Student Affairs Information and Research Office

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"Safety and Silence: Conversations about Race/Ethnicity Among Students of Different Backgrounds": 2011-2012 Undergraduate Research Partnership Initiative Report

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The Student Affairs Information and Research Office (SAIRO) is the research and assessment office within UCLA's Student Affairs organization. The mission of SAIRO is to support the learning and development of the whole student by providing reliable, timely and useful information about students and their experiences; by developing the capacity of Student Affairs and other stakeholders to collect, interpret, and utilize data to enhance the quality of students' educational experience and environment; and by helping Student Affairs units assess and document the effectiveness of their programs and practices.

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Executive Summary

The 2011-2012 Undergraduate Research Partnership Initiative Report (URPI) study explored the nature and quality of conversations between individuals of different racial/ethnic backgrounds at UCLA. A team of ten undergraduates conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with undergraduate peers that explored the extent to which conversations between individuals of different racial/ethnic backgrounds occur, where such conversations occur, as well as the quality of these interactions. Findings regarding the nature and quality of conversations on campus are divided into six key content areas: perceptions of diversity on campus, cross-racial interactions, locations of conversations, motivations for participating in conversations, quality of conversations, and recommendations for change made by study participants.

Interview data revealed that while some students believe UCLA is diverse, with a wide representation of students from different backgrounds, including racial/ethnic backgrounds, some students came to note limited and sometimes hostile experiences with others of different backgrounds. While some cross-racial experiences resulted in shared learning and deeper understanding of someone from a different racial/ethnic background, such interactions were not common. The students identified individual factors, such as the need to feel comfortable discussing such issues, as important factors which mediate whether

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conversations across difference were possible. Additionally, characteristics of the environment, such as the extent to which others in the environment believe race/ethnicity should or should not be discussed also mediated the extent to which conversations happened. Ultimately, students of different racial/ethnic identities generally are not meaningfully engaged with one another, and students said that in order for this to happen, much needs to change within individuals and the campus environment.

Background

The Undergraduate Research Partnership Initiative (URPI), is a research collaboration between Student Affairs Information and Research Office (SAIRO) researchers and UCLA undergraduates. The purpose of URPI is to meaningfully engage UCLA students in the collection of institutional data and produce qualitative research that will identify characteristics of a positive campus climate for students of all backgrounds inclusive of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation and gender identity, socioeconomic status, and disability. The initiative provides participants the opportunity to receive six academic units over the course of a completed project through the Student Research Program (SRP). Undergraduate participants gain valuable first-hand experience in designing a research study as well as collecting and analyzing qualitative data. Ultimately, SAIRO's collaboration with undergraduate researchers is an attempt to foster a mutually beneficial relationship in which students' voices are heard and incorporated into the working body of information used in Student Affairs and the broader UCLA community.

The 2011-2012 URPI study explored the nature and quality of conversations between individuals of different racial/ethnic backgrounds at UCLA. A team of ten undergraduates conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with undergraduate peers which explored the extent to which conversations between individuals of different racial/ethnic backgrounds occur, where these conversations occur, as well as the quality of such interactions. Additionally, the undergraduate research team was able to capture candid information from peers on how to improve opportunities for meaningful dialogue between individuals of different backgrounds. The research team was comprised of students from varying social identities and academic backgrounds (see Table 1).

Table 1. Undergraduate Research Team Demographics

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Race/Ethnicity	Asian/Vietnamese, Black, Caucasian/White (2), Chicana/Mexican-American (2), Latina (2), Pakistani, Filipino-American, Salvadoran
Major*	Asian American Studies (2), Chicana/Chicano Studies, Development Studies (2), English, International Development Studies, Political Science, Sociology (3), Women's Studies (2)
Year in School	2nd, 3rd (3), 4th (6)
Gender Identity	Female (8), Male (2)
Entry Status	Direct Entry (8), Transfer (2)
* There are numerically more majors than research team members because some members were double majoring.	

Methodology

A qualitative study design was used to explore answers to key research questions. Semi-structured interviews provided undergraduate researchers a scripted protocol with the flexibility to re-phrase and ask important follow-up questions in a conversational format. The fact that researchers themselves were undergraduates allowed study participants to share their opinions about the campus environment in ways that they may not have divulged to a campus administrator, SAIRO researcher, or in a standard survey format. Throughout the course of the academic year, undergraduate research team members were prepared to enter the field by SAIRO staff through a combination of weekly meetings and assignments designed to enhance their understanding and ability to conduct qualitative research. During Fall quarter, the research team solidified the design, methods, and questions and ultimately received approval to conduct the study from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Additionally, researchers underwent Intergroup Relations (IGR) training by Student Affairs staff before conducting and transcribing a first round of interviews.

During Winter quarter, research team members each conducted an additional 1-2 interviews. Individually, team members wrote analytical memos reflecting on the research process while collectively, the team analyzed transcripts and developed a coding schema that captured trends and/or themes across the interviews. The process of analysis continued in Spring quarter during which team members continued to identify themes in transcripts and refined the coding schema based on the guiding research questions.

A total of 21 interviews were conducted and analyzed. Researchers made a concerted effort to interview a diverse set of students, both in terms of social identities and undergraduate experiences. All demographic

information was self-reported. Names of participants were removed, as was any other potentially identifying information, to protect participant privacy. See Table 2 for demographic backgrounds of interview participants.

Findings

Key findings were divided into six theme areas. *Perceptions of diversity* at UCLA referred to the extent to which UCLA was perceived as diverse by participants and how those perceptions served to mediate the potential for conversation. *Cross-racial interaction* looked at previous experiences that contributed to or hindered further conversations between individuals of different racial/ethnic backgrounds. The theme of *location* described the important spaces on campus that may foster such conversations. *Motivation* explored the reasons why conversations occur between people of the same and different social identities. Multiple factors such as the extent to which students felt safe to engage in discussions of difference influenced the overall *Quality of conversations*. Finally, the *recommendations* section offered a range of suggestions from study participants regarding ways to implement change on a campus.

I. Perceptions of Diversity at UCLA

Interviewees seemed to hold one of the following four perspectives of the UCLA environment: 1)UCLA is diverse, 2) UCLA is diverse but experiences with diversity is limited, 3) UCLA is not diverse, and 4) UCLA is not diverse and experiences are negative. Interviews often began with the student describing UCLA as diverse, meaning that there is a wide representation of students from different backgrounds, including racial/ethnic

backgrounds. However, as the conversation progressed some students came to note limited and sometimes hostile experiences with others of different backgrounds.

Table 2. Interviewee Demographics

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Major	Anthropology, Asian-American Studies, Biochemistry, Chemistry (3), Chicano/a Studies, Communications, Ecology, Behavior and Evolution, Economics, International Development Studies (2), Mathematics, Mechanical Engineering, Philosophy, Psychology (2), Sociology (2), World Arts and Cultures
Year in School	1st (1), 3rd (8), 4th (11), 5th (1)
Gender Identity	Female (10), Gender Queer (1), Male (10),
Entry Status	Direct Entry (15) Transfer (6)

Others denied that UCLA is diverse and also expressed limited or negative experiences in this environment that is touted as diverse. Ultimately, even when students believed that UCLA was a somewhat diverse environment, they came to describe an environment that was at best limited in engagement with diversity, and at worst a racially hostile environment

Structural Diversity

While some said that UCLA was structurally diverse, others noted the disproportionality of some racial/ethnic groups on campus. For example, one student said:

> I know that UCLA boasts about its diversity. I don't know the statistics, but it might be the [most] diverse UC campus. However, once you're on the campus and you attend class, it's really not that diverse. The majorities are Asian and Asian-Americans and Caucasians, while there's a little bit of Blacks, Hispanics, and Pacific Islanders (T4B, p.7, 7-10).

Another student adamantly stated that UCLA is not diverse and expressed the isolation of being the only African-American student in many classes.

> I think, here it's very hard especially when you're in class, and you don't see, you're the only one. And then on campus, if you see walking around and far in between that you see another person that looks like you but again "WE'RE DIVERSITY!" You lying, it's not diversity… 9 times out of 10 I say if I'm in a regular lecture hall with 200 and something people in there, and I'm the only person of color and they get to talking about something else I probably won't feel comfortable (T10A, p.12, 24-26 and p, 13, 11-13).

When asked to comment on whether she agreed with the perception that UCLA is diverse, one student similarly expressed a feeling that the experience of diversity is limited:

I believe it definitely depends on the person and their surroundings…I think UCLA is kind of diverse but not completely, which then results in people grouping themselves in different organizations and cliques that mainly have to do with their background which is where I think people talk about race the most (T6B, p.1, 19-24).

This student suggests that the presence of individuals from different backgrounds results not in cross-racial experiences, but more often in the formation of cliques and a segregated environment in which conversations happen among those of a shared identity. One student indicated that the campus environment is somewhat diverse in that there are students representing different backgrounds. However, he also reported being the target of negative remarks. That this is an environment in which members of a racial group may need to defend themselves supports previous comments from participants that the campus is divided into distinct racial/ethnic groups and that interactions between can be negative.

I would say it's average, the cultural environment, I don't feel unwelcomed, but there have been instances where I've been singled out but I have people to back me up. But it's not like I've been singled out for racial remarks and I haven't been able to defend myself, you know? I wouldn't really care in terms of that-so I wouldn't say it's non-existent. I mean, people do hang out with people of similar backgrounds but they also intermingle and I guess there's diversity in that aspect. It's not great but it's not bad either. I feel like UCLA is one of the more conservative UCs and culture is not a topic you really touch on. It's like those taboo topics that you don't really touch on like race and religion…[on] a conservative campus there are those taboos that you don't bring up unless it's an academic setting or something like that (T6A, p.5, 29-36).

Whether negative or positive, the consensus among participants was that conversations with individuals of different racial/ethnic backgrounds are indeed not a normalized experience. Students consistently explained that such conversations are not often held on campus, and this is largely due to the perception that UCLA is divided by race/ethnicity. Ultimately, the perception of UCLA as segregated by racial/ethnic background mediated the extent to which students felt that they could have a conversation with students from different backgrounds.

Conversely, racial divisions on campus provided some students the comfort to speak to those who were racially similar. This was particularly true for students of color who found themselves discussing issues of race/ethnicity with those who were also members of communities of color. For example, one student said:

I am Latino and I mainly talk to other Latinos about issues that I feel that they feel affect Latinos, but I don't think I've ever really spoken to someone who was Caucasian or someone who's Asian or someone from a race other than Latino…I am in a Latino fraternity and I am usually around people of my same culture, my same background and ethnicity so I think it's easier to talk to them about issues like that (T6A, p.1, 14-20).

It was clear that students interviewed felt that UCLA was not an environment in which positive experiences with diversity abounded. Rather, most students acknowledged diversity but then tempered their responses by describing how their experiences with diversity have been limited or hostile. Others outright disagreed with

the perception that UCLA is a diverse environment and also shared limited or negative experiences. Ultimately, the campus environment seemed to play a key role in the extent to which students felt comfortable interacting with individuals of different racial/ethnic backgrounds.

II. Cross-Racial Interactions

Interviewees encountered a range of cross-racial and cross-ethnic experiences. These experiences ranged from negative to positive. Some felt such experiences resulted in positive gains while others came away from these experiences feeling hurt or upset. Unfortunately, the majority were negative experiences. These negative experiences then mediated the extent to which conversations about racial/ethnic differences were possible.

Positive Cross-Racial Interactions

The undergraduate research team defined positive interactions as experiences which interviewees felt were meaningful (i.e. they believed that they learned something valuable). It is important to note that these conversations only occurred in environments where students felt safe, which will be discussed further in the next section. Ultimately, conversations of difference that occurred and resulted in positive outcomes were those which moved beyond superficial discussions and cultural celebrations. It should be noted that White students more often reported positive racial interactions and students of color more often reported negative cross-racial interactions.

Negative Cross-Racial Interactions

The majority of students reported negative cross-racial interactions in the UCLA environment. Students described how negative cross-racial interactions ultimately mediated the extent to which they felt comfortable having future cross-racial interactions. Negative cross-racial interactions were characterized as interactions that left the interviewees upset or hurt. Interviewees expressed that the most common reasons for these negative interactions were because they felt discriminated against because of their racial identity. For example, one of the interviewees--a Latino male who is part of a Latino fraternity--described his experience while playing football against a fraternity that was predominately white. He said:

> No, not unless it's racist comments. We encounter that all the time. I remember we had a football tournament. It was our Latino fraternity against, it was in a...Inter-Fraternity Council, which was mostly all white-dominated fraternities. And I say white-dominated because the majority of the members are white. Yeah, there was an incident where they said, "You act like we're playing for all the burritos in the world." And of course that got us mad. And it's ironic that they were a Jewish fraternity and it just struck me as ignorant for them to say racist comments when they themselves were subject to a whole genocide. And I don't know, for them to put down another race or another ethnicity, it's just mind-boggling sometimes (T4B, p7, 28-36).

The discrimination that interviewees encountered occurred in two forms: obvious stereotypes or microaggressions. Microaggressions are subtle insults that may not be perceived as offensive at first, such as the comment about burritos in the above example. These microaggressions, and even some stereotypes, may often come from a place of ignorance. The person committing them may believe that they are only being

funny, or even paying a compliment, as in the following example from a Mexican-American female:

> I went to a party once and I was talking to this guy, and I think he was Persian, and he asked me what I was. And I told him I was Mexican-American, and then he told me, what did he say? He said, "I don't believe you because Mexican-Americans are" no he said, "Because Mexicans are ugly." And that really, I felt that was a really negative thing to say and I know it was a sort of backwards compliment, but that really offended me. And that was a negative ethnic encounter (T4A, p.8, 12-17).

However well-intentioned, these instances of microaggressions left the interviewees upset, and prevented them from pursuing more cross-racial interactions. In other words, in order to have more positive, in-depth cross-racial interactions, people must acknowledge the hurtful nature of microaggressions and learn why they are hurtful. For example, one Pilipino-American female described how knowledge of her racial background and it's subordinate position in history to White Americans, resulted in discomfort in talking to them. She said:

> I don't think that race and ethnicity is something that has been necessarily considered an everyday or popular culture topic that people feel comfortable with. Especially if you're with…for me…my personal experience of my race or my ethnicity or my feelings of privileged or being oppressed or colonized is not something that I talk about with people who I considered more privileged or people who I identify as White Americans or Caucasian (T8A, p.3, 6-11).

Colorblindness

A prevailing reason conversations of racial and ethnic difference did not occur was based on a colorblind attitude many interviewees expressed. This idea, in the context of this study, is based upon the belief that UCLA is a place for academics and not necessarily an environment that should allow for dialogue about race. Several interviewees expressed the opinion that race should not be discussed at all, because it is not a relevant issue. This colorblind attitude often hindered in-depth conversations from occurring. One example of a student with this colorblind attitude is a Pilipino-American male interviewee. When asked about why students did not talk about their differences, he said:

> I guess for me I definitely just all caught up in school like focusing in on my studies and where I want to get to in the future that I kinda often overlook what's kinda going on around me. You know, like I really don't pay attention to world issues… if something is going on in the news, I have no idea about it. You know, like "Obama set out this new policy!" I'm like "oh…well I have no idea what's going on." Like there's this war in the East and like "oh, sorry. I don't have an opinion about it." Um, I guess its just like I'm not worldly educated cause I'm so focused on what I'm doing at the moment with my studies. (T8B, p.5, 8-14).

This student seemed to interpret racial/ethnic conversations as political ones, and said that he shied away from such heated, albeit important, discussions. This interpretation of issues of race/ethnicity on campus as being related to other political issues was common. Other times, students overtly said that issues of diversity were simply not important. One Mexican-American male suggested that the campus is divided and that is how it

shall stay, regardless of diversity requirements:

> I'm a south campus major and I don't really care about that stuff anyways, I mean maybe
> the upper division sociology people are really passionate and really care but I think it's
> mostly because you have to do something so lets get it out of the way type of thing, and
> maybe someone who is in those types of classes and upper-division classes are passionate
> about the subjects and do passionately talk about it to make a difference. But for the
> majority of the UCLA campus, they have to do things like that because they are
> requirements, not because they genuinely think "Oh I really want to know more about it."
> No, it's more like "I'm here at UCLA to get an education," so you don't really care so
> much about other people and too it's like you already have the group of people you like
> and you hang out with, who accept you and you don't really want to know about anybody
> else (T6A, p.5, 11-20).

The perspective that UCLA is not an environment in which students should talk about race/ethnicity was expressed both implicitly (i.e. students trying to use race-neutral language or relating race to other political issues) and explicitly (i.e. I don't care about it and I don't think others should care about it) by study participants. This colorblind ideology along with experiences with discrimination and microaggressions, seemed to mediate the extent to which meaningful conversations were possible or even seen as desirable for individuals interviewed. Many described a need for safe spaces in which such interactions could take place, the definition of which is discussed further in the following section.

III. Location: Where Do Conversations Occur?

Students identified several locations where conversations across different racial/ethnic backgrounds occurred: 1) classroom settings, 2) within registered UCLA student organizations, and 3) residence halls. Locations were described as both physical and conceptual. Places where individuals of different racial/ethnic backgrounds could discuss their differences were considered "safe," (i.e. environments in which individuals felt they could talk freely). What follows is a detailed description of students' comments regarding safe spaces, and some of the mediating factors about a location that shape whether or not conversations occur.

Classroom Setting

Participants indicated that social science courses, particularly ethnic studies classes, engaged students in the "realities of racism" and social issues consistently perceived as "taboo" (T9A, 1, 29). Ethnic studies courses were described as providing students with a curriculum that informed students' understanding of "real issues" (T9A, p.2, 33-34). Illustrating this was a Caucasian female who described her experience taking a GE cluster during her freshman year centered on interracial dynamics as "intriguing" and "eye opening to institutionalized racism" (T5A, p.3, 5-7). This participant also described her experience with this particular GE cluster as having a direct influence on the type of student led advocacy in which she is currently involved (T5A, p.3, 7-8). Ethnic studies courses were seen as spaces where conversations about race and racial differences were welcomed and encouraged.

However, to some participants, while the classroom setting provided opportunities to engage in conversations about race and racial differences, conversations were seen as "too structured" and "not genuine enough" (T6B,

p.4, 31-33). In addition, conversations were seen as solely "based on what the professors want[ed] to talk about" rather than engaging the entire class in a true dialogue (T6B, p.4, 31-33). One participant stated that this was largely due to the fact that there was a "power hierarchy going on" where students did not feel welcomed to be completely honest about their opinions, and feared repercussions in terms of grading (T2A, p.9, 10-11). Essentially, while classroom settings were seen as having great potential to engage students in conversations about race and racial differences, the level of engagement between students was sometimes limited, and faculty played an important mediating role in the level of engagement that occurred.

As a counterpoint to constraints on classroom discussion, another participant who was white and female stated that the classroom setting became a space where she had the opportunity to talk about her racial identity when she enrolled in an intergroup dialogue peer facilitator-training course (CHS160/EDUC263). She stated that "IGR provides you that safe space, for you to discuss, you know, your personal struggles" (9B, p.3, 8-11). Intergroup Dialogue was also described as the "exception to the rule" because according to her, "you don't get that kind of discussion in normal conversations with friends or teachers …" (9B, p.3, 9-11). Enrolling in the course was understood as rewarding because she could finally engage in a conversation around "race, discrimination and how you grew up," which according to her were issues that never get addressed in other settings, "even among friends" (9B, p.3, 12-15). Lastly, this participant described the course as an "awesome opportunity" that "taught [her] to be more aware" and would recommend it to any student attending UCLA (9B, p.3,

Contrary to the social sciences and Intergroup Dialogue courses where students claimed conversations about race and racial differences were welcomed, students identified South Campus and/or STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) courses as locations where little to no conversation about race and difference occurred. According to one student, students pursuing STEM not only did "not care" about racial difference, but believe conversations about race were "irrelevant" because they were "too concerned about getting into med school" (T9A, p.3, 17-20).

Ultimately, the classroom setting provided opportunities for students to engage in conversation around racial differences, but they were seen as limited due to the structure of the classroom, the discipline, and whether students perceived the space as "safe."

Student Groups

Students identified student groups as spaces where conversations about race and racial difference occurred with the most frequency. In addition, while some participants stated that they believed student groups were the reason for a perceived division among students along racial/ethnic lines that prevents conversations from occurring, others stated that student groups provided space for the most in-depth and productive conversations about race. Interview findings do seem to support the notion that student group interaction primarily centers on conversations *about* difference rather than conversations *across* difference.

For example, some participants expressed that student groups allowed people to "stick to their own race" and never "get challenged" by others from different racial and ethnic groups (T9A, p.7, 1-2). However, some students expressed that such spaces were particularly important for underrepresented racial groups because they provided them the emotional support and resources needed to successfully navigate the university. For

example, one student of color said that he consistently felt isolated and "uncomfortable" among a large White and Asian student body, which prompted him to join a Latino fraternity (T4B, p.15, 1). Joining a fraternity comprised primarily of Latinos was important for him because it enabled him to have a space where he could be surrounded by people whom he could "trust and go to with [his] problems" (T4B, p.15, 4). He said it provided him with a "relaxed state of mind" because he knew "if something happened" he had people who supported him (T4B, p.15, 7-8). Ultimately, belonging to a student organization with others from his cultural and racial/ethnic group provided him with the support system he needed to alleviate feelings of isolation while attending an institution defined by limited diversity.

Some participants reflected on the need for student groups to come together and discuss racial differences. One participant reflected on the lack of diversity within her sorority and said, I'm the only Indian…and I'm only half [Indian]…there isn't much diversity (T9B, p.7, 30-31). When describing conversations about race and racial differences this participant went on to say of race and racial difference, "it's never been an issue, or topic that's been brought up. I think it should be" (T9B, p.8, 19-21). She concluded her interview by saying, "people are just so unaware, and I mean specially with how diverse this campus is, [we] don't spend enough time discussing race" (T9B, p.11, 17-18).

Residence Halls

Interviewees stated that, due to structural diversity, UCLA residence halls provided numerous opportunities to engage in conversations across racial and ethnic differences. Structural diversity was seen as an important factor in engaging students in conversations across racial lines. For example, one participant of Armenian descent stated, "dorms are one of the most diverse places you'll get to experience," where "everyone is so different" (T7C, p.7, 6-8). Another student who identified as White said, "we definitely talk about culture and race…my roommate is Vietnamese, me and her talk about our cultures all the time, and we're very open to it, very accepting of it…my whole floor is so [accepting] about each other's own cultures and perspectives" (9B, p.1, 23-29). It is important to note that while diversity was seen as a positive attribute in residence halls, conversations were primarily limited to those between roommates. For example, the student who said that she engaged routinely in conversation about race and cultural differences with her roommate also stated that residence halls were spaces where "they [ORL] try to bring awareness to it [race] but there's never really a whole lot of discussion on it in general, if anything its between us" (9B, p.2, 10-11). In other words, this student acknowledged that due to structural diversity students engaged in conversations with their roommates but did not engage in more "general" discussions outside of their immediate circle of co-habitants.

Safe Spaces

Interviewees emphasized the need for "safe spaces" to be made available in order to engage in honest conversation about race and racial differences. Safe spaces were defined as both physical and conceptual, spaces that were characterized as non-threatening, all-inclusive, and honest. Interviewees said that having a facilitator who could create ground rules and ensure safety of spaces was important. One participant described a hope for a space where she could "express [her] feelings and opinions and not get judged" (T7C, p.4, 8-9). It is important to note that among students of color, classroom settings outside of ethnic studies were described as unsafe spaces to engage in honest discussions of race and racial difference. Several students of color highlighted the need for more safe classroom spaces so as to minimize academic isolation.

IV. Motivations: Why Do Conversations Occur?

Why do students of different racial/ethnic backgrounds engage in discussions of their differences? Or why do students of any background (similar or dissimilar) discuss their differences? The answers to these questions are related to the previous discussion of why these conversations do and do not happen in certain spaces. The main reasons why conversations occurred were because students felt they could comfortably express themselves, they were willing to be honest about their feelings, and they felt that honesty would be reciprocated. Also, conversations about race/ethnicity occurred between individuals of shared backgrounds as a way to provide support in light of negative experiences with other students. Lastly, conversations occurred in light of a major event on campus that seemed to highlight racial differences.

Honesty and Interest

Interviewees cited that they were more likely to talk about race/ethnicity if they felt others were being honest and were genuinely interested in learning. If they did not feel the honesty and sincerity reciprocated from the other person, they were more likely to not want to have this type of conversation. When one of the interviewees was asked "What would make students want to share honestly and openly about their differences?" the response was: "I feel like that's again something that has to do with personal comfort level. Even if there is an open forum for discussion, I feel like a lot of students won't want to open up because they'll still feel like there's some sort of pressure on them not to cause a disruption" (T1A, p.5, 13-23).

The responses given by the interviewees show that even when students are in a group or class in which the topic is race and ethnicity, the conversations will not happen if there is not a feeling of comfort with the other students present. Although there is a space for these conversations to happen, interviewees did not feel comfortable enough to share experiences or opinions with students whom they felt would not open up and be honest. Moreover, interviewees also felt these conversations *could* occur if they felt others would be honest and not judgmental. As one interviewee stated: "I feel because we're so focused on being politically correct...you're afraid to step on people's toes or say something that might be offensive or interpreted as wrong. So I think that's why it doesn't happen as much" (T4A, p.1, 25-28). If students could be open with one another, these conversations could occur more often than they do.

Comfort and Commonality

Interviewees were most likely to discuss race/ethnicity with people who shared a similar identity. This identity could be either race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. This commonality brought the students together and they felt more free to talk without running into any problems. An interviewee stated that, "because [they] probably have the same opinions…[they] won't run into conflict. And since it's a touchy subject, you're more likely to express what you really feel with your friends than with people you don't know very well" (T4A, p.1, 11-14). Another interviewee stated that similar upbringings made it "easier to connect with some people, with most people. As opposed to being immersed in a crowd where almost everyone has nothing to do with you" (T4B, p.13, 11-19).

Similarly, another stated that these conversations happen because…

> You're around a group of friends that are the same race as you. You rarely see talks of race

with different races occur...I've seen it sometimes, it just becomes awkward and personal. I took a seminar about race...It was a seminar, so it was a small class. You know, very diverse. You had all types of classes, but...even if we knew that we were talking about race in a diverse class it was still sometimes awkward...people still were hesitant to speak up. As opposed to...walking anywhere with a group of similar friends, with similar race. Then of course you talk about race as an issue. I do it all the time (T4B, p4, 1-9).

In addition to providing a sense of commonality among students of shared backgrounds, conversations were a way in which students supported one another. One participant talked about a negative cross-racial experience she had and she talked to her friends about it. The negative racial experience prompted dialogue about race with friends with whom she had a shared identity. She stated, "...when that whole thing happened when I told people it was sort of...a way to vent because I couldn't believe that it had happened to me. And then they sort of just reaffirmed my beliefs that some people are really ignorant and we need to be more open minded"(T4A, p.9, 2-23). Moreover, she stated that the conversations "start negatively because...there'll be a prejudice [they] share...and that's the reason [they] start talking about ethnic differences." (T4A, p.2, 4-8).

Major Events

Another reason why conversations about race and ethnicity occur is due to major events. On the UCLA campus, incidents targeting a specific racial/ethnic group (such as the Alexandra Wallace "Asians in the Library" video) caused an increase in dialogue. Many interviewees brought up this incident within their interview, demonstrating the large impact it had on the campus community as a whole, but also indicating the potential opportunity provided by such events for engaging students in meaningful ways.

V. Quality of Conversations

Taken together, the findings highlight a number of factors that mediate the ultimate quality and depth of conversations across racial/ethnic differences. For one, although some students felt that UCLA had a diverse student body, many felt that there were not opportunities to engage with that diversity. Interviewees, particularly students of color, recounted a number of negative experiences with racial discrimination. Additionally, students often understood race as a "taboo" topic, which contributed to the perspective that race should not be talked about. These factors created a climate in which students felt it was unsafe to engage in conversations across difference.

The extent to which students felt safe in their environment then mediated the quality of conversations. When students felt afraid to offend others they were not as likely to be honest, and consequently, the quality of their conversations suffered. When students had prior experiences with racial discrimination or other negative experiences, they were less likely to want to develop relationships with others who were different from them and instead gravitated to members of their social identity groups who they felt better understood them. Given the lack of spaces in which to engage in conversations of difference, students did not feel genuinely interested in interacting with others who were from different backgrounds. The silence resulting from fear to offend, fear to build relationships, and a lack of interest prompted conversations that were more superficial in nature.

VI. Recommendations

After being asked about the current occurrence and quality of conversations about racial/ethnic differences among people from different racial/ethnic backgrounds, interviewees were asked what could be done to increase the frequency and quality of these conversations. Interviewees had three different levels of recommendations as to how this could be achieved; they offered recommendations for what events, programs, and requirements could be implemented, how these opportunities should be facilitated, and finally how individuals should conduct themselves within these spaces. Interviewees identified safe spaces and honesty as being crucial to increasing quality conversations about race and ethnicity amongst people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Finally, some interviewees were unwilling to provide any recommendations at all because they believed nothing could be done to resolve the lack of inter-racial/ethnic conversations and understanding.

Firstly, interviewees described events, programs, and other structured opportunities to provide safe spaces for these conversations to be implemented. Recommendations included:

- Implementing multicultural fairs and workshops

- Increasing diversity amongst the student body

- Creating opportunities for discussion during orientation and on the Hill

- Institutionalizing a diversity requirement in the curriculum

- Encouraging undergraduates to join student organizations in which they may be exposed, come across, and interact with students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds

- Providing more Intergroup Dialogue and Intergroup Relations opportunities.

Interviewees sought "... not programs but educational events..." (T1A, p.7, 28-29). This was described as an opportunity for students to learn about the history of certain racial/ethnic groups and their cultures (T1A, p.7, 27-36) and give a forum for people from marginalized groups to discuss their backgrounds in a positive way (T2A, p.10, 24-30). Some interviewees felt that opportunities that were already implemented on campus, such as Intergroup Dialogue were not marketed enough to the undergraduate student body. They felt if students were more aware of these opportunities, they would take advantage of them to have conversations about race/ethnicity (T9B, p.12, 11-33).

Once spaces are created, interviewees thought it was necessary to have effective facilitation to ensure these spaces remained safe. Recommendations for facilitation included having a moderator that students feel comfortable with whether it be a peer facilitator or a professor. Safety needed to be created by ensuring there was not a power hierarchy between participant(s) and facilitator(s). Interviewees also said ground rules and expectations should be set, and conversations should focus on differences as well as commonalities. Furthermore, interviewees said spaces must allow everyone to participate in an honest way without being labeled a racist and participants need to contribute towards the safe space by being open, empathetic, and honest. For example, one interviewee said:

> "I just think we would have to not worry. I think honesty is the most important thing, so we

have to sort of let our guards down and not be worried about being so politically correct and if we were completely honest we would be able to like break down some of these stereotypes and some of these assumptions that are wrong" (T4A, p.4, 17-20).

Several participants described wanting to interact and learn from individuals of different backgrounds but often lacked the language and skills to engage in such conversations. A lack of opportunity to develop such skills was a common theme among interviewees. Some interviewees expressed doubt that individuals could come together and truly be honest. One white female said, "I don't know if everyone is really readily open to talk about race on the understanding level" (T5A, p.4, 11-12). Such reservations about the extent to which conversations across difference were possible lead some interviewees to say that there was ultimately nothing that could be done to make them feel welcome, safe, and an appreciated part of the UCLA campus.

One Asian-American male did offer potential solutions, but when asked what an all inclusive environment at UCLA would look like he said, "… I can't really imagine that actually... I can't imagine a world where everything was equal or everything is, was integrated where people were just ok with other people" (T1A, p.7, 43-44). Some interviewees thought that a safe environment could only be achieved for some racial/ethnic groups. A Latino male interviewee described a hopelessness regarding the possibility of change: "... it's really hard to cater to everybody [all Latino-identified undergraduates]... I mean that's a tough question, [and] I personally don't know how that would be achieved" (T6A, p.9, 34-35).

Conclusion

This study explored cross-racial interaction at UCLA, specifically, the extent to which conversations about racial/ethnic difference are occurring on campus. Findings indicated that there are several aspects of the campus environment that mediate such interactions. Unfortunately, but perhaps not surprisingly, the portrait of UCLA's campus depicted by the students interviewed indicates that there is much room for improvement.

Students often characterized the climate as being divided by race/ethnicity. Even when opportunities to interact with individuals of a different racial/ethnic background arose, such opportunities sometimes resulted in negative or awkward interactions. Other times, conversations did not happen at all or were unproductive at best. Researchers identified a lack of safe spaces in which to authentically discuss racialized experiences as well as a lack of skills needed to foster more positive interactions as key contributors to poor quality of interactions.

Ultimately, the findings from this study demonstrate that structural diversity is not enough. Living in a residence hall, attending social events, or going to class with students of different backgrounds does not ensure that students will reap the benefits of a diverse student body. Indeed, the consequences of being around students of a different racial or ethnic background are more often negative than positive because students are without the language, skill, or motivation required for positive interaction.