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Amina Dunn April 10, 2018

An Investigation into Political Engagement on College Campuses

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2018

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Abstract

An Investigation into Political Engagement on College Campuses
By Amina Dunn

In recent history, as college campuses have become more diverse, they have also been sites of numerous political demonstrations. Literature suggests that students are more politically active than non-students of the same age because they are in spaces where they are able to connect with like-minded people, but further individual attributes can affect their political behavior. This study utilizes a mixed-methods approach through quantitative data, from the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (N = 47,893), and qualitative data (21 in-depth interviews) to understand how identity intersects with political behavior on college campuses both on the individual and group levels. I focus on the identity statuses of race, gender, sexual orientation, and political ideology and investigate student involvement in identity-based student organizations to understand how students engage in both political action and political discussion. I find that a student's social network is the best indicator of their political behavior, but overall a student's need to feel understood as a knowledgeable individual heavily influences how they choose to interact with others in regard to politics.

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Introduction

A reemerging topic of interest in our modern world is political discussion and activism on college campuses. Political demonstrations on university campuses, such as Berkley, Atlanta University, Columbia, and Kent State, to name a few, have shaped national conversations on war and appropriate forms of protest in recent decades (Fox 2015). In recent history, as college campuses have become more diverse—in 2015, the majority of U.S. college students were women and 38% of college students were classified as minorities—tensions have been rising in these educational spaces (National Center for Education Statistics). Collegiate spaces have been the sites of violent protests against members of the Alt-Right, rallying sites for the Black Lives Matter Movement, and sites for protesting the current presidential administration. With so many political conversations about who has the right to speak and on what topics, campuses are perceived as sites for ideological warfare. But, are they really?

College campuses, as spaces with many different types of people and a dedication to "social justice, reciprocal relationships, and a concern for the common good" (Dugan 2015), have the potential to be places where the most dynamic and interesting conversations are occurring. But, are these conversations actually happening? Are certain voices heard more often on campuses? Are the voices of individuals in marginalized communities being heard? I want to answer the question: How do social identities and identity-based social networks affect political engagement on college campuses? Through this study, I hope to understand whether there are barriers on college campuses withholding certain individuals from becoming active in shaping the political climate of their campus.

Literature Review

The environment of college campuses influences certain students to engage in political activities over others. For instance, attendance at a collegiate institution increases political engagement among young adults as individuals are more likely to protest in groups than alone (Crossley 2008, Curtin et al 2010, Gambrell 1990). Political engagement is simply defined as an individual's involvement in politics, as manifested by participation in political discussion, or the search for information about policies or political campaigns (Bernstein 2005). Political engagement takes a variety of forms, including: holding discussions with another individual or a group, spreading a social message, protesting in a public space, or participating in various other activities.

Levels of political engagement lie on a spectrum. Individuals are considered to be politically engaged when passive and only showing general interest in politics, as well as when they are extremely active and participate in protests. Individuals do not necessarily believe that social movements are the way to make change; often a campaign has to be long-lasting for people to continue to join; and individuals are more inclined to act when they have a positive attitude about the goal of a political movement and the means of obtaining the goal (Klandermans 1987). High levels of political engagement in college students are correlated to a high degree of anomie, or the feeling of personal unrest (Cryns and Finn 1973). These very active college students often do not have favorable views of the leaders they are protesting, are less likely to express their opinions or beliefs as fact and wish for others to hear their opinions (Cryns and Finn 1973). Further, individuals of different identity statuses participate in politics on college campuses with various levels of intensity (Bernstein 2005, Duncan 1999, Curtin et al

2010). Identity and social spaces ultimately influence individuals to participate in social movements (Husu 2013). This basic understanding influences the primary purpose of this study.

The three key concepts in my study – political engagement, social identities, and social networks – are tightly interconnected. Formulated by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s, social identity theory refers to the relationships between society and the individual. Social identities and social networks work reciprocally to develop an individual's development of self and the social environment. Social identities are self-categorized, socially constructed labels based on physical or non-physical attributes (Stets and Burke 2000). Social identities manifest in multitudinous ways: gender, race, political affiliation, nationality, religion, social class, etc. And each individual can hold a multiplicity of social labels. These social identities influence people to form groups that accentuate similarities with individuals who share characteristics. In this way, social identities help individuals develop an understanding of those both inside and outside of their own social groups. Identities inform an individual's status in society based on social structures and social roles, which then enhance the individual's self-image, leading them to behave and socially perform in expected and identifiable ways. These behaviors based on social roles and identities allow individuals to connect and build relationships with others.

In this way, individuals are constantly being molded by the social world in which they inhabit. Individual perspective based on their positionality in society influences an individual's politicization (Klandermans 2014). For instance, women who experience and identify more instances of discrimination also exhibit higher levels of political awareness (Harnois 2015). Individuals that recognize their place in a specific society may also perform more in order to serve their best self-interest; meaning, individuals choose to participate in political activity because they want to change their circumstances (Klandermans 2014). Becoming more in touch

with an identity status can be empowering. Undocumented students who shared their legal status with trusted individuals, friends, teachers, and others outside of their families, felt more inclined to organize to benefit themselves; suggesting that when a marginalized individual self-categorizes themselves and recognizes a social space they inhabit, they are more inclined to articulate their needs and lead a movement to act towards a goal they require (Enriquez 2014). Through these means, from individual self-identification and the growth of confidence in that identity and understanding of the placement of self in a social space, social movements grow and gain traction through social networks.

Social networks are abstract models of the connections or relationships between individuals (Fuhse 2009). As opposed to social relationships, in which the probability of specific action of each actor is important, in social networks, behaviors and expectations are reciprocal, and individuals are tied to each other through some commonality or self-imposed expectations (Fuhse 2009). These networks are made up of multiple dyadic relationships, groups of two, in which social ties are transitive, meaning they can change or shift depending on the choices of the actors involved. These social ties are considered meaningful because of their foundations in the actors' similarities in social identity and/or transactions and expectations between the individuals via love, friendship, competition, etc. These ties increase interactions between the actors and help build intimacy between those involved in these social pairs (Fuhse 2009). As more and more individuals become tied through these connections, and thus become attached to each other through the formation of these relationships, social networks form. Social networks have the potential to create groups that can form their own identities due to connectivity because of a singular purpose. In such networks, the members are able to bond because of a collective identity.

On college campuses, these social networks are frequently manifested through student organizations. Not only does engagement in organizations shape friendship networks, but they also grow students' connections with their own identity (Benediktsson 2012, McCorkel and Rodriquez 2009, Polletta 2001). Participation in these student organizations intensify a student's sense of identity within themselves, furthering the student's investment in the group and in the issues the group recognizes as important (McCorkel and Rodriquez 2009). These students spend much of their time outside of classes with each other and become closely-connected social groups. The connections formed in these communities eventually influence social dynamics on campuses. Further, the changes of social dynamics alter how students perceive their college's social climates. These perceptions can be identified along racial lines. For example, white students at predominately white colleges often have a more positive perception of intergroup relations and diversity than Black students (Chavous 2005). It can easily be inferred that white students are easily able to find people like them on their historically white college campuses, unlike minority students. Thus, they are able to establish connections with other students and form their own social circles quickly.

The intensity of the level of political engagement can change due to social networks. Individuals are able to mobilize with people of similar backgrounds due to both the formed connections in groups and their perception of the community on their campuses. Further, social networks act as channels for recruitment to social movements (Lim 2008). Marginalized students, such as women or students of color, tend to be reluctant to participate in social movements on campus unless they are a member of a formalized group consistent with their primary identity status (Einwhoner et al. 2000, Zweigenhaft 1993). In student organizations, the discussion of shared experiences heightens the emotions of people in that group, eventually

leading people to want to act for their own good (Enriquez 2015). For instance, during the civil rights movement, the growing number of conversations and stories about dissent and discomfort among members of the Black youth stirred young people to act through sit-ins at lunch counters in the South (Polletta 1998). The sharing of social grievances, in this way, becomes a means for group mobilization. When individuals feel as if their well-being is being threatened, they have a stronger motivation to take part in a protest "to defend their interests and principles" (Klandermans 2014). In the case of conservative students, who are often minorities on college campuses, they are usually motivated to mobilize on more liberal campuses (Munson 2010). College campuses become a unique space where individuals can easily and carefully select the relationships they choose to strengthen, which then in turn greatly affects how they navigate their social spaces in the collegiate arena.

Previous studies have primarily focused on examining the political engagement of a specific type of student, *e.g.*, Black students, female students, and various other identity groups. In contrast, this study attempts to a build a framework for understanding campus cultures and how students function in these cultures based on student dynamics and identity. While quantitative data is used to offer an understanding of campus dynamics, qualitative data is used to explore the interrelationship between self and the community respecting political engagement. Understanding that the college campus is a dynamic social space in which groups and individuals vie for the attention of other students through organized events, elections, and various other means, studying how individuals navigate the political landscapes of these spaces becomes increasingly important as student bodies become more diverse.

My research explores student involvement in politics as a new era in politics emerges -- the Trump era. The American political landscape has increasingly become more polarized in the

past twenty years (Pew Research Center, "Political Polarization, 1994 – 2017"). The 2016 presidential election, along with the emergence of identity-based social movements, such as Black Lives Matter, the Women's March, and the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), has only exposed this polarization further and has created a tense social atmosphere. Given that college campuses are, in a sense, a microcosm of our society, how individuals interact or use their first amendment right of free speech increasingly becomes an important course of study.

I hypothesize that students in marginalized identity groups statuses (with respect to race, sexual orientation, and gender) will engage more in political activity on college campuses compared to their peers in dominant identity groups. Literature indicates that students who are more marginalized due to their social identities are reluctant to be politically active on their campuses (Einwhoner et al. 2000, Zweigenhaft 1993). However, given that students of color have designated spaces on campuses for them to find and speak to people like them, through racial/ethnic student organizations, they are offered more opportunities to mobilize and find political opportunities to act. This theoretical position leans more toward the findings of several social movement studies (Polletta 1998, Harnois 2015, Klandermans 2014). In addition to this understanding, I argue that given the current national political atmosphere, more marginalized groups will be motivated to lead social movements in protest of policy changes. Due to the political dynamics nationwide and the emergence of mass-scale movements, they have developed a higher sense of anomie (Cryns and Finn 1973). I believe this will spill over onto college campuses, allowing for more marginalized students to join together and mobilize for their political goals through protest, and to share their message with other students. These students have a stronger desire and an incentive to control their own political narratives and

prioritize political discussions in their student communities in order to have their voices heard. Also, in contrast to Munson (2010), I believe that politically liberal students will be more inclined to engage in politics because of the conservative nature of the presidential administration. I further hypothesize that students in strong social networks with individuals similar to themselves are more likely to be politically engaged on college campuses because they have the ability to mobilize and organize political action easily and with collective support.

Hypotheses:

1. Students in politically marginalized identity groups, in reference to race, sexual orientation, and gender, will be more politically engaged than other students not in these marginalized identity groups.
2. Politically liberal students will be more politically engaged than conservative students.
3. Students in strong social networks, meaning identity-based organizations, will be more politically engaged than students not involved in these organizations.

Methods

This study utilizes a mixed-methods approach to gather data and information for analysis. Both a secondary data set and in-depth interviews were used to collect quantitative and qualitative data, respectively. The use of both methods provides a better understanding of not only which identities are politically active on campuses, but also how individuals create their own narratives on the importance of political engagement in the collegiate sphere, and why they do or do not engage.

Quantitative Methodology

The quantitative data in this study was collected by the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (MSL). Since 2009, the MSL, sponsored by Loyola University of Chicago, has collected data from over 300 post-secondary schools totaling an overall sample exceeding 350,000 cases. The MSL utilizes a social change model comprised of seven leadership values which operate on the individual, group, and societal levels. The values include consciousness of self, congruence, commitment, collaboration, common purpose, controversy with civility, citizenship, and change (Dugan 2015). Every three years, about 100 schools are able to enroll for MSL participation by paying approximately $6,000. Once selected, the school sends the survey out to its students to be completed. Schools that have participated in previous years include: Boston College, Emory University, University of Maryland, College Park, and Duke University.

I am using the 2015 MSL survey which contains 96,588 cases. The sample was reduced to 47,893 cases after recoding and selecting out first-year students and students that were not traditionally-aged (between the ages of 18 and 24). First-year students were excluded because I

only wanted to analyze students who were well-acclimated to campus life and had an understanding of which organizations they would like to be involved with at a greater depth. Non-traditionally aged students were excluded for similar reasons. Many of these students do not live on campus or participate in student organizations in the same way as traditionally-aged students. In addition to these groups, students that did not complete the entire survey were removed from primary statistical analysis. While applying to use the data, I selected a total of 52 variables to use. These variables included 6 independent variables, race, gender, sexual orientation, political ideology, year in school, and age, and 45 dependent variables covering students' attitudes, values, and behaviors regarding political action and activism. These 45 dependent variables were recoded to form four dependent variables for analysis. The dataset was recoded and analyzed using SPSS.

Political engagement was operationalized by examining the attitudes and behaviors of students in terms of political action and discussion. The measure for *students' attitudes regarding political discussion* was a compilation of six statements: "I am open to others' ideas," "Hearing differences in opinions enriches my thinking," "I respect opinions other than my own," "I actively listen to what others have to say," "I share my ideas with others," and "I am comfortable expressing myself." These statements were grouped because they each espouse positive ideas that would be conducive to producing an open conversational atmosphere. Respondents were able to answer the statements with: "Strongly Disagree," "Disagree," "Neutral," "Agree," and "Strongly Agree." Following the compilation of these variables, I organized the distribution (the responses had combined numbers from 6 to 30) using the categories of "Most Inclined to Strongly Disagree," "Most Inclined to Disagree," "Most Inclined to be Neutral," "Most Inclined to Agree," and "Most Inclined to Strongly Agree," in order to

analyze the output. The measure for *student attitudes regarding political action* was comprised of 10 statements. These statements included, "I am willing to devote the time and energy to things that are important to me," "It is important to me to act on my beliefs," and "I value opportunities that allow me to contribute to my community" (see Appendix III for full list of statements). The distribution of these numbers ranged from a score of 10 to 50. For further analysis, the distribution was organized in a similar fashion as the measure for political attitudes on discussion, with a scale of "Most Inclined to Strongly Disagree" to "Most Inclined to Strongly Agree."

The measure of *student political action* was a compilation of student responses from 7 statements. These statements included: "Acted to benefit the common good or protect the environment," "Worked with others to make the campus or community a better place," "Acted to raise awareness about a campus, community, or global problem," and "Took part in a protest, rally, march, or demonstration" (see Appendix III). Students were able to answer these questions through a 4-point scale with responses set to "Never," "Once," "Sometimes," and "Often." To understand the basic frequency of this variable, I recoded the data to fit into three equally distributed levels of political engagement, *i.e.,* low (students with a score of 0 to 6), medium (students with a score of 7 to 14), and high (students with a score of 15 to 21).

The measure of *student discussion* was created by compiling 5 statements into one variable. These statements included: "Talked about different lifestyles/customs," "Held discussions with students whose personal values were very different from your own," and "Discussed major social issues such as peace, human rights, and justice" (see Appendix III). Students were able to indicate whether they "Never," "Sometimes," "Often," or "Very Often" participated in these discussions. The full distribution ranged from 0 to 15. For the frequency

tables, this distribution was recoded to three equally distributed levels of political engagement, similar to the distribution of political action, low (scores of 0 to 4), medium (5 to 10), and high (11 to 15).

The dependent variables were analyzed through basic frequency tables and linear regression models. While the categorized distribution outputs were used for the basic frequency tables, the full distributions of the compiled variables were used for the regression models. There were of total 8 models run for each variable, including some additional models to see how other independent variables influenced the outcome of the data, to analyze my three hypotheses. Model 1 analyzed political engagement by the identity statuses of gender (Model 1A), race (Model 1B), and sexual orientation (Model 1C). Model 2 analyzed political engagement by political ideology (Model 2A) and additionally examined how race/ethnicity factors into this dynamic (Model 2B). Model 3 analyzed political engagement based on individual participation in a multicultural organization on campus (Model 3A) and further examined how race/ethnicity plays a role in involvement in both political engagement and participation in these organizations (Model 3B). Model 4, a model using all of the variables, is used to understand which variable is the most powerful indicator of political engagement.

Identity was operationalized in four ways: race, gender, sexual orientation, and political ideology. Students were asked to select one pre-determined answer in response to a question posited by the survey creators. For race, students were asked "Please indicate your broad racial group membership" and were given the option to select one of nine categories: "White/Caucasian," "Middle Eastern/Northern African," "African-American/Black," "American Indian/Alaskan Native," "Asian American," "Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander," "Latino/Hispanic," "Multiracial," and "Race Not Listed." Due to frequency distribution,

"Middle Eastern/North African," "American Indian/Alaskan Native," "Naïve Hawaiian/Pacific Islander," and "Race Not Listed" were dropped from the data set because not many students identified themselves as members of these groups, 0.7%, 0.2%, 0.2%, and 2.3%, respectively. The category of "Race Not Listed" was also dropped because this category was broad and undefined. For gender, students were asked, "What is your Gender?" Students were offered three categories to choose: "Male," "Female," and "Transgender/Gender Non-Conforming." The category of "Transgender/Gender Non-Conforming" was later recoded as missing because it accounted for a very small percentage (0.5%) of the overall sample population. To identify students' sexual orientation, students were asked, "What is your sexual orientation?" Students were offered five categories: "Heterosexual," "Bisexual," "Gay/Lesbian," "Queer," and "Questioning." Another variable was also created to collapse the marginalized sexual orientations: "Bisexual," "Gay/Lesbian," "Queer;" and "Questioning" into one category. There were not many students who identified themselves as part of the LGBT community, so the collapsed variable allowed for me to understand how the group as a whole functioned. Finally, to indicate political ideology, students were asked, "How would you characterize your political views?" and were offered the options of "Very Liberal," Liberal," "Moderate," "Conservative," and "Very Conservative."

Students were also asked about their involvement in student organizations. Students answered "Yes" or "No" to the question, "Have you been involved in any Identity-based/Multicultural Organizations (ex. racial/ethnic groups, LGBTQ groups, women's groups?"). This variable was used to analyze my third hypothesis, whether students are more inclined to engage in political activity when they are a part of an identity-based student organization.

Overall, this quantitative data allowed for me, on a mass scale, to examine the statistical associations between different identity statuses on multiple levels, the individual as well as the group. Due to the large data set, the data becomes a bit more generalizable and offers context to the average collegiate campus and student activity in these spaces.

Qualitative Methodology

The qualitative portion of this study focused only on the race and political ideology of students for easier analysis. As previously stated, in-depth interview questions were used to examine student narratives surrounding political engagement. This interview method provided a better understanding of how individuals create their own narratives on the importance of political engagement in the collegiate sphere. The in-depth interview questions were tested in a three-person pilot study under similar interview session conditions. Following the examination of these respondents' answers, the questions were reexamined and finalized for this current study.

The final interview guide contained 22 questions (Appendix II) examining various issues, including a description of the student's social circle, the student's opinion about on-campus political groups and multicultural student organizations, how the student defined political protests, and how political conversations function and/or should function on college campuses. The interview questions were targeted to operationalize students' social networks and their levels of political engagement. Depending on the answers from respondents, I also asked follow-up questions to further understand what the students were thinking.

To understand social networks, students were asked to answer several open-ended questions focusing on their friend groups and organizations in which they participate; for example: "How would you describe your social circle in general?"; "Tell me about your closest

five friends"; and, "Do you belong to any organizations on campus?" By asking students about their friend groups and their participating organizations, I was able to identify the students' general social networks and how they were formed. Political Engagement was measured in a similar manner. Political Engagement was measured in three ways: political discussion, political activism, and motivations for engagement. The participants were asked open-ended questions to measure their understanding of political protests and to ascertain the quantity and/or quality of any other political discussions, if any. These questions included: "What do you think counts as political protests?"; "Tell me about a time you had an uncomfortable conversation about diversity outside of class"; and "Tell me about a time you had a productive conversation about diversity outside of class."

Social Identity was operationalized on the individual level through a process of self-selection. Following the conclusion of the interview, students were asked to fill out a demographic sheet (see Appendix II) that was created using the same questions and response categories as the MSL. Students were asked their class year, race, gender, and political affiliation. This self-identification of identity statuses was used to understand how individuals with differing identity statuses engage in politics on campus based on the answers during the interview. This self-selection process helped to contextualize the answers of the survey. Through these two means of collecting data, I was able to analyze not only what students are saying in general, but also if specific groups of students are having similar experiences with political expression.

Recruitment for this study focused on an elite university in the Southeast of the United States. To participate in the study, the students had to be over the age of 18 and be designated as either sophomores, juniors, or seniors in their university's undergraduate college. First-year

students were not included in the data set because they spend their initial year in college getting acclimated to their social environment. I assumed these students would be less likely to engage in difficult conversations or become very politically active because they are still in the process of building their social networks. To obtain participants, leaders of about 15 undergraduate student organizations (*e.g.*, the Black Student Alliance, the College Republicans, etc.), as well as the Sociology and the Political Science Departments, were contacted via email with a recruitment email to be sent out to their email listservs. I surmised, that students already in these organizations and Departments have varying levels of involvement and would be able to provide information on why some students are active in certain organizations while others are not. To gain the trust of the participants, I chose not to directly contact any students. I did not want to recruit students directly, out of fear of antagonizing them. To encourage students to participate, all individuals who completed the interview were eligible to receive $20 in the form of a Visa Gift Card or cash.

Thirty students answered the recruitment call, but only twenty-one interviews were completed due to non-responses or scheduling issues. Many of the students found the study through the Political Science listserv email, although a few others answered the call via other organizations or through friends. The sample contained five Sophomores, ten Juniors, and six Seniors. The students were of various political ideologies and races. Almost half of the students, ten out of the 21 students, identified themselves as Liberal. Five students described themselves as Moderate. Another five students described themselves as Very Liberal. One student described themselves as political unaffiliated and even when pushed to choose an answer declined the offered options. None of the students that participated in the study identified themselves as conservative. Even after contacting the Republican student organization President

twice and receiving responses saying that he sent the email out to his group, I received no responses from politically conservative students. There were six students that identified themselves as Black/African-American. There were four students each in the categories of White, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian. The remaining three students described themselves as Multiracial. The sample was overwhelmingly female. There were 16 female respondents and five male respondents.

Each interview was conducted in a private space. All the interviews, except one, was conducted in a private study room in the campus library. This interview was conducted in an empty space in an academic building because there were no private study spaces available. Each interview lasted between 19 minutes and 50 minutes, although the participants were scheduled in hour long blocks. The interviews were recorded through a notes app and transcribed promptly after their conclusion. A brief description of the interview was also written at the end of each interview. Each student, at the beginning of their interview, was assigned a number based on the order in which their interview occurred, *i.e.*, the first person interviewed were identified as #1. The number was not connected to the students' names; the number only referred to the demographic sheet that the student filled out. During the transcription process, students were also deidentified; the students were only identified via number and their racial and political selections on their demographic sheets. The deidentified and transcribed interviews were then coded by hand and analyzed. In this paper, students are identified with pseudonyms.

One student was particularly concerned about how he might be viewed for expressing his viewpoint and repeatedly asked if he could be identified through the interview. After some reassurance, he was able to open up a bit more about his less than liberal views on abortion. One

interview audio file was corrupted, but I was able to salvage some of what I learned from the student due to the notes I wrote at the end of the interview.

Results

Quantitative Data

The students in the sample were equally spread among academic class levels. In the sample, 31.1% of students were sophomores, 33.4% were Juniors, and 35.6% were seniors. As seen in Table 1, a plurality of students (40.6%) indicated that they were politically moderate.

How would you characterize your political views?

Political Ideology	Frequency	Percent
Very Liberal	4257	8.9
Liberal	13909	29.0
Moderate	19458	40.6
Conservative	8852	18.5
Very Conservative	1417	3.0
Total	47893	100.0

Table 1

The second largest group (29.0%) of students classified themselves as Liberal, followed by 18.5% of students that classified themselves as Conservative. The fewest students classified themselves on the ends of the political spectrum; 8.9% self-identified as Very Liberal and 3.0% classified themselves as Very Conservative. The sample was overwhelmingly female. While 64.7% of students were female, 34.8% were male. The sample was also overwhelmingly heterosexual (91.7%) (Table 3).

Sexual Orientation

	Frequency	Percent
Heterosexual	43739	91.7
Bisexual, Gay/Lesbian, Queer, Questioning	3938	8.3
Total	47677	100.0

Table 3

Those who identified as Bisexual, Gay/Lesbian, Queer, and Questioning accounted for 8.3% of the sample population. As seen in Table 4, many of the students were White (69.8%). Non-White students (27.9%) included, 0.7% Middle Eastern/Northern African students, 4.6% Black/African-American students, 0.2% of American Indian/Alaska Native students, 7.1% Asian-American, 0.2% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 5.4% Latino/Hispanic, and 9.8% Multiracial; the remaining 2.3% reported Race Not Listed.

Race

	Frequency	Percent
White/Caucasian	33424	69.8
Middle Eastern/Northern African	312	.7
African American/Black	2189	4.6
American Indian/Alaska Native	111	.2
Asian American	3400	7.1
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	79	.2
Latino/Hispanic	2576	5.4
Multiracial	4681	9.8
Race Not Listed	1121	2.3
Total	47893	100.0

Table 4

Student Attitudes Regarding Political Discussion and Action

The vast majority of students agreed or strongly agreed with the attitudinal statements, not providing enough variation in the data for further analysis (see Appendix I). The attitudinal statements offered opinions regarding the favorability of political discussion and action. The results were heavily left-skewed. While 0.1% of students were more inclined to strongly disagree with the given statements on political discussion, 49.2% and 44.5% of students respectively, chose “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” with the statements. A total of 87.8% of

students agreed or strongly agreed with the statements in regard to political action; 0.2% strongly disagreed. Since students tend to have similar sentiments about political discussion and their political actions, I saw no need to examine these variables further.

Political Action

The majority of students are not extremely engaged in political, as demonstrated in Table 5. Only 12.1% of students had high levels of political action. The largest number of students had low levels of political action, 48.2% of the sample population.

Political Action

	Frequency	Percent
Low	23107	48.2
Medium	18961	39.6
High	5772	12.1
Total	47840	99.9
Missing	53	0.1
Total	47893	100.0

Table 5

Whether an individual is more inclined to participate in political action depends on their identity status. Women are significantly more likely than Men to engage in political action (Model 1A). When examining race, levels of political action depends on the racial group of the individual. According to Model 1B, Black students are significantly more likely to engage in political action than white students. A similar trend is seen in multiracial individuals and Asian students, although the level of significance is lower. Latinx students are the only group that is seen to not be likely to engage in political action, although this trend is insignificant in Model 1B. And, as seen in Model 1C, LGBQ students are statistically more likely than heterosexual

students to engage in political action. Ultimately, these results show that my first hypothesis is partially supported, at least with respect to political action.

Analysis of Student Political Engagement in Political Action

	Model 1A	Model 1B	Model 1C	Model 2A	Model 2B	Model 3A	Model 3B	Model 4
Identity								
Female	0.830***	--	--	--	--	--	--	0.455***
	(0.053)	--	--	--	--	--	--	(0.050)
Black	--	1.479***	--	--	1.169***	--	- 0.058	- 0.146
	--	(0.119)	--	--	(0.118)	--	(0.116)	(0.115)
Asian	--	0.221*	--	--	0.007	--	- 0.787***	- 0.830***
	--	(0.097)	--	--	(0.097)	--	(0.094)	(0.094)
Latinx	--	- 0.070	--	--	- 0.368**	--	- 1.038***	- 1.156***
	--	(0.111)	--	--	(0.110)	--	(0.106)	(0.106)
Multiracial	--	0.699***	--	--	0.514***	--	- 0.105	- 0.167*
	--	(0.084)	--	--	(0.084)	--	(0.081)	(0.081)
LGBQ	--	--	1.930***	--	--	--	--	0.015
	--	--	(0.089)	--	--	--	--	(0.090)
Political Ideology								
Moderate	--	--	--	- 1.623***	- 1.606***	--	--	- 1.076***
	--	--	--	(0.056)	(0.056)	--	--	(0.055)
Conservative	--	--	--	- 2.053***	- 1.996***	--	--	- 1.276***
	--	--	--	(0.067)	(0.068)	--	--	(0.067)
Network								
Multicultural group	--	--	--	--	--	4.580***	4.721***	4.350***
	--	--	--	--	--	(0.065)	(0.067)	(0.070)
Constant	7.003***	7.412***	7.398***	8.667***	8.560***	6.823***	6.929***	7.416***
	(0.043)	(0.030)	(0.026)	(0.040)	(0.045)	(0.026)	(0.029)	(0.058)
N	16018	46223	46223	46223	46223	46215	46215	46010
R^2	0.005	0.005	0.10	0.026	0.029	0.097	0.100	0.109
F	247.376***	52.716***	468.143***	619.78***	231.760***	4959.744***	1025.711***	627.514***

Table 9 * p < .05, ** p< .01, *** p < .001

Both moderate students and conservative students are significantly less likely to engage in political action than their liberal student counterparts, supporting my second hypothesis, that liberal students are more inclined to act politically than other students (Model 2A). And overall, student involvement in multicultural organizations is the strongest indicator of political engagement for students, supporting my third hypothesis, that students in multicultural organizations are more politically active (Model 3 and 4).

As more controls are introduced into the model, the results become more interesting. The coefficient for Asian students becomes nonsignificant when political ideology is included in the model, suggesting that the political ideology affected the higher level of engagement in these students (Model 2B). Latinx students are significantly less likely to engage in political action than white students when political ideology is controlled (Model 2B). Although the coefficients for Black and Multiracial student decreases when political ideology enters in the model (Model 2B), these students are still significantly more likely to engage in political action than White students.

When participation in multicultural organizations is controlled, political action in students in racial groups goes down. When participation in a multicultural group is included in the model, the coefficient becomes negative for Asian students, suggesting that the positive coefficient for this group of students in Model 1B was affected by students' participation in a multicultural organization. Additionally, when Black students are analyzed in a model with multicultural organizations, the coefficient for their group becomes negative and nonsignificant (Model 3B and 4), suggesting that the significance in their high levels of political engagement was dependent on student participation in these organizations. The inactivity of Latinx students' political action becomes highly significant when participation in multicultural organizations is controlled.

For students who identified as women or as LGBQ, although their coefficients are lower when participation in multicultural organizations is included, they are still are more likely to engage in political action than their other peers (Model 4). However, while the coefficient for women is significant in Model 4, the coefficient for LGBQ students is not. Overall, there is a

strong and highly significant correlation between students that participate in multicultural organizations and have high levels of political engagement, supporting my third hypothesis.

Political Discussion

More students are engaged in political discussion than political action. As seen in Table 6, 29.9% of students scored a high level in political discussion. The fewest number of students. 12.4%, engaged in political discussion at a low level.

Political Discussion

	Frequency	Percent
Low	5934	12.4
Medium	27621	57.7
High	14315	29.9
Total	47870	100.0
Missing	23	0.0
Total	47893	100.0

Table 6

Women, similar to their behavior in political action, are more likely than male students to have political conversations (Model 1A). Although the coefficient decreases when other controls are introduced into the model, women are more inclined to have political discussion than men (Model 4). All racial groups, Black students, Latinx students, and Multiracial students, are more likely to have political conversation than white students, except for Asian students who are less likely to have political conversations (Model 1B). Further, students who self-identify as LGBQ are also more likely to have more political conversations than their heterosexual counterparts (Model 1C). While my first hypothesis is supported in terms of sexual orientation and gender, it

is most unsupported in terms of race as different racial groups have different levels of political engagement.

Analysis of Student Political Engagement in Political Discussion

	Model 1A	Model 1B	Model 1C	Model 2A	Model 2B	Model 3A	Model 3B	Model 4
Identity								
Female	0.361***	--	--	--	--	--	--	0.151***
	(0.037)	--	--	--	--	--	--	(0.036)
Black	--	0.757***	--	--	0.529***	--	0.078	0.007
	--	(0.084)	--	--	(0.083)	--	(0.084)	(0.084)
Asian	--	- 0.151*	--	--	- 0.307***	--	- 0.595***	- 0.634***
	--	(0.069)	--	--	(0.068)	--	(0.068)	(0.068)
Latinx	--	0.302***	--	--	0.083	--	- 0.126	- 0.233**
	--	(0.078)	--	--	(0.077)	--	(0.077)	(0.077)
Multiracial	--	0.947***	--	--	0.811***	--	0.591***	0.527***
	--	(0.059)	--	--	(0.059)	--	(0.059)	(0.059)
LGBQ	--	--	1.368***	--	--	--	--	0.395***
	--	--	(.063)	--	--	--	--	(0.065)
Political Ideology								
Moderate	--	--	--	- 1.249***	- 1 .230***	--	--	- 0.985***
	--	--	--	(0.40)	(0.040)	--	--	(0.040)
Conservative	--	--	--	- 1.520***	- 1.472***	--	--	- 1.139***
	--	--	--	(0.047)	(0.048)	--	--	(0.049)
Network								
Multicultural group	--	--	--	--	--	2.068***	2.087	1.741***
	--	--	--	--	--	(0.047)	(0.049)	(0.051)
Constant	8.437***	8.542***	8.561***	9.514***	9.406***	8.342***	8.329***	8.916***
	(0.30)	(0.021)	(0.19)	(0.028)	(0.031)	(0.019)	(0.021)	(0.042)
N	46041	46247	46247	46247	46247	46239	46239	46033
R^2	0.002	0.007	0.10	0.30	0.35	0.04	0.045	0.063
F	93.354***	84.314***	473.848***	710.903***	281.362***	1948.646***	432.775***	344.318***

Table 10 * p < .05, ** p< .01, *** p < .001

Students who identify as Moderate and Conservative students are statistically less likely to engage in political discussions than Liberal students (Model 2A). Conservative students are the very least likely of any group to participate in these conversations. This correlation supports my second hypothesis, liberal students are more likely to have political discussions than other students. When political ideology is controlled, and race is examined, political conversations for Latinx students becomes nonsignificant, suggesting that political ideology affects whether or not these students choose to have political discussions (Model 2B). The coefficients of all of the racial categories also decrease when political ideology is a controlled variable.

Participation in multicultural groups affects how individuals have political discussions. Students that participate in these organizations are the most likely to have political discussions and have higher levels of political engagement (Model 3A). Latinx students are significantly less likely to have political conversations when political ideology and participation in multicultural organizations are controlled (Model 4). The likelihood of political discussions for students of various identity statuses, gender, race, and sexual orientation also decreases when, participation in multicultural organizations are included (Model 4). Interestingly, multiracial individuals are the most likely out of Black, Whites, Asians, and Latinx students to have the most political discussions (Model 1B), even when controlling for involvement in multicultural organizations (Model 3B) and political ideology (Model 4). Student involvement in multicultural organization is the most influential variable in a student having a high level of political discussion, supporting my third hypothesis.

Qualitative Data

As previously stated, the majority of students interviewed primarily identified as Liberal or Very Liberal. There were also a fair number of Moderate students in the sample. There were no students that identified as Conservative or Very Conservative. The fact that no conservative students contacted me is very telling. As the primary researcher, I should disclose that conservative students may not have contacted me because of my ethnic sounding name and my college majors. I am a double major in Sociology and Theater Studies, both often described as "liberal" majors. It can easily be inferred that conservative students would be reluctant to interview with me because they would assume they would be entering a space where they would be criticized or judged for their political views. Despite not having a complete array of the

political spectrum, I believe that the students offered an interesting perspective on campus dynamics. And despite the fact that many of the students came from very different backgrounds, many of them answered the questions very similarly.

Political Action

Political action, in the qualitative interviews, were analyzed in two ways, by understanding responses to student activity and student perception of protest. When describing the political atmosphere on campus, all of the students described their student body as mostly liberal. But, when they continue in their description of the political climate, many explained that political activity was pretty muted, except in certain communities.

> It's either you're very vocal, and its usually minority students who are vocal about how they feel about politics, and then there's like absence of any opinion. And its um, it's [almost like they're taught to be that way… [B]ut in terms of like responding to like minority voices, I feel like it's negative… Professors are very encouraging. Professors definitely advocate, they understand, they try to understand students, whereas students among students, I feel like it's more of like um, disdain, like they don't appreciate the vocalness of it, or they feel like it's too much or extra, or they try to stereotype like, of course you would lash out and try to like go on campus, and they also make fun of it. Like oh who cares if we wrote "Trump: all over campus? So, it's just kind of this um, like dismissive behavior almost, the way, they just make fun of it, dismiss it or just ignore it.
>
> – Hispanic Woman, Senior, Not Affiliated (Jessica)

Jessica's point illustrates that students tend to be dismissive of the actions of minority students. She feels as if the voices of minority students are not being taken seriously on campus, although these students do tend to be very politically active on campus. This perception supports my first hypothesis, that marginalized students are more politically active than other groups. However, if this behavior is being ignored by the majority of the student population, as Jessica

suggests, there is not much support to suggest that minority students are more political active. Only the perception of the individual is the determining factor. Other students acknowledged that the most political activity occurs among those with the most extreme ideologies:

> I think there are a lot of people who have a lot strong political opinions, but I think that more often then not, these people feel like their political opinions are not shared by the majority of the student population. In my experience, the people who are vocal about their political opinions are either very liberal or very conservative… I think that there's some conflict, but because of the conflict people don't really talk about it, because people are afraid of like engaging in angry political conversations. That's my opinion, it might not be pretty accurate.
>
> – Junior, Multiracial, Woman, Very Liberal (Victoria)

Victoria's comment suggests that there is political tension on campus due to the polarization of the individuals who are the most vocal; those who are the most vocal on campus are also the most politically extreme. This extremism, on both sides, liberal and conservative, does not allow much room for the moderate voice, a voice that may fit the majority of student opinion. This perspective leaves my second hypothesis without a solid foundation. Students don't have a firm idea of who is the most vocal on campus; they see movements occur, but not necessarily the leaders of said movements.

Students explained that the campus seemed the most active during the Presidential election, when both the Republican and Democrat groups were vying for the attention of students. One interviewee didn't even know if there were political groups on campus. A student that was a member of the Democratic group explained that the group was small which does not allow them to have a very outspoken group or have a lot of events. In order to promote their work, the group has focused on canvassing and signing students up to vote. In the past, the Republican group, one student noted, had been a center for controversy on campus. The group was very supportive of Trump during the 2016 Election, even having a cut-out of the then-

Presidential nominee during Wonderful Wednesday, an event that allows student groups to promote their organizations. The group also invited controversial speakers like Milo Yiannopoulos and had arguments with other students over the group's political opinions and the ways they expressed them. A moderate student thought that there was a lack of discussion on intellectual conservatism on campus and he has worked with his friends to build a new group. He said that he and his friends worked to create the group in order to combat the more controversial conservative methods of the campus's Republican group.

The second type of political action I studied was protest. Protest, was defined by students as a "substantive action" that takes place against the status quo. There was a general consensus that protest can occur on multiple levels, the individual or the group. Protests, although they can be minimal, such as silent protest or wearing a t-shirt or pin, must be open and have a defined agenda. One Moderate student added that protestors, especially when they attend an event for a public speaker, should be respectful. Just as many students said they protest as those who said that they don't protest. In fact, some of the more interesting responses came from students who did not want to be involved in protests or demonstrations. These students, when asked about their involvement in protests, responded that they don't often feel like protestors know what they are truly fighting for or that they lack the time to actually march or spread a message for a cause. Some students prefer a different technique for spreading information about issues they consider to be important:

> I do not think that I engage in political protest. So, I don't think that my actions are considered political protest because while I do enjoy talking about politics and contributing to discourse, I have never gone to a political event or gathering or held up signs or gone to a march or something like that… I haven't found a political protest that has a clear or narrow enough message that I would be motivated to go out and just protest for, um and especially not on campus or in Atlanta.
>
> – Victoria

> No. I haven't. I feel like—I'm not sure why… I think for some people it's the best way for them to express their beliefs and I guess for me, my favorite way of expressing a belief or trying to change a belief is just speaking with someone who doesn't agree with me.
>
> – Asian-American Woman, Junior Liberal (Rochell)

The responses of Victoria and Rochell indicate that student involvement in political action, especially protest, is really influenced by what the individual finds to be effective and the best for them. Not every individual, including those who are of a marginalized identity status, feel it is in their best interest to march or go to a demonstration for a particular issue. Instead, discussions and one-on-one conversations feel more effective and productive for personal growth.

Political Discussion

Before getting into discussion, it is important to acknowledge the social circles into which students integrate themselves. As explained, social ties and social groups influence how students eventually interpret the dynamics of the social spaces and decide whether or not to be politically engaged.

Most of the students, when asked about how they found their friend group, mentioned their freshman dorm and the student organization that they joined when they were first-years; which potentially causes people to segregate themselves into groups. One student, a multiracial woman who identifies as liberal, given the pseudonym of Kate, recognized this early in her academic career:

> Um, I think for me, when I came here as a freshman, and it's gotten a little better… I think students kind of self-segregate here a little bit… [I]f you go to the dining hall, you see a lot of Asian-American students sitting together and white kids sitting together and Black kids sitting together…That's just the way they work out and I don't know why.
>
> – Kate

This distance between students that look different from each other is further exacerbated by student organizations. Many students of color were in at least one organization that was dedicated to promoting their race or a racial group in some capacity, such as Black Student Union, NAACAP, the East Asian Collective, and Latinx Student Organization. Thus, their social circles included a lot of people that looked like them. However, many of the students overall described their friend groups as being very diverse. These relationships influence how students view politics on their campus.

This separation of social circles is not only seen between racial groups, but also in differences in political ideology. Students who lean more to the political center or right tend to feel pushed out of political conversations on campus. Twelve students, when asked what were the major issues facing the country, mentioned the increased polarization of ideologies. In their opinions, our country is becoming politically unproductive and we do not have trust in our government because individuals are unable to talk to one another.

> …I think one of the issues that we face now is just the fact that people don't like each other essentially and you know when you say you are liberal or Republican or conservative, Libertarian, whatever it is, people automatically make very strong assumptions. I think compared to years before, which it's always been very strong assumptions, but I think even now, so people are more afraid to say what they are and what they believe in… It can be little tough to see that political culture.
>
> – Asian-American Woman, Junior, Liberal (Jane)

Essentially, Jane acknowledges that individuals make assumptions about others based on their identification of political ideology. If an individual is identified as something, automatically negative or positive stereotypes are placed upon them by other persons examining them; individuals are never able to truly be themselves, they are a labeled. This type of assumptive quality affects how students on campuses perceive their ability to have political conversations.

When prompted to answer if college campuses were good places to have conversations on national issues there were a variety of responses, but the majority responded positively. Students asserted that college is a place for intellectual innovation, where students have the academic knowledge to test political theories and merge disciplines to create productive responses and actions to problems. There was also a lot of talk about how students represent the future of the country, and as such, they should be able to voice their opinions on issues that occur nationally. There was some contention about whether campuses are diverse enough. A Liberal Black student explained that some campuses do not have a lot of socioeconomic diversity. Another White student stated:

> …I feel like because this campus is very liberal and college campuses tend to be very liberal, the liberal viewpoint is given more weight and other things are pushed out. And like with the thing with Milo it seems like there's so much protest against it, but when there's things like rallies on campus for um, they had one for immigration at one point, there's was no one opposing that. I understand that he's a very controversial figure, but it seemed like there was a lot more animosity against conservative action versus liberal action. But, private discussion on the other hand, I think is entirely different because people are less likely to gang up against someone who may be more conservative. It's easier to have a reasonable discussion of ideas one on one or at least in a small group.
>
> – White Man, Junior, Moderate (Colin)

Colin perceives his campus to be a hub for liberal political action. To him, the liberal voice is supported by students without much push back. So, on a mass scale, he feels his more conservative voice would not be included, or further condemned, if he were to set forward a movement. So, instead, he prefers having private conversations where there may be less animosity towards his political opinions. Another student, Kate, defends college campuses as spaces for political discussion.

> …I think college is this weird little bubble where you're mixed with people who might be a little different than you and have those different perspectives to kind of discuss. And just by that college, is a place where you have that age group of 18 to 24, around that age where we are really the next generation, we're going to enter the job force and we are going to enter society and I think through targeting this area or this age group and really talking about these politically-charged issues we can create the next generation that are more inclusive and tolerant. I think it's more important to talk about these issues than not. Even if it's something that's really a sensitive topic or it's uncomfortable, I think that's where the growth happens, in those uncomfortable moments where you're like, wow I never considered that perspective or my reality is not this person's reality, but I still need to value that person and acknowledge their experience is totally different than mine and not like demonize them or romanticize them or whatever you must do to project your ideas to someone you really don't know about their situation.
>
> – Kate

But, despite this positivity, students agreed that these conversations were not necessarily happening. At least, with the majority of the college student population. As one student explains:

> …[I]t depends how you would name those conversations. Because those conversations are always had among the minority, whether that's the LGBTQ or Blacks or Hispanics. Those conversations are a part of everyday conversations...
>
> – Black, Moderate, Senior, Woman (Sandra)

The reason that many students used to explain this phenomenon is that when they enter political conversations, they want to be understood, not heavily criticized or attacked. Only three students said they had very "comfortable" conversations focused on politics when their ideas were being challenged. Colin explains that because he is politically moderate, there are a lot of conversations that he enters where he grows uncomfortable by both liberals and conservatism. He says: "I feel like extremism in either direction is really bad. So, I definitely had talks with liberals where I felt personally attacked as a white male and I've had talks with conservatives where it's kind of like messed up what you're saying because they're talking about transgender issues or Black Lives Matter and it's too much. It's like too extreme." The individuals in the

conversation are not entirely able to fully understand each other, so the conversations may become stilted or unwelcome.

> A lot of people's refusal to budge on their beliefs. Um, I know that a lot of conservatives think…there's like an attack on conservatism in academia. But, you know because statistically most academics lean liberal… Um, and they're kind of forced to be really uncomfortable about their own beliefs because they are constantly being challenged and they're forced to think for themselves and think critically and think logically about what they believe and why they believe that… I think that can go for the liberal side as well. You kind of believe things because that's what your friends believe or what the internet tells you to believe…. [In these conversations,] you're kind of forced to confront your own ideology and be like why do I think this when this person thinks this?... Why do I believe this is right over that? And I think because that's so uncomfortable and difficult to do, like it's so much easier to be like I'm gonna believe that and then just stick to it. I think a lot of discussion can be hindered because people don't want to be around people who think differently than them… Group think is so comforting, to have your thoughts validated and not challenged. You don't have to like confront your own beliefs, you can just like agree with other people and it's so great, it's so fun… So, I think that's a big problem is people not engaging with people with different people. It's something that we can all work together to try to fix.
>
> – Sophie

Another student described an uncomfortable conversation she had, which ultimately didn't allow for the people involved to form a connection or grow in any way.

> …[T]his past summer one of the guys that lived next door, he was the first Trump supporter that I ever met who was my age and I really wanted to talk to him. It was a very uncomfortable conversation where he made a lot of homophobic remarks, so like some really, he just said a lot of sexist, he said a lot of things that shocked me. And there's stereotypes that I have that he played so much to, so I was really shocked. I think half of it he was joking, but it was very surprising. It did not end positively. We weren't friends, but we didn't talk after that.
>
> – Multiracial Woman, Senior, Very Liberal (Nadia)

Places that did not seem to have these conversational limitations seems to be sports teams, organizations where individuals are brought together through chance and talent, not

through individual choice. Two students, who were athletes, said that they had the most productive conversations with people on their athletics teams. One explains:

> Because we're – it's like a weird mix of guys that wouldn't be brought together in any other setting. Um, there's three Black kids, two of us are low-income backgrounds and then, I think one of our teammates is pretty well off. Then, the whole team outside of that are White and all very well of. And even within that, we've got liberal guys, we've got conservative guys from Texas, New York and Florida, all over the place, so definitely a diversity of experiences. We do get into that a little bit, I realize that my wealthy teammates from Houston are not going to see things the same as I do most of the time. That's definitely where I have most political debates because a lot of the times, they are just so clueless as to how people outside of their world see things. And I think they acknowledge that, which is why they engage me in these conversations often.
>
> – Black Male, Junior, Liberal (Dante)

These teams were described as being politically diverse and since the students were pulled together by a common bond and had a familiar dynamic, they are able to have difficult discussions about a variety of social and political issues.

There are numerous ways to have a productive conversation. Many of the students explained that listening is a very important goal when having a political conversation. Individuals should be seeking to understand and learn, so each person is equally able to participate in the conversation. A few students also expressed that individuals need to be educated on the topic that they are discussing, so that everyone can debate the issue with accurate information. There was a consensus that for productive conversations to occur among diverse groups of people, passion for an issue must be put aside, and logic should be put in the forefront of everyone's minds. Ultimately, when engaging in political conversations, students want to be in an environment where every individual is open and objective about the conversations at hand; an environment where respect is the means of discussion and views can be absorbed with "open ears and hearts." All of the students asserted that a productive

conversation does not mean that the individuals in the conversation must come to a consensus or agreement; but reaching out to have understanding between people of differing viewpoints is productivity in and of itself.

> It makes a lot more sense to listen to what they say, think critically for second, and ask them difficult questions. If you feel so strongly on a topic, you should be able to debate it. You should be able to ask someone questions that will make them think critically and will make them come up with an answer that has to directly address you question. So, if you are someone who is an ardent opponent of Ben Shapiro and you know maybe it's the way he feels about one topic or another, you should be able to directly maybe address that within your question and ask him something where you would think he would have a time answering it in an appropriate manner. That I think, is the most civil form of protest, yet at the same time, exchange of ideas. That's an ideal world.
>
> – John

> So then, a productive political conversation would be one where different ideas are challenged… I don't think agree to disagree is very productive. It might be much easier, but I think that productivity in political debates comes from reaching a certain level of um, sympathy for each other, I guess. And trying to understand each other and trying to work together to solve whatever thing is happening… [U]ltimately, there needs to be some consensus to make something happen.
>
> – Sophomore, Asian-American, Woman, Very Liberal (Sophie)

There was a general consensus that emotions hinder conversations. Logic, as John describes, and critical thinking should be at the forefront of a conversation. Political opponents should be able to enter a conversation by attacking the arguments of the person with whom they are talking. The individuals, as Sophie says, should seek to understand each other's perspective and learn from each other. Otherwise, as Sophie acknowledges later in her interview, sometimes conversations dissolve into character assassination because the individuals involved are unable to connect.

Although these descriptions seem a bit bleak, some students have ideas about how colleges can help promote diversity in a structured manner. Four students independently suggested that colleges should have diversity classes for first-year students. These diversity

classes would help students learn about the various backgrounds of their classmates and teach techniques to have conversations with people that do not look or think like them, so that when they are older and have more knowledge, they are able to have difficult conversations with anyone.

Politics and the Self

Are politics personal? An overwhelming number of the interviewed said yes. There was a repeated sentiment that each individual's experiences shape their understanding and perception of the world, which then, in turn, shape an individual's political opinions. Thus, there was a conventional idea that identity does affect how students build their political selves. People are shaped by what they are and separating politics from an individual's sense of self seems almost impossible.

> As someone who tries the whole balancing act with multiple identities, I want to say it's impossible for someone like me because I'm like a very marked category of a person being Black, being Muslim, being a woman, being from the background I happen to be from, I'm just a very marked category and ultimately, based off of appearance, there are assumptions and it's hard to take that out…. So, I find it very difficult to take myself out of the conversation. It's always there. I can definitely try to see someone else's viewpoint, but at the end of the day I'm only seeing it through my own eyes and through my own ears. I can never be just a blank space.
>
> – Black Woman, Junior, Very Liberal (Diane)

> I feel like no matter who you are you try your best because that's part of being very open-minded, just trying to get rid of your own past, your own biases. But just like everything in political science, everything is based on bias, everything is based on your journey that you came from and that is your social identity, your religion, your sex, your social status, your class, all of that. A lot of people do try, but no matter how much you try, it's going to be in the political conversation because that is how you gained your political view.
>
> – Jane

> Always. I think there's this whole thing surrounding political identity and your values and what you bring to the table and there's always a personal stake in that. It takes a very educated and scholarly person to consider that someone's views might be different than yours, but they're still valid because of their own lived experience. You don't have to agree on those views, but you have to at least understand that their views might be a little than yours because of that reasoning. And there's something worth, you can learn from that person in that sense. But yes, I think I'm a little skeptical of people that are very one-sided leftists or on the right because I kind of wonder, are you that intense about your political view because of what you feel or because that's the way you were brought up? And because there' variation, that's always something I played with in my mind. Because there's variation with how strongly you identify with a political view or value in terms of where you were born, that variation in itself shows maybe it's not the view itself, maybe it's that you were indoctrinated in that. If we turn the scholarly lens on ourselves and our own values and our way of understanding the world, would we still feel that way about it?
>
> – Kate

All three of these women identify something really crucial; that each individual is built from their own personal experiences. Identity status places a marker on individuals, the ways in which society perceives the individual and how the individual reciprocally understand themselves. This relationship between society and the individual builds a person's political self. Individuals, in this sense, become subjects to their social environments and are unable to separate themselves from how their social environments will eventually be shaped through the method of politics.

Multicultural Organizations

Unlike the political organizations, multicultural groups have made their mark on campus. Students explained that these organizations have a lot of fun events, are great places to promote diversity, provide resources to students of color, and act as a home for those who are far from home. Although there was overall a positive perception of multicultural groups, some individuals also espoused the negative qualities of these organizations. Many students, including

students of color, explained that these multicultural organizations have the potential to be very exclusive. Kate described a story in which she and her friends, one White student and one Black student, were told to leave a Black Student Union meeting before the meeting began. This experience negatively affected her perception of the purpose of multicultural groups on campus. Other students corroborated this point:

> I think that multicultural organization on campus, their intention is always to be a space for people who share or are interested in an identity to gather. But, I think that they have a lot of the same short comings and in an effort to be a space for a specific group of people, they also exclude people from whatever definition they put forth.
>
> – Multiracial Woman, Junior, Very Liberal (Victoria)

> …I think that there are certain parallels that you can assert between certain multicultural student organizations, such as Students for Justice in Palestine, Latin Student Organization, Black Student Alliance, um, I would not be confident to say the Muslim Student Organization, but they all assert a sense of intersectionality… I remember going to Latin Student Organization meetings and they were already talking about, in the first meeting, the essence of intersectionality and standing up for marginalized groups and, while that does sound good in theory, of course any sane person would want marginalized groups to be uplifted, but it's all, sometimes I think there's a sense of blindly supporting whatever, less a sense of tolerance and more a left-leaning agenda if that makes sense… I think that frequently organizations like LSO or BSA with their list of student demands, they get tied up in issues that simply do not pertain exclusively to their own ethnicity. It goes beyond that, it goes more to an agenda that is more political more than it is racial or ethnic, and that's where I start to have a sense of doubt. I was involved with the Latin Student Organization for a little bit, but I stopped going to the meetings because as soon as I started going, they were telling me about safe spaces and about trigger warnings and all these things that I, while that has plenty of room for discussion on university campuses, I don't think it is something that should always be widely talked about and discussed between circles that solely pertain to celebrating culture and heritage.
>
> – John

John's point holds true to a few of the students that I interviewed. Multicultural organizations have not been places for celebrating heritage, but a place for mobilizing liberal students and students with similar ideologies. A senior, Sandra, also discussed how in the Black community

at the school, there is a perspective of "us" versus "them," Blacks versus Whites. This phenomenon increases divisiveness in the Black community on campus, limiting opportunities for cross-cultural conversations and movements. Sandra elaborates by explaining that Black students take microaggressions too seriously, like when a professor calls all the Black students the same name in a class. She explains herself: "I believe in exploiting things and using them to your benefit, so that you can get where you need to go. So, yeah there are a couple things that you need to take, like sharing the same name in a science class, but if that professor is the best teaching that course, then okay, I'll be Sandra. I'll be whoever you want me to be as long as I get my grade in the class." This is an illustration of a kind of passivity in action. While Sandra decides to use moments of "microaggressions" to manipulate the system for her own eventual success, other Black students would feel the need to act against moments like this and try to fight for their own judgement of equality.

Multicultural organizations are identified as intensely political spaces, which supports my third hypothesis. But these dynamic spaces also cause divisions among members of the same racial/ethnic group and isolate other students who may want to be active in the organizations.

Discussion

A collegiate campus acts as a microcosm of the real world. But, admittance into this social world is confined by age, admission into the school, socioeconomic status, and various other variables. Students, just like every other member of society, are affected by the rules and politics of the country. And students, each with their own background knowledge, enter a diverse and dynamic space in which they are expected to interact with people with a wide array of thoughts and preconceptions of reality.

Students, in general, do not participate in political or political activities at an outstanding rate while on campus. An individual's participation in a multicultural organization will most likely affect how politically engaged they are on campus. As seen in the regression models, students who participate in identity-based organizations, such as women's groups, racial/ethnic groups, and LGBTQ groups, are the most likely to engage in political discussions and political action, which supports my third hypothesis. These students are more inclined to have discussions in regard to political topics and mobilize through these organizations to serve their campus in any way they see fit. As seen in the interviews, this phenomenon may occur because these multicultural groups have become rallying sites for political action. As John, the Hispanic Male who identified himself as politically Moderate, said, there is a perception that these multicultural organizations have become places where liberal students in a specific identity group can join together and discuss their issues. In this way, students are able to bolster their already set perceptions of the world and attempt to mobilize and protest for what they deem it to be necessary in their community.

College campuses, in this way, become sites where liberal voices are heard. The more liberal students are in these multicultural organizations, the more liberal students are more

politically active on campus than conservative and moderate students. This support for my second hypothesis was verified in both the quantitative and qualitative sections of this study. In both tables for political action and political discussion, conservative students and moderate students were statistically less likely to engage in these behaviors than Liberal students. Within the qualitative interviews, it was perceived that college campuses supported the liberal agenda by both more moderate students and liberal students. For example, for the student Colin, liberal movements, such as a Black Lives Matter protest or a walk out for DACA students, did not seem to get as much push back as more conservative movements or speakers, such as Milo Yiannopoulos. In addition to this, the actions of the Republican group on campus stood out to a lot of the students, but this was because the activity of a more conservative group was perceived as out of the ordinary. Liberal students on college campuses, in this way, are able to mobilize and become more politically active because their political activity is normalized.

The support necessary to uphold my first hypothesis is mostly unfounded. Participation in multicultural organizations, as seen in Tables 9 and 10, is more highly and significantly correlated to higher levels of political engagement than an individual just having a particular racial, gender, or sexual orientation. While students who identified as LGBQ or female were more inclined to engage in political action, their coefficients massively decreased as participation in these multicultural organizations was controlled. Additionally, different racial groups act differently. While Latinx students are less likely than white students to engage in political action, Asian students are less likely than white students to have political discussions. Marginalized groups, as a whole, are not inclined to be more politically active. There is more nuance in these identity statuses that determine whether students will choose to act politically while on campus. As seen in the interviews, students navigate their political landscapes due to

their own comfortability and their need to be understood as themselves. All of the students explained to me that politics are personal as they affect how individuals are able to navigate the world around them. But, the means of rectifying politics or their social world ultimately depends on the individual and their perception of reality, not solely based on identity categorization.

Overall, the exchange of political ideas occurs by happenstance. Students discuss politics with those who are close to them and those who they feel the most comfortable with when trying to be understood. And in this way, the "political echo chamber" becomes an increased issue and students are not being challenged in the ways that they wish to when having political conversations. But as shown in the qualitative data, some students are seeking out paths to meet new people and have productive conversations with those who think differently than themselves.

This study is not without its own problems. The quantitative data set is a bit old and does not entirely reflect our current political climate. Politics and political alignments radically and quickly shift, especially because the American political landscape changes every two to four years. The MSL also lacks a bit of the depth that I would like to find in this type of study. First, the MSL utilizes a Likert-like Scale that offers only a vague understanding of student attitudes. Some students are not going to differentiate between the levels, for example of "Agree" and "Strongly Disagree" or "Sometimes" and "Often." These level differences are subjective and may cause students to either overestimate or underestimate how often they may act out a certain behavior or their attitudes on concepts. Second, the study doesn't really examine voting behavior, which I think is an important element to examine when looking at political behavior. Finally, the study doesn't allow me to identify which responses comes from a specific type of school. The environment of a religious school is different a from a state school, which is also different from a private school. Understanding these different environments and the students that

attend these different types of schools is essential to creating a full picture of how politics function on college campuses.

Within the qualitative method, the lack of conservative students doesn't really permit me to make a large generalization of campus political dynamics. The interviews also only allowed me to examine one type of college. One campus culture does not provide enough context to understand political engagement on a universal scale. Each collegiate institution has its own political climate and requires its own changes to make it work for the students on the campus.

Social desirability also becomes a problem in the creation of this project. The students, especially in the face-to-face in-depth interviews, may be self-conscious when asked about their political motivations. This was seen with the one student who was nervous and worried about who would eventually listen to the recording of his interview. Especially in this political moment, individuals have the need to appear understanding of other people's opinions and thoughts. The country is in a very divisive place and as the students said, understanding each other and losing our assumptions of other people is an important part of putting the country back together.

If anything, this study provides a framework to look at political engagement on campuses across the United States. If given the opportunity to expand this paper, it would be beneficial to select institutions through cluster samplings by region. This would provide a wide variety of schools with various student bodies. In the future, I would really like to understand how language and what language is utilized in political discussions. It is as important to understand where and how individuals are having political conversations, as it is to know more intimately what happens in these interactions. I would also like to see how groups of differing opinions, for example, a Republican group and Democrat group, would interact with each other during a

formalized debate on a topic such as, prison reform, abortion, or police brutality. I could pose questions to the groups and analyze how the students navigate political conversations with others who think very differently than themselves. And following these focus group sessions, and using the same questionnaire guide as my thesis, I could individually ask the same participants in the focus groups about other political discussions they have participated in. This format should allow me to see if people are, as they say, "practicing what they preach" about being open-minded and objective during political conversations with people of opposing opinions.

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Appendix I

How would you characterize your political views?

Political Ideology	Frequency	Percent
Very Liberal	4257	8.9
Liberal	13909	29.0
Moderate	19458	40.6
Conservative	8852	18.5
Very Conservative	1417	3.0
Total	47893	100.0

Table 1

Gender (with transgender as missing)

	Frequency	Percent
Male	16672	34.8
Female	31005	64.7
Total	47677	99.5
Missing	216	.5
Total	47893	100.0

Table 2

Sexual Orientation

	Frequency	Percent
Heterosexual	43739	91.7
Bisexual, Gay/Lesbian, Queer, Questioning	3938	8.3
Total	47677	100.0

Table 3

Race

	Frequency	Percent
White/Caucasian	33424	69.8
Middle Eastern/Northern African	312	.7
African American/Black	2189	4.6
American Indian/Alaska Native	111	.2
Asian American	3400	7.1
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	79	.2
Latino/Hispanic	2576	5.4
Multiracial	4681	9.8
Race Not Listed	1121	2.3
Total	47893	100.0

Table 4

Political Action

	Frequency	Percent
Low	23107	48.2
Medium	18961	39.6
High	5772	12.1
Total	47840	99.9
Missing	53	0.1
Total	47893	100.0

Table 5

Political Discussion

	Frequency	Percent
Low	5934	12.4
Medium	27621	57.7
High	14315	29.9
Total	47870	100.0
Missing	23	0.0
Total	47893	100.0

Table 6

Attitudes on Political Discussion

	Frequency	Percent
More Inclined to Strongly Disagree	52	0.1
More Inclined to Disagree	152	0.3
More Inclined to be Neutral	2736	5.7
More Inclined to Agree	23571	49.2
More Inclined to Strongly Agree	21315	44.5
Total	47826	99.9
System	67	0.1
Total	47893	100.0

Table 7

Attitudes on Political Behavior

	Frequency	Percent
More Inclined to Strongly Disagree	75	0.2
More Inclined to Disagree	375	0.8
More Inclined to be Neutral	5299	11.1
More Inclined to Agree	24305	50.7
More Inclined to Strongly Agree	17748	37.1
Total	47802	99.8
Missing	91	0.2
Total	47893	100.0

Table 8

Analysis of Student Political Engagement in Political Action

	Model 1A	Model 1B	Model 1C	Model 2A	Model 2B	Model 3A	Model 3B	Model 4
Identity								
Female	0.830***	--	--	--	--	--	--	0.455***
	(0.053)	--	--	--	--	--	--	(0.050)
Black	--	1.479***	--	--	1.169***	--	- 0.058	- 0.146
	--	(0.119)	--	--	(0.118)	--	(0.116)	(0.115)
Asian	--	0.221*	--	--	0.007	--	- 0.787***	- 0.830***
	--	(0.097)	--	--	(0.097)	--	(0.094)	(0.094)
Latinx	--	- 0.070	--	--	- 0.368**	--	- 1.038***	- 1.156***
	--	(0.111)	--	--	(0.110)	--	(0.106)	(0.106)
Multiracial	--	0.699***	--	--	0.514***	--	- 0.105	- 0.167*
	--	(0.084)	--	--	(0.084)	--	(0.081)	(0.081)
LGBQ	--	--	1.930***	--	--	--	--	0.015
	--	--	(0.089)	--	--	--	--	(0.090)
Political Ideology								
Moderate	--	--	--	- 1.623***	- 1.606***	--	--	- 1.076***
	--	--	--	(0.056)	(0.056)	--	--	(0.055)
Conservative	--	--	--	- 2.053***	- 1.996***	--	--	- 1.276***
	--	--	--	(0.067)	(0.068)	--	--	(0.067)
Network								
Multicultural group	--	--	--	--	--	4.580***	4.721***	4.350***
	--	--	--	--	--	(0.065)	(0.067)	(0.070)
Constant	7.003***	7.412***	7.398***	8.667***	8.560***	6.823***	6.929***	7.416***
	(0.043)	(0.030)	(0.026)	(0.040)	(0.045)	(0.026)	(0.029)	(0.058)
N	16018	46223	46223	46223	46223	46215	46215	46010
R^2	0.005	0.005	0.10	0.026	0.029	0.097	0.100	0.109
F	247.376***	52.716***	468.143***	619.78***	231.760***	4959.744***	1025.711***	627.514***

Table 9 * p < .05, ** p< .01, *** p < .001

Analysis of Student Political Engagement in Political Discussion

	Model 1A	Model 1B	Model 1C	Model 2A	Model 2B	Model 3A	Model 3B	Model 4
Identity								
Female	0.361***	--	--	--	--	--	--	0.151***
	(0.037)	--	--	--	--	--	--	(0.036)
Black	--	0.757***	--	--	0.529***	--	0.078	0.007
	--	(0.084)	--	--	(0.083)	--	(0.084)	(0.084)
Asian	--	- 0.151*	--	--	- 0.307***	--	- 0.595***	- 0.634***
	--	(0.069)	--	--	(0.068)	--	(0.068)	(0.068)
Latinx	--	0.302***	--	--	0.083	--	- 0.126	- 0.233**
	--	(0.078)	--	--	(0.077)	--	(0.077)	(0.077)
Multiracial	--	0.947***	--	--	0.811***	--	0.591***	0.527***
	--	(0.059)	--	--	(0.059)	--	(0.059)	(0.059)
LGBQ	--	--	1.368***	--	--	--	--	0.395***
	--	--	(.063)	--	--	--	--	(0.065)
Political Ideology								
Moderate	--	--	--	- 1.249***	- 1 .230***	--	--	- 0.985***
	--	--	--	(0.40)	(0.040)	--	--	(0.040)
Conservative	--	--	--	- 1.520***	- 1.472***	--	--	- 1.139***
	--	--	--	(0.047)	(0.048)	--	--	(0.049)
Network								
Multicultural group	--	--	--	--	--	2.068***	2.087	1.741***
	--	--	--	--	--	(0.047)	(0.049)	(0.051)
Constant	8.437***	8.542***	8.561***	9.514***	9.406***	8.342***	8.329***	8.916***
	(0.30)	(0.021)	(0.19)	(0.028)	(0.031)	(0.019)	(0.021)	(0.042)
N	46041	46247	46247	46247	46247	46239	46239	46033
R^2	0.002	0.007	0.10	0.30	0.35	0.04	0.045	0.063
F	93.354***	84.314***	473.848***	710.903***	281.362***	1948.646***	432.775***	344.318***

Table 10 * p < .05, ** p< .01, *** p < .001

Appendix II

In-Depth Interview Questions

1. Why did you decide to come to Emory?
2. How would you describe your social circle/your friend group in general?
3. How did you find these people?
4. How would you describe the political atmosphere on campus?
5. What are some of the most pressing issues on campus now?
6. What you think of the Young Democrats of Emory?
7. What do you think of Emory College Republicans?
8. What do you think about multicultural groups (ex. Black Student Alliance, Latino Student Organization) on campus?
9. Do you belong to any organizations on campus?
10. How did you find/join these organizations?
11. Have you left any groups on campus?
12. What do you think counts as political protest?
    a. Do you engage?
    b. Why or why not?
13. Currently, what are the major issues facing our country?
14. Are college campuses adequate places to discuss these national issues?
15. What are the major issues facing college campuses in America?
16. Where are you having most of your conversations on politics?
17. Tell me about a time you had an uncomfortable conversation about politics outside of class.
18. Tell me about a time you had a productive conversation about politics outside of class.
19. What would a productive conversation about politics look like to you?
20. Is there anything stopping these conversations?
21. Are politics personal?
22. Do you think you are ever able to separate your political ideas from your identity?

Demographic Questions

1. What is your year?
    a. Sophomore
    b. Junior
    c. Senior
2. Gender?
    a. Man
    b. Transgender/Gender Non-Conforming
    c. Woman
3. Indicate your broad racial group membership.
    a. White/Caucasian
    b. Middle Eastern/Northern African
    c. African-American/Black
    d. American Indian/Alaskan Native
    e. Asian American
    f. Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
    g. Latinx/Hispanic
    h. Multiracial
    i. Race Not Listed
4. What is your sexual orientation?
    a. Asexual
    b. Bisexual
    c. Gay/Lesbian
    d. Heterosexual
    e. Pansexual
    f. Queer
    g. Questioning/Unsure
    h. Preferred Response Not Listed
5. How would you characterize your political views?
    a. Very Liberal
    b. Liberal
    c. Moderate
    d. Conservative
    e. Very Conservative

Appendix III

Statements Regarding Attitudes on Political Action

(Response Options: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree)

- I am willing to devote the time and energy to things that are important to me.
- It is important to me to act on my beliefs.
- I can make a difference when I work with others on a task.
- My actions are consistent with my values.
- I believe I have responsibilities to my community.
- I work with others to make my communities better places.
- I participate in activities that contribute to the common good.
- I value opportunities that allow me to contribute to my community.
- It is important to me that I play an active role in my communities.
- I believe my work has a greater purpose for the larger community.

Statements Regarding Attitudes on Political Discussion

(Response Options: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree)

- I am open to others' idea.
- Hearing differences in opinions enriches my thinking.
- I respect opinions other than my own.
- I actively listen to what others have to say.
- I share my ideas with others.
- I am comfortable expressing myself.

Statements Regarding Behavior towards Political Action

(Response Options: Never, Once, Sometimes, Often)

- Acted to benefit the common good or protect the environment.
- Communicated with campus or community leaders about a pressing concern.
- Took action in the community to address a social or environmental problem.
- Worked with others to make the campus or community a better place.
- Acted to raise awareness about a campus, community, or global problem.
- Took part in a protest, rally, march, or demonstration.
- Worked with others to address social inequality.

Statements Regarding Behavior towards Political Discussion

(Response Options: Never, Sometimes, Often, Very Often)

- Talked about different lifestyles/customs.
- Held discussions with students whose personal values were very different from your own.
- Discussed major social issues such as peace, human rights, and justice.
- Discussed your views about multiculturalism and diversity.
- Held discussions with students whose political opinions were very different from your own.