a. What sorts of activities did you think would take place on the hall?
  - b. What kinds of students did you think would be attracted to living on the hall?
  - c. What did you think the benefits, if any, would be of living on the hall?
  - d. When you knew you were assigned to the MCEH were there things that concerned you?
3. As you think back to your experience, what was the best thing about living on the MCEH?

Let's move on now and talk more about your specific experiences on the hall.

4. What hall related activities planned by your RAs or the Faculty Mentor did you participate in?
  - a. Why did you choose to participate in these particular activities?
  - b. Were there activities that you chose not to participate in? Why?
5. What types of informal or unstructured activities did you do with people on the hall? In this question informal or unstructured refers to activities not planned by the RAs or Faculty Mentor; things like hanging out in the hallway, attending other campus events, going to a soccer game, having a meal together, and any other kind of spontaneous activities.

As I mentioned earlier, I'm trying to understand the ways in which living on the MCEH influenced students' development of multicultural awareness. For my study I define multicultural awareness as understanding one's own cultural experiences and beliefs, learning about the cultural experiences and beliefs of diverse others, and understanding how characteristics of self and others can work together successfully to create a diverse society.

6. Of the activities you participated in, formal or informal, which do you feel had the greatest influence on your development of multicultural awareness?
  - a. In what ways did these activities increase your multicultural awareness?
7. Describe your relationship with your Resident Assistants.
  - a. In what ways, if any, did your RAs support your individual development of multicultural awareness?
  - b. In what ways, if any, did you witness your RAs supporting multicultural awareness development in others?
8. Describe for me the friendships you developed while living on the hall.
  - a. Thinking about these friendships, would you say that a majority of the relationships you built were with people from similar or different backgrounds/experiences to your own?
  - b. [If different] How so?
9. In relation to these relationships, what kinds of experiences or interactions, either formal or informal, did you participate in together that addressed the concepts of multicultural awareness?
  - a. How did about these experiences or interactions help you understand someone else's cultural experience?
10. How would you describe the influence of your friendships, if any, on your development of multicultural awareness?
  - a. In what ways has your interactions with people of different backgrounds/experiences, outside of the hall, been influenced by living on the MCEH?
11. As it relates to multicultural awareness, how do you think you changed since living on the hall?
  - a. Why not?
12. How did living on the MCEH contribute to your sense of belonging at UCSB?
  - a. Why not?
13. Are you living on an MCEH in your second year? Why/why not?

That is all I have for today. Thank you so much; I truly appreciate your time and willingness to share your experiences with me. Do you have anything that you would like to add that perhaps we did not get a chance to cover? Before we wrap up, do you have any questions for me? Thanks again for your time.

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