

Possibilities for Making Institutional Change: An Institutional Critique of Diversity Discourse at
a Predominantly White Institution

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ABSTRACT (academic)

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore how diversity discourse inscribes oppressive institutional structures (slavery, racism, and whiteness), specifically, institutional power, and offer possibilities for making sustainable change. This dissertation is an institutional critique (Porter et al. 2000) that includes Black women's experiences in diversity leadership roles at Virginia Tech, an analysis of the institution's bureaucratic structure, an analysis of diversity discourse published by Virginia Tech's Office for Inclusion and Diversity (OID), and climate surveys. By following diversity discourse, I explore how the discourse and modalities inscribe institutional power, the "outsider-within" construct of Black women, and obstructions to institutional change through discursive practices. In general, change happens at institutions but does not connote equitable, sustainable change. I argue that mapping the discursive and material construction of institutional power can reveal discursive methods/methodologies for remapping the institution toward inscribing structures of resistance.

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Dedication

To my family: Agnes Campbell (late grandmother), Vera (Mother), Sterge (Dad), and my older siblings (Genever, Natalie, and Lance)

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Table of Contents

Dedication	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Dissertation Exigence	3
Virginia Tech 2003: Affirmative Action Concerns	4
Virginia Tech 2019: Black Graduate Students as Underserved.....	6
Building on Existing Research in Higher Education and Rhetoric and Writing	8
Institutional Slavery	10
Institutional Racism and Whiteness.....	11
Research Site and Focus: Virginia Tech’s Diversity Discourse	14
Problems with Predominantly White Institutions as a Reactive Force in Diversity Discourse	15
Problems with Climate Surveys as an Ineffective Discursive Tool for Assessing Diversity ...	19
Contribution to the Field of Rhetoric and Writing.....	22
Chapter Summaries	25
Chapter 2: Methodology.....	27
Introduction.....	27
Analysis of Virginia Tech as a Site of Study (Macro-Level)	27
Positionality	28
My Positionality in Relation to the Site of Study	29
My Positionality in Relation to Black Feminist Theory	31
My Positionality in Relation to the Field of Rhetoric and Writing.....	33
Theoretical Approach.....	35
Rhetorical Methodologies.....	35
Black Feminisms.....	37
Micro-Level Sites of Study: Space/Place, Technology, and Processes	39
Organizational Charts	41
InclusiveVT Videos	42
Climate Surveys	44
Data Collection	44
Mixed-Methods Approach.....	44
Participant Interviews	45
Modes of Analysis	46
Critical Discourse Analysis.....	47
Rhetorical Analysis	49
Conceptual Framework.....	49

Themes	49
Chapter 3: Analysis and Discussion of Black Women Diversity Practitioners.....	51
Foreground: Hegemonic and Structural Domains and Black Women at Virginia Tech	51
Introduction.....	53
Sites of Study	54
Rhetorical Analysis: Mapping Institutional Power.....	56
Imagined Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion	56
Perceived Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.....	58
Organizational Structure Impediments	60
Climate Surveys Rhetorical Effectiveness.....	66
Starts and Stops: The Institution as a Reactive Force.....	68
Diversity Practitioners’ Discursive Practices.....	71
Conclusion	75
Chapter 4: Bureaucratic Structures of Virginia Tech (Analysis and Discussion).....	76
Oppressive Structures of Virginia Tech.....	77
Structures of Institutional Slavery at Virginia Tech	77
Structures of Institutional Racism and Institutional Whiteness at Virginia Tech.....	80
Organizational Lines of Authority and Communication for Decision-Making.....	82
Discussion and Conclusion: Harmful Organizational Structures	100
Chapter 5: Public Diversity Discourse (Critical Discourse and Rhetorical Analysis)	103
Part One: Diversity Discourse Video Analysis and Discussion	104
Contextualizing InclusiveVT Diversity Videos.....	104
Critical Discourse Analysis Method and Results.....	106
Rhetorical Analysis of the “Making the Chair Fit” Videos (Dataset One).....	111
Rhetorical Analysis of the “VT Unfinished Conversation” Videos (Dataset Two)	124
Section Conclusion: Mapping Institutional Power in Diversity Discourse Videos.....	130
Part Two: Rhetorical Analysis of Virginia Tech’s Climate Surveys.....	131
Contextualizing Virginia Tech’s Climate Surveys	132
Survey Questions Results and Analysis.....	134
Section Conclusion: Mapping Institutional Power in Virginia Tech Climate Surveys	147
Chapter 6: Conclusion	150
How Diversity Discourse Constructs Institutional Power	151
How Diversity Discourse Inscribes Impossibilities Toward Anti-Racist Campus Climates..	154
How Black Women’s Discursive Practices Inscribe Possibilities for Institutional Change...	155
Black Women’s Standpoints on Diversity.....	155

Clearing Communication Lines in Organizational Structures	157
Contribution to the Field of Rhetoric and Writing.....	158
Research Limitations	159
Future Work and Implications	159
References	161
Appendix A. IRB Exemption Letter.....	167
Appendix B. Interview Participant Recruitment Letter	168
Appendix C. Interview Participant Consent Letter.....	170
Appendix D. Interview Questions.....	173
Appendix E. University Council Roster.....	175

List of Figures

Figure 1-1. Representation Model of Discourse Inscribing Institutional Structures. <i>Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism, and White Supremacy rationalities foreground institutional structures.</i>	10
Figure 1-2. Number Of Selected Types of On-Campus Hate Crimes at Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions, By Category of Bias Motivating the Crime: 2018.....	16
Figure 1-3. March 2023 at Virginia Tech. <i>Hate speech is written on the door.</i>	17
Figure 1-4a. Instagram Reactions to March 22, 2023, Racial Incident at Virginia Tech	18
Figure 1-4b. Instagram Comments: Reactions to March 22, 2023, Racial Incident (con't).....	19
Figure 4-1. Office of the President Organizational Chart.....	84
Figure 4-2. Virginia Tech Student Affairs Anti-Racism Commitment	90
Figure 4-3. Executive Vice President and Provost Academic Administration Organizational Chart.....	92
Figure 4-4. Graduate School's Organizational Chart	95
Figure 4-5. Office for Inclusion and Diversity Organizational Chart.....	97
Figure 4-6. InclusiveVT Sustainable Structure – Framework 3.0	98
Figure 4-7. Lines of Authority and Communication Organization Chart of Virginia Tech	99
Figure 5-1. “Making the Chair Fit” Video Thumbnails.....	113
Figure 5-2. Example of Black women Blitt’s 2008 New Yorker cover, “Fistbump: The Politics of Fear,” was inspired by the rumors that circulated about the Obamas during that year’s presidential campaign.	116
Figure 5-3. Graduate Student Climate Survey 2022 Representation.....	137
Figure 5-4. Human Resources Climate Survey 2021 Participation by Race	138
Figure 5-5. Human Resources Climate Survey 2021 Participation by Gender	139
Figure 5-3. Graduate Student Campus Climate Summary Overview.....	141
Figure 5-6. Familiar with Principles of Community Results in University-Wide Climate Survey 2019.....	142
Figure 5-7. Importance of Principles of Community Results in University-Wide Climate Survey 2019.....	143
Figure 5-8. Familiar with InclusiveVT Results in University-Wide Climate Survey 2019	143
Figure 5-9. Importance of InclusiveVT Results in University-Wide Climate Survey 2019	144

List of Tables

Table 5-1. InclusiveVT, YouTube Channel Videos from “Making the Chair Fit” and “VT Unfinished Conversation” Series. <i>Gray shaded rows dataset one and white rows dataset two.</i>	104
Table 5-2. Dataset One and Two Diversity Discourse Terms – Top 25 TF-IDF Scores.....	107
Table 5-3. Dataset One Terms in Categories by Rhetorical Theme	108
Table 5-4. Dataset Two Terms in Categories by Rhetorical Theme.....	109
Table 5-5. Most Valuable Terms and Videos with Common or Unique Characteristics in Dataset One and Dataset Two. <i>Green shaded rows are selected terms and videos for analysis.</i>	110
Table 5-6. Problematic Survey Terms under “Section 1: Campus Climate” Statements	135

Chapter 1: Introduction

“Institutions are hard to change. (No kidding.) But they can be rewritten...through rhetorical action.” – Porter et al. 2000

The double pandemics of 2020, COVID-19 and police brutality against Black people, challenged various social institutions on their values regarding racial matters, moving many to protest in their communities and major cities across the United States (U.S.) (and the world) against racism. U.S. institutions struggled in a state of crisis trying to respond to the COVID-19 global pandemic, racial violence against Black people, and the resurgence of white nationalist groups. Back-to-back racially motivated murders, like those of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and sadly many more, at the hands of police set ablaze global protests as the prior incessant killings of Black women, men, and children still awaited justice. In particular, the virality of George Floyd’s recorded murder on social media catalyzed a public outcry and demands for justice. #BlackLivesMatter and #SayHerName reverberated throughout social media platforms. Social media increases exposure to racial violence, and an avenue to confront historical violence on Black bodies with fewer opportunities for whitewashing Black lived experiences. I acknowledge that the virality of Black suffering across the Internet brings other forms of rhetorical violence. While at the same time, the exposure challenges our ontological and epistemological perceptions, particularly our positionality regarding institutional racism and our engagement in the associated discourse. Black genocide in plain sight is a U.S. social norm, while federal and state institutions are ambivalent about “alleged” Black murders that require “further investigation” as an institutionalized practice.

In the post-George Floyd era, calls for action across the nation included removing racist or discriminatory symbols, such as statues of “leaders” who represent racist ideologies, sports team names, building names, the Confederate flag, etc. Many of these demands have existed for

years, but the double pandemics exacerbated critical issues and increased sensitivities. National protests became an invocation for U.S. institutions and corporations to publicly post their shared sentiments on websites and social media to demonstrate solidarity or allyship with those impacted by racism. With urgency, predominantly white institution (PWI¹) and corporations inscribed diversity and antiracism statements that became epigraphs of their commitment against racial injustice.

Like equal employment opportunity and Affirmative Action statements, diversity statements serve as institutional diversity communications that symbolically connotes action. On the contrary, diversity communications is institutionalized, rendering it “non-performative” in making institutional changes regarding various oppressions marginalized populations face (Ahmed, 2012). There is an uptick of diversity communications by institutions used as an affective tool in the wake of racial crisis, marked as antiracist practice. I am concerned with the role of diversity communications within the circulating diversity discourse of institutions.

This dissertation explores how diversity discourse inscribes oppressive institutional structures, specifically institutional power, and offers possibilities for sustainable change at PWIs. This is an institutional critique (further discussed in Chapter 2) of Virginia Tech, a PWI located in Blacksburg, Virginia, that includes Black women’s experiences in diversity leadership roles at the institution, an analysis of the institution’s bureaucratic structure (Collin, 2022; Porter et al., 2000), and an analysis of diversity discourse published by Virginia Tech’s Office for Inclusion and Diversity (OID) and of Virginia Tech’s climate surveys. By following diversity

¹ Throughout this dissertation, the terminology predominantly white institution (PWI) refers to an institution of higher education that since inception has a majority, if not all, white campus demographic, and, in present day, maintains a predominantly white institution status that can be conceptualized as a legacy predominantly white institution.

discourse around Virginia Tech, I explore how this discourse and modalities inscribe institutional power, the “outsider-within” (Collins, 2022) social location of Black women, and obstructions to and possibilities of institutional change through discursive practices. In general, change happens at institutions but does not connote equitable, sustainable change. I argue that mapping the discursive and material construction of institutional power (following the discourse) can reveal discursive methods and methodologies for remapping the institution by inscribing resistance methods.

In this chapter, I discuss the exigence of this work and the existing research in Higher Education and Rhetoric and Writing fields. The discussions in Rhetoric and Writing set the initial framing of how PWIs possess oppressive institutional structures inscribed by diversity discourse. Next, I explain this dissertation’s research focus and analysis sites. Then, I discuss existing problems with diversity discourse at PWIs and argue the contribution this dissertation makes to the field of rhetoric and writing. Lastly, I include chapter summaries as a guide for the remaining chapters in this dissertation.

Dissertation Exigence

The exigence for this dissertation research begins in 2003 with an Affirmative Action event at Virginia Tech during my undergraduate matriculation, and my reentrance into the institution as a doctoral student in 2019—acclimating to a different campus climate than my initial encounter with the university. These experiences unexpectedly converged and sparked my curiosity regarding Virginia Tech’s engagement with diversity discourse and understanding how we can inscribe sustainable change that mitigates racial harm against Black bodies, specifically Black women’s, at PWIs.

Virginia Tech 2003: Affirmative Action Concerns

I attended Virginia Tech from 2001-2006 and earned a Bachelor's in English with a concentration in Professional Writing and a minor in Business. As an alumna, I recount a 2003 incident at Virginia Tech regarding how public institutions implemented Affirmative Action policies that affected Black student enrollment and faculty hiring, raising several concerns. Twenty years later, there are ongoing racial concerns for Black students and faculty at Virginia Tech and similar institutions.

In 2003, the Black undergraduate student enrollment at Virginia Tech peaked since the first Black students entered the institution. It reached 1,243 Black out of 21,294 undergraduates on campus. The Black undergraduate population was 5.83% of the total on-campus undergraduate population; this was the institution's highest percentage of Black students enrolled to-date. Within that same year, the institution decided to no longer adhere to Affirmative Action policies (a set of practices to include those with underrepresented identities, such as race, sexuality, gender, creed, and nationality, and reduce discrimination) following a directive from the attorney general's office. As the news circulated, the Black Virginia Tech community protested the institution's plan to dismantle the Affirmative Action policy (*Virginia Tech Reverses Decision on Affirmative Action*, 2003). The justification from Virginia Tech was that there was no legal obligation to meet diversity requirements. In the news article "Virginia Tech Reverses Decision on Affirmative Action" (2003), the Vice Rector (a university board of visitors (BOV) member), William Latham, was quoted as saying, "We love diversity as much as you do;" "But we have to do it within the framework of the law, and you only have to do it politically." Speaking on behalf of the BOV, in Latham's reductive response, he used "diversity" broadly. He missed the mark on noting how removing the Affirmative Action policy symbolized

an exclusionary practice. His statement delegitimized the Black community's demand for inclusion (e.g., belonging) by using politics (an object) as a scapegoat and the BOV (an entity) not taking accountability, considering they decided on an issue slotted for racist messaging.

At the time, the state's attorney general, Jerry Kilgore, indicated to Virginia Tech that its diversity policies were unconstitutional. After the Black community's protest, the institution considered that a reread of federal law might reveal an interpretation to sustain existing diversity initiatives (*Board of Visitors Reinstates Affirmative Action, Sexual Orientation in Non-Discrimination Policy*, 2003). The "Virginia Tech Reverses Decision on Affirmative Action" (2003) article provides a summation of the BOV's concluding activities on the issue that resulted in rescinding the ban they placed on Affirmative Action policy:

Despite assertions from the attorney general's office that some of its diversity programs are unconstitutional, the school's board of visitors voted 7-5 with one abstention to rescind a March 10 ban on preferences for racial minorities and other underrepresented groups in hiring, admissions and scholarships.

The BOV demonstrated its power to challenge the existing legislation—it challenged politics.

At twenty years old, this event was my initial introduction to Affirmative Action issues and how covert racism appears in the institution's rhetorical and material structures. This event directed my attention to Virginia Tech's organizational structure, which shows the Federal and State Government's authority over the institution's operations. The state governor's office appointed the institution's BOV; this governing body consistently included mostly white males during this era, including the attorney general, state governor, and university president. These

members of the university's leadership reflect the white image of the institution and pose a complex obstruction in enacting change that could protect Black bodies.

Virginia Tech 2019: Black Graduate Students as Underserved

Returning to Virginia Tech in 2019 to pursue a Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Writing, I recognized a decline in Black students. I considered the impact of oppressive institutional structures blocking diversity progress. With over fifteen years since the Affirmative Action protests, Black undergraduate students on-campus were now 4.38% of the undergraduate population (898 out of 20,501). How can an institution reach record numbers of Black students, engage in diversity work for decades, and produce a decline in Black student enrollment? Black students average +/-5% of the undergraduate population per academic calendar year. Reflecting on the constant battle of Black students and faculty for justice at Virginia Tech, I grew concerned with the current state of the Black community.

During the first semester of my doctoral program, I learned about Black graduate women on campus, like me, trying to find ways to navigate their graduate program and how their experience was informed by their intersecting identities (Crenshaw, 1990). To manage a stressful transition into school after numerous years working in industry, I attended a group counseling session organized by the university's Black graduate student organization. I was interested in connecting with other Black graduates who may have similar feelings of uncertainty as I was having in hopes of finding support or banding together in a milieu of Black solidarity. In attendance were only Black graduate women and two Black women counselors from the university's counseling center as mediators for the session. As the Black graduate women started to share their troubling interactions involving white advisors and peers, the two counselors assisted with processing feelings about their unresolved situations. Unfortunately, the next day

these same Black women would face the same issues that reify their invisibility reflected in unmet needs. One young woman in the group was on a leave of absence from her program to reset and decide her future academic plan because of the uncertainties she tried to resolve alone. Other women expressed concerns through stories that involved a combination of microaggressions from white classmates and faculty as oppressive structures, where escalating an issue meant layers of white faculty with personal relationships and familial ties in the leadership hierarchy resulting in no changes.

The common thread I gathered from these stories was a lack of university support and guidance on navigating oppressive white spaces. The women who shared stories expressed defeat. The Ombudsperson was the university's only viable support option for unresolvable issues between the two parties and required mediation. These Black graduate women were underserved, having one person to address many concerns of Black bodies with intersecting identities and intersecting oppressions (Collins, 2022). This counseling session signaled ineffectiveness in existing diversity efforts; like Sara Ahmed (2012), I also questioned, what is diversity doing? Who is involved in diversity work? Who is responsible? Where are the linkages for making institutional change within the organizational structure? Who is engaging in diversity discourse? How is diversity discourse used? Is the existing diversity discourse effective in shifting the institution's racial climate? For example, without the built-in infrastructure to support the Black graduate student population, specifically Black women, Virginia Tech is participating in what Kimberlé Crenshaw (2020) calls an intersectional failure—an institution not actively participating in intersectional work (supporting the concerns of multiply-marginalized persons) leads to continuous harm from oppressive institutional structures until addressed directly and intentionally with input from Black women.

In these two anecdotes, the BOV's shifty decision-making regarding Affirmation Action demonstrates something awry, an inequity, in how boundaries of access are demarcated for decision-making power. The Vice Rector's patronizing address in diversity discourse engendered institutional racism while depicting a raw sense of the campus climate Black bodies endured during this time at Virginia Tech. In discussing the Black women graduate students, they did not have a viable connection to an entity in the institution's structure with decision-making power, rendering them invisible and silenced. These Black women's diversity discourse existed within a private meeting space limiting its mobility to inscribe change as a counter-discourse to the institution's public-facing diversity discourse. A PWI's bureaucratic structure and diversity discourse contribute to perceptions of the institution's campus climate by demarcating access through boundaries and locating reification paths of institutional power.

Building on Existing Research in Higher Education and Rhetoric and Writing

This research draws on related research on diversity at PWIs in higher education and rhetoric and writing fields, including my previously published theoretical work, "A Reimagining of Diversity at Predominantly White Institutions: Institutional Reinscription Using Critical Discourse Analysis and Counterstory" (Evans, 2023). First, I would like to acknowledge the labor of higher education researchers in diversity discussions drawing from my existing contributions to the field:

Higher education researchers raise awareness of the consistent issues with racial and gender inequities at PWIs and develop strategies to reduce the effects of racial discrimination and stereotypical thinking as methods toward "moving the needle" on institutional change to improve diversity conditions (De Welde, 2017; Myers & Finnigan, 2018; Patton, 2016). Black graduate students experience stereotype threat, silencing,

alienation, racial tension, and distrust at PWIs (Cleveland, 2004). Faculty of color experience isolation and are disproportionately critical contributors to improving diversity (Collins, 2022; De Welde, 2017; Squire, 2017). Even with a plenitude of diversity strategies, racial and gender inequities persist at PWIs, and the reporting of their diversity progress using campus climate surveys, diversity statements, enrollment reports, and diversity initiatives suggest[s] they are meeting diversity goals (Evans, 2023).

Higher education continues to seek out methods in academic recruiting, hiring, and retention to address diversity concerns. From the Rhetoric and Writing disciplinary perspective, I argue that harmful institutional spaces are produce through diversity language and using language these spaces can be dismantled.

This dissertation builds on the work of scholars Sara Ahmed (2012) and Louis M. Maraj (2020) on diversity and racialized language within PWIs. I foreground this work with the perspective that institutions are constructed according to three institutional structures. Ahmed (2012) and Maraj (2020) identify institutional slavery, institutional racism, and institutional whiteness as inherent structures that inform institutions' rhetorical motives in using racialized language to protect perceptions of whiteness and shape meanings of Blackness.

Diversity discourse holds institutional structures in place, portraying them as unchangeable structures. Diversity discourse is also mobile—circulatory—making institutional structures dynamic at the micro-level, which signals instability within the structures, meaning they are indeed changeable. **Figure 1-1** portrays institutional slavery, institutional racism, and institutional whiteness operating as constitutive structures that keep institutions in place—keep institutional power in place. These institutional structures bolster PWIs and diversity discourse plays a role in shaping each oppressive structure within the institution.

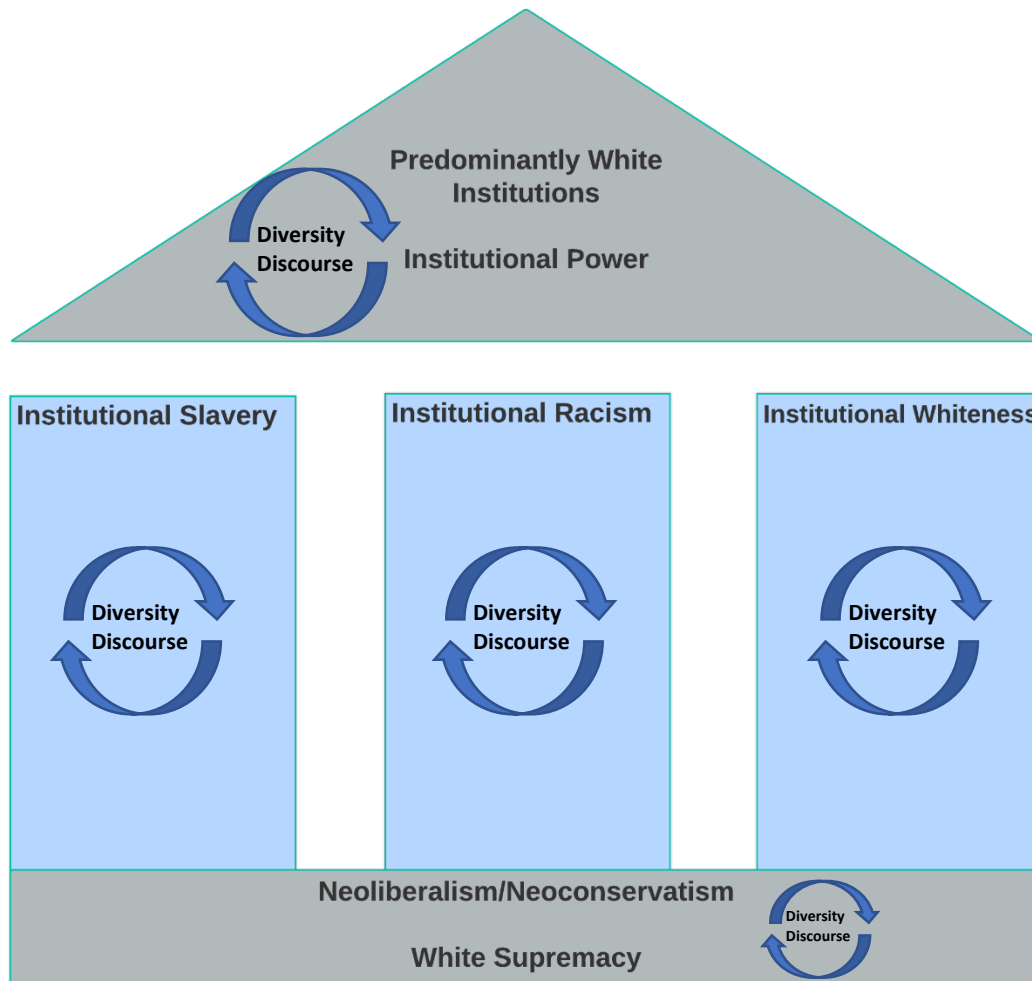


Figure 1-1. Representation Model of Discourse Inscribing Institutional Structures.
Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism, and White Supremacy rationalities foreground institutional structures.

I demonstrate throughout this dissertation that diversity-related discourse strengthens institutional structures as the discourse circulates and changes the physical and discursive matters of the structures, shifting the perception and possibilities of institutional structures from unchangeable to dynamic.

Institutional Slavery

Institutional slavery establishes a bureaucratic framework premised on hierarchy and ownership of people and land that plays out in institutional spaces like that of the slaver

(owner)/enslaved (possessed) dichotomy in U.S. chattel slavery. Institutional slavery is also the bedrock of the U.S. economic system and land-grant academic institutions. The initial establishment of land-grant funds through the Morrill Act of 1862 demonstrates that enslaved labor across various social institutions still supported the economic system. To issue funds to institutes, the Federal Government possessing over 90 million acres of tribal land from native people, sold land to non-natives, dispersed money to each state to invest the funds in agricultural education, and instructed each state to issue interest to select schools.

The Morrill Act provisioned using funds for the cost of instruction (teaching), and up to 10% of funds could be used toward land purchase. The Act specifies, “No portion of said fund, nor the interest thereon, shall be applied, directly or indirectly, under any pretence whatever, to the purchase, erection, preservation, or repair of any building or buildings” (*Morrill Act (1862)*, 2021). The restrictions in this clause forced schools to use labor from the enslaved for building construction. The 10% maximum for land purchasing presented an exclusionary barrier for those not already possessing land, the means to purchase land, or enslaved labor to support building construction. The Morrill Act language reinforced institutional slavery, an advantage for white institutions to strengthen institutional power. The emancipation of the enslaved did not occur until after 1865. African Americans are an oppositional force to institutional structures like institutional racism and institutional whiteness. These structures reify social norms to disidentify with Blackness and identify with whiteness as desired and achievable.

Institutional Racism and Whiteness

Institutional racism uses racialized language and symbols to bolster structures from institutional slavery and reinforce institutional whiteness and power. Sara Ahmed (2012) recognizes linkages between institutional racism and institutional whiteness as rhetorical

formations in her work. Ahmed (2012) states, “[t]o recognize the institutionality of whiteness remains an important goal of antiracist work, as does the recognition of institutional racism” (44). PWIs avoid addressing institutional racism because they struggle with recognizing “that all forms of power, inequality, and domination are systemic rather than individual” (p. 44). Nirmal Puwar (2004) posits, “we need to recognize how whiteness is embedded in the institutional cultures” (p. 135). Also, within institutions, “[p]eople are reluctant to confront the uncomfortable fact that racism is endemic to organisations and professions. The denial of racism places emotional and psychological pressure on black people in public institutions” (Puwar, 2004, p. 137)—racial harm.

Institutional whiteness is the structure for maintaining the image and perceptions of whiteness and sets the trajectory for institutional racism. Ahmed finds that institutions possess an organizational pride that diverts from stated commitments to diversity, “institutional whiteness.” Institutions aim to manage an internal and external image; an association with the term “diversity” portrays their desired appearance. Ahmed (2012) states, “[d]iversity becomes about changing perceptions of whiteness rather than changing the whiteness of the organizations” (p. 34). She explicates that “institutions will speak about diversity without discussing racism to dissociate from attributes of racism” (Evans, 2023). However, some institutions will accept the use of “race” and “racism” when “diversity [becomes] a method of protecting whiteness” (p. 147); “[a]ntiracism even becomes a discourse of white pride” (p. 170). Furthermore, Maraj (2020) describes “white institutional defensiveness” as an attribute of institutional whiteness informed by neoliberal ideologies. Maraj (2020) states, “The very philosophy breathes white institutional defensiveness into life through racially colorblind rhetoric” (p. 83). Diversity discourse is institutionalized as colorblind rhetoric. It implicitly discusses racism while

inscribing institutional whiteness and institutional racism. Institutional slavery, institutional racism, and institutional whiteness are discursive institutions with material effect. In concert, these three institutional pillars maintain permanence of white supremacy impeding institutional changes.

Neoliberal and neoconservative rationalities undergird perceptions of the three institutional pillars through discourse and persistently cause racial violence (Ahmed, 2012; Ore, 2019). Neoliberalism and neoconservatism are “a market-political rationality and a moral-political rationality, with a business model of the state in one case and a theological model of the state in the other” (Brown, 2006), p. 698). Both terms’ meanings are dynamic and in flux as the sociopolitical context continues to evolve but can be understood from broad bounding concepts. Neoliberalism and neoconservatism are market (economic) and moral (religious/ideological) rationalities maintained through social control. Through neoliberal rationalities, there is polarized redistribution of power (poverty management), profit-making through carceral systems (surveillance, policing, and incarceration), and citizenship (belonging, freedom, and national security) (Barnard Center for Research on Women, 2013). Neoconservative rationalities are the political control of culture and subject through schools of thought on truth, submission, and hegemony (Brown, 2006). As neoliberalism and neoconservatism relate to institutions, we find business approaches and organizational structures with characteristics of these rationalities.

In this dissertation, understanding that institutions are cyclically inscribed by neoliberalism and neoconservatism rationalities means the sociopolitical context is always shifting our perceptions of power. For example, U.S. Black women intellectuals are in leadership roles within academic institutions perceived as positions of power but rhetorically they are elevated in organizational structures to be held in place and marketed as the face of diversity

resulting in the institution's profits (Ahmed, 2012; Collins, 2022). How diversity discourse is inscribing institutional power is difficult to trace considering the various elements, like identities and oppressions, within each structure that inform the discourse reifying these institutionalized systems.

Research Site and Focus: Virginia Tech's Diversity Discourse

In a study concerned with how PWIs are "saying" versus "doing," Sara Ahmed (2012) posits that PWIs use diversity as reparative work. These institutions implement diversity as the "solution" to race, racism, and inequality. Like Ahmed, I am concerned with how PWIs use diversity-related discourse ("saying") and the rhetorical effect ("doing") on campus communities, extending Ahmed's question, "What is diversity doing?" To this end, I interview Black women as diversity practitioners at Virginia Tech to discuss their historical contribution to the university, and I analyze Virginia Tech's bureaucratic structure to elucidate boundaries restricting access to Black bodies navigating white institutional spaces and power domains (Collins, 2022).

During the double pandemics of COVID-19 and police brutality targeting Black bodies, Virginia Tech contributed to the institution's diversity discourse by publishing YouTube video conversations between the Office for Inclusion and Diversity (OID) Vice President and Virginia Tech alums, employees, and community members that included social issues and diversity topics. For this dissertation, I claim these videos represent the institution's values and position on diversity released through Virginia Tech's OID. These OID videos are available to the public and representative of Virginia Tech's concerns with diversity progress within the institution and position on social issues. The critical discourse analysis of the videos takes a deep dive into language as text and data used in controlling institutional spaces and possibilities for change

concerning who gets to speak (based on their organizational position) and the modality (method) that carries the messaging.

Also, I analyze three different types of climate surveys to examine diversity discourse when translated as numerical data. I argue that climate surveys perpetuate racism through what Hoffmann (2020) calls “data violence.” Data violence is data science and technology that facilitates material and symbolic violence. I explain how the method by which universities use climate surveys performs data violence by perpetuating racism.

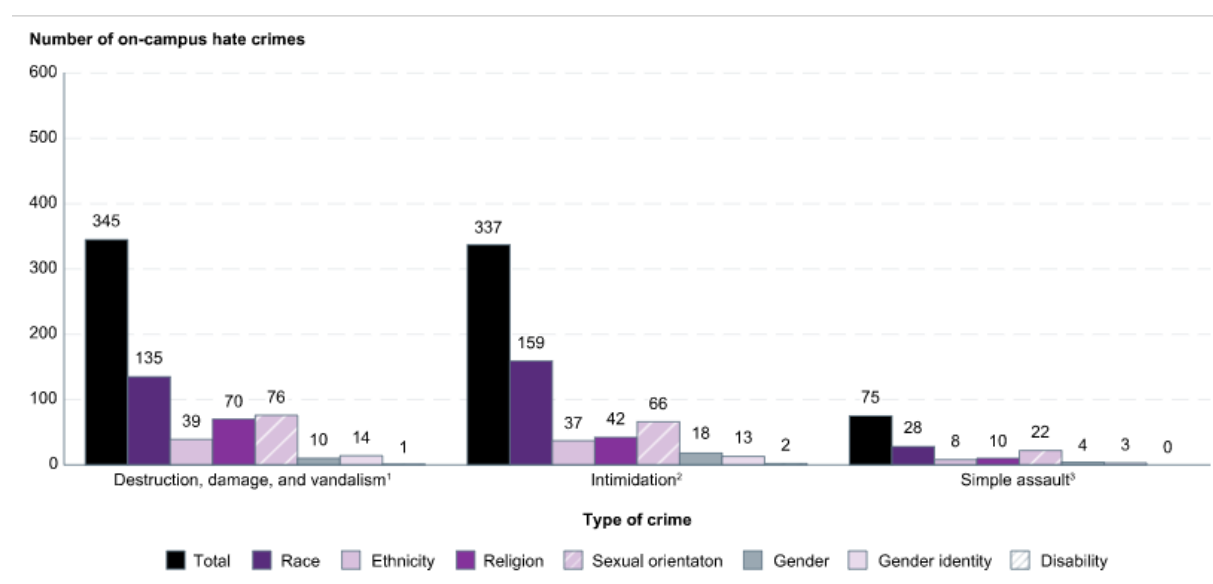
With the OID videos and climate surveys as sites of inquiry, I aim to posit a data analysis method for mapping discursive practices and the potential for reimagining data analysis as an antiracist method for a large corpus of text. The results from the critical discourse analysis are placed with other Virginia Tech discourse and interview data to critique institutional power further leaning on the possibilities for making institutional change. There are a few blockages when there are an opportunities to make changes: responding to a call-to-action and choosing on an effective method to conduct a needs assessment to develop applicable programs and support.

Problems with Predominantly White Institutions as a Reactive Force in Diversity Discourse

PWIs operate as a reactive force in response to public discourse on racial matters and social injustices rather than as a proactive force that learns the differences (Kerschbaum, 2014) of its minoritized communities to better serve their needs. Once there are public outcries within or outside the institution for PWIs to address racial concerns, they may get involved, but the call-to-action has become the motivator for some PWIs to do the work that has been expected of them all along. Institutions discuss diversity to be perceived as proactively addressing diversity concerns (feministkilljoys, 2018). In “Strategic Inefficiency,” Ahmed (2018) states, “A diversity policy can come into existence without coming into use.” This “strategic inefficiency”

demonstrates “not just the slowness of an uptake but how that slowness is useful and purposeful;” “inefficiency is beneficial insofar as it supports an already existing hierarchy” (para 17). Institutions manage perceptions of diversity, allowing them to continue with the business that is not the business of diversity other than the profits made from marketing diversity. Ahmed (2012) discusses diversity as having market value.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) states that “approximately 80 percent of the total reported on-campus hate crimes in 2018 were motivated by race [43%], sexual orientation [22%], or religion [16%]” (*Digest of Education Statistics-Most Current Digest Tables*, n.d.). **Figure 1-2** shows racial bias as the primary motivator for hate crimes. I center Black bodies in this research due to the prevalence of racial incidents and violence at PWIs.



¹ Willfully or maliciously destroying, damaging, defacing, or otherwise injuring real or personal property without the consent of the owner or the person having custody or control of it.

² Placing another person in reasonable fear of bodily harm through the use of threatening words and/or other conduct, but without displaying a weapon or subjecting the victim to actual physical attack.

³ Physical attack by one person upon another where neither the offender displays a weapon nor the victim suffers obvious severe or aggravated bodily injury involving apparent broken bones, loss of teeth, possible internal injury, severe laceration, or loss of consciousness.

NOTE: Data are for degree-granting institutions, which are institutions that grant associate's or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Some institutions that report Clery Act data—specifically, non-degree-granting institutions and institutions outside of the 50 states and the District of Columbia—are excluded. A hate crime is a criminal offense that is motivated, in whole or in part, by the perpetrator's bias against a group of people based on their race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, or disability. Includes on-campus incidents involving students, staff, and guests. Excludes off-campus crimes and arrests even if they involve students or staff.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, Campus Safety and Security Reporting System, 2018. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, table 329.30.

Figure 1-2. Number Of Selected Types of On-Campus Hate Crimes at Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions, By Category of Bias Motivating the Crime: 2018

For example, on March 22, 2023, at Virginia Tech (Blacksburg campus), a Black male employee of the institution found his on-campus office door marked with racist language. The message, shown in **Figure 1-3**, reads, “NIGGER H8 DEI Monkey” with “NIGGER” double underlined. In **Figures 1-4a** and **1-4b**, comments in response to the racial incident capture a few overall reactions (circled with red), and there is an expectation for Virginia Tech to address the incident, skepticism about whether Virginia Tech will act, and suggestions for disciplinary action or legal ramifications. There is an overall sentiment of pride and community in that some feel violated.



Photo: picture from the Instagram social media post of the victimized
Figure 1-3. March 2023 at Virginia Tech. Hate speech is written on the door.

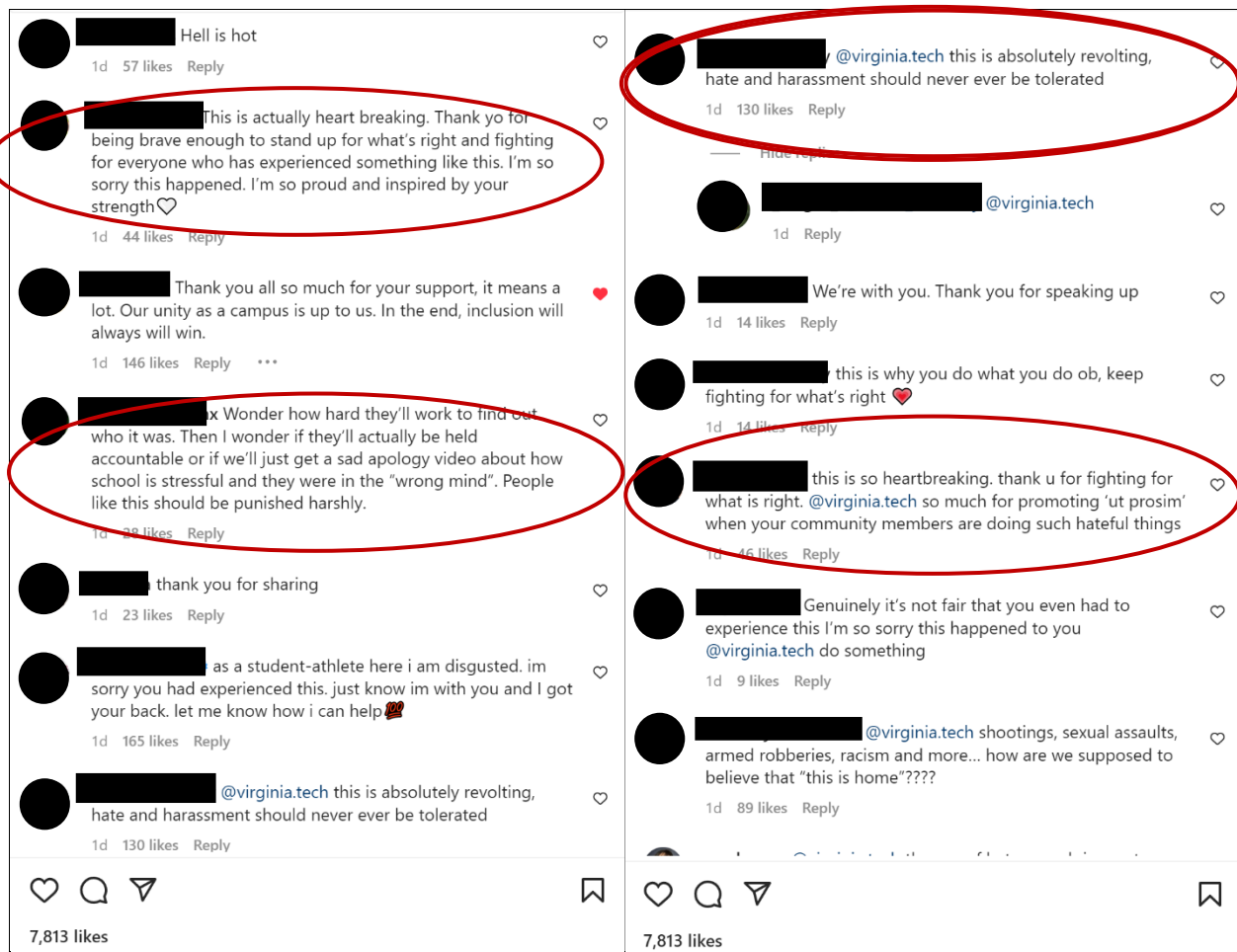


Figure 1-4a. Instagram Reactions to March 22, 2023, Racial Incident at Virginia Tech

Virginia Tech did not respond to the March 2023 racial incident, and there is uncertainty about whether the institution's response would be effective. College presidents are notorious for not addressing racial incidents, and when they do, they avoid words like "race" and "racism" to subvert associating the institution with racism (Ahmed, 2012; Cole, 2020).

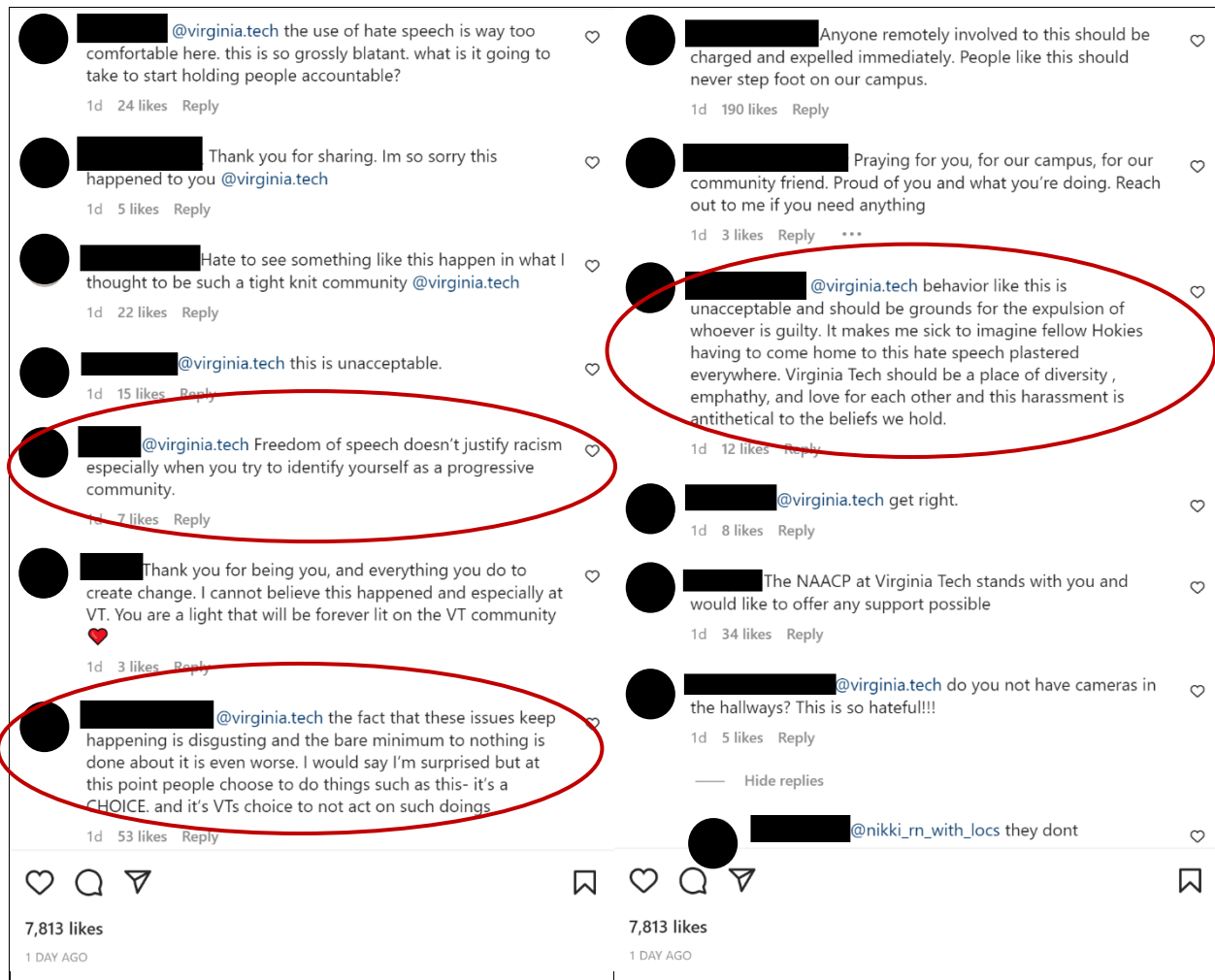


Figure 1-4b. Instagram Comments: Reactions to March 22, 2023, Racial Incident (con't)

Problems with Climate Surveys as an Ineffective Discursive Tool for Assessing Diversity

In 2020, concerned about diversity discourse and the role of climate surveys, I examined Virginia Tech’s 2016 graduate climate survey and uncovered a survey design with restrictive identity categories, such as race and vague language in open-ended survey questions, that obfuscates the intended purpose of the survey. I found that climate surveys are not structured to address identity-related concerns. Stephanie L. Kerschbaum (2014) discusses the “commodification of diversity” and argues that commodifying diversity includes being “consistently measured by counting the number of students, faculty, and staff belonging to particular race-ethnic categories. Within neoliberal discourses, then, diversity becomes a kind of

property that individuals accumulate “diversity capital” by recruiting and retaining members of these race-ethnic categories to campus” (p. 32).

The 2016 Climate Survey defines diversity and inclusion, “*Diversity* encompasses differences amongst students, and *inclusion* is the engagement of difference amongst communities. These differences are identified through the survey to understand the unique experiences of students” (p. 21, emphasis added). Kerschbaum theorizes “marking difference,” which provides a framework for gaining multiple perspectives on differences and ways to frame diversity for a relationality approach to not only increase but priming the campus community for the acceptance of differences. Kerschbaum demonstrates how stereotypes we affix to each other diverge from the embodiment of our differences through lived experiences, which model a good relationship through interactions. Kerschbaum states, “Differences take shape as people come to know who they are in relation to others” (p. 56). Diversity and inclusion, as defined in the surveys, align with how Kerschbaum articulates “difference,” but the survey does not accomplish identifying differences from the experiences of students as the epigraph suggests.

The Virginia Tech Graduate School’s climate surveys at the time administered every three years since 2013. I reviewed the 2016 climate survey because the 2019 survey was unavailable for distribution. A third-party vendor conducts climate surveys to aggregate data from graduate students through an anonymous survey process. The 71-question survey was pushed out to students at all Virginia Tech graduate campuses (including virtual campuses). At the time of the survey, the Graduate School had approximately 7,000 students, but only 1,094 students completed the survey. Two key points are relevant to the survey results. First, the survey captured that graduate students were under a considerable amount of “stress,” but stress is used in a way that masks whether or not the stress is from the rigor of graduate studies, financial

burdens, lack of mental health support, racial discrimination, and more. As discussed in the survey report:

Stress is the most prevalent theme that comes out of this section of the report. Students all feel stress and they deal with it in different ways. The sources of stress varies, but most students who commented about their stress stated that finances and work volume (both academic and assistantships) are most prevalent. Students also mentioned a lack of clear advising or direction as a source of stress (2016 Climate Survey, p. 11)

Secondly, the current survey design compromises the participants' ability to have confidence in the effectiveness of the survey or the university's willingness to address significant concerns. One student's response was captured in the survey that expressed this sentiment: "The professors with racial bias integrate that into their pedagogy in oppressive ways. It is the norm, and when you voice dissent, they immediately try to push you out. That causes many people of color alienation or what this survey considers "stress" (2016 Climate Survey, p. 21). "Stress" raises concern for those who recognize the limitations of the word when there is a full spectrum of issues. Others who are looking to document a racialized incident may be deterred but interpret the question as not the appropriate context to share.

Climate surveys underpin how the university will establish programs to improve diversity and inclusion as "principles of community." Virginia Tech's response to the survey report led to creating "Beyond Boundaries" (2047 vision plan for the next generation) and initiatives such as "InclusiveVT" (an umbrella for diversity programs throughout the institution). The intent of the climate survey may have been to "identify differences" among students, but a racialized campus still stands. The same issues that existed in the 2013 climate survey showed up in the 2016 survey: "The 2013 survey also highlighted the sources of stress experienced by members of the

graduate community, including financial strain, which have inform[ed] the discussion of resources and funding structure in the development of the university strategic plan, *Beyond Boundaries*.” Black students are recruited to the university but unexpectedly encounter oppressive structures in the climate without support systems in place. In diversity discourse, climate surveys need to be more than just a means to external reporting but rather a data collection tool that supports the needs and well-being of Black students.

Contribution to the Field of Rhetoric and Writing

The scholarly contribution of this research is centered on an institutional critique of a PWI. Scholarship theorizes that an institutional critique methodology is a way to analyze institutional (macro level) concerns for institutional change. In this era, institutional critique (Porter et al., 2000; Britt, 2006; Ahmed, 2012) is due for a new uptake using a social justice approach and understanding the institution as a rhetorical ecology.

This dissertation is significant for the Rhetoric and Writing field because it extends theories of institutional critique and contributes a generative rhetorical theory for institutional research from a Black feminist lens. In “Institutional Critique: A rhetorical methodology for change (2000),” Porter et al. (2000) posits that language builds institutions. They provide a methodology centered on graduate students designing a research project for institutional critique that frames the rhetorical situation from three overarching material and rhetorical research sites: spaces/places, technology, and processes. Porter et al. (2000) state that “One premise of institutional critique is that understanding the power and operation of such structures is important to developing strategies for changing them” (p. 626). Jennifer Sano-Franchini states, “an institutional rhetorics approach can and perhaps should look beyond institutions to center the space where institutional structures and human beings meet—through a rhetorical, spatial,

temporal, cultural, political, historical, and embodied methodology” (Cobos et al., 2018, p. 149). Furthermore, Elizabeth C. Britt, in the “Rhetorical Work of Institutions,” states that “drawing on institutional theory in other fields can help us engage in criticism that moves beyond seeing the institution as a generic backdrop for discourse” (Britt & Douglas, 2006, p. 137).

This dissertation is significant because it considers the historical or sociopolitical context while extending institutional critique toward the invention of Black rhetorical technologies (Maraj, 2020) for a critical institutional critique. Black rhetorical technologies are Black rhetorical inventions as methods of resistance or empowerment against harmful structures. I draw on theories of Rhetoric, Technical and Professional Communication, Black Feminisms, and Higher Education to take on an interdisciplinary approach from various perspectives to engage this research as a critical institutional critique.

The site of inquiry for Rhetoric and Writing institutional research is often the classroom (literacy assignments and classroom interactions), program, or field for critique (micro-level) (Porter et al., 2000). This dissertation demonstrates how future graduate researchers can consider the role of writing toward institutional change. This dissertation anticipates not settling for an outcome that is only about awareness of Black struggles, like Derrick Bell’s (1992) concept of “Racial Realism:” “‘our realization, and the dedication based on that realization, can lead to policy positions and campaigns that are less likely to worsen conditions for those who are trying to help’ (p. 378)” (Maraj, 2020, p. 131). From a Black feminist and critical lens of institutional critique, I will contextualize diversity rhetorics at Virginia Tech, the rhetorical implications of diversity discourse, the tensions that emerge from juxtaposing sites of inquiry, and the emerging rhetorical formations captured from perceptions and understandings that relate to the PWI’s diversity discourse. These endpoints of this dissertation support the goal to change perceptions of

institutional diversity, thereby evolving methods used to capture marginalized experiences and change institutional diversity goals. This dissertation challenges the college president's role in diversity discourse and the associated bureaucracies.

Lastly, this dissertation responds to several calls for furthering institutional graduate research, diversity research, and extending rhetorical and antiracist critical methods and methodologies (Ahmed, 2012; Maraj, 2020; Martinez, 2020; Porter et al., 2000). Specifically, I build on Ahmed's (2012) and Maraj's (2020) diversity work. Also, this dissertation adds to Black feminist rhetorical scholarship due to the ongoing concern for centering Black women's knowledges and contributions to scholarship. Similarly, to Maraj (2020), this dissertation "adds to that growing corpus of antiracist research in centering Black folk and their traditions, languages, literacies, and rhetorics in white institutional spaces" (p. 10). This dissertation intends to address three questions:

- How does diversity discourse construct institutional power at predominantly white institutions?
- How is diversity discourse inscribing blockages or impossibilities against an equitable campus climate?
- How can the discursive practices of Black women diversity practitioners inscribe possibilities for institutional change?

In approaching these questions, this research is presented as a discursive assemblage demonstrating a myriad of rhetorical elements at play within a PWI as a deep rhetorical ecology of things. Deep rhetorical ecologies are "ecological networks of interconnected relationships consist of evolving series of rhetorical situations in which communication occurs, which are interrelated through bodies, spaces, cultures, and contexts with specific regard to power

dynamics and race relations” (Maraj, 2020, p. 7). I assess the discursive practices of Black women diversity practitioners, the bureaucratic structure of Virginia Tech, and the university’s diversity communications (diversity videos and climate surveys).

Chapter Summaries

In this chapter, I present the exigence of this work and how diversity discourse inscribes institutional structures (slavery, racism, and whiteness) through existing research. From here, I discuss existing problems with institutions in relation to diversity discourse. I also discuss my research focus, a recent racial incident at Virginia Tech, and how I perceive my contributions to the field of rhetoric and writing. In Chapter 2, I include the methodological approach for this dissertation research. Therein, I discuss my modes of analysis, disciplinary perspectives, and positionality as it relates to each lens.

In chapters 3-5, I provide historical foregrounding and background as a rhetorical move to contextualize the longevity of discriminatory discursive practices and racialized language. I share my discussions with Black-women diversity practitioners in Chapter 3. I identified common themes and engaged in an analysis and discussion from a Black feminist lens. I share their standpoints in diversity discourse and discursive practices doing diversity work.

In Chapter 4, I provide context for the material structure of Virginia Tech, including the history of the institution and how that history bleeds over into today’s interactions with Black bodies. Then, I analyze Virginia Tech’s bureaucratic structure, beginning with its three organizational charts. In reading the charts, I trace the decision-making paths and identify positions with multiple responsibilities—committed to a primary responsibility and a diversity or governance council. I initially focus on the positions within the university’s organization structure rather than the persons in the roles. Lastly, I show the overlapping positions, lines of

communication, and lines of authority within Virginia Tech that may not otherwise be easily visible.

Chapter 5 is organized in two parts to analyze Virginia Tech's diversity communications. Part One is a critical discourse analysis and rhetorical analysis of diversity YouTube videos published by Virginia Tech's OID. I use a data science method to conduct the initial analysis cycles, contextualize the work, and enter an analysis and discussion. In Part Two, I conduct a rhetorical analysis of three Virginia Tech campus climate surveys. I analyze and discuss the narrative summaries of the climate surveys, survey design, and data representation. In Chapter 6, I conclude with a response to my research questions, limitations, contributions to the field, and future work and implications.

Chapter 2: Methodology

“African Americans are historically positioned from their experiences and identities to invent new forms of resistance for the liberation of the oppressed” —Evans, 2023

Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 1, this dissertation research extends Sara Ahmed’s (2012) and Louis M. Maraj’s (2020) work in institutional rhetorics. Ahmed and Maraj’s work establish that institutional structures (slavery, racism, and whiteness) are inscribed through diversity discourse, and this dissertation extends their approach to understand how diversity discourse inscribes institutional power necessary to access decision-making power. Ahmed calls researchers to follow diversity discourse to map out institutional power structures. This chapter presents a methodology with the components needed for interrogating this dissertation’s research questions, noted in Chapter 1, that aims to disrupt inscribing oppressive institutional structures with diversity discourse by mapping institutional power structures in the discourse and seeking possibilities for making institutional change.

Analysis of Virginia Tech as a Site of Study (Macro-Level)

Herein, I argue that an effective rhetorical mapping of institutional power within predominantly white institutional spaces warrants a detailed replicable approach (Porter et al. 2000) that locates where issues of power emerge from the research data. This dissertation draws from Porter et al.’s (2000) theory on “institutional critique” (discussed later in this section) as a spatial methodology to frame the methodological approach of this research. In examining how space informs a rhetorical situation, this work’s rhetorical sites of inquiry are in instances where diversity language (phonetic, numerical, or symbols), positionality, or privilege intersect with produced institutional spaces (micro-level sites of study) and points to power issues. A level of

certainty or rationality is necessary for sighting power issues, a critical feature for precision in mapping institutional power. How are issues of power observed at the rhetorical site of inquiry? What characteristics of inequitable power or rhetorical elements emerge at the rhetorical site of inquiry? With these methodological questions in mind, I implement a baseline of concepts that describe types of power and forms of oppression as markers (themes) in the “Conceptual Framework” section. Then, the conceptual framings are applied to interrogate the sites of study to understand the ways in which events (or pathways) lead to issues of power as rhetorical formations: patterns or frequent occurrences of events that emerge across the research to understand the design of space and sites of power (Porter et al. 2000). Finally, I theorize that this process generates characteristics for a generative discussion on blockages that makes institutional change appear as an impossibility, but with identifying pathways that lead to issues of power allows for perspectives on possibilities for making institutional change.

Moving forward in this chapter, I discuss my positionality concerning this work and this dissertation’s theoretical approach, micro-level research sites, data collection, modes of analysis, and conceptual framework.

Positionality

I share my positionality as it has shaped my approach to this research and afforded me access to and privileges with research participants and data. During the data collection, I moved in and out of spaces based on my multiple and intersecting identities. My epistemological and ontological perspectives are from intellectual knowledge, relationships, and lived experiences. I am a Black, Jamaican American industry professional and graduate student who is a heterosexual, cisgender woman. I am a first-generation U.S.-born citizen, and a third-generation immigrant, as my parents and grandmother emigrated to the U.S. from Jamaica (who all earned

U.S. naturalized citizenship status). I was raised in the suburbs of Montgomery County, Maryland; the region and state hold high national rankings for racial and ethnic diversity, 16th and 4th, respectively. Montgomery County sits adjacent to counties (Prince George's County and Charles County) with the nation's highest and wealthiest Black populations. My cultural perspective informs how I see myself as a Black woman in this country and this dissertation; it is shaped by Jamaican epistemological and ontological nuances passed on to me from my family and where I was raised.

Additionally, I am an othermother, according to Black feminist framings, and I explain how this identity is relevant to my work later in this section. But simply put, an othermother is a mother who is not a birth parent; I am a parent (and grandparent) to family relatives. My education includes a bachelor's degree in English, with a concentration in Professional Writing and a minor in Business, from Virginia Tech and a master's degree in Technical Communication from Texas Tech University. My identities held significant weight in recruiting Black women as interview participants and the conversations they were willing to have with me. I further explain my positionality concerning the research site of study, the field of rhetoric and writing, and the Black feminist theory that frames this dissertation.

My Positionality in Relation to the Site of Study

As a Virginia Tech alumna and doctoral student, I selected Virginia Tech as a site of study because it is a place that I have called home for a second time and encapsulates my higher education experience. I am connected to this place from joyous memories with friends and my contributions to the campus climate. After two years of leadership as the President of the Caribbean Student Organization (CaribSO), in undergrad, the organization earned the university's "Campus Climate Award" from our numerous activities. I am connected to this place

from its biggest tragedy, the April 16, 2007 mass shooting that took thirty-two lives. I recall sitting in my British literature class on opposite sides of the classroom from a quiet young man who held his head down. He spoke once in class on the first day during introductions and was probed by the professor for not introducing himself; he said, “My name is Question Mark.” The following year, this young man did not present the same meek disposition when displayed across the news as the school shooter on that sad day. I graduated and moved back to Maryland a year before the tragedy. As a fifth-year senior, I should have never been in British literature, but changing my degree program after my sophomore year placed me in a sophomore-level English class to complete degree requirements. When I recall this event, my mind always tries to make sense of my proximity to this tragedy. There is something about my overall experience within the space of the institution that drew me back in.

Living in Blacksburg for five years, during my formidable young adult years, ties me to the Blue Ridge Mountain corridor, the New River Valley region, and Virginia Tech, more locally. I tutored children across Southwest Virginia from Roanoke County to Giles County at various elementary schools and predominantly Black and white after-school programs. I interned for two consecutive summers with the Public Information Office of Roanoke County government, helping to write content sent to local media in packets for broadcasting on their channels. This land is a part of my embodied experiences. This land has shaped me in ways that inform how I produce knowledge and exist in various spaces.

Sadly, but for example, this region was my first experience with racism as an adult. In short, I reserved a space at the Christiansburg Recreation Center with the program’s director for CaribSO to have an event, and days before, I received a voicemail on my dorm room landline phone stating that my event could not be held there—no further explanation. Naïvely thinking

there was a misunderstanding, I went to the recreation center with my organization's secretary, only for the center's director to still inform me that my event could not be held there without reason. He spoke to me with his back turned toward me throughout the discussion. Once I registered the experience as racism, I told the director, who rebutted with, "I have Black friends." Although a painful memory, this, too, is an experience that connects me to this land.

I know this place; at least, I thought I did. I returned in 2019 to pursue a Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Writing to find a place with glimpses of familiarity with many changes in the landscape, physical buildings, and community of people that express Black people as a deprioritized population. This brought me to pause for concern. As an alumna and former and current resident of Blacksburg, I claim rights and privileges to engage in an institutional critique of Virginia Tech's diversity discourse and include my voice in this discourse, expecting change.

My Positionality in Relation to Black Feminist Theory

My ancestral experiences also inform my positionality. My identities and experiences as a Black woman connect me in many ways to understanding the frameworks and approaches discussed in Black feminist theory. Patricia Hill Collins' (2022), *Black Feminist Thought*, applies intellectual concepts to my epistemological and ontological perspectives that I would have otherwise minimized as an everyday experience or just my family's story. Collins helped me see the larger sociopolitical structures that shape my life experiences and my mother's and grandmother's whose lives impact mine. Collins' work specifies U.S. Black women by positing characteristics of Black feminist thought. When my grandmother emigrated to the U.S., she stepped into U.S. Black women's socioeconomic status and the oppressions they faced being mapped onto her body.

My grandmother grew up in Jamaica before the country saw independence from Britain. She grew up under a colonialist social structure. She was a domestic worker in white homes in Jamaica and emigrated to the U.S. to do the same work in white households, having seen advertisements for these U.S. positions while in Jamaica. She had seven children being raised separately by different family members from her family and the families of their respective fathers. In pursuit of a life in the U.S., she left her children behind and eventually earned enough money to bring them to the U.S. one by one, starting with my mother (the eldest). My grandmother's story has unique characteristics that make it hers, but her story is not uncommon.

Collins explains that before World War II, Black women as domestic workers in white households, as one of two employment opportunities, contributed toward their economic exploitation. There was a contradiction between their "social location" and the close relationships they had with white children and employers—marking them as an "outsider-within"—"a peculiar marginality that stimulated a distinctive Black women's perspective on a variety of themes" (p. 15). My grandmother indeed built lifetime relationships with her employers. She was gifted valuable jewelry and left money in a will that allowed her to pay off a home she purchased for her retirement, but she had a distinctive perspective on womanhood to live her life independently and empowered. My grandmother never married, and her reason was always, "mi nah marry no mon fi tek mi money dat I wuk hard fa." No man (husband) would take the money she worked hard for. She subverted heteropatriarchal dominance by scathing off marriage despite any social pressures that would suggest otherwise. For most of her career, she worked as a certified nursing assistant, and by the time she passed away in 2020 at ninety-two years old, she had lived in retirement for twenty years and left a significant inheritance to her six living children.

Furthermore, Collins argues that with Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality (nuanced experiences that emerge from intersecting identities), Black women's intersectional experiences in the sociopolitical context result in intersecting oppressions elucidating the weight of oppression on Black women, and from this tension, Black women's knowledges, and ways of inventing sustainable resistance movements against injustices that lead to social change. Collins (2022) states, "the dialect of oppression and activism characterizing U.S. Black women's experiences with intersecting oppressions also influenced the ideas and actions of Black women intellectuals" (p. 17). The "outsider-within" trope persists even today; as Collins indicates, "U.S. Black women intellectuals have found themselves in outsider-within positions in many academic endeavors" (p. 17). In this dissertation, the saliency of examining the role of Black women in diversity discourse was a high priority from my positionality shaped by my grandmother's domestic worker experiences. I could quickly draw parallels between the "outsider-within" trope and Black women in diversity practitioner positions (those in positions that contribute to diversity efforts within the institution) at Virginia Tech. Most importantly, their role at a PWI means they have discursive knowledges in diversity work worth excavating to contribute towards the possibilities in making institutional change.

My Positionality in Relation to the Field of Rhetoric and Writing

My professional experience informs my ability to have a high-level view of this research topic and break it into digestible chunks for a generative discussion on the rhetorical situation. I have over fifteen years of bids and proposals experience in the Federal, State, and local government-contractor sector, which continuously allows me to apply and build on concepts from rhetoric and technical and professional communication. Deciding on my scope for this dissertation was difficult because my professional work addresses national and global-level

concerns. My work has existed at each tier of the U.S. government, departments within the government, military branches, and even globally, with experience at the NATO agency located in Den Haag (The Hague), Netherlands. My professional interactions span a whole gamut of identities and roles, mostly with white men with military and engineering backgrounds. So, although my inclinations draw me to changing institutions at the macro-level, I follow Porter et al.'s (2000) advice to enter the research at micro-level sites that will make institutional change possible at the macro-level institution over time.

My industry work contributes toward mitigating national and global concerns assuming some level of risk with any solution, but there is a value-added when the solution has a low cost and significant risk reduction compared to other solutions. As a scholar, I shift from the perspective of being solutions-oriented, which is deterministic, to possibilities for infinite approaches and continued discussions on the critical issue of diversity because institutions continuously fail to make sustainable change, tainting many towards pessimism having little to no expectations for change. Collins (2022) references Nikki Giovanni, who “admonishes that people are rarely powerless, no matter how stringent the restrictions on our lives: ‘We’ve got to live in the real world. If we don’t like the world we’re living in, change it. And if we can’t change it, we change ourselves. We can do something’ (in Tate 1983, p. 68)” (p. 153). My positionality helps me to locate sites where PWIs attempt impossibilities for change through discourse, but this dissertation explores these sites of perceived impossibility toward possibilities for making institutional change (Porter et al., 2000).

Theoretical Approach

In this section, I discuss the theoretical approaches shaped by research questions and methodological approaches in this dissertation. I draw on rhetorical methodologies, institutional and diversity rhetorics, and Black feminist frameworks.

Rhetorical Methodologies

My theoretical approach is foregrounded by the rhetorical methodologies of Porter et al.'s (2000) "Institutional critique: A rhetorical methodology for change," Sara Ahmed's (2012) *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*, and Louis M. Maraj's (2020) *Black or Right: Anti/Racist Campus Rhetorics*.

Porter et al. (2000), in "Institutional Critique: A Rhetorical Methodology for Change," argues that although institutions are hard to change, there is a possibility for change through rhetorical action. They claim that "Though institutions are certainly powerful, they are not monoliths; they are rhetorically constructed human designs (whose power is reinforced by buildings, laws, traditions, and knowledge-making practices) and so are changeable" (p. 611).

According to Porter et al. (2000), an institutional critique is meant to examine "institutional formations" due to the relationship between "social processes and local practices," making institutions "rhetorical systems of decision-making." In other words, institutions are material and discursive spaces, including a spatial and rhetorical dynamic that raises questions of power and access. Institutional critique is a "rhetorical practice [for] mediating macro-level structures and micro-level actions rooted in a particular space and time" (p. 612). Who has access to make decisions/changes throughout the institution? Porter et al. posit the need for "boundary interrogation" to understand access points. They draw on David Sibley (1995), who expresses that "'zones of ambiguity,' or spaces that house change, difference, or clash of values

or meanings...[are] locations where change can take place because of the boundary instability they highlight” (Porter et al., 2000, p. 624). Subsequently, identities are interrogated at these boundaries in an “identification process” that involves inclusion, exclusion, and boundary maintenance practices.

“Institutional critique examines institutions as rhetorical designs—mapping the conflicted frameworks in these heterogeneous and contested spaces, articulating the hidden and seemingly silent voices of those marginalized by the powerful, and observing how power operates within institutional space—in order to expose and interrogate possibilities for institutional change through the practice of rhetoric” (630).

Sara Ahmed (2012) adds that “institutions provide a frame in which things happen (or don’t happen). To understand how ‘what happens’ happens, we actually need to narrow rather than widen) the frame: to think about words, texts, objects, and bodies, to follow them around, to explore what they do and do not do, when they are put into action” (p. 49-50).

Louis M. Maraj’s (2020) monograph, *Black or Right: Anti/Racist Campus Rhetorics*, uses a Black feminist lens to analyze Blackness in relation to white campus spaces drawing on rhetorical theory and literacy studies. Modeling Sara Ahmed’s methodological approach, Maraj conducts a critical discourse analysis of three literacy events (rhetorical situations) at a PWI (a deep rhetorical ecology). Maraj finds that the language used within a historically white institution regarding these literacy events reifies white notions of Black bodies as disruptive in white spaces and as commodities to bolster diversity (“institutionalized difference”). Maraj deploys “rhetorical reclamation” to create possible Black rhetorical technologies for antiracism. Through rhetorical reclamation, “Black disruption” intervenes in the institution’s deep rhetorical ecology in response to “institutional white defensiveness” and destabilizes the commodification

of Black bodies. The institution's response to or within literacy events marks Black bodies as not belonging, such as written policies that use racialized language to characterize Blackness according to neoliberal imaginaries.

Elizabeth C. Britt, in the "Rhetorical Work of Institutions," explicates that "analyzing discourse as situated within institutions means interrogating how knowledge-making practices, ontological assumptions, and implicit values shape the reception or production of discourse. It also means examining how discourse functions (rhetorically and materially) within and between institutions" (Britt & Douglas, 2006, p. 137). Porter et al. add that we should "seek to change institutions through acts that constitute a critical rhetoric of institutional design" (p. 625). This dissertation is designed to do just that.

Black Feminisms

Although institutions may appear as hard to change, Black women have historically traversed institutional transformation through resistance work against hegemonic ideologies for the empowerment of those who face intersectional forms of oppression, like Black women and other oppressed groups. Patricia Hill Collins (2002) illustrated a theory of Black feminist thought (Black feminisms), recognizing that Black women's experiences were not like white men and women or Black men. In *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, Collins (2022) exemplifies her concern using the experiences of Black women domestic workers, pre-World War II, who suffered economic exploitation laboring in white households. Black domestic workers witnessed dominant power structures within white homes. They suffered internal conflicts on what it meant to be a good woman and mother—ideas constructed by whiteness—while deprived of the privileges to embody these prescribed roles. Due to oppressive social inequalities, Black domestic workers left their families to work in white

elite homes. Collins coins this existence as the “outsider-within,” a dual existence as an outsider within oppressive spaces. Collins (2022) states, “African-American women have been active in movements for Black civil rights such as the abolitionist movement, the anti-lynching struggles in the early twentieth century, and the...civil rights movement in the South” (p. 279). Black women’s lived experiences and oppressions constructed what Collins coined as Black feminist thought. As a critical social theory, Black feminist thought supports developing innovative ways to make institutional transformation under the guidance of principles derived from Black women’s everyday practices and social activism. Collins (2022) characterizes Black feminist thought as “distinctive...Black feminist intellectual traditions” (p. 23) and explicates six distinguishing features:

1. Black women’s standpoints are “Collective wisdom on how to survive as U.S. Black women” (p. 32).
2. Dialectal relationship of African American women’s individual experiences with oppression and ideas for activism: “Diverse responses to common challenges” of U.S. Black women based on the individual experiences of African American women (p. 33).
3. Dialogical relationship of “Black women’s collective experiences and group knowledge” (p. 39) with the belief that changed thinking leads to changed actions, stimulating a changed consciousness.
4. “Contributions of African-American women intellectuals” from within and outside academia, including a merger of action and theory, birthed from their “everyday actions and experiences” (p. 43-44).

5. Dynamic and significance of change: “As social conditions change, so must the knowledge and practices designed to resist them” (p. 51).
6. Relationship with other social justice projects: “Black women’s struggles are part of a wider struggle for human dignity, empowerment, and social justice” (p. 54).

These six features of Black feminist thought carry significance to Black women and the sentiment of Black women when embarking on a critical research study. From the Black feminist perspective (Black feminist knowledges, standpoints, and oppressions across domains of power), this dissertation research approach includes a critical institutional critique that centers on Black women’s lived experiences and aims for institutional change in opposition to oppressive structures inscribed using diversity discourse channels. I understand that institutional transformation may not occur all at once, and changes occur over time, no matter the scope and magnitude of the research. Collins addresses that “domination may be inevitable as a social fact,” and the critical race theory tenets refer to racism as a “persistent and even [a] permanent feature in politics, education, corporations, popular media, sports, and in the criminal justice system” (Brown, 2017, p. 3).

Micro-Level Sites of Study: Space/Place, Technology, and Processes

I examine four sites of inquiry in this dissertation: Virginia Tech’s organizational structures, public-facing diversity discourse, climate surveys, and the discursive practices of Black women leaders in diversity-related positions to gather their insights on institutional processes. In her study, Sara Ahmed (2012) follows diversity language around to understand how the institution is ‘saying’ versus ‘doing’ diversity and argues for researchers to continue to follow diversity language around to gain more insights. Ahmed beseeches those doing diversity work to continue to share their adversities with diversity as an act of resistance and a means of

data collection. (Women, B. C. F. R. O., 2018, March 7). She argues the benefit of data collection is that “data becomes a technology for exposing the gap between official descriptions of diversity and what the organization is doing.” (Ahmed, 2012, p. 55).

As a path forward in diversity work, Ahmed posits in her 2017 lecture that those who have experiences with the institution’s failures to reconcile diversity concerns should share them, which leads to an outpouring of others’ experiences—what Ahmed calls “lifting the lid.” Ahmed states, “professional norms of conduct are about keeping a lid on it; institutional loyalty as silence in case of institutional damage” (Women, B. C. F. R. O., 2018, March 7). Ahmed calls for us not to keep silent and be “unprofessional” by collecting more data from sharing experiences. Ahmed interviewed diversity practitioners to capture their experiences with institutional diversity work—an ethnographic research method for data collection. Ahmed states the benefit of data collection in this work when explaining that “data is used as a technology for exposing the failure of the university to live up to its use of diversity as self-description” (p. 55).

Porter et al. (2000) define the sites selected for data collection. They argue that institutional critique should use a feminist methodology to conduct “boundary interrogation.” Boundary interrogation is a “tactic for interrogating how spaces are produced in institutions” (p. 623). The rhetorical analysis in this dissertation uses Black feminist theory in the boundary interrogation process where language, positionality, and privilege intersect with the site of inquiry. Porter et al. recommend spaces/places (boundaries), technology (access), and processes (rhetorical systems/discourse) as three possible sites of study for interrogating rhetorical relations between sites. This dissertation at Virginia Tech discusses how institutional power is inscribed at PWIs. The sites of inquiry center diversity discourse in four micro-level sites: 1) Interviews with

Black women diversity practitioners, 2) Virginia Tech’s organizational charts, 3) the “InclusiveVT” YouTube channel video series, and 4) climate surveys.

Organizational Charts

I analyze Virginia Tech’s organizational charts as symbolic diversity discourse, discussed in Chapter 4. Academic institutions are businesses with corporate cultures. The organizational charts of Virginia Tech display the various roles that participate in the operations (the senior administrative personnel) of the institution. Organizations symbolize shared knowledges, values, and processes (Johnson-Eilola and Selber, 2004). Porter et al. (2000) posit that,

institutional critique should look at bureaucratic structures—for instance, at how law and policy create “value” for sites and influence discursive relations and at how organizational roles and responsibilities, work models (e.g., management philosophies, publishing models, collaboration practices), lines of authority and communication, and alignment of and interaction between personnel all affect institutional practices. One premise of institutional critique is that understanding the power and operation of such structures is important to developing strategies for changing them (p. 626).

I conduct a rhetorical analysis of Virginia Tech’s organizational structure to identify the diversity discourse lines of communication, lines of authority, and roles in the institution with decision-making power to approve changes. Also, I trace the roles and responsibilities for engaging in diversity initiatives as part of this dissertation’s rhetorical analysis to make sense of diversity discourse’s effectiveness and possible constraints. I initially conduct a comparative analysis of the three organizational charts that display leadership and administrators for where they converge, revealing invisible structures and making meaning of the impact on diversity discourse. The analysis of the organizational charts sets the tone and contextualizes the

institution before a rhetorical analysis of Virginia Tech’s public-facing diversity discourse and climate surveys that follow in Chapter 5.

InclusiveVT Videos

Diversity discourse, presented by Virginia Tech’s Office for Inclusion and Diversity’s (OID) YouTube channel, hosts discussions on social issues with community members and an update from the institution on the outcomes of diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. I focus on the circulation of diversity discourse; my discussions are influenced by the literature on how language shapes imagined communities (Anderson, 2006) forming publics and how rhetorical ecologies is a means to conduct a rhetorical analysis of public spheres (Britt, 2006; Edbauer Rice, 2005).

According to public sphere theory, circulating discourse forms publics, and I am concerned with how diversity discourse circulates. Public sphere theory exposes the institutional power structures and hierarchies in various modes of diversity discourse. Understanding the functionality of the public sphere further contextualizes how diversity discourse circulates. Gerard Hauser and Thomas Benson (1999) articulate the public sphere as a network or “communicative ecology” (p. 60), a metaphor that depicts the circulatory nature of discourse that constitutes a public. The dynamic nature of forming and continuing a public allows individuality and voice finding. The bureaucracy of institutional structures is silencing but does not exclusively inhibit nondominant individuals’ rhetoricity or formation of publics (counter publics).

Virginia Tech has a YouTube channel called “InclusiveVT,” where I found many discussions on diversity-related topics. In the interest and scope of this dissertation, I did not incorporate diversity discussions from Virginia Tech’s Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter that may

demonstrate how people react to the institution's posts. I analyzed twenty-six videos, equivalent to 21 hours and 22.6 mins of transcripts, published by Virginia Tech's OID starting in 2020. These videos are available to the public and representative of Virginia Tech's concern with diversity progress within the institution and position on social issues. I conduct a critical discourse analysis, discussed in the next section, to gather data on the salient language and identify patterns in Virginia Tech's diversity discourse. A rhetorical analysis is also conducted to assess the context of the videos and gather data on who gets to speak (based on their positionality) and the modality (method) that carries the messaging. The steps below explain the process taken in collecting Virginia Tech's diversity discourse for analysis:

1. Sought out public platforms in which Virginia Tech engages in diversity-related discourse.
2. Selected diversity-related videos produced in two series on the "Inclusive VT" YouTube channel, "Making the Chair Fit" and "VT Unfinished Conversation" (two data sets)
3. Chose all episodic videos avoiding multi-hour (3+ hour) videos that were recordings of Virginia Tech's diversity summits due to the video length and constraints with the magnitude of a dissertation research study. However, I gathered background information on the institution to contextualize the dissertation.
4. I extracted transcripts from each video and cleaned them up to prepare them for the critical discourse analysis. It involved running the transcripts through Python coding to gather information from a large corpus of text (discussed in the "Modes of Analysis" section).

Climate Surveys

Also, I sourced climate surveys from Virginia Tech's website, which serve separate, distinct audiences (e.g., undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty/staff) and are salient in this dissertation to understand how Virginia Tech is assessing its populations' perceptions. This analysis includes three climate surveys representing each population: 1) undergraduates, 2) graduates, and 3) faculty/staff. I reached out to the point of contact for each climate survey. I scheduled a meeting with them to confirm the most recent survey, processes, roles involved in the development phase, and responsibilities for circulating climate surveys to their intended audiences.

Data Collection

I collected most data for this dissertation by reading scholarship across multiple disciplines and university communications, down-selecting multiple university diversity videos as a basis for analysis, collecting university climate surveys, and interviewing university climate survey administrators and Black women faculty in diversity-related positions. Also, I listened to the stories of the first Black women at Virginia Tech and read multiple books published on the history of Virginia Tech. I attended an event at the Smithfield plantation property on Virginia Tech's campus to add to my knowledge of the institution.

Mixed-Methods Approach

I used a mixed-methods research approach linking qualitative and quantitative data from the data I produced in my discourse analysis to analyze and discuss the quantitative data in the Virginia Tech climate surveys.

Participant Interviews

The interviews in this dissertation capture data that is applied in the analysis of the micro-level sites of this study as intellectual knowledge that contributes a distinctive perspective. I engaged in two types of interviews that were informal and formal. I met with three Virginia Tech staff members who manage the institution's climate surveys and represent three groups: undergraduate students; graduate students; and faculty, staff, and wage employees. I conducted informal conversations with them, seeking a better understanding of the climate surveys for analysis. I asked questions about their role or responsibilities, the purpose of the climate surveys, the individuals they work with to push climate surveys to the campus community, and methods for analyzing and reporting the survey data. Ultimately, I used the informal interview to identify my analysis's most recent climate surveys.

The second set of interviews included formal interviews with Black women faculty/staff in the role of diversity practitioner. I reached out via email to Black women who work in affinity spaces that are predominantly Black (e.g., Black Cultural Center, Ujima Living-Learning community, etc.) as well as Black women who are a part of the organizational structure of The Office for Inclusion and Diversity. In my first attempt at recruiting participants via email, I did not elicit substantial responses to my inquiry as anticipated, so I allowed for the snowballing method where Black women who responded to my inquiry began to recommend other Black women I could interview. They introduced me to Black women who I may not have otherwise known to consider or had access to without extending their network to me.

Another element in the selection process came about when considering the broader scope of my participant experiences. I initially considered current Black women faculty/staff but

contacted former and newly hired employees from different vantage points. I interviewed women in three categories based on their years of employment with Virginia Tech:

- Diversity practitioners are presently engaged in diversity-related positions.
- Past diversity practitioners contextualize the situation over time.
- New diversity practitioners to capture first impressions in their position.

I conducted six interviews in the data collection phase of this dissertation with Virginia Tech diversity practitioners who are Black women.

Modes of Analysis

After selecting Virginia Tech's "Inclusive VT" YouTube video series as a research site, I needed a method that supports a large corpus, having pulled the transcripts for all videos included in the dissertation. I conducted a critical discourse analysis on the transcripts to understand how diversity discourse inscribes institutional structures. Critical discourse analysis "is an interdisciplinary approach to textual study that aims to explicate abuses of power promoted by those texts by analyzing linguistic/semiotic details in light of the larger social and political contexts in which those texts circulate" (Huckin et al., 2012, p. 107). This critical discourse analysis method is combined with theories of rhetoric and functions to analyze multimodal discourse at spatial sites of inquiry: spaces/places, technologies, and processes. Critical discourse analysis provisions a "critical" approach to engage the language and power relationship in a large corpus of multimodal institutional discourse (the object of study). The critical discourse analysis process involves coding large qualitative data sets for language patterns and then taking the first round of analysis to code themes in the discourse.

The qualitative and quantitative data outputs are placed into the context of the study site to engage in a generative discussion in Chapter 5 on rhetorical formations emerging from the data.

Critical Discourse Analysis

In a critical discourse analysis to understand how Virginia Tech is using language in diversity discourse, I used Python coding applying a Term Frequency-Inverse Document Frequency (TF-IDF) library (code template), a method used in data science projects for a large corpus of text, to read the large corpus of “Inclusive VT” video transcripts searching for the terms most valuable to Virginia Tech.

I worked with Dr. Chreston Miller, an assistant professor and the Data and Informatics Consultant for Engineering within Data Services of the University Libraries at Virginia Tech, for coding support. We had several conversations about my dissertation and my concerns about how technology can be racialized, and we agreed on producing data outputs for four Python methods. Selecting the most salient method and keeping this dissertation in scope, TF-IDF was the only method necessary to address my research questions.

The way TF-IDF works is how often a word occurs in a document multiplied by how unique the word is across all documents resulting in the weight of importance of the word to the corpus. The TF-IDF calculation mitigates the limitations of ranking only term frequency. Term frequency alone determines the number of times each word occurs across the entire document or corpus but tracks parts of speech, like articles and prepositions, that would naturally have a high frequency with very little importance to the context. In using TF-IDF, parts of speech are considered “stopwords” that are removed, and punctuation marks are in the initial steps of running the Python library before the code reaches the TF-IDF calculation step.

TF-IDF Equation:

$$\text{TF} = (\text{Number of repetitions of a term in a document}) / (\text{\# of terms in a document}) * \text{IDF}$$
$$= \text{Log}[(\text{\# Number of documents}) / (\text{Number of documents containing the term})]$$

I analyzed the diversity video transcripts by conducting three analysis cycles.

Analysis Cycle One: Running the Code. The first coding cycle aimed to identify the specific language and/or mainstream diversity language beyond what is visible (e.g., diversity, equity, inclusion)/culture of diversity. Python coding is considered natural language processing (NLP). NLP is used to “make computers understand unstructured text and retrieve meaningful pieces of information from it;” it is a “subfield of AI [artificial intelligence] involving the interactions between computers and humans.” The NLP Python framework is generally used in topic modeling and similarity detection. Running Python coding, I used the TF-IDF method to identify salient terms in Virginia Tech’s diversity discourse. I then analyzed how these terms shape institutional spaces, discursive structures, and power. The TF-IDF method outputs a score, which is the weight of the term across the entire corpus.

Analysis Cycle Two: Identifying Themes. After retrieving a list of terms, ordered from the most valued (highest TF-IDF score) to the least (lowest TF-IDF score), I referred to a separate output of the IDF values to select videos for rhetorical analysis. The IDF value expresses the importance of a term per document (video transcript). The IDF output helped me to locate the respective videos(s) for each term to discuss the term in the context of the relevant video(s) and identify videos for their uniqueness based on terms with an IDF value of zero (term appears in a singular video transcript and nowhere else in the corpus).

Analysis Cycle Three: Rhetorical Analysis. During this cycle, the most relevant rhetorical analysis is applied to making meaning of the data for further discussion.

Rhetorical Analysis

Using my conceptual framework (outlined in the next section), I conduct a rhetorical analysis of all sites of inquiry and enter into a generative discussion as a contribution of this dissertation to the field of rhetoric and writing.

Conceptual Framework

This dissertation uses a qualitative and quantitative approach using a predominantly rhetorical framework and a Black feminist framework. It aims to understand how Virginia Tech operationalizes diversity discourse and how it inscribes oppressive institutional structures. Critical discourse and rhetorical analysis using concepts from Black feminist thought will allow for mapping institutional power at the various sites of inquiry. The mapping includes identifying themes of oppression; power; Black feminist epistemology, concerns, and activism; and identification/intersectionality to connote a boundary (or intersection) for interrogation. The terms that characterize these themes are markers to bound this work by creating a baseline with predefined terms. Additional themes in this work will come from making meaning of the discourse in the analysis process. Except for identification (a rhetorical concept), these Black feminist themes support identifying Black feminist standpoints in the dissertation that come from the discursive contributions of Black women diversity practitioners from different sites of this dissertation. Below I provide a table of themes, related terms, and definitions that support mapping institutional power.

Themes

Themes	Related Terms
Identification Process (Porter et al., 2000)	• Inclusion • Exclusion • Boundaries
Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1990)	• Race • Sexuality

Themes	Related Terms
	• Gender • Class • Nation
Domains of Power (Collins, 2022)	• Structural² • Disciplinary³ • Hegemonic⁴ • Interpersonal⁵
Black Feminist Concerns/Forms of Oppression (Collins, 2022)	• Objectification • Commodification • Exploitation
Black Feminist Epistemology (Collins, 2022)	• Ethics of Caring⁶ • Ethics of Personal Responsibility⁷
Black Feminist Activism (Collins, 2022)	• Ownership/Choice/Empowerment • Accountability • Collective Action⁸

Throughout the analyses and discussions in Chapters 3-5, I identify instances of oppressive structures and power dynamics, drawing on concepts from my conceptual framework. These concepts operate as constituents in mapping out institutional power at a PWI when Black women are identified as the leading diversity practitioners.

² Structural Domain of Power: “How social institutions are organized to reproduce Black women’s subordination over time”; “emphasis on large-scale, interlocking social institutions” (Collins 2022, 350).

³ Disciplinary Domain of Power: “Manages power relations... through the ways in which organizations are run”: bureaucratic hierarchies and techniques of surveillance (Collins 2022, 355).

⁴ Hegemonic Domain of Power: “Deals with ideology, culture, and consciousness” (Collins 2022, 359); “ability to shape consciousness via the manipulation of ideas, images, symbols, and ideologies” (Collins 2022, 361)

⁵ Interpersonal Domain of Power: “Each individual derives varying amounts of penalty and privilege from the multiple systems of oppression that frame everyone’s lives” (Collins 2022, 363)

⁶ The Ethics of Caring: “Personal expressiveness, emotions, and empathy are central to knowledge validation process” (Collins 2022, 334)

⁷ The Ethic of Personal Accountability: “Not only must individuals develop their knowledge claims through dialogue and present them in a style proving their concern for their ideas, but people are expected to be accountable for their knowledge claims” (Collins 2022, 336)

⁸ Collective Action: “only collective action can effectively generate lasting institutional transformation required for social justice” (Collins 2022, 366)

Chapter 3: Analysis and Discussion of Black Women Diversity Practitioners

“Black women, as diversity practitioners, are not afforded the power to make structural changes as a macro-level. Instead, institutions use the face and labor of Black women to support institutional diversity aims” —Evans, 2023

Before engaging in an analysis and discussion from my interviews with research participants, I foreground Black women’s involvement in diversity work at Virginia Tech and the oppressive structures around them. The foregrounding factors in the historical context to further grasp the continued support of Black women’s support to the institution. I identified several themes among shared diversity discursive practices that emerged from the discussions.

Foreground: Hegemonic and Structural Domains and Black Women at Virginia Tech

In 1966, the first Black women were admitted to Virginia Tech, and all Black students were permitted to live on campus. Marguerite Harper, a Black woman and student from the cohort of the first Black women, recalled in an interview a racist tradition during Virginia Tech football games where cheerleaders ran across the field with a large confederate flag and the Civil War “Dixie” song played at halftime. Marguerite was assaulted by a man who punched her and poured beer on her for not standing for the “Dixie” song. When her mother first witnessed the flag and song during a televised game, her mother called, concerned for her safety, and thought she made a mistake by sending Marguerite to Virginia Tech. As a student senate member, Marguerite brought a resolution forward with others to remove the Confederate flag and the “Dixie” song. The Confederate flag also hung in Cassell Coliseum, an enclosed stadium for sporting and other events. Dr. Laverne Hairston, from this same cohort, adds to this memory, recalling the flag being temporarily removed when a prominent Black figure, Earl Gardner, visited the institution.

The senate resolution led to student protests where white students hung Confederate flags from their dorm windows and blasted “Dixie.” Marguerite was even approached and verbally threatened by a white man and peer regarding the resolution. Marguerite reflects, “[t]he time, when I was most fearful, was when we were attempting to get the university to take the confederate flag out of the Coliseum” (Oral History with Marguerite Laurette Harper Scott, March 2, 1996, 41:36). These actions signified the campus climate and the effects of *institutional racism*. Ultimately, the resolution passed to remove the Confederate flag from football games and discontinue playing the “Dixie” song.

However, the effect of *institutional racism* leaves long-lasting racial trauma to those who become its victim. Marguerite expresses that her experiences with *institutional racism* changed her perceptions of navigating white spaces where racial language is mobilized. Marguerite explains,

First when I came here, I was a sweet child. By the time I left, I was ‘Ungowa! Black power!’ kind of person. I had become that and I remember always having to have that serious façade so that people would take me seriously. So that they would be careful what they would say around me...I guess in a way I tried to become intimidating to people, which I guess was kind of like a defense mechanism to try to survive in this environment. (Oral History with Marguerite Laurette Harper Scott, March 2, 1996, 50:55).

In 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated, and with an overtly racist campus climate, white Virginia Tech students celebrated this news. Dr. Hairston describes her experience as she grieved Martin Luther King, Jr.’s murder in the company of other students and explains, “A bunch of us went to the apartment that was above The Lyric [theatre] and we were talking about what happened...and I still remember...a Black cadet who came over because kids were

celebrating in the dorms...and I was like...I can't deal with this anymore...I need[ed] to get out" (Oral History with Marguerite Laurette Harper Scott, March 2, 1996, 47:19). The expressions of *institutional racism* tangentially engender *institutional whiteness* that map what the institution says belongs and does not belong. Dr. Hairston, unwilling to attend Virginia Tech under this campus climate that exemplified ambivalence, left the institution after two years to complete her degree elsewhere. As time passes, more notable incidents demonstrate *institutional racism* and *institutional whiteness* as technologies wielded by Virginia Tech as an institution to retain the bureaucratic structure for *institutional power*. The institution's focus is on the business or corporatization of the institution rather than equitable benefits for the entirety of the campus population.

In this chapter, I discuss the background information on the interview participants and structure, study site, analysis method, rhetorical analysis, and discussion of possibilities for institutional change. I analyze and engage in a rhetorical discussion using the data collected in the participatory interviews of this research. I conducted six separate interviews, each with a Black woman who is a current or former employee at Virginia Tech in a diversity-related position.

Introduction

These Black women exemplify Virginia Tech's diversity practitioners from the Black community. In this dissertation, diversity practitioners refer to employees who contribute directly to diversity efforts within the institution, whether their diversity support is required for their position. The Black women diversity practitioners selected for this dissertation are in positions across the institution's organizational structure as directors, faculty/staff, and administrative professionals. The names and positions of these Black women are not disclosed in this

dissertation as an extension of the safe space established during the interview process; they are referred to as “Practitioner” and an alpha character (e.g., Practitioner X). I avoid numerical sequencing to not promote a hierarchical orientation among participants. This chapter answers Sara Ahmed’s (2018) call to keep “lifting the lid” on diversity by collecting stories as rigorous data because “professional norms are about keeping the lid on” the issues. The interviews averaged one and a half hours each, and the questions focused on hearing the voices of Black women on Virginia Tech’s expressed diversity and their experience with doing diversity work.

This part of the research captures Black women practitioners’ distinctive perspectives on Virginia Tech’s diversity discourse. I use this intellectual knowledge to construct Black women’s standpoints on diversity and how their discursive practices produce possibilities for institutional change. This section rhetorically focuses on diversity practitioners’ positionality, considering their intersecting identities, oppressions, and privilege in a predominantly white institutional space. Space is also considered more abstractly as the position that the diversity practitioners hold within the institution’s organizational structure and their position in diversity discourse as it relates to institutional power.

Sites of Study

Structuring this dissertation as an “institutional critique” (Porter et al., 2000), Virginia Tech is the macro-level site of study, and the interviews with Black women diversity practitioners a micro-level site of study with the university as a discursive backdrop. In the interviews, I asked specific questions about the other sites of study for this dissertation to gather discursive data according to the practitioners’ perceptions of them, further analyzed and discussed in Chapter 5: Virginia Tech’s macro-level organizational structure, “InclusiveVT” YouTube videos (micro-level), and Virginia Tech’s climate surveys (micro-level). I discuss these

sites of study with Black women diversity practitioners to collect data from their perceptions regarding their discursive effectiveness. All interviews with diversity practitioners were held via a Zoom video conferencing platform. I started each interview by asking diversity practitioners about their role at Virginia Tech to locate the space/place they occupy within the organizational structure and identify their proximity to university leadership—conceptually, their proximity to decision-making power to explore the rhetorical effects and Black women empowerment.

As outlined in Chapter 2, I conduct a rhetorical analysis using a mapping process (Porter et al. 2000) to examine how Virginia Tech’s institutional power is constructed through diversity discourse and the discursive practices of Black women diversity practitioners. I draw on Porter et al.’s (2000) identification process that focuses on inclusion, exclusion, and boundaries as they emerge from the conversations with diversity practitioners. I listen to the diversity practitioners regarding their commitment to justice for the Black community at Virginia Tech using a Black feminist perspective, including concepts of Black feminist concerns (objectification, commodification, and exploitation), epistemology (ethics of caring and personal responsibility), and activism (empowerment, accountability, and collective action) (Collins 2022). The identification process and Black feminist concepts help uncover how these rhetorical elements are constructed within the institution’s bureaucratic structure and diversity discourse. I conclude by addressing how the institution’s design of space (diversity roles within the organizational structure) using diversity discourse produces what appear as sites of impossibility for making institutional change.

I started each interview with a conversation asking how the participant imagines diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Next, we discussed processes or actions they found necessary to accomplish their job responsibilities or goals. This conversation framed discussions

related to discourse modalities, collaboration, and departmental structure in relation to how they do their jobs and their responsibilities in addressing racial incidents. Then, I collected interview participants' perspectives on the Office for Inclusion and Diversity's (OID) "InclusiveVT" YouTube videos and campus climate surveys as effective technologies in making diversity progress. Lastly, diversity practitioners shared their perspectives on the role of college presidents in addressing diversity concerns and campus racial incidents.

During the analysis, the interview results showed multiple instances where participants' perspectives converged across each section. Following the alignment of responses, I present interview results of the Black women diversity practitioner's collective wisdom on diversity discourse in thematic sections as Black women's standpoints (Collins 2022).

Rhetorical Analysis: Mapping Institutional Power

This rhetorical analysis of Black women diversity practitioners' engagement with diversity work aims to demonstrate the nuances that reify oppressive institutional structures (as discussed in Chapter 1).

Imagined Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

In responding to how they imagine DEI as either separate terms or collectively, Black women diversity practitioners shared their imaginings of diversity, discussing them as their expectations of DEI—what they would like to see from Virginia Tech moving forward. Their expectations do not align with the reality of their experiences at Virginia Tech. A few diversity practitioners speak in the past tense connoting a perspective that no longer exists, necessitating the need for change.

Practitioner A: "I started here probably more optimistic than I am now."

Practitioner C: “I imagined DEI as clear, specific, and intentional goals...it’s like dangling the carrot across multiple units that have DEI focus, but the focus may not be the priority.” DEI goals are “tailored to meet the needs of certain audiences like donors” or for strategic planning.

Some practitioners expressed diversity as a location (a place) where representation means different voices from diverse bodies and placing them in spaces of access (e.g., “leadership,” “membership,” etc.). For example, Practitioner D mentioned diversity as including safe campus spaces where students can see themselves.

Practitioner A: “I imagine that a lot of different voices are going to be represented...I would like to see diversity as a place—where people can find their people or see themselves represented in leadership, in membership, in organizations, and in the culture.”

Practitioner D recalls her hiring process when asked what she would “do” to support Black students. With no intention of being the “Black Savior,” she informed her interviewers that she was not there to solve their racial concerns. She describes diversity as an “institutional concern and not relegated to just one person.” Practitioner D’s experience is a peek inside how the *commodification*, *objectification*, and *exploitation* of Black women creep up and are systemic. She averted the Black tax that would have had her indefinitely carrying the weight of Black people relieving the pressure of her white colleagues from shouldering the burden of responsibility. Black tax can include “the invisible labor of mentoring students of color, being appointed or invited to serve on myriad committees, task forces, initiatives, etc., particularly when themed with ‘diversity’” (De Welde, 2017). Practitioner D avoids having a hand in her own suffering. However, the expectations for Practitioner D to focus on Black concerns but the

assumption that a ready-made plan exists to save her people were queued up for discussion. Lastly, having witnessed a similar inquisition in academic hiring at Virginia Tech, PWIs have been known for taking Black women's knowledge without giving them credit (Nash). The interviewers asked during the hiring process for Practitioner D's plan to help the Black community, and if she shared her intellectual property without being an employee, then her ideas would not have the protections of the university.

Perceived Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

After having the interview participant discuss their understanding of a diverse, equitable, and inclusive institution, I shifted the discussion to discuss how their experiences at Virginia Tech inform their current perceptions of diversity at Virginia Tech.

Practitioner A explains that her perceptions of diversity at Virginia Tech are characterized by the institution's lack of urgency in making progress—slow progress.

My experiences here have taught me how hard it seems to be, for us, to go from conversation to action. And from even those who are well-intentioned, getting them to move in a real direction seems to be tough. It's been interesting to me to note how the Black community has changed—the Black community itself is more diverse in some ways—in terms of interest and ways people identify and connect. But, one of the things I noticed with students is that the conversations are largely the same. We have made some progress here, but at the same time, I feel like the things happening in classrooms, the things happening on the campus, in the town—they're the same. And, now maybe the difference is how others react to us—the conversations they're willing to have and not willing to have. We've seen that fluctuate again even with the last political changes. So

I've really become much more—skeptical of real progress—the possibility for real progress. I've learned more nuances of what to look for when real change is possible.

In a short soliloquy that is addressed to the institution's leadership, who have access to funds and can "effect real change," she questions their intentions to make progress, "Where's the money going? What's your plan? What have you done? Where have I seen you in this discussion? What is your life like? What cultural events have I seen you at?" She continues, "What have you asked of your employees?"

Practitioner A brings our attention to an issue with the pace at which diversity is discussed as impeding action. The concern about going from "conversation to action" suggests a hold-up in the discourse that is not translating into movement toward progress. Practitioner A presents the causal/dynamic relationship between language and outcome (material and discursive)—the presupposition that discourse (cause) leads to action (effect)—the presupposition that discourse is acting on us to act. The circulatory nature of discourse (Asen, 2000) would create the necessary momentum to affect change throughout the institution's deep rhetorical ecology (Maraj, 2020). Practitioner A notes that the issue with diversity conversation is apparent from the slothfulness of leadership and the "well-intentioned." Those in the position to act demonstrate momentum equating to "real" progress.

The line of question at the end of this statement hints at what is holding up the discourse. The language in the diversity conversation lacks messaging about a diversity plan, employee expectations, leadership's diversity engagements/progress, leadership's voice, and the expressed resources to support a plan. Leaders' commitment to engage in a theoretically more effective approach to diversity conversations would result in their presence among underrepresented communities. Practitioner A questions, "what cultural events have I see you at?" and requests a

demonstration of the *ethics of caring*. A component of the ethics of caring is “developing the capacity for empathy” (Collins, 2022, p. 335). A lack of empathy for Black people in predominantly white spaces is a systemic issue that emerges as a constant pang for Black women diversity practitioners throughout interview discussions.

In addition, Practitioner A’s interrogation of the leadership’s actions, she asks, “What is your life like?” which does not run parallel with the other questions that focus on a concern for diversity actions toward progress. Practitioner A is asking a personal question about leadership’s job responsibilities. Collins (2022) describes *the ethic of personal responsibility* as characteristic of Black women’s epistemology, whereas “not only must individuals develop their knowledge claims through dialogue and present them in a style proving their concern for their ideas, but people are expected to be accountable for their knowledge claims” (p. 336). One’s life or lived experiences would validate their personal responsibility and stake in the issues at hand—in this case, issues of diversity. This is another theme that raises concern for diversity practitioners.

Organizational Structure Impediments

The organizational structure of Virginia Tech came up in discussions with practitioners as they considered the ways in which the university can achieve sustainability in diversity progress and the role of the Office for Inclusion and Diversity (OID). Practitioner C states, “I think we’re a mess structurally...” She describes that other institutions have a structure incorporating a legal body with their diversity coordinator role, unlike Virginia Tech. Diversity, equity and accessibility, student misconduct, and law are part of the same body. There is a legal implication (legal language) to support diversity-related violations. Virginia Tech’s organizational structure has placed university leadership too high up to see the issues on the “ground.” The organizational

structure demonstrates *hegemonic power* (Collins, 2022) and the ideologies that mimic social constructs. Practitioner C further explains,

So, you have this culture of chaos that has sort of taken place in many units and people know, and they just learn to function in it. No accountability. No one's checking in to say, 'hey, what did you do with violation [X]? A student has submitted a case against you.' Most students know if they submit a case that nothing is going to happen with it.

Virginia Tech uses a decentralized model for diversity work, which is why diversity work is happening in every crevice of the institution creating the disconnect that Practitioner C speaks of where broad university goals exist and unit-level goals mismatch the university goals leaving students to experience harm or violence because of poorly communicated and disjointed goals that are not constructed to meet their diverse needs nor protect them from those wielding systemic/structural violence. Sara Ahmed (2021), in *Complaint!*, states, "Complaints, it seems, go further the extent to which those positioned higher up in an organization express them or give support to them. The path of a complaint, where a complaint goes, how far it goes, teaches us something about how the institutions work" (p. 6).

Practitioner C's perspective implies that diversity directives come from a central diversity office with regulatory language to protect the diversity language. There will be not only stability for diversity work but also climate stability. A legal implication connected to diversity work creates a potential for mitigating violence by those who may never take on *ethics of caring* or *personal responsibility*.

Practitioner C argues that the diversity work needs to be at the office level to bridge the gap between the student level and the college president to "be the glue in between." Although Virginia Tech has OID, Practitioner A adds, "I think OID is kind of a unique bear too. I think

sometimes their efforts may be spread out in a way that can make it harder to be effective for one group. I think...we can't rely on one office for anything." The tension between/messaging perspectives comes from two concerns: 1) Diversity with multiple goals from various colleges, communities, and university levels, resulting in dissonance. 2) The expectation for some is that resolving diversity issues, like racial issues, can be tackled by one office for the multiplicity of identities and oppressions on campus.

Moreover, Practitioner C posits that DEI is not independent because it informs all other problems and issues people face. At Virginia Tech, the lines of communication on diversity separate DEI issues from university issues. Practitioner C reads DEI issues as university issues. As Practitioner C describes documenting diversity goals for her position as a part of departmental reporting, she demonstrates how DEI is portrayed as an independent entity or check in the box. She explains that some positions, like hers when she started, are inherited, and doing the work for some can look like reordering existing goals to update a report. A colleague asked Practitioner C, "what number do you want to move [this goal] up to this year?" She expressed concern about how the data loses the students' story and states, "The experience is the one-on-one in data summaries. I don't feel like [the data] captures the true story behind the emotions and the progress...that some students...go through." Sara Ahmed (2012) warns,

When diversity work becomes a matter of writing documents, it can participate in the separation of diversity work from institutional work...When the document becomes a fetish, the diversity worker also becomes detached. Rather than participate in fetishizing these documents, we need to reflect on the circumstances of their production (p. 87).

It appears that such fetishizations occur because, as Practitioner C describes, the institution's goals have been broadened so much that there are issues with unit-level goals

aligning with the university's goals. Now, "We're all InclusiveVT...This model is in place, that is a model, but no one knows their role, and how they should interact with others, and how it's contributing to the larger institution." This dissonance makes the work of diversity practitioners, like Practitioner C, invisible work. She mentions that the reported data on diversity goals occludes the stories of students, but it also redacts her contributions to supporting students and supporting the institution's diversity.

College Presidents: The Voice of the Institution. When diversity practitioners were asked about how they see the role of the college president in addressing diversity concerns and racial incidents, their response was unanimous. The college president was described as the institution's voice with a responsibility to lead the diversity messaging and mitigate the organizational chaos, as discussed in the previous section. I incorporate several reactions from diversity practitioners.

Practitioner E: The college president is the chief spokesperson of the institution...I think the college president sets the tone for what is culturally acceptable and unacceptable. I think they are consistent, bold, and clear, in their pronouncements. Even more so in this political moment. I think that's what people want. I think we're living a political moment where the zeitgeist is 'tell us about what you stand for.'

Practitioner D: [The college president's role is] to be clear, very clear and a deliberate statement/position about where [they] stand on those issues. If something happens, to be upfront and out front in terms of addressing the issues and not hide behind staff that are below. Just like, when something really devastating happens in this country, everybody wants the president, they need to see the president....it's the same thing at any other university setting. People need to see the president. The president needs to be the one

who addresses...something major that's going on that is impacting the campus community at-large then the president needs to be visibly present.

Practitioner C: To me, I haven't seen any strong statements around inclusion and diversity...I can say the institution is 'moving the needle'...I can't say he's the person driving the change. I don't see it top-down. I think there's a lot of pockets of people doing great work, but it's not because of a charge from the president...[the college president should] make a strong claim. [Take] a stance. I feel like at some point, when you get to a certain point in your career, you should be able to stand on your values...There are very few things I would do outside of my value system...It's to lead with transparency and universal values that doesn't make it seem like you're leaning towards the majority.

Practitioner A: They have to always be sending the message that it matters. And always be sending the message that they expect you to institutionalize the understanding and concern for diversity. I think that they have to think holistically, not just getting people here, but keeping them here and all the pieces that it impacts. And for them to do that, I think they have to do the work themselves. So yeah, I think that, that means creating more than one line item in the budget. Not just the line item to one office. It can't just be dependent on other people finding the money either. So. To get people to move the needle on diversity...you have to be willing to get on some people's nerves. You have to be willing to lose some money. Where you may gain it in other places. You have to be willing to do the work.

Practitioner C: We have had very few statements that really are about anything racial or DEI-related. It may be about masks and COVID, but I saw a lot of disparities in that

messaging even...students of color have COVID...I've had to step in—because that's what I do—What do you need? Is somebody getting stuff to you? I've proactively made it my business because I value them; I know how it's impacted my community...If you're blinded not to advocate for that community, then what? I would like to see a real position. ...We know it's a small Black community...whatever group you want to think about...we know it's small relative to the majority...but does that mean we're not going to talk about those things [that concern their community] because it's only a smaller number?

Practitioner D recalls a former Virginia Tech president who was student-centered in thinking about the college president's role.

Practitioner D: The commitment needs to be from the top. The institution is...a university because we have students. It's not a university because we have faculty. It's not a university because we have staff. It's a university because we have students. If we have students, we have to take care of our students. Students are a valuable commodity and an equal partner...in making a true university...It's the top. Who sets the vision? If it's murky, if it's not clear, and it has to be echoed in every conversation. It can be the folks who are doing the diversity work who are saying 'this is important.' That does not infiltrate the whole university—it's just one aspect, one piece, one side. It has to be at the top. The language is shaped by what's at the top and people will begin adopting whatever the rhetoric is.

Top-Down Approach. The theme throughout the responses was that diversity messaging must start at the top of the university's organizational structure and cascade its way down to the institution's bottom (ground level) to align the institution with values ideally, which we imagine

suitable for diverse, equitable, and inclusive institutions. The power and privilege of the presidential location (position) intersect with diversity messaging and become an authoritative body—an avatar entrusted to motivate the entire institution to comply. Practitioner D mentions that the vision “has to be echoed in every conversation.” Discourse is temporal and must be repeated with frequency to reinforce the message. As Practitioner A notes in an earlier discussion, political change is a factor that shifts perspectives. Diversity messaging is not only unidirectional from top to bottom to possess the appropriate force to influence change but also must reverberate throughout the university’s body over time for sustainable change—a process for institutionalizing language with a justice-centered message where underrepresented bodies can benefit from this resonated diversity.

Climate Surveys Rhetorical Effectiveness

Understanding that diversity impacts campus climate, I asked Black women diversity practitioners about the effectiveness of climate surveys in making diversity progress. Institutions like Virginia Tech use climate surveys to capture perceptions of campus climate from each of the three populations: undergraduate, graduate, and employees. Climate surveys pose questions of interest to the entity distributing the survey. The collected data is aggregated and available in a report on the Virginia Tech website. Quantitative data is represented in various charts, and the status of qualitative responses remains unknown. All practitioners responded with an exacerbad look pausing and then with a breath, responding that climate surveys are ineffective in achieving anything diversity-related.

Practitioner B: The climate surveys are...the university does a top-down thing. When they should be doing a bottom-up thing. They should be trying to understand from the people, who are the people they should be trying to serve. What is happening? Rather

than trying to force a solution on people who they haven't even talked to. But send out a survey, a survey with numbers. We're not going to see the qualitative response because [they're] probably [not] even reading that. They're just looking for the numbers, right? But Black people are very weathered at the university, meaning that they're battered by the actual climate of the university. And then the climate survey comes out and it doesn't say anything about how battered and beaten they are and how weathered they are. You just experience universities in ways that beat you down. And you know, when you think about a house, we're the house that needs a new paint job because all the rain and the sun and, the, everything has just beaten. Or you see a tree that is barely standing, all the leaves gone because it just c[a]me through a hurricane and it has been weathered. And then you bring a climate survey and you['re] talking about...this weather.

Diversity Practitioners find climate surveys ineffective tools and are not entrusted to collect data on how people are doing. The climate surveys serve the institution's organizational needs to report to donors but do not meet the needs of those responding to the surveys, specifically Black people and other marginalized groups. Practitioner A recommends climate surveys that directly collect data on why people leave or stay at the institution. She was primarily concerned with surveys for employees to gather data on why underrepresented employees are exiting the institution to resolve the issues precisely. Also, this would give the cultural caucus opportunity to address concerns even when human resources will not.

For climate surveys, a top-down approach perpetuates violence on marginalized bodies. As suggested by multiple practitioners, the top of the organizational structure is out of touch with the bottom. A bottom-up approach is recommended to address concerns and meet needs from a negative climate impact—first collecting data on diversity-related concerns from the populations

that the institution serves and then designing the climate survey space based on information from this first round of data collection. Based on each diversity-related concern, a decision can be made to create a customized climate survey to track progress over time or develop a progressive tracking method. If a custom climate survey is designed and data aggregated, progress can be tracked for each diversity-related concern. Climate survey results in their current form do not translate as plans of action for proactively engaging in diversity work. I further discuss climate surveys along with an analysis in Chapter 5.

Starts and Stops: The Institution as a Reactive Force

The other discursive tool is OID's video series on the "InclusiveVT" YouTube channel. I discussed with Black women diversity practitioners their take on the role of these videos and diversity discourse. Practitioners shared a similar response when asked about climate surveys. The diversity-related videos were situated as a constant diversity voice to fill the silence during COVID-19. According to practitioners, the videos serve an audience external to the institution as a recruitment tool. Practitioner B points out that the videos show smiling faces of Black and Brown bodies. When students who identify with them come to the institution and realize they are not smiling, they think they are doing something wrong in their experience.

Practitioner D credits Dr. Menah Pratt, Vice President for Strategic Affairs and Vice Provost for Inclusion and Diversity, who hosts the "InclusiveVT" video series, for "keeping the conversation [on diversity] going." Practitioner D found saliency in discussing diversity and ongoing talk about it. She views the videos as a visible discursive symbol that demonstrates the institution's care. On the other hand, Practitioner B finds them to be symbols of oppression: *commodification*, *exploitation*, and *objectification*. For example, with the sound of frustration in her voice, she explains that through platforms like the videos, the same histories about Black

“excellence” are told repeatedly as though the Black community has done nothing significant in the last 60 years since the first Black students. There are diversity messages practitioners agree should be echoed. The repetition of Virginia Tech’s Black history is a form of erasure of newer or more relevant Black stories, and the Black people in those stories are tokenized as oppression overcomers.

For example, one “InclusiveVT” video is a conversation between Dr. Pratt and guest Charles Yates. Yates is one of the first Black students at Virginia Tech; he earned a mechanical engineering degree becoming the first Black alumnus at any land-grant college in the former Confederate states. He also served as an engineering professor and a term on the Board of Visitors. When Yates was admitted to Virginia Tech, Black students were not permitted room or board on campus and were discouraged from attending dances. An elderly African American couple, Janie and William Hoge, provided housing and meals to the first six Black students at Virginia Tech. In 2020, a residence hall named after an anti-Black leader was renamed Hoge Hall as a resolution to requests from the Black population to rename buildings that represent symbols of racism. The initial recognition of this married couple’s, specifically the wife Janie Hoge, efforts in supporting Black students. Yates’s story and five other Black students became a Virginia Tech Black triumph story—the story of struggle and perseverance. This sends a message that has trickled down from U.S. chattel slavery until now that Black people have a natural disposition to endure severe pain and survive. The video discussion with Yates perpetuates the conditioning that Black students will face racism at Virginia Tech, but racism is survivable, and Black students can push through to achieve Black “excellence.” An issue with stories like Yates at Virginia Tech is that non-Black university leaders and stakeholders can assume that retention and inclusion practices are unnecessary because students today can room

and board on campus. History has taught us that one discriminatory issue resolved means the issue is unresolved, only changing in form, changing only the perception of the discrimination, changing the perception of the institution (Ahmed, 2012). The more specific Black stories are told—the tokenism, *objectification*, and *commodification* of certain Black bodies—the longer it takes for other Black stories to be heard (erasure).

Practitioner D mentions that through the OID, Dr. Pratt is bringing back programs that are no longer in place. Diversity programs would help meet the needs of underrepresented people, but they fall in and out of diversity discourse over time. Practitioner D reflected on the history of the “Diversity Summit” initiated to do a climate check of the university because there were so many starts and stops with diversity programs. The “Diversity Summit” served as an annual report card to ask, “Where are we? Where do we want to go? And, how far have we gotten?” “Every year it felt like we were talking about the same thing. We were starting and we would get to a point...when one [program] came aboard another got pushed out.” Practitioner D states,

We would go down the path where we’re doing really well then all of a sudden...somebody would think...the work is done and then we’ll stop. And then it feels like you’re starting all over again...It goes back to who’s steering the ship.

Diversity discussions construct and strengthen diversity programs to have longevity and mitigate the frequency of a phase-in, phase-out, and rephase program cycle. Rephased programs appear as new programs in diversity discourse that often rebrands the initial phased-in program. For example, the “Diversity Summit” was renamed in 2022 as the “InclusiveVT Summit.” The introduction of a new program without knowing the history of that program sends the message that the institution is proactive in addressing diversity-related concerns when the institution is in

actuality reactive to an institutional failure—institutions not proactively addressing diversity matters results in an institutional failure demonstrated through the distress or harm of underrepresented people.

Practitioner D posits that diversity can't be just words; there has to be “visible symbols...to let students know,...the university know, that diversity is important.” To see, “[diversity] must be really important. This is being done...[the university] really do[es] care. We really do have a place at the table...Doing things that really keep that conversation in the forefront.” Practitioner E suggests a communications director for each college who communicate broadly to campus constituents from top to bottom and bottom to top, leveraging digital tools to announce positive things happening within the Black community and other communities.

Diversity Practitioners' Discursive Practices

Obstacles in Diversity Work. Having discussed diversity discourse with Black women diversity practitioners under various contexts, I discuss their discursive practices in doing diversity work. I asked what obstacles they face in carrying out diversity efforts. Practitioners pinpointed three impediments that slow down their work or point of concern: lack of resources (e.g., money), ambivalence to diversity, and work-life balance.

Practitioner A: More money—there can always be more money; People not doing their jobs; Unwillingness to integrate the idea of diversity into their thinking. An unwillingness to believe that it's necessary.

Practitioner D: Attitudes; Folks who felt like there were no problems; Blindness; [If] it didn't impact them then they didn't understand what the big deal [was] about it. Diversity is not something that matt[ers] to them because they...[don't] see how it's going to be of any value. We're very capitalistic driven.

Practitioner C mentioned that one obstacle has been prioritizing needs, and she recalls a conversation with someone about prioritization.

Practitioner C: Someone told me...they gave me permission to 'let them balls drop'...it must be nice to drop balls when you don't look like me. It must be nice because I don't know how to begin to...let anything drop or halfway hit the ground and be cool with it and know that there's no repercussions...I've done the most that I can do...I realized how much time I take away from my household...I've missed a lot of hours, a lot of time by doing this kind of work.

Practitioner C misses time at home by prioritizing the institution's diversity work over her family responsibilities. Practitioner C is engaging in institutional housekeeping as she is compelled to meet students' needs outside of business hours and frequently in one-on-ones. Collins (1999) states, "Making diversity and inclusion an institutional priority via sustained commitment from institutional leaders is an effective strategy for minimizing the effects of workplace bias (Bielby, 2008). Also, if this becomes "women's work," it will be cast as "institutional housekeeping" (Bird, Litt, and Wang 2004)" (p. 203).

Another obstacle includes multiple participants being approached by white colleagues to be the Black representative in various scenarios or assumed to have contact with all Black people just because they have a shared identity. This *objectification* and *exploitation* of Black women could be mitigated if the institution would prioritize diversity in the college president's messaging to pull for accountability from all employees. These scenarios demonstrate to the practitioners that their white colleagues avoid building relationships necessary for diversity work.

Collaboration. When responding to what has served them best in their role, practitioners unanimously said “collaboration.” Through discursive practices, they can share knowledge, resources, and labor. Practitioner E states, “Collaboration is the only way to get things done. There’s not enough resources to do what we want to do.” Practitioner A writes in grants opportunities for collaboration with other programs. In working with colleagues, Practitioner A notes,

We all make an effort to think of all of the ways [in] which people need extra effort to make them feel like they belong...Having a good community of people that I can connect with and understand what I’m trying to tell them.

Practitioner A explains additional discursive practices where she builds in workshops with those willing to collaborate “to support the research that sometimes takes a different approach—needs a different approach to be successful.” She states that it is necessary to have the “support, understanding, and funds,” which has been a blockage in doing the work in the past; she “couldn’t get the work done because even those with the responsibility of supporting [her] in that work, didn’t understand and didn’t always do what they needed to do.” Now, she has colleagues willing to “promote the work” and “understand the importance” of the work.

Practitioner C: I wouldn’t say [my position] requires [collaboration], but it should. A lot of relationships, my colleagues know it’s built of because it’s me. I guarantee the support would not be there if I am not in the role and I think it’s unfortunate...but it just speaks to the nature of how some systems have functioned...The more you collaborate it just means the more spaces you’re in that you can make those statements boldly and factually...[Collaboration] has allowed me to be in more spaces by being willing to partner with people which is the majority of my role. I didn’t have to do it. I could have

been like other people in the role...Students really...count...on and rely...on this type of work and this type of investment.

Practitioner D: To create a diverse group of people, you need a diverse team...A Black person working in a predominantly white community cannot do the work alone. You have to have allies on the other side. And you have to create space for them to be at the table and you have to create space for them to have a voice at the table. We can't recreate what was done to us in terms of the token positions because they cannot work. It didn't work for us. So' we need to create for those people who are really interested in helping the university journey to becoming a truly inclusive community...They need to own the table. There's a difference...Find people who share your vision and work with them.

Educational Approach to Diversity. "Black women's style of activism also reflects a belief that teaching people how to be self-reliant fosters more empowerment than teaching them how to follow" (Collins, p. 280).

Practitioner A: There's a lot of focus on getting people here without focusing on the systems that keep them here. And understanding what could keep them here. I think there's a lot of things done without context. For instance, our native students, faculty, and staff. Most folks trying to get those students here...don't have a genuine understanding of how culture and history impact that. It happens in multiple communities...I would like to see that...a PWI really means it, and they mean it by expecting their educators, their people who connect with those students to have some knowledge.

Practitioner C: I would like to see a more educational standpoint from DEI as well as the practical side of it. Here's some issues, here's how we resolve it...They could create a unit just solely around that...

Conclusion

During interviews with diversity practitioners, I asked Black women several questions to garner their perspectives on what is happening with diversity at Virginia Tech. I asked their perceptions on DEI, the college president's role, the effectiveness of climate surveys, job responsibilities, work processes, and obstacles they face. Collins references Audre Lorde, "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change (Lorde, 1984, 112)" (p. 153). Black women's epistemologies inform their diversity discursive practices. Their discursive practices diverge from how white institutional leadership and colleagues engage in diversity work—slow progress—that distresses diversity practitioners in their work. Diversity Practitioners recognized that to carry out their job responsibilities successfully, they had to create new practices. In interview discussions, practitioners discussed building relationships and communities to access resources and share knowledge. Collins (2022) posits "only collective action can effectively generate the lasting institutional transformation required for social justice" (p. 366). Even with students, Practitioner B builds relationships with students. She does not document her interaction with students in her act of resistance. There is no paperwork, records, or documentation on the students. She focuses on retention efforts to help students one-on-one toward a sense of belonging. Practitioner A states that at Virginia Tech, "You have to be the loudest. You have to make noise." "To get people to move the needle on diversity, you have almost to get; you have to be willing to get on some people's nerves." Sara Ahmed calls this person a *feminist killjoy*. The institution marks bodies as disruptive when they threaten images of whiteness. Diversity practitioners implement discursive practices that lead to their empowerment.

Chapter 4: Bureaucratic Structures of Virginia Tech (Analysis and Discussion)

Besides institutions being ripe for critique, academic institutions are inextricably intertwined with nationalism and neoliberal ideologies that concretize institutional norms (Readings, 1996), as discussed in Chapter 1. Institutions establishing diversity offices and initiatives are indicative of a deep-rooted concern (Ahmed 2012)—institutions as breeding grounds for various forms of oppression, making it necessary to stand up diversity offices to support the imminent violence. Bill Readings (1996), in *The University in Ruins*, argues that the institution has fallen from its intent as a site for knowledge production or a site with love (*eros*) for knowledge to an operation run using a business model (*logos*). Readings objects to “deconstruction” as an analytical approach to reset the institution as a site for collaborative interdisciplinary knowledge production. Deconstruction is not an applicable method for Readings because the institution lacks foundation. Readings states the University,

as an institution it has a history—and a history that is structured by the contradictions attendant upon the performative act of the foundation of any institution. The history of an institution is persistently marked by the structural contradiction of its founding. The institution is founded, is grounded, in being called forth into existence as a radically new institution. It will exist in a place where it did not exist before, and hence its foundation is never natural or assured. It did not spring up. In this sense, all institutions, as founded, are unfounded (p. 145).

Therefore, an “unfounded” institution cannot be simply deconstructed, but “the University should be analyzed as a bureaucratic system” (p. 146). Porter et al. (2000) explain that analyzing bureaucratic structures looks at,

how law and policy create ‘value’ for sites and influence discursive relations and at how organizational roles and responsibilities, work models (e.g., management philosophies, publishing models, collaboration practices), lines of authority and communication, and alignment of and interaction between personnel all affect institutional practices (p. 626).

In this chapter, I provide an analysis and discussion of Virginia Tech’s bureaucratic structure as a method of institutional critique (Porter et al., 2000). First, I foreground Virginia Tech, the macro-level site of study for this dissertation, to contextualize the bureaucratic structure and history of the university. Then, I analyze and discuss three organizational charts for lines of communication and lines of authority at the administrative level of the institution to identify the relationships between positions and the roles that influence university changes.

Oppressive Structures of Virginia Tech

I analyze Virginia Tech’s three organizational charts that demonstrate the positions responsible for the institution’s operations, paying close attention to organizational roles and responsibilities as well as lines of authority and communication in relation to diversity efforts. I begin with a discussion on how oppressive institutional structures (institutional slavery, racism, and whiteness), discussed in Chapter 1, are intertwined with the history of Virginia Tech to foreground power dynamics in the organizational structure.

Structures of Institutional Slavery at Virginia Tech

Virginia Tech’s material and discursive construction began during the era of U.S. chattel slavery using the affordances of federal law. The institution of slavery was the economic backbone of the U.S., and over time as the structure of slavery changed in form, it did not change in essence or motive (Ore, 2019). Federal laws and acts gave credence to citizenship and hierarchical structures for enslavement, land ownership, and academic institutions. The early

construction of Virginia Tech involves James Preston's purchase of nineteen West Africans from a slave-trading post in Southern Maryland. His sons, Ballard Preston and Robert Preston, inherited the Smithfield and Solitude plantations from him, respectively. The original school of Virginia Tech, Preston and Olin Institute, was established in 1851 as a Methodist school using the wealth of the two plantations. The Preston and Olin Institute received funds through the Morrill Act of 1862 (described in Chapter 1). The land grant allowed the institution to expand in agricultural and mechanical studies, and the school was renamed Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College (VAMC). Virginia Tech boasts as a land-grant institution, like many others receiving Morrill Act funds during the era of institutional slavery. The land-grant designation is a historical marker for the cultural influences that inscribed the Virginia Tech institution we engage with today. The Morrill Act language reinforced *institutional slavery* and provided an advantage for white institutions to operate with *institutional power (domains of power)*, as described by Collins, (2022). As laws changed over time, restructuring Black citizenship, Black bodies had few, if any, protections under constitutional law.

Although Virginia Tech underwent several institutional changes from Preston and Olin Institute to VAMC, to Virginia Polytechnic Institute (VPI), and finally to Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (in short, Virginia Tech), white supremacy ideologies associated with *institutional slavery* still inform Virginia Tech's bureaucratic structure and decision-making. For example, the Historic Smithfield Plantation and Solitude Plantation are Virginia Tech's operating campus structures. The Smithfield Plantation house was once an infirmary, family housing for WWII veterans, and faculty housing. Today, the Smithfield Plantation house is available for reservations to host events, such as weddings and parties. The property symbolizes Black trauma for the Black community at Virginia Tech.

During Fall 2022, the Virginia Tech Graduate School hosted a mixer for graduate students and faculty. The Graduate School was confronted about why the event was being held at the Historic Smithfield Plantation and the implications. Despite the multiple expressed concerns, the event was held and only one Black person attended—me—for my research. A man working at the event stopped me to say, “You are the only Black person who came through here today. Why is that?” I knew that I could not speak for the entire Black community at Virginia Tech, but I did inform the man that the event being held at the plantation, despite the impact on Black employees and students, demonstrates how we are seen or valued by the institution. The site’s history is not well-circulated for Black students and faculty/staff to engage the property without inducing trauma. Dr. Kerri Moseley-Hobbs is a descendant of the enslaved Fraction family who labored and lived on Virginia Tech’s plantation property (Moseley-Hobbs, 2017). Dr. Moseley-Hobbs at Virginia Tech’s “The Advancing Diversity Gathering” described her observations (a posteriori) with taking people with African ancestry on plantation site tours (Inclusive VT, 2022),

What we’ve learned from finding descendants and taking them to Smithfield is that it is a traumatic subject for African American students. You can’t just take them to Smithfield. You can’t just take them to the Fraction House. There’s the educational component that happens first. We’ve learned that once they know the Fraction story about fighting back, about not being happy, about running away, about talking back, about coming and starting to build their houses after emancipation and just claiming the space. Once they start kind of challenging the indoctrination that Black people were invented during slavery and that encompasses waking up, being abused, working, and going to sleep. And that cycle.

Virginia Tech's invitations to the Black community to events (e.g., mixers) at the Historic Smithfield is an exclusionary practice delineating a boundary for who belongs and who has open access to the institution. While graduate students with various cultural backgrounds had an opportunity to meet faculty members and build relationships, Black graduate students experienced inequity and marginalization in building a network with faculty. The location was a blockage, a non-invitation. Although one can argue about the value of retaining "historical" sites or even rebranding a plantation as "historic," these sites are a material and a discursive reminder of Virginia Tech's history of white supremacy and the history of the institution it is willing to preserve. The end of one structure of slavery births another carrying the same motive in a different form—*institutional racism* and *whiteness*.

Structures of Institutional Racism and Institutional Whiteness at Virginia Tech

Virginia Tech was challenged in their relationship with Black bodies during the Civil Rights Era and desegregation. A letter from the Virginia Teachers Association in 1951 questioned Virginia Tech about their position on the treatment of Black guests at the institution—the concern for Black guests entering a white space/place: "representing the black teachers of Virginia's public schools, [President Newman was asked] how Tech would treat applications from them to study there" (*Virginia Tech Magazine Feature 1*, n.d.)—one of the first artifacts of discourse on a diversity-related or racial matter. Virginia Tech did not respond to the inquisition at that time. Later, after a Virginia Social Sciences Association conference in 1953, Virginia Tech received questioning again.

This time there was a racial incident regarding the mistreatment of Black guests at the conference. Over time, the societal context and community pressures through written communication led to Virginia Tech deciding on the impact on their institution's image

(*institutional whiteness*) and *institutional racism* to maintain boundaries of power. President Newman, the college president of that time, met with the Board of Visitors (BOV) to avoid “embarrassing situations.” Thereafter, the first Black students were subsequently admitted to Virginia Tech but not permitted to room or board on campus—partial access to the institution’s space (white space)—demonstrating institutional racism’s function to map boundaries of identification as an exclusionary practice. Discursive practices on racial matters inscribe material and rhetorical institutional structures of racism and whiteness that transcend time until counterdiscourses confront the harmful and violent effects.

In 2020, when the U.S. was amidst racial protests against police brutality that reignited demands to remove symbols of institutional racism, Virginia Tech students protested for the institution to change the name of residence halls, Lee Hall and Barringer Hall. Lee Hall was named after a Ku Klux Klan (KKK) member, Claudius Lee, and Barringer Hall was named after Paul Barringer, a white supremacist, pro-slavery, and anti-Black leader. These buildings were renamed Hoge Hall and Whitehurst Hall, respectively. Janie and William Hoge, an elderly African American married couple, managed a Black boarding house providing rooms for the first six Black students (and Black faculty) at Virginia Tech. Whitehurst Hall was named after James Leslie Whitehurst Jr., the first African American student to live on campus and later the first African American to serve on the Board of Visitors at Virginia Tech. Ironically, the demand to change Lee Hall was presented in 1997, and the institution’s president argued that Lee’s KKK affiliation was in the context of the time. In the context of the #BlackLivesMatter movement applied a different kind of social pressure for the institution to act and regard with ramifications that would compromise *institutional whiteness*. Virginia Tech had several motivators to make the building name changes: The potential for public discourse associating Virginia Tech with racism

posted to social media; the institution was in preparation for the sesquicentennial (150th anniversary) trying to clean up Virginia Tech's history, and, as stated in many BOV letters, this issue was not "going away" with a second attempt for a resolution on Lee Hall.

In 2023, Black students celebrated 70 years on Virginia Tech's campus while earmarking over 70 years of *institutional racism* and *institutional whiteness* at Virginia Tech. Considering Virginia Tech's history, the institution is ripe for an institutional critique to mitigate institutional racial violence, a rhetorical effect of institutional diversity discourse (racialized language and symbols). I analyze the bureaucratic system of Virginia Tech, examining the organizational structure and the lines of authority and communication, which demonstrate how symbols of diversity discourse inscribe the *structural domain of power* (Collins, 2022). The *structural domain of power* is "how social institutions are organized to reproduce Black women's subordination over time;" and places an "emphasis on large-scale, interlocking social institutions" (Collins, 2022, p. 350). The reproduction of Black women's subordination is revealed through oppression (*objectification, commodification, and exploitation*).

Organizational Lines of Authority and Communication for Decision-Making

Predominantly white institutions (PWIs) diversity discourse constructs material and discursive, institutional structures. Under the bureaucratic system of PWIs, the university president's role is a position of power, empowered to implement institutional change. The president's voice is the voice of authority expected to guide university leadership and direct the campus community to keep everyone in alignment with the institution's vision. The university president engaging in diversity-related discourse sways how material and discursive institutional spaces take shape. In a discussion on "institutional whiteness," Ahmed (2012) explains that when racial incidents occur at PWIs, college presidents have an opportunity to speak for the

institution's position on racism, but they often discuss racial incidents without mentioning racism and focus their response on a "commitment" to *diversity*. The university president plays a vital role in setting the racial climate through addresses on racial matters. Diversity discourse inscribes institutional spaces, but who has access to *institutional power* while participating in the diversity discourse to make an institutional change or impede change?

Institutions' static organizational charts do not demonstrate how the nodal communication points are connected across authority lines. I needed to read about each position's responsibilities to align roles and responsibilities, converging three charts to produce a functional organization chart. In analyzing Virginia Tech's three organizational charts (**Figures 4-1, 4-3, and 4-4**), I identified the positions responsible for implementing the strategic diversity plans. Then, I located these positions across three organizational charts that capture the administrative functions from the top tier to the college/unit level. From this analysis, I developed an organizational chart (**Figure 4-5**) that maps the positions involved in the decision-making processes for institutional change, responsible for incorporating inclusion and diversity throughout the university and engaging in diversity discourse. Organizational charts are symbols of diversity discourse and the bureaucratic structure of the institution.

President's Organization Chart. The Virginia Tech President's organizational chart, shown in **Figure 4-1**, is the highest-level organizational chart of the institution displaying the executive, vice president, and director positions that maintain operations. Some positions fall under an organizational line of authority but report to an office outside Virginia Tech's organization. For example, the University Legal Counsel reports to the Attorney General of Virginia, and the Executive Director of Audit, Risk, and Compliance reports directly to the BOV.

All positions are connected directly to the President except for a handful of positions under the Executive Vice President/Provost and the Executive Vice President/Chief Operating Officer.

The most notable element regarding the “President’s Organization” is that the President is not the highest position—the BOV is the highest-ranking body for decision-making. Fourteen BOV members are under the guidance of the Commonwealth of Virginia and the State Board for Community Colleges. Under the Code of Virginia, the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) is required to run educational programs for BOV members; board members are required to attend every two years. Newly appointed BOV members must attend orientation on governing responsibilities within their first two years.

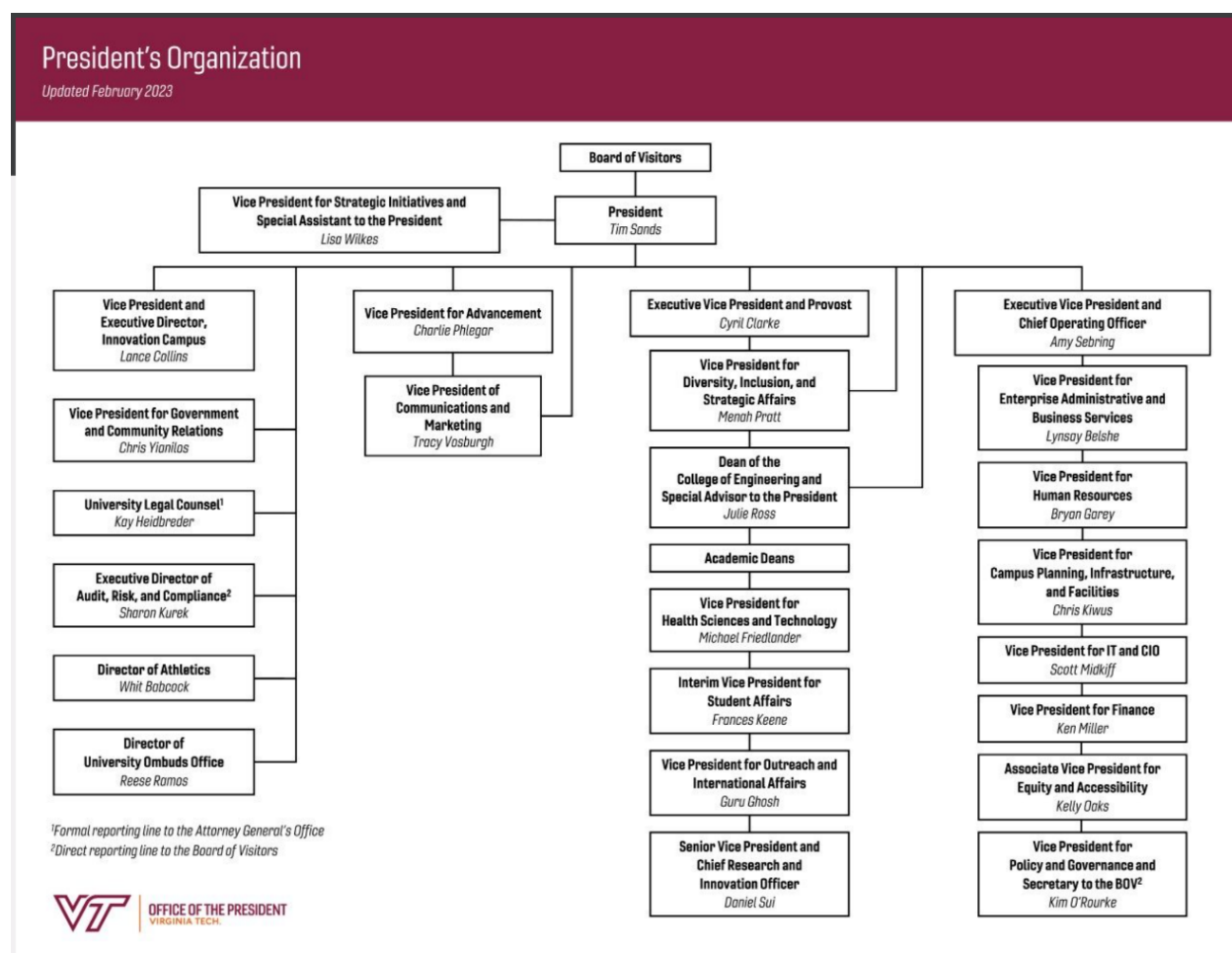


Figure 4-1. Office of the President Organizational Chart

Virginia Tech’s Board of Visitors. The composition of Virginia Tech’s BOV includes:

...fourteen members, thirteen of whom are appointed by the Governor subject to confirmation by the Senate. The fourteenth member is the President of the Board of Agriculture and Consumer Services, who serves ex officio. All fourteen members have full voting privileges. Three members of the Board may reside outside of Virginia; at least six of the thirteen appointed members are required to be alumni or alumnae of the University.

The term of office for a visitor is four years, and the visitor is eligible to be reappointed for a successive four years. An individual appointed to fill an unexpired term which has become vacant is eligible for appointment to two additional four-year terms.

As stated, the Governor appoints BOV members, but the appointments are “subject to confirmation by the Senate.” Bureaucratic structures are rhetorically complex structures. The Governor has the decision-making power to appoint BOV members, but the Senate can agree or disagree with—confirm or deny—the Governor’s decision. The racial and gender composition of Virginia Tech’s BOV is historically white and male. The political leanings and culture of the Virginia state government and the U.S. Senate representative will have bearings on the bodies in place on the BOV. Neoliberal and neoconservative rationalities (discussed in Chapter 1) are normative ways of thinking that are infused into our political systems from various types of stakeholders and the political discourse circulated with the support of media—inscribing the *hegemonic domain of power* (Collins, 2022). Collins (2022) argues that the *hegemonic domain of power* “acts as a link between social institutions (structural domain), their organizational practices (disciplinary domain), and the level of everyday social interactions (interpersonal domain)” (p. 359). “The hegemonic domain of power deals with ideology, culture, and consciousness” (p. 359). The State and Federal positions as authoritative bodies that are granted

decision-making power over Virginia Tech, which places marginalized and underrepresented bodies at risk because changes rely on motive. What are the motivating factors (benefits) to appoint diverse bodies on the BOV that do not reflect the institution's composition?

The President of the Board of Agriculture and Consumer Services position on the BOV is not appointed like the other thirteen positions. The Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services has its process to nominate a President to its Board, and subsequently, that position includes a seat on Virginia Tech's BOV. The BOV bylaws continue,

The term of the ex officio member of the Board of Visitors runs concurrently with his/her term as President of the Board of Agriculture and Consumer Services, which is typically from July 1 through June 30.

For each vacancy on the Board, the Alumni Association of the University may submit, for the consideration of the Governor, the names of three qualified persons. The Governor, however, is not limited to the persons on such a list when making an appointment (§23.1-2601, Code of Virginia, as amended).

Prior to appointment, the Virginia Commission on Higher Education Board Appointments may review potential Board appointees and make recommendations about the appointees to the Governor (§2.2-2518, Code of Virginia, as amended).

Virginia Tech's BOV must include at least six alums, and the Virginia Tech Alumni Association (VTAA) can submit up to three persons to the Governor for each vacancy, but the Governor can make selections outside of the VTAA's recommendation. For this portion of the analysis, I assume that the VTAA board is the assigned body recommending names to the Governor because they are the governing body of VTAA. The VTAA has one hundred chapters, and the regulatory language pertaining to their engagement with the BOV uses "VTAA" broadly

and does not state explicitly that their BOV recommendations are coming from the VTAA “board.” I assume that communicating with one hundred chapters to receive three names per vacant position would be a massive undertaking and is a responsibility of the VTAA board on behalf of the one hundred VTAA chapters. The Virginia Commission on Higher Education Board (VCHEB) can also make recommendations to the Governor. The process to appoint BOV members appears linear at first glance but is indeed messy:

1. The Governor can appoint members to the BOV, but the Senate can upend the appoints.
2. The VTAA can make board member recommendations, but the Governor can disregard those recommendations when assigning appointments.
3. The Virginia Commission on Higher Education Board also has the Governor’s ear to recommend members to the BOV.

Four entities are positioned to influence Virginia Tech’s BOV: the U.S. Senate representative, the State’s Governor, VTAA, and VCHEB. Virginia Tech’s BOV composition is unique to the institution as each university’s BOV has a different composition. Compared to Virginia Tech, the University of Virginia, in Charlottesville, Virginia, has seventeen board members, at least twelve members must be alumni, and there is no ex officio position. Again, I assume that the composition of Virginia Tech’s BOV is based on the institution’s structure and what is needed for the institution’s operations.

Lastly, the BOV “Powers and Duties” explained in the Code of Virginia are as follows:

§ 23.1-2603. Powers and duties.

A. The board is charged with the care, preservation, and improvement of the property belonging to the University and with the protection and safety of students and other

persons residing on such property. Pursuant to such duties, the board may change roads or driveways on the property belonging to the University or entrances to such property, close temporarily or permanently the roads and driveways on such property and entrances to such property, prohibit undesirable and disorderly persons from entering such property, eject such persons from such property, and prosecute under state law trespassers and persons committing offenses on such property.

B. The board shall regulate the government and discipline of the students.

Code 1919, § 864, § 23-122; 1924, p. 143; 1970, c. 98; 2016, c. 588.

The power and duties focus primarily on protecting Virginia Tech’s property, ensuring students’ safety while on the property, preventing “disorderly persons” from entering the property (through executing legal action), and regulating student governance and discipline. Employees are not mentioned in the BOV duties to be protected—Black women are vulnerable. The concerns for managing Virginia Tech are spatially and materially oriented, where responsibilities for students’ well-being concern their physical safety and must be tethered to a geolocation on Virginia Tech’s property. The BOV’s “duties” describe a duty to the physical institution and limited liability of students if their safety is compromised while engaging the material site. There is also a duty to protect the institution from students through governance and discipline. With their “power,” the BOV can also vote to remove employees from the institution and change curricula.

In Chapter 3, Black women diversity practitioners mention that students’ needs are often unmet based on the institution’s normative discursive practices. Students report violations that are not addressed with urgency or are never addressed. Black women diversity practitioners also refer to the university’s President as the “voice of the institution,” arguing that diversity progress

can be implemented once the messaging, imbued with a clear vision and values, infiltrates the institution from the “top-down.” They add that learning the appropriate actions to address the concerns of underrepresented populations requires a “bottom-up” approach. Based on the University President’s role and the BOV’s “power and duties,” students remain vulnerable to violations and injustices without prescriptive language that describes the entity responsible for addressing their concerns, written policies that explain disciplinary actions when students’ cases are not addressed with urgency, and plans for a “bottom-up” approach to become educated on issues plaguing members of underrepresented communities. The President’s Organization chart (**Figure 4-1**) is too high-level for any of the positions to address students’ experiences with faculty and peers.

Office of Student Affairs. The Vice President of Student Affairs position on the organization chart appears to be the most appropriate role for managing students’ concerns. “The mission of Student Affairs is to promote student learning, life skills, and personal growth through a strong focus on holistic student development and collaborative partnerships that deliver superior service to, and care for, students in the spirit of *Ut Prosim*” (*About Student Affairs*, n.d.). Student Affairs’ mission statement converges with the diversity practices expressed by the Black women diversity practitioners interviewed in this dissertation. The practitioners collectively emphasized the importance of collaboration in doing diversity work and an ethics of care. Student Affairs states supporting student development through “collaborative partnerships” and serving students by demonstrating that they “care for” them. Through an anti-racism statement (**Figure 4-2**), Student Affairs even acknowledges how systemic racism is imbued in the social structure and is a force that must be reckoned with at Virginia Tech. The language shares characteristics with Black feminist thought to engage in diversity work through “collective

action” and community-building (Collins, 2022). This commitment statement presents a generative contribution to the ongoing diversity discourse at Virginia Tech with language like “urgent work,” “re-allocate power, reimagine communities of trust, and [reclaiming]...justice” (*Virginia Tech Student Affairs Anti-Racism Commitment*, n.d.)

Racism in this country is not a new problem. Because our social structures were created under the influence of white supremacy—diversity, equity, and inclusion—the pure elemental necessities of a society that is for all people, were forfeited. Thus, a ‘for some people’ social structure emerged. This flawed ideal has and will continue to flourish everywhere there is an absence of systemic analysis, corrective education, steadfast discipline, and human decency.

For this reason, Student Affairs believes our collective and urgent work as a community is to re-allocate power, reimagine communities of trust, and reclaim the highest ideals of justice, kindness, compassion, and generosity. We believe Virginia Tech can and should be in daily pursuit of an anti-racist cultural transformation. We must embed in ourselves the memory of our most painful moments to fight racism in ourselves, in our community, and in our systems. As we stand against racism we must be unequivocal in our stance that minoritized lives and identities matter.

Figure 4-2. Virginia Tech Student Affairs Anti-Racism Commitment

Ahmed (2012) warns against “antiracism...[becoming] a discourse of white pride,” and “antiracism becomes a matter of generating a positive white identity that makes the white subject feel good” (170). The commitment statement says, “We must embed in ourselves the memory of our most painful moments to fight racism in ourselves, our community, and our systems. As we stand against racism, we must be unequivocal in our stance that minoritized lives and identities matter.” PWIs “saying” they are committed to antiracist efforts and “saying” that they will do the work with a demonstration of the work “is what allows racism to remain the burden of racialized others” (p. 170). In thinking about who is speaking and spatial orientation, this antiracism statement enters the diversity discourse of the institution from the Student Affairs office located on a third-level webpage. The navigation path includes going to the Student Affairs homepage, selecting the ‘About’ page from a left panel menu, and clicking the antiracism commitment

button at the bottom. If the user does not click on the antiracism commitment button, it does not exist. Ahmed (2012) argues that diversity work is relegated to diversity offices, demonstrating that the institution has not made diversity work the institution's job. Diversity practitioners of this work emphasized diversity directives coming from the "top." This antiracism commitment would arguably make more of an impact on the institution if coming from the top, but Ahmed (2012) states, "a commitment does not necessarily commit the institution to anything or do anything" (p. 116).

In **Figure 4-3**, the Executive Vice President and Provost Academic Administration Organizational Chart shows the institution's unit level or administration. At this level, the academic offerings (left side) and the necessary support services (right side), like compliance, are in view to keep this level fully operational. In **Figure 4-1**, the BOV is at the top with responsibilities that focus on the physical institution and students—admitting students to a physical school is the institution's primary line of business. Employees are essential to this structure as much as to keep the institution's business, which is to offer an education to students. Employees are not mentioned in the BOV duties as bodies to be protected.

The "Academic Administration" chart (**Figure 4-3**) shows Student Affairs on the left side and Faculty Affairs and Undergraduate Affairs, on the right side, as specified departments for faculty and undergraduates, respectively. There is no designated Graduate Affairs department among these departments on the right. Graduate Education is among the Academic Deans on the left, and Student Affairs appears on the left. Virginia Tech's graduate student population is about one-fourth the size of the undergraduate student population. This organizational chart is unclear in demonstrating how graduate students are prioritized, but it does suggest a vulnerability due to uncertainty about the office responsible for graduate students' needs or concerns.

Virginia Tech EVP & Provost Academic Administration Organizational Chart
As of February 2023

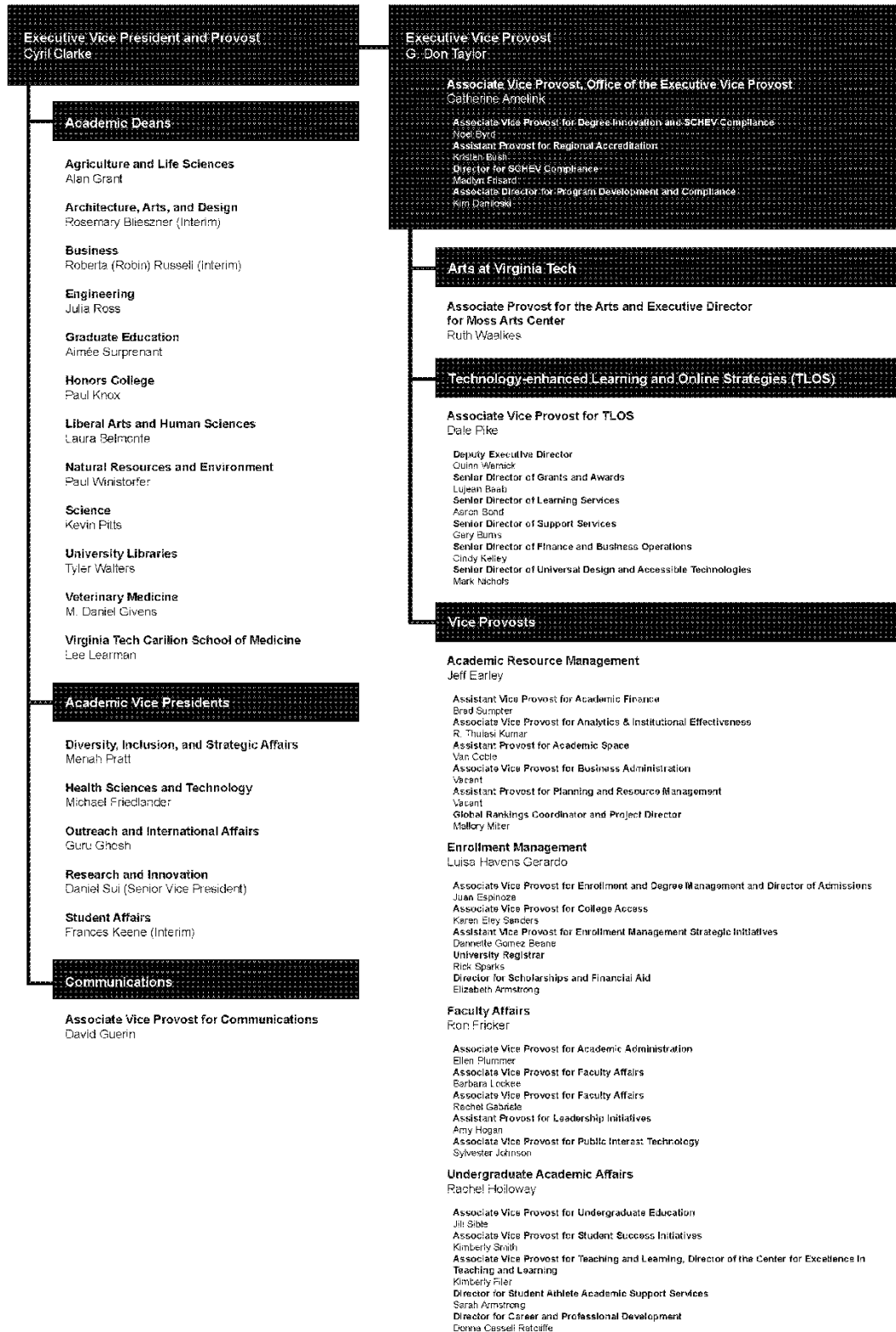


Figure 4-3. Executive Vice President and Provost Academic Administration Organizational Chart

Student Affairs historically focused on undergraduate students and expanded their scope to include graduate students over time. However, the “Affairs” offices are structured to keep bodies in place using a holistic (feminist) approach providing resources for well-being—or retention resources. Retention of students and faculty supports the institution in achieving higher graduation rates, resulting in many conferred degrees. Faculty and students are in a dynamic yet fragile relationship. As a support service, affairs offices work to keep students on target and through matriculation. When student bodies are placed in relation to faculty with the backdrop of numerous rhetorical elements, like the white institutional space, a level of volatility exists, that cannot be measured but predicting outcomes from historical accounts (experiences as evidence) and taking an assessment of these relationships, while they are happening, can produce data for resources geared towards mitigating the risks of injustices.

University Council. Student Affairs’ programs and initiatives center on undergraduate students; graduate students’ support exists under the governance responsibilities of Student Affairs. Student governance, as mentioned in the BOVs’ duties, focuses on problems that impact the majority of the undergraduate or graduate student population. The two student government bodies, the undergraduate student senate (USS) and the Graduate and professional student senate (GPSS) operate under the Student Affairs office. Their governance responsibilities include making recommendations for policies and procedures to the University Council (see **Appendix E**). This critical decision-making body does not explicitly appear across the three top-level or university organizational charts.

The University Council is a governance body composed of ex officio members from the President’s Organization (**Figure 4-1**) and Academic Administration (**Figure 4-3**), appointed members of the various governing bodies (e.g., USS, GPSS, A/P Faculty, etc.), appointed senate

positions for each employee type, and representatives from the equal opportunity and outreach commissions. The USS, GPSS, and other governing bodies can bring forth resolutions through the University Council for adoption and approval. As the institution's voice, the university's president can bring forth relevant issues before the BOV that require their approval for policy changes. Through student programs and governance, the Student Affairs office is concerned with issues that affect the student populations en masse. Besides governance (managed by graduate student senate members), graduate students' support services remain invisible on the Student Affairs webpage and the Academic Administration organizational chart—Faculty Affairs and Undergraduate Affairs have detailed departments. Although the associated departments listed are not demonstrative of spaces/places for justice, faculty, and undergraduates are salient bodies.

Graduate Education (The Graduate School), in **Figure 4-3**, is the notable location for graduate students to request support for violations outside their graduate programs' purview. Virginia Tech's Graduate School supports approximately seven thousand graduate students spanning eight Virginia Tech campuses and centers with programs focusing on graduate students at the Blacksburg Campus—the location for more than 50% of the graduate students' population. Graduate students have three options for raising concerns: graduate program, ombudsperson, and Graduate School. This is under the assumption that the issue presented does not meet the scope and magnitude criteria to draw up a GPSS resolution. Suppose graduate students experience some form of assault (intersectional violation) within the institution. In that case, the student can report the concern to the program. If the issue remains unresolved among parties, then the ombudsperson can be called upon for a mediated discussion—not a solutions-driven discussion. The ombudsperson is situated in the Ombuds Office at the President's Organization level (see **Figure 4-1**) and has a Graduate Ombudsperson available for the Graduate School. If the graduate

student is still dissatisfied with the outcome, the next viable option would be reaching out to the Graduate School, which could have been a first option too. Suppose a graduate student brings an issue to the Graduate School, from the position of the organizational chart, shown in **Figure 4-4**⁹. In that case, it is unclear which position the student should contact within the Graduate School. The Graduate School's organizational chart, in **Figure 4-4**, demonstrates the web of confusion associated with bureaucratic structures. For Graduate students, it is a gamble trying to identify the appropriate support to address violations using this organizational chart. Director of Student Services could be one possible option, and the other, Assistant Dean & Director Diversity Initiatives.

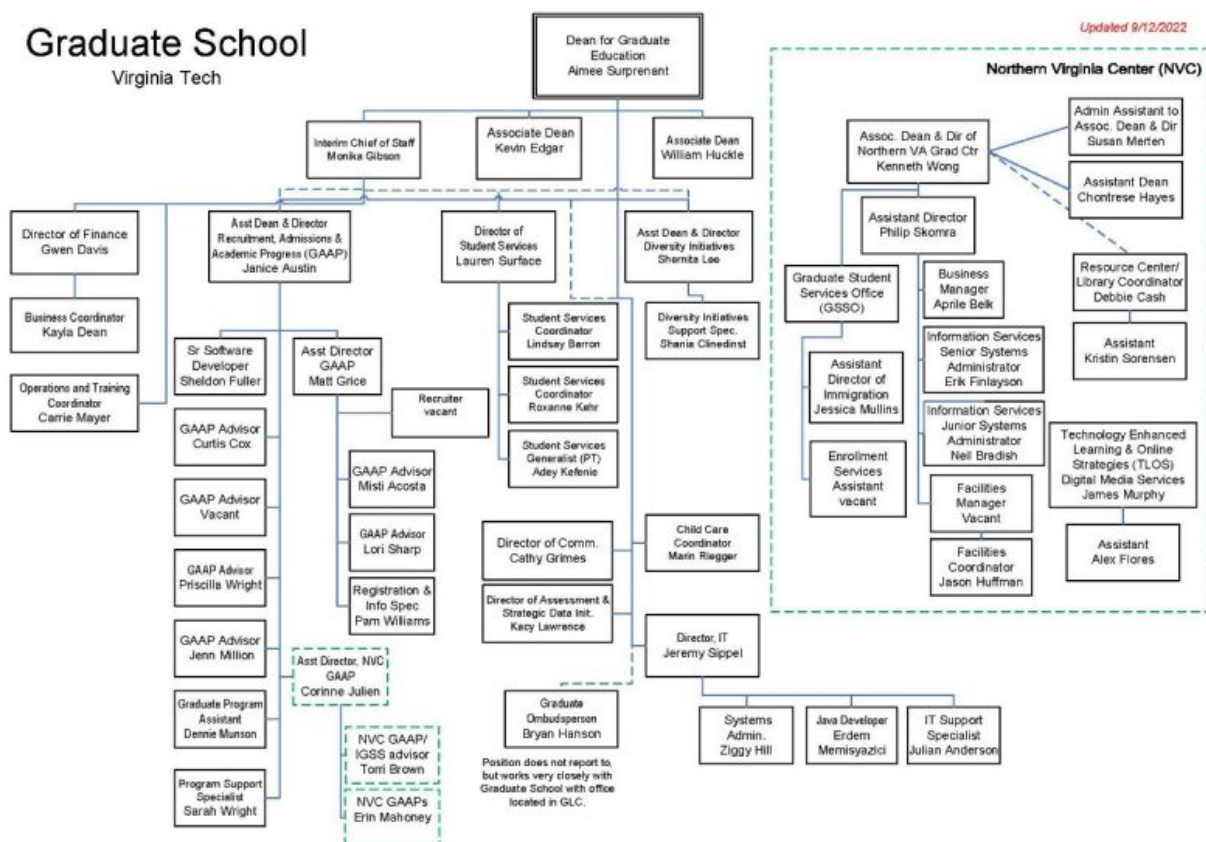


Figure 4-4. Graduate School's Organizational Chart

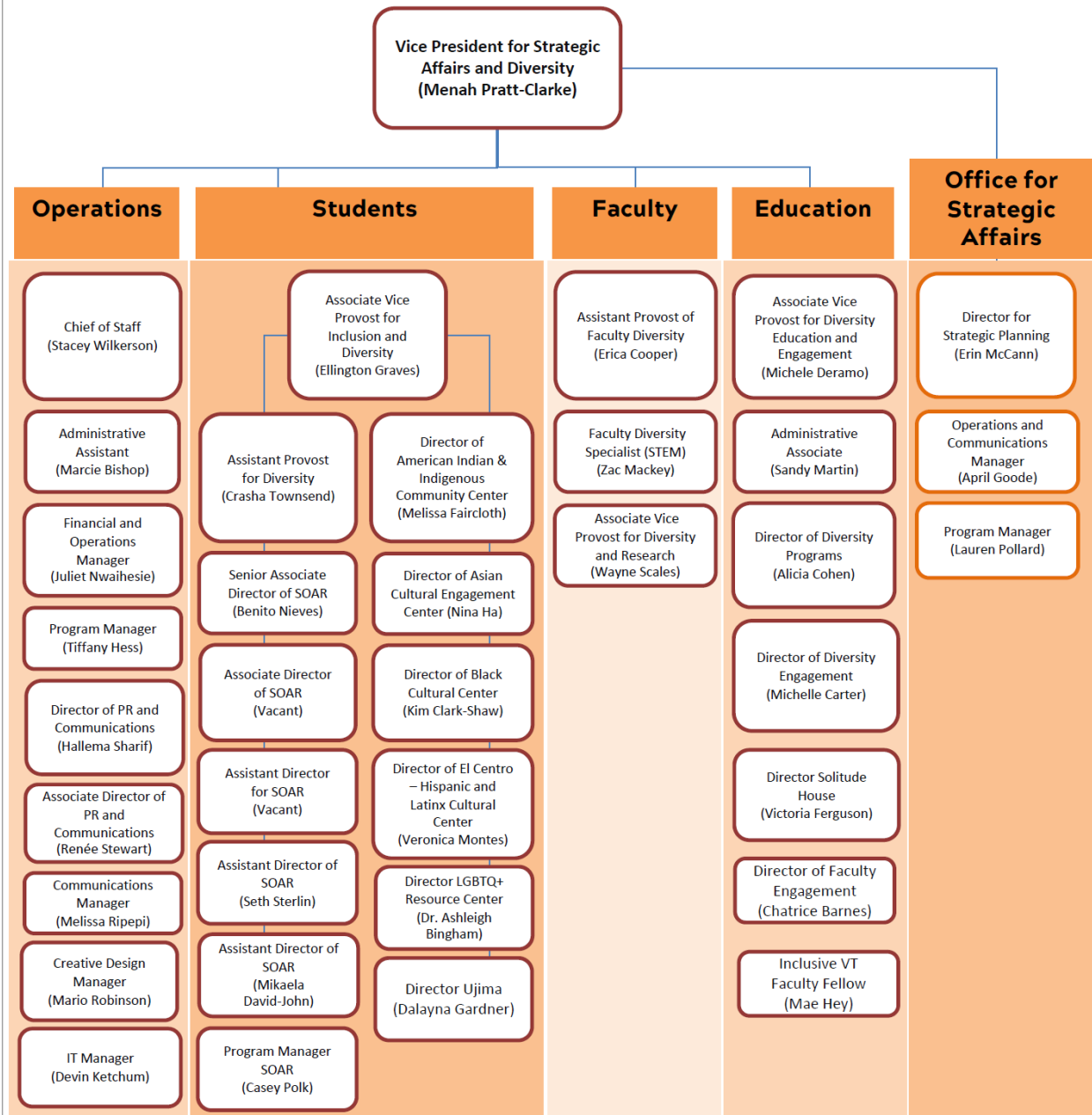
⁹ The Graduate School's organizational chart is for context purposes only and is not a salient object of analysis.

The Office for Inclusion and Diversity (OID) is the third hierarchical body at Virginia Tech with an organizational chart, in **Figure 4-5**, connected to the structure of the institution's executive members and academic administration. The three organizational charts provide an overview of the lines of authority to locate the positions with decision-making power for executing institutional changes. In discussions with Black women diversity practitioners, OID services the entire institution and the myriad of intersectional identities, making it challenging to address the various students' needs at the granular level. **Figure 4-5**, The Office for Inclusion and Diversity Organizational Chart, shows five branches under the Vice President for Strategic Affairs and Diversity position to support diversity goals across the institution. The first branch, Operations, are positions that keep OID as a body fully functional. The last (fifth) branch, Office for Strategic Affairs, manages the vision and the plans to carry out the vision, ensuring the institution's growth, competitiveness, and diversity. The strategic plans of this office include *InclusiveVT*, *Beyond Boundaries*, and *Advancing Beyond Boundaries*. InclusiveVT (in **Figure 4-6**), created and managed by the head of OID, Dr. Menah Pratt, are broadly stated goals with the "President's InclusiveVT Executive Council" as the governing body is intended to guide "the development of InclusiveVT and ensure...that responsibility for inclusion and diversity is infused throughout Virginia Tech." InclusiveVT aims for a sustainable approach to making institutional change. The four InclusiveVT goals are as follows:

1. *Institutionalizing structures to promote a sustainable transformation.*
2. *Increasing faculty, staff, and student diversity*
3. *Ensuring a welcoming, affirming, safe, and accessible campus climate*
4. *Advancing the research, teaching, and service mission through inclusive excellence.*

A Black-woman diversity practitioner concerned states, "Now, we're all InclusiveVT...This model is in place, that is a model, but no one knows their role, and how they should interact with others, and how it's contributing to the larger institution."

The Office for Inclusion and Diversity Organizational Chart



Last Updated 07/18/2022



INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY
VIRGINIA TECH.

Figure 4-5. Office for Inclusion and Diversity Organizational Chart

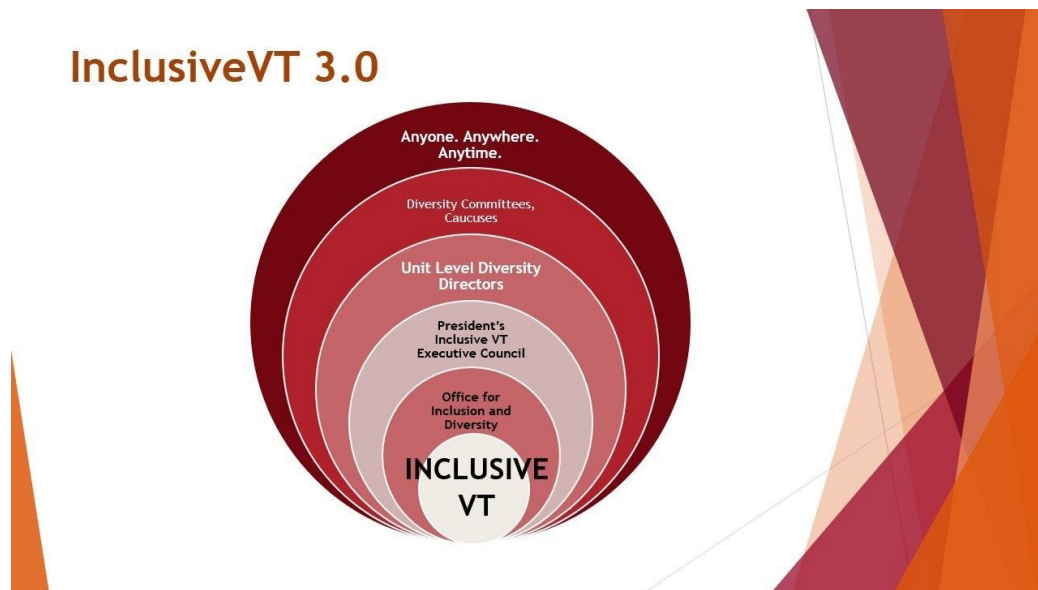


Figure 4-6. InclusiveVT Sustainable Structure – Framework 3.0

The university's strategic plan includes guiding principles that carry the sentiment of the university's motto: Ut Prosim (That I May Serve). Along with the council, diversity directors are employed in each academic college at the unit level to carry out diversity programs. Each college developed unit-level strategic plans that aligned with the university's vision. However, the prominent voices engaged in diversity discourses are the university's President and Vice President for Diversity, Inclusion, and Strategic Affairs positions: President Tim Sands and Dr. Menah Pratt. President Sands and Dr. Pratt are empowered to influence change from their position throughout the institution.

In summary, the BOV at Virginia Tech are trustees in charge of all institutional changes. Requests must be brought to the board for review to receive approval. The State's Governor appoints the BOV members; subsequently, the BOV appoints the university's president. The Governor's office can consider BOV member recommendations from VTAA and the Virginia Commission on Higher Education.

As shown in **Figure 4-7**, the Vice President for Advancement and the Senior Associate Vice President for Advancement are also officers on the VTAA Board. As previously mentioned,

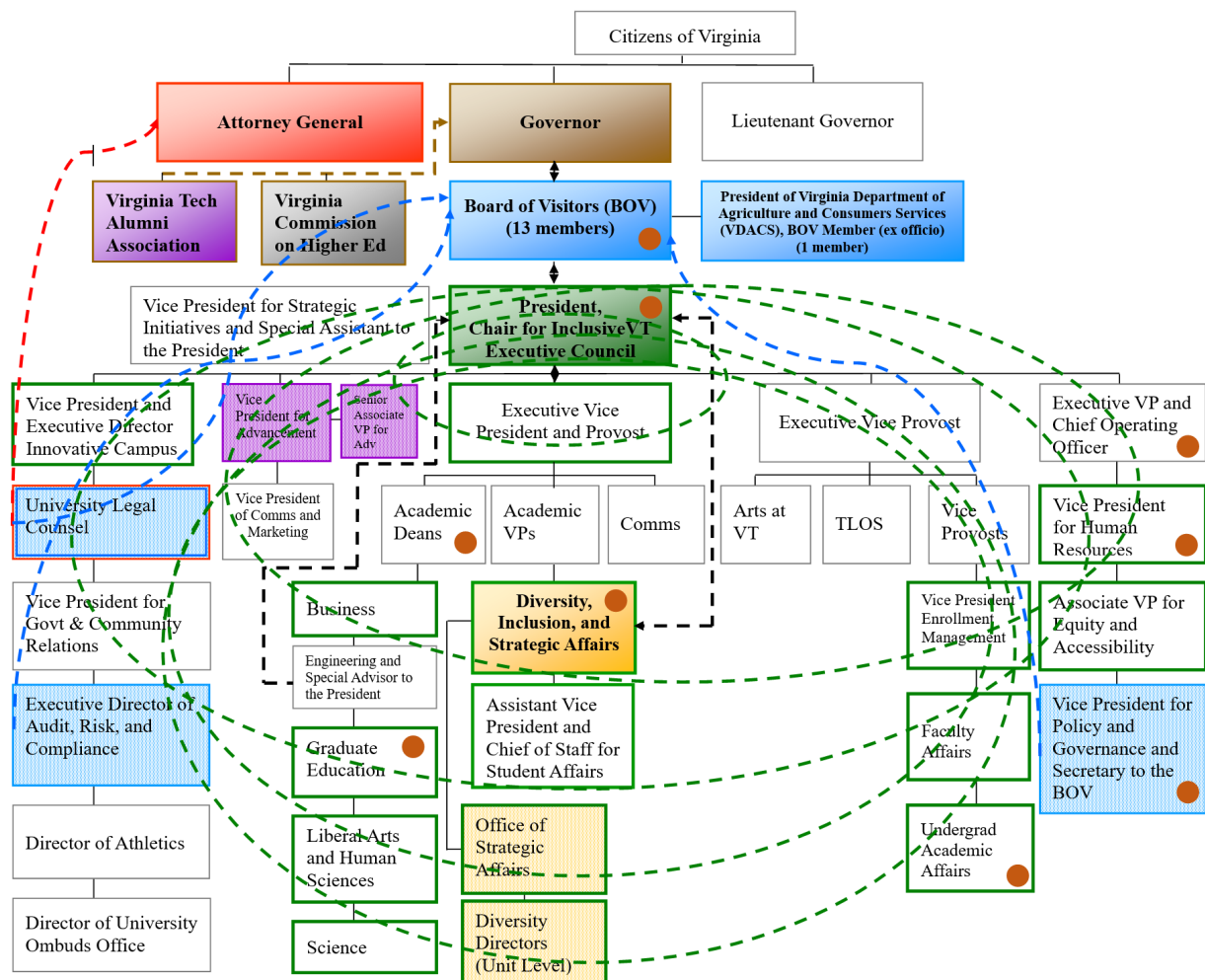


Figure 4-7. Lines of Authority and Communication Organization Chart of Virginia Tech

the Governor may use recommendations from VTAA in deciding who to place in vacant BOV positions. University Legal Counsel reports to the attorney General's office and as legal counsel

to the BOV. Also, the University Legal Counsel; Executive Director of Audit, Risk, and Compliance; and Vice President for Policy and Governance as Secretary to the BOV have a line of communication with the university's President. Lastly, several university leaders serve on the University President's InclusiveVT Executive Council and the University Council. Several overlaps between positions could contribute to the circulating discourse about unclear visions, goals, and values and students who experience violations that are never addressed. This dynamic organizational chart can be used and applied to improve decisions and mitigate Black women's subordination.

Discussion and Conclusion: Harmful Organizational Structures

Organizational structures and charts are presented as static and bounded representations of that structure. Each person fills a position and has assigned roles and responsibilities, but the daily operations and decision-making practices are dynamic. The institution's activities are as dynamic as the discourse that shapes processes, technologies, and spaces within the institution's landscape. Organizational charts are blockages to what is happening within an institution. They model social hierarchies and individualism and block understanding decision-making processes and authority to change. Organizational charts show authority levels and individuals' location within an institutional hierarchy. The Black women diversity practitioners I interviewed all mentioned their work necessitating collaboration, and the organizational charts become misleading because they suggest that diversity practitioners work alone. Organizational charts inform discourses of individualism—the “pulling yourself up by your bootstraps” narrative—a model that teases the possibilities for moving up the administrative ranks.

Black feminists engage in justice work in coalitions as collective action (Collins, 2022). Organizational charts hide the different bodies that support and work with diversity practitioners

in doing diversity work. As described by interview participants, community work and the labor in building relationships are hidden and devalued. Multiple Practitioners discussed white colleagues requesting access to their networks or tokenizing them as the only Black person they know to represent diversity for their work projects. These behaviors demonstrate individualism as conditioned and ingrained in American identity. Diversity Practitioners' work becomes valued by leadership when it is associated with a monetized value when bringing significant funds into the institution.

An example of hidden labor is displayed in **Figure 4-7**. The organization chart appears messy, with communication lines swirling up and down. In some respects, the communication lines are direct between positions, but the more bodies involved, the more dynamic or messy the communication becomes. Most positions shown here have multiple responsibilities aside from the position title labeled on the chart. Positions with shading, an outline color, and a dot possess a minimum of three position responsibilities. For example, the Diversity, Inclusion, and Strategic Affairs position (Dr. Menah Pratt) is the primary position with a seat on the University's Executive Council for InclusiveVT initiatives and the University Council Member as a governing member. Dr. Pratt's decision-making power is not immediately noticeable without a deeper analysis of roles and responsibilities—but regardless, the final decisions for institutional changes rest with the BOV. The leaders noted in this organizational chart may experience minimal negative impact from labor that goes unnoticed by the university community because their work engages the university's President. However, the Black-women diversity practitioners are off the charts and affected by the oppressive institutional structures that organizational structures bolster. They are often double-taxed in diversity practitioners' labor because they

work their primary role and support Black bodies in their community to navigate racial experiences. There is no infrastructure in place for the diversity work that is needed.

Organizational charts are symbols of *institutional slavery*, *racism*, and *whiteness*. Bodies are placed in tiers with an uneven distribution of labor upholding *institutional power* in the highest-ranked decision-making positions. Organization charts are dismembering, displaying plane boxes with position titles/names with no bodies or faces signaling the importance of investigating various institutions' various sites for what is happening in spaces, processes, and technologies. The disinformation about what the person in the position is doing demonstrates the saliency of empowering communicative practices to mitigate racial violence.

Chapter 5: Public Diversity Discourse (Critical Discourse and Rhetorical Analysis)

“Diversity programs suggest that PWIs do antiracist work and support marginalized persons’ needs. Conversely, historical accounts of racial violence neoliberal rationalities and ideologies of white supremacy”—Evans, 2023

After locating university leadership’s positions across Virginia Tech’s organizational charts and mapping the bureaucratic structures, Chapter 4 demonstrates multiple entry points to executive bodies with the power to influence decisions toward changes within the institution. Institutional discourses over time construct institutions’ material and discursive landscapes. This chapter analyzes how diversity discourse reifies institutional power through systems of oppression, occluding equitable and sustainable change. According to Porter et al. (2000), an institutional critique should occur at the micro-level sites of an institution for realizable change impacting the macro-level institution. Here, I analyze two sites of inquiry: Part One) a series of diversity videos produced by Virginia Tech’s Office for Inclusion and Diversity (OID), and Part Two) climate surveys representative of three demographics at Virginia Tech.

First, I contextualize the diversity-related video series in Part One to examine a space where diversity discourse is happening at Virginia Tech. Next, I conduct a two-part critical discourse analysis involving a textual analysis of a large corpus of text, a collection of transcripts from the video series. The second part of the analysis is a rhetorical analysis of the data output. I discuss how bodies within the context of the videos are marked and the access of power for making institutional change. I approach the rhetorical analysis from a Black feminist lens while including the voices of Black women in diversity-related positions at Virginia Tech to capture Black feminist knowledges. Then, in Part Two, I contextualize and conduct a rhetorical analysis of Virginia Tech’s climate surveys to engage data analytics’ role in diversity discourse and how

power structures map bodies. Finally, I conclude with a discussion on how diversity discursive practices at Virginia Tech inscribe institutional power.

Part One: Diversity Discourse Video Analysis and Discussion

Contextualizing InclusiveVT Diversity Videos

Here, I contextualize videos from Virginia Tech’s “InclusiveVT” YouTube channel that include public-facing discussions on diversity-related topics. In the interest and scope of this dissertation, I did not incorporate diversity discussions from Virginia Tech’s Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter that may demonstrate how people react to the institution’s posts. I analyzed twenty-six videos, equivalent to 21 hours and 22.6 mins of transcript, published by Virginia Tech’s diversity office, OID, starting in 2020. I aimed to understand how Virginia Tech engages in diversity discourse and the role of diversity discourse in inscribing institutional spaces and *institutional power*. These videos are analyzed in two datasets according to each series’ topic: “Making the Chair Fit” (dataset one) and “VT Unfinished Conversation” (dataset two). I included two other videos in dataset one’s analysis that were not produced under either series but were closely related to dataset one’s topic. **Table 5-1** lists the videos in this dissertation, and the gray-shaded rows distinguishes the two datasets.

Table 5-1. InclusiveVT, YouTube Channel Videos from “Making the Chair Fit” and “VT Unfinished Conversation” Series. *Gray shaded rows dataset one and white rows dataset two.*

Order	Date	Video Title	Transcript .txt
1	4/20/2020	Making the Chair Fit: Episode 1	1_MTCF
2	5/1/2020	Making the Chair Fit: Episode 2 (May 1, 2020)	2_MTCF
3	5/29/2020	Making The Chair Fit: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at the National Level	3_MTCF
4	6/12/2020	Making The Chair Fit: Cultural and Community Centers during COVID-19	4_MTCF
5	7/10/2020	Making the Chair Fit: Season of Transition	5_MTCF
6	8/14/2020	Making the Chair Fit: Episode 5	6_MTCF

Order	Date	Video Title	Transcript .txt
7	9/10/2020	Making The Chair Fit: A Conversation about Disability & Accessibility (Episode 6)	7_MTCF
8	11/6/2020	Making The Chair Fit: Advancement and Alumni Relations for Diversity & Inclusion	8_MTCF
9	12/4/2020	Making the Chair Fit: Virginia Tech Alumni Leaders	9_MTCF
10	3/8/2021	Making The Chair Fit: Virginia Tech's Latina Women Leaders	10_MTCF
11	3/12/2021	Making the Chair Fit: Virginia Tech's Presidential Principles of Community Award Recipients	11_MTCF
12	4/2/2021	Making the Chair Fit: Rufus Elliott, First Monacan Student at VT	12_MTCF
13	4/23/2021	Making The Chair Fit: APIDA Panel	13_MTCF
14	5/7/2021	Making The Chair Fit: LGBTQ+ Panel	14_MTCF
15	10/7/2021	Making the Chair Fit - a conversation with Alumnus BK Fulton	15_MTCF
16	12/8/2021	Making The Chair Fit - Juanisha Brooks	16_MTCF
17	7/2/2020	VT Unfinished Conversations: Race and Racism	17_VTUC
18	9/9/2020	VT Unfinished Conversations: White Women Allies	18_VTUC
19	9/11/2020	VT Unfinished: The Little Book of Racial Healing	19_VTUC
20	10/2/2020	VT Unfinished Conversations: White Men as Allies	20_VTUC
21	11/18/2020	VT Unfinished Conversations: Athletics Director, Whit Babcock	21_VTUC
22	12/9/2020	VT Unfinished Conversations: Virginia Tech's First African American Student	22_VTUC
23	2/9/2021	VT Unfinished Conversation: Anti Racist Teaching	23_VTUC
24	1/9/2022	VT Unfinished Conversation: Female Pioneer	24_VTUC
25	7/27/2020	President Tim Sands Speaks on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion	25_VTgen
26	11/4/2020	Finding Common Ground: Reflecting after the 2020 Election	26_VTgen

“Making the Chair Fit” Diversity Videos (Dataset One). The “Making the Chair Fit” (MTCF) video series includes sixteen videos published starting one month after the official media announcements (March, 2020) of COVID-19 as a global crisis, ranging from April 2020 to December 2021. Dr. Menah Pratt, Vice President for Diversity, Inclusion, and Strategic Affairs and the head of Virginia Tech’s OID, created the MTCF series to help the Virginia Tech

community adjust to the pandemic and society. In the opening remarks of the first video, Dr. Pratt describes the purpose of the videos as “adjusting to the pandemic,” “adjusting to society,” and “celebrating the incredible community that is Virginia Tech.” I analyzed all sixteen videos for this dissertation to demonstrate how Virginia Tech engaged in diversity discourse during the dual pandemics: COVID-19 and racial violence/police brutality. The two other videos added to this dataset are diversity-related messages from the university’s president that, like MTCF, are geared towards the campus community, unlike dataset two, designed for a broader audience.

“VT Unfinished Conversation” Videos (Dataset Two). The “VT Unfinished Conversation” (VTUC) videos focus on identity concerns, typically around race. Dr. Pratt explains the sentiment of these videos stating, “Conversations about race are often not finished, not started, interrupted, [or] silenced.” OI, through Dr. Pratt, accelerated the conversations in this video series after the murder of George Floyd. I analyzed the eight videos in this series published from July 2020 through January 2022.

Critical Discourse Analysis Method and Results

In a critical discourse analysis to understand how Virginia Tech is using language in diversity discourse, I used Python coding applying a Term Frequency-Inverse Document Frequency (TF-IDF) method to read the large corpus of video transcripts and apply a weighted value for the terms most valuable across the entire corpus, described in Chapter 2. I analyzed the diversity video transcripts by conducting three analysis cycles for datasets one and two.

Analysis Cycle One. The first coding cycle aims to identify the specific language and/or mainstream diversity language beyond what is visible (e.g., diversity, equity, inclusion). **Table 5-2** shows the top 25 terms from datasets one and two most valuable across the corpus of diversity videos.

Table 5-2. Dataset One and Two Diversity Discourse Terms – Top 25 TF-IDF Scores

Ranking	Dataset 1 Terms	TF-IDF Score	Dataset 2 Terms	TF-IDF Score
1	people	0.262314	jack	0.237109
2	frank	0.223134	luke	0.237109
3	values	0.167162	white	0.227255
4	work	0.158107	things	0.222520
5	ground	0.139532	dont	0.189379
6	political	0.127361	masculinity	0.165977
7	conversation	0.125767	jeremy	0.165977
8	core	0.119401	dave	0.154121
9	community	0.119316	culture	0.153045
10	menah	0.119126	men	0.153045
11	common	0.115822	yeah	0.151503
12	question	0.107861	people	0.132565
13	viewpoint	0.106716	male	0.119774
14	dont	0.100614	conversation	0.118362
15	deb	0.099754	time	0.118362
16	virginia	0.098862	bit	0.104158
17	stake	0.097015	moment	0.094689
18	diversity	0.095453	years	0.089955
19	principles	0.095383	gender	0.086504
20	tech	0.092044	aware	0.086504
21	time	0.089834	ive	0.084674
22	justice	0.089560	change	0.084674
23	despair	0.088669	diversity	0.080486
24	election	0.088669	work	0.080486
25	dialogue	0.087561	conversations	0.080486

Analysis Cycle Two. For the second step in the analysis process, I categorized terms according to rhetorical elements and identified emerging patterns from the TF-IDF and IDF raw data. To contextualize the videos from a rhetorical perspective—considering institutional structures and bodies within predominantly white institutions (PWI) spaces—I thematized the top 25 most valuable terms from diversity videos using salient rhetorical elements in an institutional rhetorics approach according to Jennifer Sano-Franchini, who states, “an

institutional rhetorics approach can and perhaps should look beyond institutions to center the space where institutional structures and human beings meet—through a rhetorical, spatial, temporal, cultural, political, historical, and embodied methodology” (Cobos et al., 2018, p. 149). Terms are categorized by theme, considering the context of the videos. In **Tables 5-3 and 5-4**, terms are applied to the most applicable theme leaving some themes without terms. There are opportunities for terms to share themes, but the focus here is to include a perspective on the context of the videos with some amount of objectivity. The TF-IDF calculations extracted words that would not otherwise be in my purview to consider for analysis and discussion.

In **Table 5-3**, according to the specified themes, the terms from dataset one give a sense of the sociopolitical climate during the video conversations and the need for critical *dialogue* within our *communities*. The terms under “Political” remind us that besides the COVID-19 pandemic that, U.S. racial injustices had high visibility globally. The livelihood of Black people and other non-white groups was at *stake* from differing *viewpoints* and *values* on COVID-19 vaccination, voting processes, and the president’s *re-election*. Dr. Pratt is the main speaker and host who produced this space in the YouTube environment to hold conversations about how members of Virginia Tech were adjusting their lives to the double pandemics—or the “new normal.”

Table 5-3. Dataset One Terms in Categories by Rhetorical Theme

Dataset 1 “Making the Chair Fit” Themes						
Identity	Rhetorical	Spatial	Temporal	Cultural	Political	Historical
people	conversation	ground	time	work	political	
frank	dialogue	virginia		common	justice	
menah	dont	tech			election	
deb	diversity				values	
community	question				principles	
despair					core	
					stake	
					viewpoint	

The videos in dataset two are about conversations on race and identity that are “often left unfinished.” The terms from dataset two, shown in **Table 5-4**, are characteristic of the white hegemonic hetero-patriarchal society that, through identification practices, has led to the oppression and violence against Black people as a racialized other. For example, Black women engaging with institutional structures in PWIs have resulted in various oppressions such as commodification, objectification, and exploitation (Collins, 2022) due to the interplay of masculinity, whiteness, and gender differentials within those environments (Ahmed 2012). Dr. Pratt is also the main speaker, and Dr. Michelle Deramo, Assistant Provost for Diversity Education, in these videos heading up discussions on issues of racism and gender.

Table 5-4. Dataset Two Terms in Categories by Rhetorical Theme

Dataset 2 “VT Unfinished Conversation” Themes						
Identity	Rhetorical	Spatial	Temporal	Cultural	Political	Historical
jack	conversation	things	time	work		
luke	aware	bit	moment	yeah		
masculinity	conversations		years			
jeremy			change			
dave						
white						
men						
people						
male						
gender						
ive						
diversity						

After retrieving a list of terms, ordered from the most valued (highest TF-IDF score) to the least (lowest TF-IDF score), I referred to a separate output of the IDF values to identify emerging patterns and select videos for rhetorical analysis. The IDF value expresses the importance of a term per document (video transcript). The IDF output helped me to locate the respective videos(s) for each term for discussions in the context of the relevant video(s). Upon review, I became curious about the most valuable terms that occurred in all videos to investigate

the purpose of their frequent use. Terms that appear in each video have an IDF value of 1. For a contrastive step, I located the term(s) that appear in only one video designated by an IDF value of 0. These terms are the most valuable to the corpus (dataset), with a unique appearance across all videos. A term appearing in only one video marks that video as having special features in the messaging, and that video stands out from the corpus. **Table 5-5** shows the terms in dataset one and dataset two with an IDF of 1 and the terms with an IDF of 0 that were extracted from the top 25 terms in each set.

Table 5-5. Most Valuable Terms and Videos with Common or Unique Characteristics in Dataset One and Dataset Two. *Green shaded rows are selected terms and videos for analysis.*

Dataset One: MTCF	
Highly Valuable Term Across Corpus with Common Video Characteristic (IDF=1)	
community (#9)	diversity (#18)
virginia (#16)	tech (#20)
Highly Valuable Term Across Corpus with Unique Video Characteristic (IDF=0)	
deb (#15)	“Finding Common Ground: Reflecting after the 2020 Election “ (26_VTgen.txt)
Dataset Two: VTUC	
Highly Valuable Term Across Corpus with Common Video Characteristic (IDF=1)	
white (#3)	bit (#16)
things (#4)	moment (#17)
dont (#5)	years (#18)
yeah (#11)	diversity (#23)
people (#12)	work (#24)
conversation (#14)	conversations (#25)
time (#15)	
Highly Valuable Term Across Corpus with Unique Video Characteristic (IDF=0)	
jack (#1)	“VT Unfinished Conversations: White Men as Allies” (20_VTUC.txt)
luke (#2)	
masculinity (#6)	
jeremy (#7)	
dave (#8)	

Analysis Cycle Three (Dataset One). For dataset one, an additional analysis cycle was necessary to place the four valuable terms (**Table 5-5**) in the context of the videos to find what they are doing in Virginia Tech’s diversity discourse, but in building on Sara Ahmed’s (2012) work, I conducted a comparative analysis with the “language of diversity” and the dataset one

terms. First, I compared *community*, *virginia*, *diversity*, and *tech* to the terms Ahmed extracted and analyzed from several institutions' diversity discourse. Ahmed examined the term "diversity" and its co-occurrence with "equality/equity," "global," "whiteness," and "racism." Because TF-IDF is a method that works well in creating search engines, I then searched for Ahmed's key terms among the IDF output in Virginia Tech's diversity discourse across all video transcripts in dataset one. I compared Virginia Tech's use of these terms to consider Ahmed's argument about what they are "doing." While analyzing the four valued terms in the corpus and Ahmed's terms, the term *community* stood out as showing up in the top 25, but not in Ahmed's discourse analysis and discussion. Although *community* occurs in diversity discourse, I find it generative to analyze and discuss the role of the term *community* in institutionalizing diversity. *Community* is an important feature and common theme among Black people. Patricia Hill Collins (2022) explicates the importance of community in shaping Black women's epistemological and ontological practices. I analyze how *community* is used in the context of the videos foregrounded by how Collins (2022) describes the role of *community* in shaping Black feminist thought.

Analysis Cycle Three (Dataset Two). For dataset two, in narrowing down the videos for analysis, I examined how the most valuable words were used in the videos' context, and the most meaningful term in the context was *white*. The term *white* was often used in co-occurrence with "colleagues," "women," "allies," and "whiteness." I move forward in this analysis with the term "whiteness," considering how it is engaged in conversation across videos.

Rhetorical Analysis of the "Making the Chair Fit" Videos (Dataset One)

Spatial Analysis. To further map the landscape or space of Virginia Tech's diversity videos, I conduct a rhetorical analysis considering the rhetorical effect of YouTube's format on diversity messaging. I am concerned with how technologies like this present a barrier to

institutional change. In my initial research for this work, Black women emerged as prominent university leaders to support institutional diversity. Although Black women share common identities, their experiences with diversity are not universal, and we should account for shifting perspectives on and experiences within PWIs' diversity discourse. Collins (2022) explicates the exploitation of Black women in predominantly white spaces from the “outsider-within” location. Collins (2022) states, “U.S. Black women intellectuals have found themselves in outsider-within positions in many academic endeavors” (p. 17). The “outsider-within” location symbolizes Black women’s dual existence as outsiders within oppressive (white) spaces, drawing from Black women as domestic workers in white homes in the pre-World War II era.

As shown in **Figure 5-1**, Dr. Pratt appears across the MTCF video thumbnail sampling, which can be expected as she is the discussion moderator and Vice President for Diversity, Inclusion, and Strategic Affairs. Dr. Pratt is the voice and face of diversity at Virginia Tech. Dr. Pratt presents an intersectional body as a Black woman and academic intellectual at a PWI. She is a smiling Black woman and a body contained in place. Dr. Pratt is poised in each video, bringing a pleasant disposition, full of energy. She remains engaged with her guests and is prepared to keep the conversations moving forward on the topic. She is willing to discuss issues that may be difficult for some and challenge statements that, unchecked, could cause rhetorical violence. As a Black woman doing diversity work in white spaces of a PWI, she becomes a commodified object in still images—easily portable for exploitation when her work is marked as the “proactive” work of the institution (Ahmed, 2012).

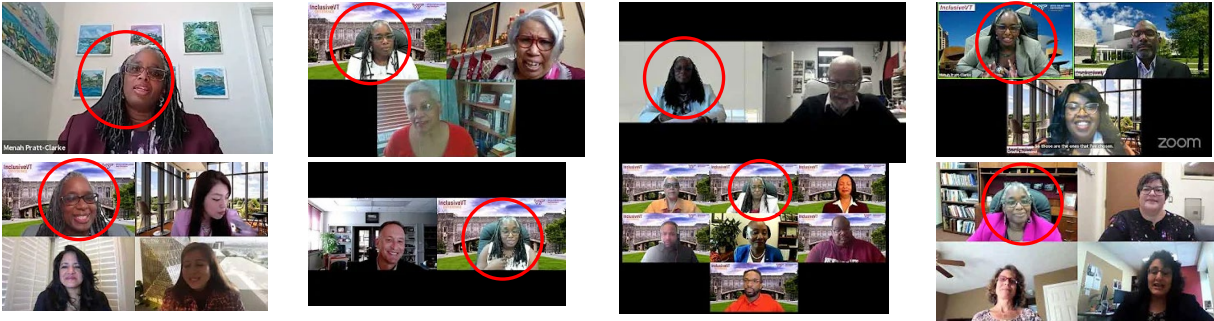


Figure 5-1. “Making the Chair Fit” Video Thumbnails

The language of diversity constructs institutional structures through words and symbolically through images (Ore 2019). The institution’s meanings of Blackness mark Dr. Pratt’s body. With each produced MTCF video, Dr. Pratt becomes a part of the framework, creating a genre of diversity that reifies oppressive institutional structures. Collins (2022) mentions that Black women are complicit in their oppression by institutional design to police or subdue other Black women. Dr. Pratt becomes a fixture in the window, the pane, and the box the institution can check off as doing diversity. Ahmed states, “Bodies of color provide organizations with tools...[to turn] action points into outcomes. We become the tools in their kit. We are ticks in the boxes; we tick their boxes...our bodies become targets” (Ahmed, 2012, p. 153).

Similarly to “outsider-within,” today, Black women hold diversity leadership positions within PWIs and participate in how PWIs mark Blackness through diversity work. As diversity practitioners, Black women are not afforded the power to make immediate structural changes at the macro-level institution. Instead, institutions use the face and labor of Black women to support institutional diversity goals (Ahmed, 2012).

Dr. Pratt is just doing her job but is under the institution’s surveillance. Although under surveillance, “Black women have the capacity to keep organizations under surveillance” by

gaining positions of authority to use bureaucratic resources and “innovative ways to foster bureaucratic change” (Collins, 2022, p. 356). Dr. Pratt identifies as a Black feminist and womanist, and I believe she is completely aware of her access to making change as she takes up space as a present consistent body. Dr. Pratt is a body “out of place” (Browne, 2015) by remaining visible, upfront, and center. Her constant presence resists the mapping of Black women’s bodies as loud and disruptive—resistance to the notion of the “feminist killjoy” (Ahmed) where showing up in white spaces disrupts institutional whiteness. With these videos’ context, I engage in a rhetorical analysis of salient terms for a generative discussion.

“deb” Video Uniqueness Analysis. The term “deb” is located in the “Finding Common Ground: Reflecting after the 2020 Election” diversity video, characterized as unique across the corpus of video transcripts. The term is associated with a story told by Dr. Frank Shushok, Vice President for Student Affairs, about a Black woman named Deb who provided him guidance as a young white man (Note: underlined text are the focal points for analysis):

And in many ways, ours was an unlikely friendship. I was this young white kid with a whole lot of privilege from Texas. Deb was a middle aged African American single mom who grew up in Milwaukee. And her openness to me the Frank of a quarter century ago, makes me marvel in retrospect. Deb’s investment in the young professional who knew everything, and her commitment to stick it out with me while I pretended I needed no one has molded the way I see the world. And although I cannot recall all the things I must have said in Deb’s presence, I can imagine what I have uttered in ignorance or immaturity, especially in the earliest days of our friendship. And Deb’s response has always been to invite me into her wide inclusive circle of learning and love.

And I’ve learned that wisdom is born in such circles. I think wisdom is one thing you grow into through experience, not through acquisition. And today I enjoy watching my dear friend Deb extend similar grace to countless other folks through simple friendship. And listen, don’t get me wrong, Deb is not simple or quiet. She marches, she fights, she pushes, she has a strong and assertive voice. And I know no better champion for justice than Deb. But Deb is why, she knows how people change and how to help them broaden their perspective by inserting the right dose of challenge with a whole lot of love. And I think at a place like Virginia Tech, we got to be looking out for opportunities to do just that because that’s how a Frank Shushok becomes Frank Shushok.

In Dr. Shushok's engagements with Deb, he describes Deb's contributions to his life as an "investment" and "commitment." There is no return on investment for Deb in this disproportionate relationship. Deb is operating in power relations with Dr. Shushok, which contradicts the relationship Dr. Shushok imagined he had with Deb. While Deb conducted her domestic institutional work as an "outsider-within" taking care of a young white man, Dr. Shushok was privileged to navigate the relationship ("friendship") and the world around him belligerent spewing utterances "in ignorance and immaturity." He describes Deb as "not simple or quiet" but as one who "marches," "fights," "pushes," and "has a strong and assertive voice." Dr. Shushok's emphasis that Deb is "not simple or quiet" participates in the racial stereotype of the loud/angry Black woman—characterizing meanings of Blackness from a position of whiteness. Kevin Quashie (2012) explains that in a struggle for racial equality, "black culture has been characterized largely by its responses to racial dominance" as "loud, literally as well as metaphorically since such loudness is the expressiveness that articulates its resistance" (p. 11).

In his overall description of Deb, one perspective of analysis is that Dr. Shushok describes a militant caricature of Deb—again symbolic of an angry Black woman. Ersula Ore (2019) represents in *Lynching* a similar caricature drawn of Michelle Obama: "The image of an army fatigue wearing, afro-sprouting, machine-gun carrying Michelle..." (p. 106), shown in **Figure 5-2**. This 2008 photo was symbolic of demarcating the white space of the Oval Office from anti-Americans and anti-citizens. The visual rhetoric supported disidentification with the Obamas during their presidential campaign. Dr. Shushok's description of Deb demonstrates how racialized discourse inscribes institutional racism through "pedagogies" of racism. The virality of the same racialized language and images toward Black people enculturate harmful meanings of Blackness.



Figure 5-2. Example of Black women Blitt's 2008 New Yorker cover, "Fistbump: The Politics of Fear," was inspired by the rumors that circulated about the Obamas during that year's presidential campaign.

An additional perspective of Dr. Shushok's description of Deb is the image of a Black woman activist who "marches," "fights," and "pushes." Quashie (2012) argues against mainstream discourse essentializing Black resistance as always loud and expressive. Deb's work to guide the young, white, and future Dr. Shushok may have been activism to mitigate future harm on Black bodies inscribed by whiteness.

Dr. Pratt responded to Dr. Shushok after his story saying, "I appreciate that story, Frank because that is how it happens. But Deb had to be the one to be like, 'I'm going to deal with this dude,' basically." He replied, "I know, I know. So, what do we do about that, Menah?" Dr. Shushok's racialized language reinforces

racist images of Black women. Dr. Pratt and Dr. Shushok noticed through their response and demeanor in the video that the story of Deb was problematic, but they did not probe the issue and moved on. The conversation needed to repair the racial harm from the language used is beyond the context of the video.

"Community" Term Use Analysis. The emergence of *community* in a PWI's diversity discourse deserves a deeper dive, as Ahmed (2012) found the institutionalized language of diversity to be racialized and non-performative. Ahmed argues that the language of diversity inscribes institutional racism and whiteness. *Community* as an attribute of PWI diversity efforts is oxymoronic to what diversity discourse is doing. Diversity discourse inscribes dissension,

disidentification, and discrimination (Ahmed 2012). *Community*, like diversity, is a “feel-good” term (Ahmed 2012), which suggests togetherness and harmony, which are not associated with institutionalized diversity. A definition of a *community* is “a group of people having common interests” (*Define Community - Google Search*, n.d.). Kenneth Burke (1969) describes common/shared interests as “identification.” When bodies have shared interests (commonalities), there is a bridge to communication, which Burke calls “consubstantiality.” Rhetoricians; Krista Ratcliffe (2005), Stephanie Kerschbaum (2014), Ersula Ore (2019), and M. Remi Yergeau (2018); argue that identification is not without the negation disidentification. In this sense, *community* is not without exclusionary boundaries—to identify is to disidentify. *Community* in use within a PWIs context presupposes a body with commonalities aiming toward a similar goal.

Within Virginia Tech’s diversity discourse is an imagined community with a collective mission to improve diversity—Virginia Tech’s InclusiveVT. InclusiveVT “is the institutional and individual commitment to Ut Prosim (That I May Serve) in the spirit of community, diversity, and excellence” (*InclusiveVT*, n.d.). My interviews with Black women diversity practitioners demonstrate that InclusiveVT is an imagined community of “HokieNation” operating in the “spirit of Ut Prosim.” Virginia Tech’s school mascot is called the Hokie Bird. It is a Chicago maroon and burnt orange bird resembling a very plump turkey. Anyone associated with the university is affectionately considered a part of the “HokieNation.” However, not everyone experiences the affections of HokieNation, so the community referred to by university leadership in diversity discourse does not carry the same import.

Community emerged as a salient term across all videos, and different meanings of *community* are observed in trying to understand its role in diversity discourse. In the “Making the Chair Fit” videos, Dr. Pratt asked her guests about their favorite chair as they were encouraged to

sit in their favorite chair in the theme of the videos. In one conversation, as a Black man, Dr. Ellington Graves, Associate Vice Provost for Inclusion and Diversity, chose a barbershop chair. He states,

But to me, the barbershop chair represents the same principle as a university, that's the place where folks get to come together and share ideas and engage and debate.

Especially, in the African American community, it really is a focal point for how we come to grapple with the issues of the day.

He explains why he chose the barbershop chair, and in doing so, he also describes a Black perception of community. In the Black community, from Dr. Grave's perspective, Black people "come together to grapple with the issues of the day" and share ideas, engage, and debate. The barbershop has historically been a community gathering place for Black men to engage in discussion.

As Collins historicizes the role of Black women in social activism, *community* appears in several contexts: "Black community," "community leader," and "community othermother." Collins defines the Black community as "a set of institutions, communication networks, and practices that help African-Americans respond to social, economic, and political challenges confronting them. Also known as the Black public sphere or Black civil society" (393). This definition aligns with Dr. Graves's characterization of the Black *community*; a *community* associated with space/place, discourse, and action. The Black *community* is an enclave counterpublic (Squires 2002) as an open-access educational institution for knowledge production. Also, *community* is an action; there is an expectation for bodies to engage in community rather than inactive bodies or objects in the way of action.

Community has similar action-oriented engagement characteristics outside of the Black community. Dr. Pratt discusses with Virginia Tech cultural center directors and asks the same question about their favorite chair. Veronica Montes, the Director of El Centro (a cultural and community center for the Latinx community), describes her chair:

I think for me will be my dining chair. And it's not only because I love to eat, but it's a family tradition that every time that we finish a meal, we stay around the table we call it "sobre la mesa" that mean over the table. And I think one of the best conversations in community building and family building is around the table. And that time when you're already finished lunch, you start taking the crumbs and waiting for the coffee and maybe tea and maybe we clean again and dinner is served. We spend a lot of time around the table.

Again, there is a focal point or gathering (e.g., barbershop chair, table) place and an emphasis on a conversation to build community, build relationships (togetherness). Both community descriptions from Dr. Graves and Montes also express a characteristic of familial interactions.

In conversations with other cultural center and living-learning community directors, Dr. Pratt asks how their positions will help the entire campus community, and a few other community characteristics emerge.

Tyler Brentley, who was the Black Cultural Center director at the time, states:

So, being able to work with the four other directors of the cultural and community centers who you all had an opportunity to meet with the last episode. I think that's going to be a very unique opportunity to really explore the intersectionality within our different identities that we all share, that will really bring us closer together and ultimately really

help us get on the same page and, moving forward, can really have some intentional programming that reflects our current struggles, but provides opportunities for critical education, critical dialogue. Because from that, I feel like that's where true change really comes from.

Adding on to Brentley's comment, Dalayna Gardner, Director of Ujima Living-Learning Community (residential housing and education for Black Virginia Tech undergraduate students), says:

There is a phrase that so many people are familiar with, known as preaching to the choir. It means that communities often present an argument or an opinion to people who already agree with it. My goal is to do the complete opposite. Similar to Tyler, with him collaborating with the other cultural centers, I intend to do the same with other living-learning programs. I intend to do the same with various campus organizations. I intend to encourage dialogue and foster healthy conversations between students. I think healthy conversations are the key for our nation to move forward, for our campus to move forward, for our campus to become stronger.

Tyler recognizes "intersectionality within our different identities," speaking to differences in community experiences and perspectives. He explains that working together through our differences is a way to bring people together and engage in "critical education" and "critical dialogue." This goes back to the concept of *community* as an educational site—an alternative academic institution that exists *within community*. Gardner agrees with Tyler in that, dialogue across identity boundaries enacts change and a shift forward, making the community stronger.

When university leadership discusses *community* in diversity discourse, *community* has repeated co-occurrences with “principles” about Virginia Tech’s “Principles of Community,” which reads,

We affirm the inherent dignity and value of every person and strive to maintain a climate for work and learning based on mutual respect and understanding.

We affirm the right of each person to express thoughts and opinions freely. We encourage open expression within a climate of civility, sensitivity, and mutual respect.

We affirm the value of human diversity because it enriches our lives and the University. We acknowledge and respect our differences while affirming our common humanity.

We reject all forms of prejudice and discrimination, including those based on age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, and veteran status. We take individual and collective responsibility for helping to eliminate bias and discrimination and for increasing our own understanding of these issues through education, training, and interaction with others.

*We pledge our collective commitment to these principles in the spirit of the Virginia Tech motto of *Ut Prosim* (That I May Serve).*

The “Principles of Community” are positive affirmations, but the use of an inclusive “we” is perceived as everybody on campus having taken up these principles. Also, this inclusive “we” activates the identification process that forms an imagined community (Anderson 2006). Who is included in “we” at a PWI? Disidentification and exclusionary practices are at play. Bodies experiencing discrimination within the institutional space can read the “Principles of Community” and inquire about who is living out these affirmations because their experiences demonstrate that not everybody agrees. It only takes one encounter that diverges from these principles for them to be invalidated. For example, “College Pulse” conducted a Freedom of Speech survey that included 251 Virginia Tech undergraduate students asking about their experiences with freedom of speech and expression on campus. Virginia Tech’s overall freedom

of speech ranking is below average compared to other institutions surveyed. Students responded to the statement, “Please share a moment where you personally felt you could not express your opinion on your campus” (*Free Speech Rankings*, n.d.). Their response to the survey statement exposes the current fractures in Virginia Tech’s diversity discussions that included *community*.

I present a few statements from Virginia Tech students as a counter-discourse to the “Principles of Community” to demonstrate that experiences at the “ground” level of the institution diverge from the institution’s diversity image purported through anti-discrimination and inclusive statements.

We affirm the inherent dignity and value of every person and strive to maintain a climate for work and learning based on mutual respect and understanding.

"Me and my fellow female peers have encountered numerous professors that harass and sexualize students, I do not feel as if we have a voice to speak up on the matter of faculty behavior."

– Class of 2023

We affirm the right of each person to express thoughts and opinions freely. We encourage open expression within a climate of civility, sensitivity, and mutual respect.

"People can't talk about sexual assault because our administration does nothing."

– Class of 2023

We affirm the value of human diversity because it enriches our lives and the University. We acknowledge and respect our differences while affirming our common humanity.

"During a religious class I felt like I couldn't share my experiences being a queer woman."

– Class of 2023

We reject all forms of prejudice and discrimination, including those based on age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, and veteran status. We take individual and collective responsibility for helping to eliminate bias and discrimination and for increasing our own understanding of these issues through education, training, and interaction with others.

"There were multiple incidents I had with a professor where the professor said things that were inappropriate in regards to race and religion. I drew the line when she used the n word in class and called her out on it. Filed a report against her but not sure if she actually did a training or not."

– Class of 2022

*We pledge our collective commitment to these principles in the spirit of the Virginia Tech motto of *Ut Prosim* (That I May Serve).*

Virginia Tech is religious about incorporating “in the spirit of ... Ut Prosim (That I May Serve)” as a closing line for opening remarks of speech acts or at the end of diversity-related statements, like “Principles of Community.” I attended non-denominational Christian churches that believed in the Trinity: Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. All prayers ended similarly, “in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.” This line seals the deal and gets your prayers delivered to heaven, and everyone in attendance for the prayer says “Amen” in unison, agreeing that the prayer request will come to fruition. In some religious or mystical way, the Spirit of Ut Prosim that governs HokieNation will guide us on Virginia Tech’s mission to be “an inclusive community of knowledge, discovery, and creativity dedicated to improving the quality of life and the human condition within the Commonwealth of Virginia and throughout the world” (*Facts About Virginia Tech*, n.d.). Virginia Tech’s imagined inclusive community makes change hard. Nirmal Puwar (2004) points out the apprehension of organizations to confront racism, and institutions seek an imagined community. She says, “The systemic fantasy of imagined inclusiveness makes it difficult to see racism” (p. 137). Furthermore, Krista Ratcliffe (2005) states, “A disidentification based on faulty identifications demonstrates why imagination alone is not enough when attempting to understand a person from a different tradition” (p. 62). As Black women diversity practitioners mentioned, Virginia Tech leadership needs to learn about differences among bodies navigating the institution at the “ground level” to build community by building relationships rather than applying designations to the community from imagination or wishful thinking.

The beginning of Virginia Tech’s mission statement, mentioned above, says, “Inspired by our land-grant identity and guided by our motto, Ut Prosim (That I May Serve), Virginia Tech is an inclusive community....” As previously stated, Ut Prosim is the spirit guide, but Virginia

Tech's declaration of being an "inclusive community" is a bold statement considering the multiple perceptions of *community* and the experiences of Black women diversity practitioners and students experiences and witnesses to all forms of discrimination at the institution.

The repetitive use of terms in diversity discourse creates permanence for those terms because it is an easy path for others to follow. Ahmed states, "The more a path is used the more a path is used." A worn path is easier to follow because obstructions do not exist. The frequency of *community* in Virginia Tech's diversity discourse is a worn path thwarting the meaning of *community* for various cultural groups to a non-performative word like others found in the "language of diversity." Making new paths is hard, but Virginia Tech's accounting for different perceptions of *community* can reinvigorate its meaning toward institutional change. Otherwise, *community* becomes another institutionalized diversity term that loses its effect within the community, only serving the institution as a commodity.

Rhetorical Analysis of the "VT Unfinished Conversation" Videos (Dataset Two)

"White (ness)" Term Use Analysis. The term "white" appears in every video across the dataset two corpus, but I found a generative discussion around the term "whiteness." Institutional whiteness, discussed in Chapter 1, is about protecting the "right image" of the institution by "*changing perceptions of whiteness rather than changing the whiteness of organizations*" (Ahmed 2012, 34). In the "VT Unfinished Conversation" videos, *whiteness* is discussed from the perspective of individual's embodiment of *whiteness* and identification.

Dr. Michele Deramo mentions *whiteness* as an institutional structure. She states, "Whiteness is about structures in society that advantage some groups and disadvantage others." Dr. Deramo, in sharing her family's Italian history that included being ostracized and accounts of Italians lynched in New Orleans, lends a perspective that communicates that identification or

disidentification with whiteness has no bearing on one's participation in *whiteness*. *Whiteness* is a structure, and if it is not recognized, then complicity in perpetrating violence through its characteristics is possible. Dr. Deramo adds, "Any group entering American society enters into that Black/white binary, that whiteness, anti-Blackness framework." (17_VTUC). Ratcliffe (2005) says, "Whiteness speaks as does the slash mark [in the binary]. And...whiteness functions differently not just for whites and non-whites but particular people within each category and for multiethnic people straddling these categories" (103).

In "VT Unfinished Conversations: White Women as Allies," a guest, Stacy, describes *whiteness* as being about privilege. She says, "It's about the way in which I navigate the world as a white woman. I navigate as a white woman in the world very differently than a woman of color." As Dr. Deramo discusses, the frameworks that uphold *whiteness* exist, so if one's complexion is white. One navigates society as white, then there is an inherent benefit of white privilege.

Dr. Pratt explains that one of the "privileges of whiteness is you could be sheltered from certain realities, and you have to be a little more intentional about really understanding the complexity of identities." The Black women diversity practitioners in this dissertation describe a few white colleagues who are invested in collaborative diversity work; they are aware of whiteness as an institutional structure and their possession of white privilege. While others operate in their white privilege through passive involvement with diversity work—avoiding building the necessary relationships to do the work. One guest in a video discussion on anti-racist teaching points out his flawed approach by ignoring issues of racism in the classroom to avoid the burden of addressing racism—A form of racial colorblindness that feeds into institutional white defensiveness (Maraj 2020).

Institutional whiteness concerns the institution's white image (Ahmed 2012) and what gets coded white (Ratcliffe 2005) to maintain white bodies, sentiments, and ideologies. When structures of whiteness are not challenged, institutional whiteness facilitates violent acts of whiteness, like racism, because understanding differences is not an institutional priority.

“Masculinity” Video Uniqueness Analysis. Five highly-valuable terms to the dataset two corpus appear only in the “VT Unfinished Conversations: White Men as Allies” video (20_VTUC): jack, luke, masculinity, jeremy, and dave. After analyzing each term in the context of the video, the term *masculinity* was identified as the most salient for further analysis and generative discussion. The other four terms are the names of the guests featured in the video. Here, I conduct a rhetorical analysis of how *masculinity* is engaged in conversation among members of Virginia Tech.

In the video (20_VTUC), Dr. Pratt conversed with four white men; Dr. Jack Lesko, Dr. Luke Lester, Dr. Dave Cox, and Jeremy Weaver; to have them share their perspectives on *maleness*, *whiteness*, and *masculinity*. The white men participating in the discussion are professors, department heads, and an associate dean in the College of Engineering who were selected to join Dr. Pratt because they attended a “White Men as Full Diversity Partners Program.” At this retreat program, these white men and others learned about their privilege concerning their race, gender, sexual orientation, and intersectionality of their identities. Dr. Pratt asked the men to each share a “transformational moment” from their experience.

A few of the men mentioned that they did not realize they had a culture as white men and assumed the traits they identified with were common “American” traits.

Dr. Lester: The first one was, one of the exercises we went through was listing the typical traits of white male culture, and I never thought of them. We listed a whole bunch of

traits and one of our colleagues at the meeting said, “Well, I always thought that was just being an American.” And I thought, “Yeah, the same.” It was this light bulb went off that, “Oh my God, I have a culture.”

Dr. Lesko shared the moment he realized that groups of people are concerned daily with how their identities will be received in normative spaces because of the pending discrimination.

Dr. Lesko: At the end of each day, we had these sets of cards that we would read. We would all sit in a circle. These were curated cards of statements from... I think the first night, we did race, the second night, we did gender and the last night, we did sexual orientation. And it was an exercise, where at these are statements from those groups who are saying what they have to deal with on a daily basis. And I understood some of these. But as we read them, I began to really understand the totality of the problem.

Dr. Lesko stating that he understands the “totality of the problem” speaks to the realization that each person’s experiences with discrimination are nuanced, but the frequency of different types of discrimination harkens back to a systemic issue.

Dr. Lesko: And that made a huge impact on me. And it only reinforced what I had heard from...black graduate students who were coming from the Hampton Roads area, that there were locations on [I-]64 that they would not stop at, and they would tell their friends. And I remember that not only that experience, but then the totality of this, and realizing weren’t not where we need to be. And it really has helped me, I think be more aware of being aware and trying to be sure that when I’m in a situation, I’m trying to recognize my position and that power potentially.

Dr. Lesko’s understanding of himself in relation to others opened him up to rhetorical listening. He states the experience reinforced “what [he] heard from black graduate students.” He

recalled that he “heard” his students, but the program session helped him rhetorically listen (Ratcliffe 2005) to hear the “totality of the problem.” Dr. Weaver shared a similar realization regarding the mental labor that Black people experience, thinking about what it means for their bodies to exist in certain white spaces as they navigate different environments.

Weaver: there was a black woman who was part of our group that was... and somebody I enjoyed from the participation helped me. And she was talking about, every day she goes out to her car from a primarily white neighborhood, and she recognizes the fact that she’s not white. She has to think about this 24/7. And I went to a conference in Illinois, and I thought about it. I was worn out too like Jack said, but I came back to Blacksburg, and I was Jeremy. I could almost stop thinking about it, and I left there knowing that that woman was still thinking about this right now. It doesn’t leave, doesn’t end. And that was just like, “Oh my gosh.”

Dr. Pratt asked guests, “How have you tried to translate the experience to [your] work?” Dr. Cox is now going into his work reimagining diversity and how his interactions. Dr. Cox states, “Treating everybody the same is not equity because everybody doesn’t experience the world the way I do.” He must renegotiate his perceptions of equity and treat each person according to their individuality learned through interactions (Kerschbaum 2014).

Dr. Lester: It’s not about treating people equally, it’s not about being, “Oh, I’m colorblind.” Being the department head of a very large department, I hear all these comments. “I treat everybody the same, Luke.” And really, it’s pivoting more to be anti-racist. And this is related to the Black Lives Matter movement. You have to be more activist and more purposeful. Now that we know that it’s exhausting for those that have

been exposed or subject to systematic racism, I had not appreciated how exhausting it was for people who were part of minority communities, and what they experienced.

Lastly, Dr. Pratt asked guests “briefly share your thoughts about masculinity and how that’s influenced you.” Most men struggled with seeing themselves in relation to masculinity but communicated a dissociation because their understanding of masculinity associates the term with growing into masculinity from boy to man. Dr. Lester shares his thoughts from the context of work culture.

Dr. Lester: I used to work at the University of New Mexico. I come to Virginia Tech seven years ago and I’m like, “Gosh, what a masculine image university this place is. It’s sports crazy. I mean lots of white males in the student population.” Remember, I was in a majority minority state. I found this equates masculinity with leadership here, much more powerfully than my previous institution.

He transitioned from one work environment to Virginia Tech, and from this shift, he noticed a predominantly white and male image in different spaces throughout the institution. Dr. Pratt adds that Virginia Tech’s Corps of Cadets is another image of masculinity, even with the diversification underway. Virginia Tech has historically portrayed images of *masculinity*, *maleness*, and *whiteness*. I recall teaching a technical writing workshop for a Materials Science and Engineering course during my first semester as a graduate teaching assistant and Ph.D. student at Virginia Tech. The class had 60 students; the lasting impression on my mind as I lectured was looking out into a sea of majority young white men, except for two Black men and less than 20 women.

Section Conclusion: Mapping Institutional Power in Diversity Discourse Videos

In this section, I conducted a critical discourse analysis and rhetorical analysis of diversity videos produced by Virginia Tech's OID office with conversations led by Dr. Pratt. Most guests are affiliated with Virginia Tech as alums and past or current employees. The videos are a paratextual assemblage that includes humans, video communication, transcripts, and the YouTube platform. The video assemblage rhetorically perpetuates the objectification, commodification, and exploitation of Black women intellectuals as oppressive structures across power domains. As Dr. Pratt's body, as a Black woman and scholar, enters the InclusiveVT YouTube space, she becomes the face of diversity that can be exploited with each "view" and commodified when Virginia Tech's image as a diverse institution is bought by stakeholders, future students, and future employees. With Black women stereotyped as disruptive to institutional whiteness as diversity practitioners, Dr. Pratt becomes a non-threatening body in place—contained within the YouTube channel. A Black woman's body and voice that does not have to be seen unless other bodies choose to engage. Her body is under surveillance and is granted access within an assigned space. The oppressive structures that emerge from the assemblages demonstrate how the disciplinary domain of power is operationalized and engages intersectional oppressions. Dr. Pratt's ability to influence institutional decision-making from her position and the spaces she can access has boundaries based on the bureaucratic structure of Virginia Tech and the ways in which the YouTube channel becomes surveillance technology.

On the other hand, Dr. Pratt's body in place is also an act of resistance. Sites of struggle for Black women are also sites of possibilities (Collins 2022; McKittrick 2006). Dr. Pratt taking up space is a signifier internal to the institution that diversity issues that have yet to be addressed. One diversity practitioner from interviews conducted in this dissertation mentioned that Dr. Pratt

is keeping diversity conversation going. The video topics challenge hegemonic ideologies that foreground institutional power through the discursive practices of whiteness. Dr. Pratt's discussions focus on issues of diversity, race, gender, and sexuality. The use of these videos as a discursive practice for engaging ideas and knowledge production demonstrates how discourse inscribes oppressive institutional structures, like the story about "Deb," and shifts in institutional transformations, like the conversations with "white men as allies." These videos exemplify the saliency of different bodies meeting at crossroads on neutral (safe space) territory to engage in dialogue from different perspectives. This discursive practice inscribes counterdiscourses and reconstructs discourse often associated with certain bodies but reassigned to speakers with different bodies.

Part Two: Rhetorical Analysis of Virginia Tech's Climate Surveys

In this section, I contextualize and conduct a rhetorical analysis drawing on concepts from technical communication (Porter et al. 2000; Fowler 2013) and Black feminisms (Baldwin 2022; Collins 2022; Sharpe 2016) of Virginia Tech's climate surveys to engage data analytics' role in diversity discourse and the ways in which power structures map Black bodies. I aim to understand how modes of diversity discourse, including quantitative data, inscribe institutional power and impossibilities to campus climate change as institutional change. Black women diversity practitioners interviewed in this dissertation extended their perspectives on and experiences with Virginia Tech's climate surveys. Black women's voices are incorporated throughout this rhetorical analysis supporting a generative discussion on the ways in which Virginia Tech can reassess its impact and framework for climate assessment to contribute Black women's standpoints (Collins 2022) on the issue of diversity discourse.

Contextualizing Virginia Tech's Climate Surveys

Virginia Tech's climate surveys intend to capture the campus population's "perceptions" of the campus and departmental climates regarding inclusivity and diversity. Disseminating climate surveys allows the institution to say they are doing diversity. Sara Ahmed (2012) claims, "[d]iversity becomes about changing perceptions of whiteness rather than changing the whiteness of the organizations" (34). I continue to map Virginia Tech's diversity discourse by examining climate surveys as discursive production sites. I sourced three Virginia Tech climate surveys from the university's website representing each campus population (undergraduate students, graduate students, and employees (faculty/staff)). My analysis includes the most recently issued surveys for the following demographics: "Climate Survey Report Virginia Tech 2019," "Graduate Student Climate Survey 2022," and "Human Resources Climate Survey 2021." I met with three women, who happen to be white women, responsible for administering the respective climate surveys to collect background information about the surveys' implementation team, location online, questions development, design structure, results, and dissemination. In conversations with these women, I had to be mindful of sharing my concerns about the climate surveys and focus on collecting data that helped my understanding of the processes involved in issuing surveys. For me to insinuate any ineffectiveness of the climate surveys during these conversations could be considered a direct attack on the purpose of their position at Virginia Tech. The survey administrators work with teams of people from design to marketing departments.

The "Climate Survey Report Virginia Tech 2019" was administered campus-wide to all employees and students during the 2018-2019 academic year. Employees received the survey from October 15 to November 9, 2018; students were surveyed between February 12 and March

8, 2019. Response rates for employees and graduate students are considerably high for sample population data collection compared to undergraduate and professional student responses. The sample population percentage is only important to the researcher depending on their survey goals:

- *38.6% for faculty, staff, and wage employees (3,663 of 9,500)*
- *22.5% for graduate students (1,371 of 6,098)*
- *6.4% of undergraduate and professional students (1,764 of 27,481)*

The “Graduate Student Climate Survey 2022” was issued by the Virginia Tech Graduate School from March 15 to April 5, 2022, to graduate students from the Blacksburg campus and approximately seven other Virginia Tech campuses where graduate programs are offered. The response rate was 27% to 71 questions. The survey results are provided through an interactive tool that allows the user to select different views (e.g., by department, by college, by campus, etc.) from drop-down menus and compare results from the past two survey years.

The “Human Resources Climate Survey 2021” is a Virginia Tech employee survey (except student employees) made available from April 13 to May 3, 2021. This survey included COVID-19-related questions to garner employees’ feedback. The survey included 55 questions and had a 26% response rate. All campus climate surveys include eight core questions focused on diversity and a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree):

1. The overall climate on my campus is good
2. My campus is friendly.
3. My campus is inclusive.
4. My campus is diverse.
5. I am familiar with the Virginia Tech Principles of Community.
6. The Virginia Tech Principles of Community are important in maintaining a positive and productive environment on campus.
7. I am familiar with InclusiveVT.

8. InclusiveVT is important in maintaining a positive and productive environment on campus.

Virginia Tech's campus climate surveys aim to create and support "a climate that fosters inclusion and diversity and allows all students and employees to be productive and engaged members of our campus communities. The university uses climate surveys to gauge employee and student perceptions of climate, diversity, inclusion, leadership, work environment, and job satisfaction" (campus-wide survey 2019). I sample sections from the three survey types for rhetorical analysis as repeated survey design practices exist across surveys. In this analysis, I contend with how survey questions, data visualizations, and narrative summaries construct oppressive structures in relation to the university's diversity goals.

Survey Questions Results and Analysis

According to Floyd J. Fowler (2009) in *Survey Research Methods*, when constructing survey questions, "good questions maximize the relationship between the answers recorded and what the researcher is trying to measure" (2). Fowler argues that two goals when developing questions should be *reliability* and *validity*. Reliability involves questions that are consistently understood by respondents, which is demonstrated in how questions are answered. Validity is what answers to questions mean in relation to what is measured by the survey and who is conducting the survey. The practice of increasing question reliability and validity improves the measurability of a survey for its intended purpose. I conducted a first round of analysis to code the surveys based on problematic survey design features. I then conducted a rhetorical analysis of campus climate survey design decisions at Virginia Tech. The problematic survey question design features were coded under three categories:

- Poorly defined terms
- Open versus closed practices

- “Ethics of Caring” and “Community”

Poorly Defined Terms. After reading the three climate surveys, I identified terms that I marked as poorly defined to investigate further how they are mobilized in diversity discourse.

Table 5-6 shows climate survey terms (bolded) from the “Graduate Student Climate Survey 2019” that demonstrate uncertainty in meaning due to poorly defined terms: “climate,” “good,” “campus,” “friendly,” “inclusive,” “diverse,” “positive,” “productive,” and “important.”

Table 5-6. Problematic Survey Terms under “Section 1: Campus Climate” Statements

The overall climate on my campus (or in my department) is good .
My campus (or department) is friendly .
My campus is inclusive (or My department is inclusive of individuals with diverse backgrounds.)
My campus (or department) is diverse .
I am familiar with the Virginia Tech Principles of Community.
The Virginia Tech Principles of Community are important in maintaining a positive and productive environment on my campus.
I am familiar with InclusiveVT.
InclusiveVT is important in maintaining a positive and productive environment on my campus.

The terms *climate* and *campus* are predefined in the survey summaries, but I flagged them as problematic because the *climate* definition is long and complicated to keep the meaning in mind while answering questions, and *campus* in the context of the questions is a reductive approach to capturing the perceptions of the campus climate. The university campuses are ecologies with multifarious elements acting on each other for a respondent to answer a singular question on the entire campus’s status. *Climate* and *campus* are defined as follows:

Climate “may be considered as the atmosphere of an organization as perceived by its members. An organization’s climate is reflected in its structures, policies, and practices; the demographics of its members; the attitudes and values of its members and leaders;

and the quality of personal interactions. It includes perceptions of inclusiveness, friendliness, cooperation, professionalism, recognition, support, and opportunities for advancement.”

Campus “refers to the campus or location at which you are primarily located and where you spend most of your time.”

The remaining terms bolded in **Table 5-6** are undefined, and the meanings can be interpreted subjectively. I group the good, positive, and productive terms together to discuss them as a collective that bolsters *institutional whiteness* and *institutional racism*. Historically, when placed in relation to Black bodies, these terms have proved to inscribe discursive and material violence. The *climate* definition describes the atmosphere of the university regarding material “personal interactions” and how discursive practices inform interactions with members of the institution, associating the terms in question with bodies. Identification processes of identifying or disidentifying with bodies lead to inclusionary and exclusionary practices causing bodily harm (Ore 2019). Like identification tactics, bodies upholding constructs of whiteness or white supremacy ideologies apply normative discursive codes to *good*, *positive*, and *productive* that cast Black bodies as a racialized other reifying institutional whiteness. Rhetorics of antiblackness are pervasive through the ways in which meanings of Blackness produce images of Black bodies as bad, a negation, and lazy (Maraj 2020), foregrounded by discursive practices of *institutional slavery*. Through Black victimization using “whites only” discourse, white/whiteness has been coded to be synonymous with “right” or as *good*, *positive*, and *productive*—feel-good words with the same rhetorical effect. Ahmed (2012) states, “diversity work becomes about generating the ‘right image’ and correcting the wrong one (34). If

institutions remain predominantly white—maintaining an image of whiteness—then they are deemed *good*, *positive*, and *productive*.

Analyzing the term *good* more closely, I ask, how is the term *good* measured? The campus is *good* according to whom? The Graduate Student Climate Survey respondent representation, in **Figure 5-3**, shows most respondents as international and white students, and therefore, the bodies contributing towards an overall *good* campus climate. The overview summary states, “Overall findings from this survey show positive perceptions of campus climate; however, there are also areas that are not trending in the right direction.”

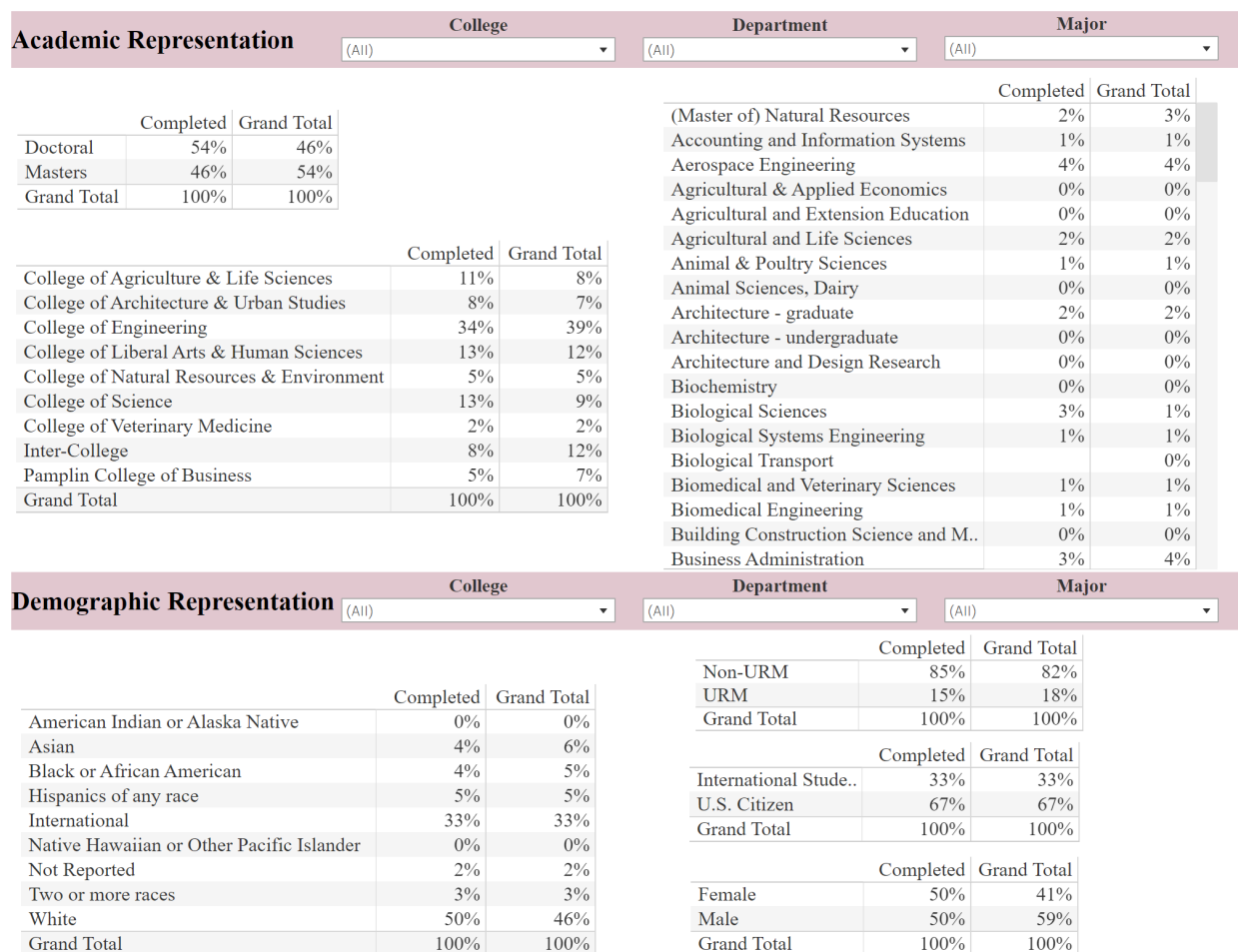


Figure 5-3. Graduate Student Climate Survey 2022 Representation

The responses to questions are available in comparison charts with the surveys from the past two years. The representation view options are underrepresented (URM), gender, international, and degree level. Racial and cultural demographics are invisible when reading answers to questions. The survey areas trending in the wrong direction are also unknown (not shared).

The “Human Resources Climate Survey 2021” for Virginia Tech employees displays in **Figures 5-4 and 5-5** that the primary respondents are white females whose perceptions describe the *climate* as *good* or *positive*. The survey narrative summary states, “When asked if they would choose to join Virginia Tech again, 77 percent said they would. The current campus employment climate is good according to 77 percent of employees.”

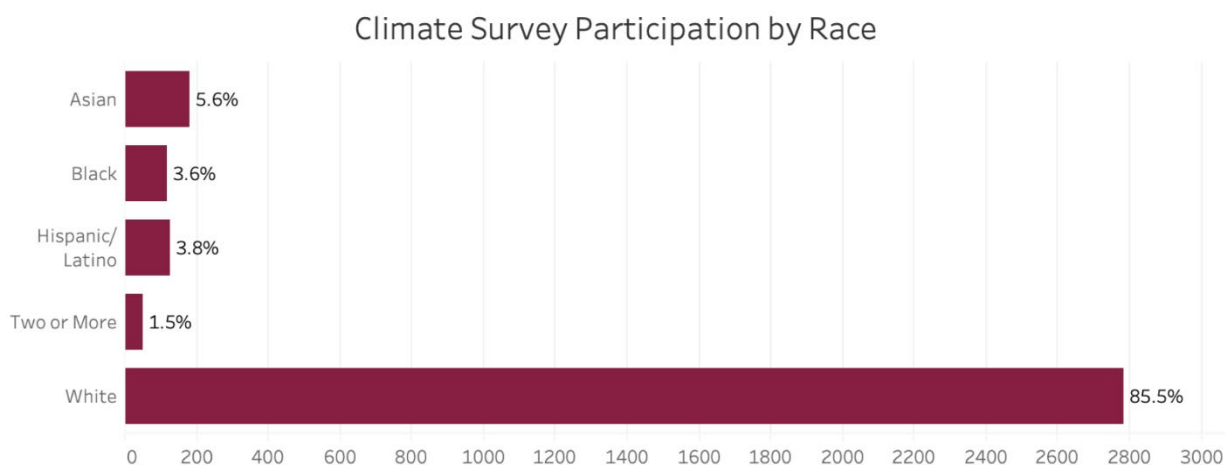
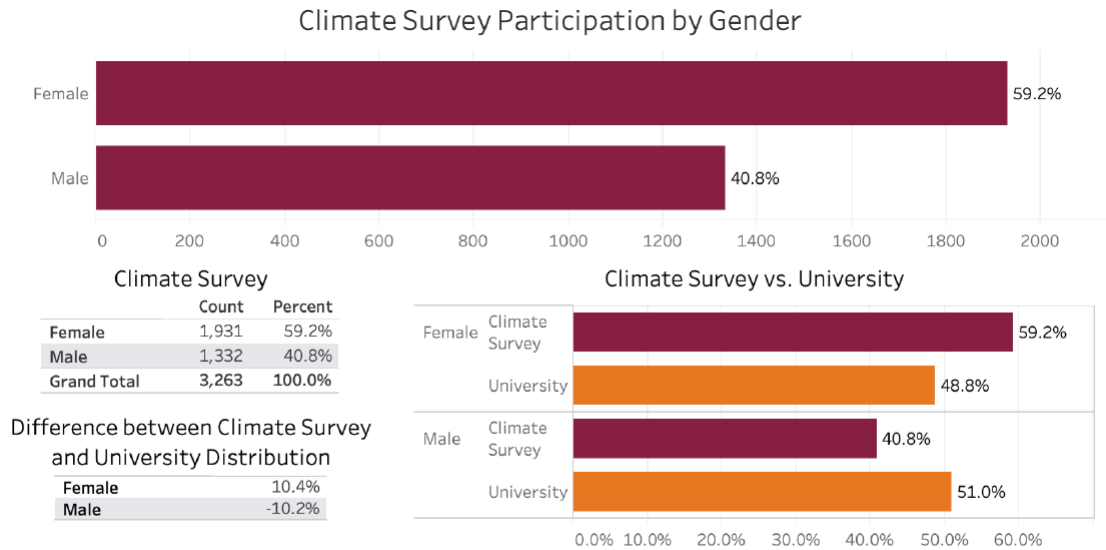


Figure 5-4. Human Resources Climate Survey 2021 Participation by Race



*Individuals who do not identify as male or female also participated in the survey. In order to protect anonymity, these individuals are not reported in the above information.

Figure 5-5. Human Resources Climate Survey 2021 Participation by Gender

The term *good* means the negation of *bad* is present and must be considered. The dichotomy between *good* and *bad* has historically engendered violence on Black bodies. In the essay “‘Good and Evil,’ ‘Good and Bad,’” Nietzsche posits that the notion of ‘good’ people was created by those in power that named their actions ‘good’ against those that they see as ‘bad’ by contrast, and those notions of ‘good’ are then propagated as fact, despite the basis of ‘good’ being a subjective and highly oppressive action (p. 11). This positing of ‘good’ people versus ‘bad’ people, in a moralistic sense, creates a sense of resentment (a French word for feeling hostile or defeated because of an inability to express one’s thoughts or self in society) among those who are posed as morally ‘bad.’ When this resentment gives birth to values, this is an act of creation (Nietzsche, 1988, p. 20).

The term *good* is codified in ways that benefit *institutional whiteness*. When reporting the overall campus climate across the surveys in the narrative summaries at the beginning of the survey results, *good* and *positive* are used interchangeably—overall *good* rating results in a *positive* perception of the campus climate. The *climate* described as *good* dissociates *good* from

describing bodies or the *whiteness* of the institution to the material atmosphere when the atmosphere is attributed to bodies (reference *climate* definition).

I analyze *friendly*, *inclusive*, and *diverse* as terms that construct an imagined community causing racial harm as a different rhetorical practice. The campus climate section of the Graduate School's 2022 climate survey summary, shown in **Figure 5-3**, gathers data on perceptions of whether the campus is diverse, friendly, inclusive, and overall good. Considering the multiplicity of identities, each of these terms is fluid taking on the shape of its container. These terms take on meaning according to positionality, which includes lived experiences, cultural contexts, identities, etc. Furthermore, the "my campus is..." places the respondent in a position of ownership and as the voice of their campus to make a definitive statement. How can an individual state the status of their campus climate with any certainty? The assumption can be made that certainty comes from personal experiences. Also, the word "campus" denotes the physical location of the respondent's graduate program. The three statements are spatially/materially oriented to "campus" rather than 'attention to the more complex, less visible institutional structures that appear in personal experiences.' There is tension between whether the respondent imagines the material campus or interactions they have experienced or witnessed. Bodies not conscious of those experiencing violence from forms of discrimination, their perceptions of the campus climate could be considered positive, pushing critical issues further away from university leadership's purview for intervention. The Black population's needs await in the interstices until they become the institution's concerns.

Furthermore, these terms are positive attributes of an environment that misalign with experiences discussed in Chapter 3 with Black women diversity practitioners and students in the previous section of Chapter 5. Researchers across various disciplines address the idea of a

diverse campus as a standalone feature that perpetuates *institutional racism* because bodies are *commodified, exploited, and objectified* when brought into the PWI and marked as *diverse* (Ahmed 2012; Kerschbaum 2014). The statement “My campus [or department] is diverse” plays on the subject because a response of “Agree” or “Somewhat agree” on the Likert scale could mean the campus is “diverse enough” to the respondent under either answer choice.

The campus climate section of the survey asked students to reflect on the overall climate on campus, along with its diversity, friendliness, and inclusiveness. Students had the lowest level of agreement with the statement: *My campus is diverse* (64% strongly agree or agree) which is the same percentage as in 2019. The level of agreement decreased from 2019 to 2022 among each of the other three questions in this segment:

- *My campus is friendly* (88% to 86%)
- *My campus is inclusive* (74% to 71%)
- *The overall climate on my campus is good* (85% to 81%)

While these levels of agreement are generally high, a decrease over time is not a trend we would like to see.

Finally, this section asked students about the frequency of negative experiences. A very low percentage of students reported hearing others make disparaging or discriminating remarks about groups of people (7%), or experiencing exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct themselves (6%) extremely or very often. However, these rates vary when split out by student demographic characteristics such as underrepresented minorities (URM), gender, citizenship, or degree level.

Figure 5-3. Graduate Student Campus Climate Summary Overview

Lastly, the meaning of the term *familiar* in the context of the question is ambiguous. Depending on what the respective questions are intended to measure, *familiar* could mean the respondent has seen or heard of the “Principles of Community” or “InclusiveVT” but not having them committed to memory. The follow-on questions about their importance in “maintaining a positive and productive environment on my campus” necessitates knowledge/understanding of “Principles of Community” and “InclusiveVT” beyond having seen or heard of the diversity commitment statement and inclusion goals, respectively. For *reliability*, both parts of the questions for each diversity entity would need to be reviewed to ensure the respondent understood the questions, which would be noticeable by comparing any divergences in their answers (Fowler 2013). In reading the survey results in **Figures 5-6 and 5-7** on familiarity and

importance of Principles of Community in the university-wide “Climate Survey Report Virginia Tech 2019,” respondents demonstrate uncertainty. The “Neither Agree or Disagree” score significantly increases between the two answers, and a similar response increase is shown between **Figures 5-8 and 5-9** for familiarity and importance of InclusiveVT. The increase representing uncertainty alerts us to an issue of *validity* with the question based on the language used or how Virginia Tech’s diversity office is communicating Principles of Community and InclusiveVT. For the InclusiveVT graphs, the “Agree” reduces and “Neither Agree or Disagree” increases from **Figure 5-8** to **Figure 5-9**. This could be interpreted as community members being familiar with InclusiveVT, but they do not believe the InclusiveVT goals are changing attitudes or how people are working.

5. I am familiar with the Virginia Tech Principles of Community.

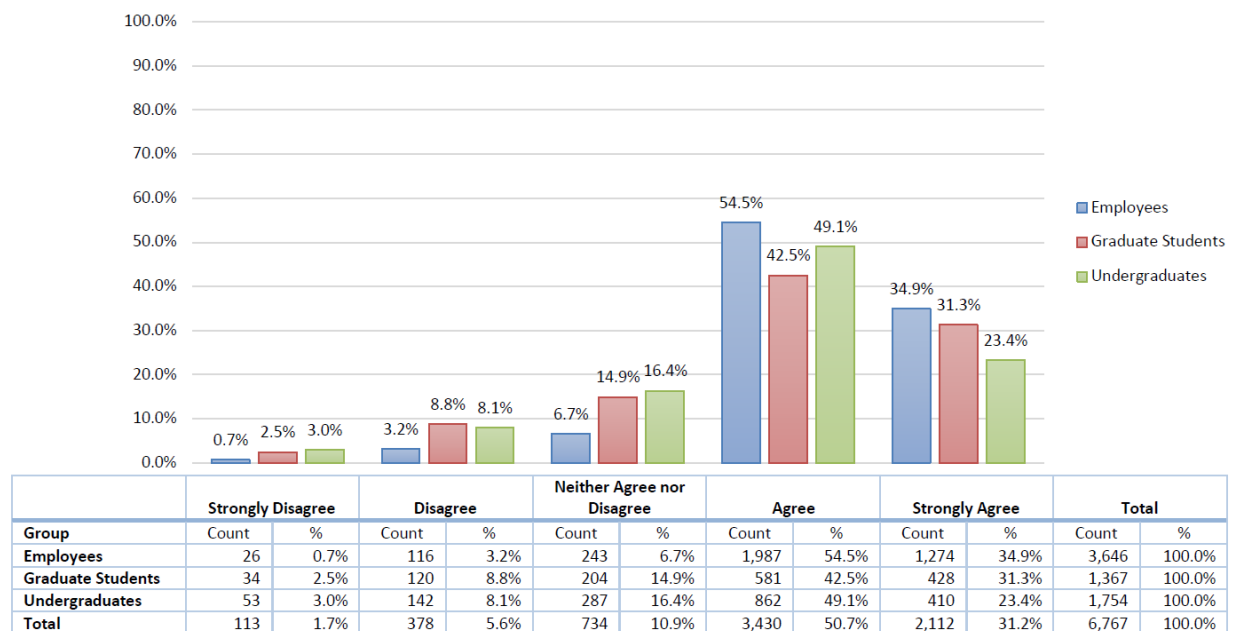


Figure 5-6. Familiar with Principles of Community Results in University-Wide Climate Survey 2019

6. The Virginia Tech Principles of Community are important in maintaining a positive and productive environment on campus.

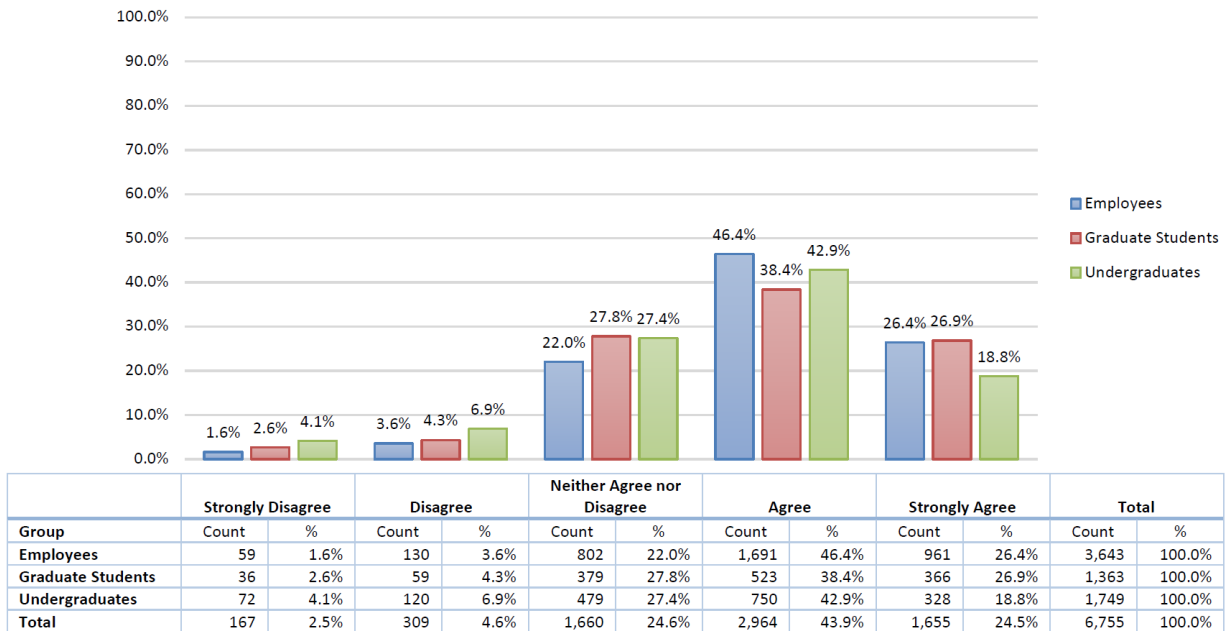


Figure 5-7. Importance of Principles of Community Results in University-Wide Climate Survey 2019

7. I am familiar with InclusiveVT.

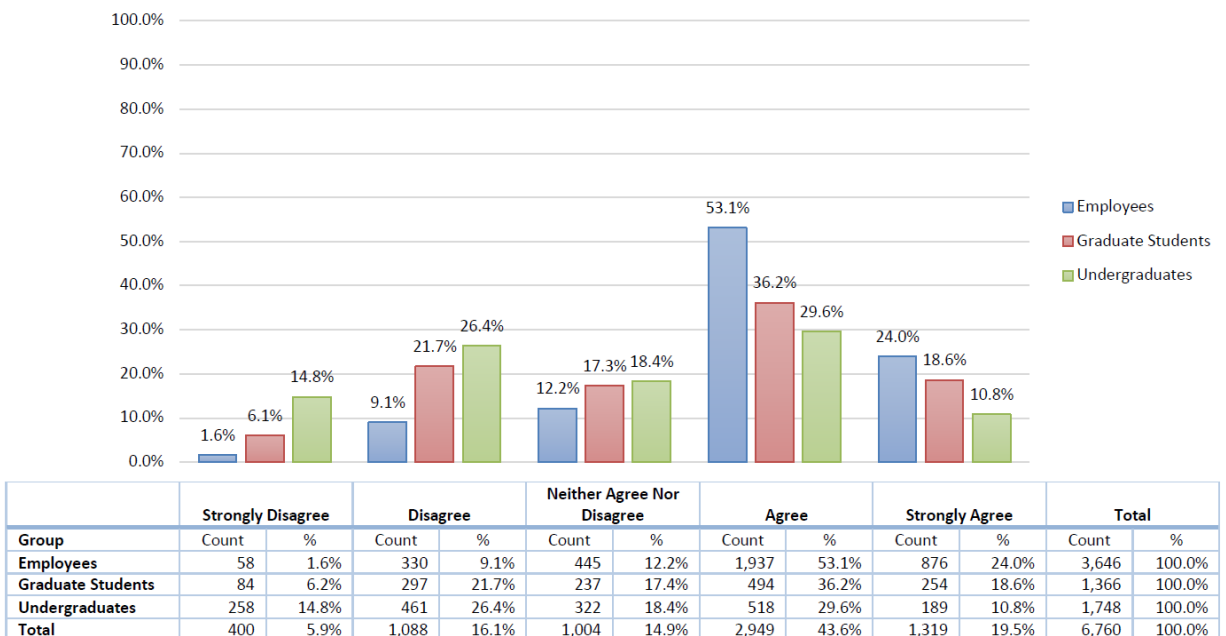


Figure 5-8. Familiar with InclusiveVT Results in University-Wide Climate Survey 2019

8. InclusiveVT is important in maintaining a positive and productive environment on campus.

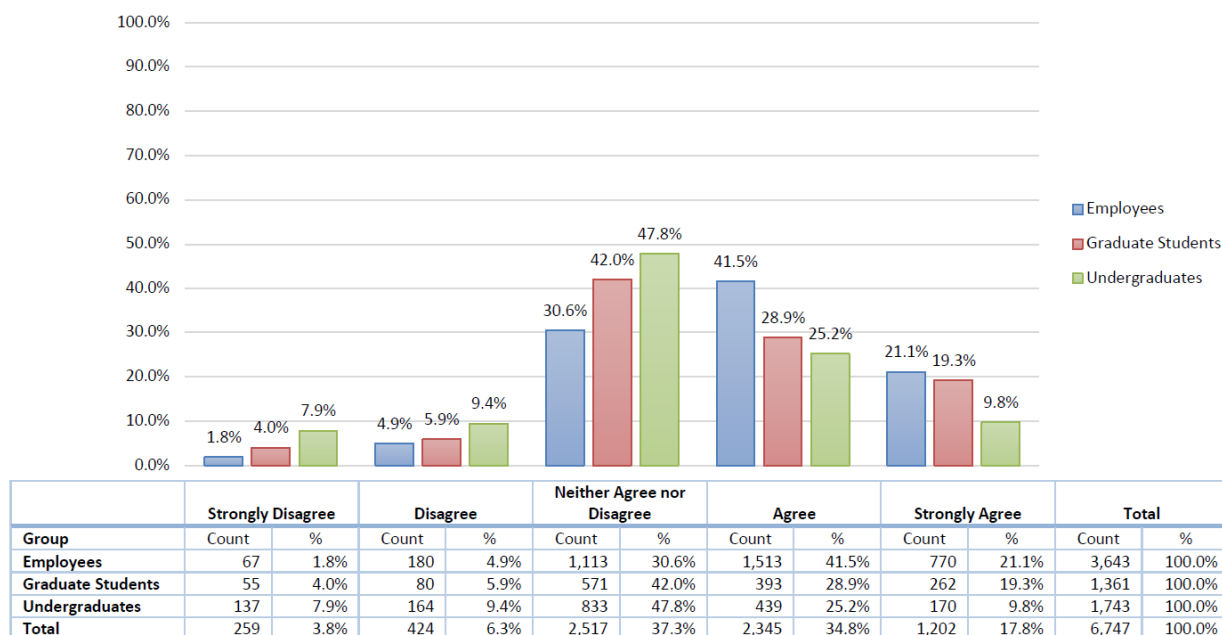


Figure 5-9. Importance of InclusiveVT Results in University-Wide Climate Survey 2019

All terms analyzed and discussed have similar levels of uncertainty surrounding their meanings in or out of the context of the question. The discursive practices of the climate surveys raise the inquiry, what is being measured by the institution?

Open versus Closed Questions. There are open-ended questions included in climate surveys, listed below from the Graduate Student survey, but open-ended questions are not analyzed and aggregated to communicate the sentiments of the responses in the survey results. Open-ended questions are where personal experiences are expressed. Open-ended questions are where we find the voices of bodies in the community. Open-ended questions are the marginal spaces where harm/violence is expressed and the starting point to engage in justice work—diversity work. However, the responses are closed—the door becomes the colon—the door is shut on the voices that may disrupt the institution’s image. Wake work as colon work to unlock the narratives necessary to transform how the institution addresses violence against marginalized bodies.

- *Please share with us any information regarding department climate you believe will be helpful:*
- *Please share with us any other thoughts you may have about University support:*
- *Please share with us any additional information you may have regarding advising that you believe will be helpful:*
- *Please share with us any other thoughts you may have on creating an inclusive and affirming environment for graduate education:*

In speaking with the Graduate Student Climate Survey’s administrator, she mentioned that “addressing” open-ended questions is to print them and turn them over to the Graduate School’s leadership to read—and the door is closed.

Other survey answers are not disclosed besides the answers to open-ended questions. The survey responses that are less than 10 for a demographic are not included in the results. The Virginia Tech employee climate survey states, “Responses with less than 10 submissions were excluded from demographic reporting to protect anonymity.” In the past, less than five submissions were excluded from the survey results. There is an awareness that disclosure is essential to maintain confidentiality. However, demographics are excluded from the reporting. At a predominantly white institution, with the percentage of white females responding to the survey, an “institutional failure” (Crenshaw, 1990) would persist because minoritized respondents, who may also be marginalized, may never have their concerns seen—keeping them in place, in the liminal spaces of institutions, a risk in achieving inclusive diversity—being InclusiveVT.

The “Ethics of Caring” and *Community*. The survey questions and design discussed in the previous sections demonstrate a lack of care for marginalized populations considering the level of ambiguity, uncertainty, and silencing as embedded characteristics. I analyze two

statements in the “Student Support” section of the Graduate Student Climate Survey (shown in **Figure 5-10**) as exemplars of two themes in this dissertation regarding “the ethics of caring” (Collins 2022) and *community*, previously discussed:

1. *I feel Virginia Tech administrators care about me (65%).*
2. *I feel a strong sense of community at Virginia Tech (75%).*

Student support is another area that can strongly influence the graduate student experience. There was a wide range in the levels of agreement among questions in this section.

- The areas of support with the highest levels of agreement were:
 - *I feel safe on my campus (or in virtual spaces) (92%);*
 - *There are sufficient resources available to ensure my academic success (92%); and*
 - *I know where to find support if I am having academic difficulties (84%).*
- The areas of support with the lowest levels of agreement were:
 - *I feel Virginia Tech administrators care about me (65%) and*
 - *I feel a strong sense of community at Virginia Tech (75%).*

Regarding support provided by the Graduate School staff in Blacksburg, students had the most favorable level of agreement with the statement about graduate school staff being approachable and helpful with questions (90%). Lower levels of agreement were found related to graduate school activities and resources helping students feel connected to the graduate community (75%) and the Graduate School providing programs and services that are relevant to student interests and needs (75%).

Figure 5-10. “Student Support” Section Data Summary of the Graduate Survey 2022

The summary notes that the above areas of support have “the lowest levels of agreement.” In discussing climate surveys with Black women diversity practitioners, Practitioner E states, “There’s not an ethic of care. This place wants my labor but not my ideas.” In the first statement, “administrators” would need to be defined as an initial step to ensure respondents have a foundation for understanding the bodies in question. The multiple interpretations of this statement would prove *reliability* concerns. The statement could be assessed based on several personal experiences. Suppose campus climate surveys consistently express that the campus climates are “good” without supporting information about marginalized groups. In that case, no reason exists for administrators to extend empathy to their Black and brown students. Also, diversity practitioners mentioned not using or needing climate survey results to inform their

work. There is limited information about most non-white populations to consider making institutional changes.

For Black bodies, the ethics of caring is characteristic of “a strong...community.” As Part One of this chapter mentions, Virginia Tech claims to be an inclusive community without understanding the nuances of how different cultural groups perceive community. Also, a “sense of community” here could consider Virginia Tech as community or positionality associated with a racial affinity group or cultural organization. Access to a subcommunity could be sufficient for some to have a strong sense of community. The qualifier “strong” can be enough of a distinguishing element to sway answers in one direction or another. The respondents are forced to decipher the difference between a “strong” sense of community and a general feeling of community.

Section Conclusion: Mapping Institutional Power in Virginia Tech Climate Surveys

When asked about the effectiveness of climate surveys as a tool to address diversity concerns, Diversity Practitioner A speaks to the confidentiality concerns and states,

The climate survey, you can identify who says what on the climate survey. Like, if you get some stuff from your office, you’re leading an office that has two black people. One of them is male, one of them is female. And in there it says, Black female said this. Gee, I wonder who that could be. So, people don’t, people don’t answer those in the same way. And so, we’ve been asking for a truly anonymous survey that also addresses, you know, like where someone might, not where someone might be in the university but what role, what type of role they play in the university. I’m looking at the experience. If we’re losing a large percentage of, you know, AP faculty, why don’t we know why? You know, the, the, the policy line is that people are leaving because they found a better opportunity.

Well clearly the better opportunity wasn't here. Are you sure you understand what happened when someone left? So, I think having a real climate survey, I think having exit surveys. When people leave stay surveys, when people stay, knowing who's staying and why. I think there are a lot of things that we could be doing that we don't.

The fewer underrepresented bodies in a department, whether issuing a graduate student or employee survey, the more a door is closed on having racial violence concerns, rendering climate surveys as racialized technology and unsafe spaces for Black bodies. Anna Lauren Hoffmann (2020) describes “discursive violence” as “misrepresenting people in ways that reproduce longer standing patterns of oppression and violence” (p. 1). Hoffmann argues that “discursive violence asks us to focus not only on data science and technologies’ harmful outputs but also the broader configurations of histories, institutions, and discourses that not only enable but normalize the potential for violence” (6). In *Race after technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code*, Ruha Benjamin (2019) argues that embedded racism exists in digital technologies, which she coins as the “New Jim Code: “the employment of new technologies that reflect and reproduce existing inequities but that are promoted and perceived as more objective or progressive than the discriminatory systems of a previous era” (p. 3). “Neoliberal ideologies underpin the construction of our physical world, and in the same way, these ideologies inform the creation of technologies. Benjamin dispels the idea of technology as race-neutral, which for this critical discourse methodology means attentiveness when selecting a modality” (Evans, 2023, p. 72) to engage diversity work as justice work.

I explain how the method by which universities use climate surveys performs data violence and perpetuates racism. The intent of the climate survey may have been to capture perceptions of the campus climate, but minority populations need access to having their

perceptions captured and interpreted, which can only be done by engaging in conversations with minority populations at the ground level.

If the intent is to identify differences, then the language in the survey should reflect anti-oppressive and non-marginalizing language. The survey should operate as a tool that captures data and emulate cultural sensitivity in the survey design. The tone of the survey is perceived as the university's tone. It has the agency to build a bridge between institution and student through compassion or reaffirm feelings of distrust for underrepresented graduate students.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

“Rather than navigating the issues of diversity marked as exploited Black women, Black women can bring forth theoretical interventions to diversity research, understanding that Black feminist thought is powerful and always will be.” – Evans (2023)

This dissertation research study explored how diversity discourses inscribe discursive structures while considering several rhetorical elements like historical context, sociopolitical context, temporality, and positionality of my interview participants and my own within the landscape of Virginia Tech. I attended four sites of inquiry, including the diversity discursive practices of Black women as diversity practitioners, Virginia Tech’s bureaucratic structure, diversity videos produced by the Office for Inclusion and Diversity at Virginia Tech, and campus climate surveys. Drawing on theories of rhetoric, technical communication, and Black feminisms, I sought to understand how institutional power, and subsequent oppressive structures, are inscribed through diversity discourse. The four sites of inquiry cast salient vantage points to understand the macro-level institution. I found it prudent to incorporate additional diversity documents to contextualize further and support the analyses developing in this dissertation.

Chapter 3 included discussions with Black women in diversity leadership roles demonstrating their knowledge production and discursive practices as diversity practitioners within a predominantly white institution. Later in this chapter, I discuss the discursive practices and formations that emerged from my one-on-one dialogues.

In Chapter 4, I provide Virginia Tech’s history with institutional structures. Then, I compare three Virginia Tech organizational charts in conjunction with diversity language to contextualize the bureaucratic structure of the institution. I trace the lines of communication and compare positions across diversity decision-making. This grounding supports expectations and

strategies for further engagement in diversity work. Ultimately, I found that the organizational charts as a genre symbolize the rigidity and hierarchical structures of the sociopolitical context perpetuating oppressive structures. Organizational charts are not meant to look past their static design and seek out the dynamic underbelly of the institution where decision-making is happening.

Chapter 5 presented a critical discourse analysis and rhetorical analysis of Virginia Tech's diversity discourse delivered in YouTube video format and climate surveys that express diversity discourse using narrative and quantitative data. The analysis of the diversity videos demonstrated oppressive structures using the YouTube platform, racialized language that comes up in diversity conversations of the videos, and recognizing how Dr. Pratt is doing resistance work. I focus my analysis of the climate surveys on the narrative summaries and the empirical data. The survey results are factual in that the majority of responses show that the campus climate is "good" or "positive," but to understand the rhetorical implications of this message, I posit that the narratives summaries should explicitly say that the survey results are only applicable to the predominantly white community and a new approach needs to be taken to ensure the climate surveys have a well-researched design intended to address real problems within the institution.

How Diversity Discourse Constructs Institutional Power

This research concerned me with how diversity discourse constructs institutional power at predominantly white institutions (PWIs). Black women as diversity practitioners vented about white colleagues not contributing diversity work and actually "getting in the way." The college president was a point of concern for not being a more prominent voice in the university community, taking a stance on topics associated with diversity. As mentioned in Chapter 1, a

racial incident occurred where an office door was vandalized with anti-black derogatory terms of a Black man who works for Virginia Tech. No announcement was made by the college president or anyone in a leadership position (reference organizational charts in Chapter 4) regarding the incident. In thinking about the pervasiveness of oppressive structures only changing in form over time (Ore, 2019), Christina Sharpe (2016) describes our social climate (the weather) as antiblack. “The weather is the totality of our environments; the weather is the total climate; and that climate is antiblack” (p. 104).

Sara Ahmed (2018) theorizes that institutions are slow to act or do not act at all on diversity-related concerns as a “strategic inefficiency.” The slowness to respond to racial matters benefits the institution by saving itself from putting in the labor or “doing the work.” Ahmed (2018) states that “some are relieved from doing the work that would slow their progression. And, of course, others then inherit that work. That some people are given more administrative work because they are more efficient might seem so obvious that it does not need to be said” (p. 1). Meanwhile, Black women diversity practitioners are keeping diversity conversations going, like Dr. Menah Pratt, and are often operating with limited resources in isolation for the sake of diversity, or as said at Virginia Tech, in the “spirit of Ut Prosim” (That I May Serve). Practitioners keep diversity conversations going efficiently to “not let the balls drop.” To maintain this efficiency, Black women participate in surveillance of their bodies and the bodies of others. In an infinite cycle of materializing diversity efforts, Black women become “weathered” over time (Baldwin, 2022; Sharpe, 2016).

In *A Decolonial Black Feminist Theory of Reading and Shade: Feeling the University*, Andrea N. Baldwin (2023) describes Black and brown bodies as being weathered by the institution and states, “To be weathered is to be battered by the force of a system, enough to be

dispossessed of the energy or the wherewithal, while still being connected to an ecosystem that requires you to show up in ways that demand you to perform, so as to keep up the inclusive perception” (p. 106). Practitioner B and interview participant states:

Black people are very weathered at the university, meaning that they’re battered by the, by the actual climate of the university. And then the climate survey comes out and it doesn’t say anything about how battered and beaten they are and how weathered they are. Using these two things like weathering, which is a black feminist framework that is used by a lot of folks. Weathering you are, you just experience universities in ways that beat you down. And you know, when you think about a house we’re the house that needs a new paint job because all the rain and the sun and, the, everything has just beaten. Or you see a tree that is barely standing, all the leaves gone because it just come through a hurricane, and it has been weathered. And then you bring a climate survey and you ain’t talking about nothing about this weather.

Black women, diversity practitioners engage in institutional co-dependency. The incessant need or desire to make the institution better to minimize discriminatory issues, but the institution lacks an ethic of care and personal responsibility, so the practitioner is multiplied taxed carrying a load of their primary responsibilities and the colleagues or the institution (a burden) becoming resentful. Black women diversity practitioners are relegated to the margins with no support to help Black and Brown students clean up the institution’s mess. Virginia Tech’s dysfunctional organizational structure lacks accountability measures when violations against students are not addressed. Ahmed (2021) states, “counterinstitutional work in Black feminist and feminist of color hands is also often housework, with all the drudgery and repetition that word entails; painstaking work, administrative work, care work, and yes, diversity work.” (p.

23). When diversity practitioners get caught up in the rhetorics of production then diversity work becomes about producing diversity documentation (e.g., statements, commitments, videos, climate surveys) rather justice work. A situation where anyone, regardless of identities involved in diversity work is checking the box on completing their diversity goals. Strategic inefficiency becomes an institutionalized practice.

I followed diversity discourse around not to obtain “power” but to understand how diversity discourse reifies institutional power to create resistance methods towards liberation and empowerment. “When it comes to knowledge, Black women’s empowerment involves rejecting the dimensions of knowledge that perpetuate objectification, commodification, and exploitation” (Collins, 2022, p. 366). This dissertation identified areas in diversity discourse through processes, technologies, and spaces that inscribed the three forms of oppression. For example, forms of oppressions were found in the thumbnails of diversity videos produced by Dr. Pratt and how minoritized voices are redacted from climate surveys as discursive violence. Diversity discourse must be analyzed at a particular site of study to understand how it constructs institutional power and then contend with the oppressive structures at the inquiry site. The context, bodies, matter, history, space, and time of the situation inform the rhetoric formations.

How Diversity Discourse Inscribes Impossibilities Toward Anti-Racist Campus Climates

The interviews with diversity practitioners, the analysis of organizational charts, and the climate surveys demonstrate how diversity discourse inscribes impossibilities to equitable climates. I agree with a comment on equity from one of our guests in the “White Men as Allies” OID videos. He stated, “I think the biggest takeaway for me has been that treating everybody the same is not equity because everybody doesn’t experience the world the way I do.” Rather than seeking an equitable climate, I am concerned with working towards an antiracist climate since

antiracism has a goal built into the name of the work. The organizational charts inscribe the domains of power defined by Collins (2022) and previously discussed in this chapter. The most concerning element and rhetorical formation of the climate surveys that inscribes impossibilities are the open-ended questions and the colon in the write-in field. The colon signals the opportunity to unload experiences via an unstructured response. The write-in response cannot be marked and quantified like the other questions/statements in the survey. The colon is a site of oppression and resistance. Sites of oppression are sites for diversity work. The survey administrators have silenced respondents, especially the marginalized, until write-in responses receive the long overdue platform.

How Black Women's Discursive Practices Inscribe Possibilities for Institutional Change

The Black women as diversity practitioners in this dissertation have several discursive methods for diversity work. The practitioners agreed unanimously that their job responsibilities necessitated building a team or network for collaboration. The positions did not specify, require, or ask them to implement this practice. They have coworkers who choose not to collaborate until they have no choice. This practice can be interpreted as community or collective action (Collins, 2022).

Another discursive practice that one practitioner carried out was when meeting with students who are often in a crisis trying to make decisions; this practitioner does not take notes or maintain a paper trail from student to student. Because she is solutions-driven and student-centered, she quickly gets started on students' concerns and is attentive to their needs.

Black Women's Standpoints on Diversity

“As members of an oppressed group, U.S. Black women have generated alternative practices and knowledges that have been designed to foster U.S. Black women's group

empowerment” (Collins, p. 39). Black women’s standpoints are “collective wisdom on how to survive as U.S. Black women” (Collins, 2022, p. 32). A common theme among interview participants was the concern about Virginia Tech engaging in a top-down/bottom-up approach.

Top-Down Approach. The “top-down approach” posits that the university president’s values, if truly aligned with diversity concerns, should trickle down the organizational structure contributing to his vision for change. E. R. Cole and Harper (2017) state, “‘college presidents’ statements set the tone for how racist behavior will be tolerated and addressed” (p. 330). Conversely, the university president speaks on the efforts that come out of the Office for Inclusion and Diversity (OID). Also, the top-down approach would include the president leading the charge in discussions on personal responsibility. University employees “doing” diversity work would take personal responsibility by building relationships with people who identify with the people they are advocating for to avoid multiply taxing the “diverse” bodies of the institution who are already doing the work just because they have longevity with the institution. The tokenism of Black-women diversity practitioners hints at fractures in the institution’s diversity progress when the same bodies are frequently requested to represent Black presence.

Bottom-Up Approach. The “bottom-up approach” posits that climate surveys are ineffective because of a top-down approach. Climate surveys are designed and implemented without administrators and leadership meeting people at the bottom of the organizational structure to discuss their needs, like focus groups, as recommended by multiple participants. A climate survey could then be constructed based on needs and honestly assess climate progress. One interview participant suggests going back to the basics regarding the intended purpose of the climate surveys by asking several questions:

- “Why are we doing this?”

- “Why do we want this to be shared?”
- “How are we going to guide the user and monitor their experience with data?”

The questions are overall a question of motive to challenge developing survey questions informed by educational research. “Black women’s struggles are part of a wider struggle for human dignity, empowerment, and social justice” (p. 54).

Clearing Communication Lines in Organizational Structures

Bodies with intersectional identities and oppressions encountering predominantly white space and other bodies engaging in identification processes informed by hegemonic ideologies result in inclusionary and exclusionary practices that produce boundaries of access and assault. An infrastructure to support underrepresented faculty and students relative to the magnitude of risk possibilities is critical. Interruptions of intersectional violence and oppressions occur when intersectional bodies encounter power domains in normative white spaces that reify the matrix of domination. A contingency plan for intersectional failures is long overdue, and communications have since been compromised for reporting system failures. I posit a project to investigate and execute a solutions-driven approach based on a singular contingency—a member of an underrepresented community filed an assault report—with a legal body at the Academic Administration level to enforce disciplinary action that will shift the institution’s trajectory. For example, Kimberlé Crenshaw shares the story of Anita Hill experiencing sexual harassment in the workplace and the government. As predominantly white men eschewed her story, women’s protection and empowerment hung in the balance as an intersectional failure until the government developed sexual harassment policies (regulatory language). The policies not only helped Black women, who experienced higher rates of sexual assault at the time, but all women.

Crenshaw and Collins argue that Black women's activism against injustices consistently liberates other communities that are also experiencing oppression from the same injustices.

Contribution to the Field of Rhetoric and Writing

This work builds on the institutional diversity research of Sara Ahmed and Louis M. Maraj and extends the institutional critique (Porter et al. 2000) spatial methodology to graduate dissertation research. I answer Ahmed's call to those doing diversity work to continue to share their adversities with diversity as an act of resistance and a means of data collection. This dissertation contributes to the corpus of antiracist research, research from the Black feminist rhetor positionality that centers and gives authority to the Black woman's researcher's and Black women participant's voices.

I also contribute a critical discourse analysis incorporating a data science method with natural language processing's TF-IDF. I structured the research process for opportunities to replicate the study. During an informal meeting with a Virginia Tech climate survey administrator, there was concern regarding the management of qualitative survey responses, indicating a method does not exist for analyzing and addressing write-in responses for the graduate school's climate surveys. The current process includes the respondents' answers being printed in hopes that a graduate school leader will sort through the large corpus of text and address concerns. Ahmed (2012) cautions against diversity work becoming paperwork because it places distance between diversity goals and action (p. 87). My application of Python coding as an initial coding cycle is a method Virginia Tech's graduate school could implement for their large corpus of qualitative responses from students whose concerns need attention and validation. For the field of Rhetoric and Writing, this method expands on the ways in which language as code is used to do justice work. Scholarship critiques and identifies racialized

language in technology, but this work presents a way to engage in counter discourse through code to develop systems that mitigate violence.

Research Limitations

Based on the scope of the dissertation, other forms of discourse could not be incorporated for analysis, and the research could only focus on a singular PWI to study. With more time and resources, this research study could extend across multiple institutions to compare organizational structures and circulating discourse for patterns suggesting more possibilities for making institutional change through diversity discourse. Also, I generated a significant amount of data and have additional perspectives on the research results that would exceed the magnitude of the dissertation genre.

Future Work and Implications

For future work, I am looking to engage rich conversations that I could not continue within the restrictions of the dissertation. For example, I anticipate work about how Black bodies are “weather[ed]” (Sharpe, 2016) in the institutional climate, and Ahmed’s (2018) work refers to how institutions do not want Black and Brown bodies to “rock the boat.” I look forward to juxtaposing these two concepts. I would follow the governance of PWIs more closely, like attending board meetings and conducting research on regulatory language in higher education.

After interviewing Black women diversity practitioners, analyzing the bureaucratic structure of Virginia Tech, and developing an organizational chart that shows decision-making paths and communication lines, it became apparent that Black women diversity practitioners are conducting the brunt of diversity work literally off the charts. Black women diversity practitioners are doing diversity work at the “ground level” of the institution. Although there are communication lines between the President’s Executive Council (responsible for implementing

diversity work throughout Virginia Tech), diversity activities exist at lower levels unrelated to the Council's responsibilities. This means that the processes and language used by Black women diversity practitioners misalign with the institution's processes and language. The institution's diversity language and efforts result in harm from oppressive structures found in the organizational charts, diversity videos, and climate surveys. The discursive practices of Black women diversity practitioners lead to empowering approaches because their lens is people-centric versus business-centric or a lens that draws from neoliberal and neoconservative framings. Black women diversity practitioners were most interested in collecting the experiences of marginalized bodies through focus groups to meet needs best. These discursive practices can be applied across PWIs to make changes even when a university president participates in strategic inefficiency (Ahmed, 2018). This would mean that survey designs can be tailored with measurable questions based on the campus community's needs for a tool like climate surveys across the nation. Black rhetorical technologies are meant to liberate Black bodies and empower all bodies displaced from decision-making power. If we continue to research Black women diversity practitioners discursive practitioners, we can continue to illuminate possibilities for making institutions changeable despite oppressive structures.

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Appendix A. IRB Exemption Letter



Division of Scholarly Integrity and
Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board
North End Center, Suite 4120 (MC 0497)
300 Tenth Street NW
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
540/231-3732
irb@ut.edu
<http://www.research.ut.edu/irb/app>

MEMORANDUM

DATE: March 31, 2023
TO: Derek Mueller, Amilia Natasha Evans
FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572)
PROTOCOL TITLE: Possibilities for Making Institutional Change: An Institutional Critique of Diversity Discourse at a Predominantly White Institution
IRB NUMBER: 22-389

Effective March 31, 2023, the Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) determined that this protocol meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review under 45 CFR 46.104(d) category (ies) 2(ii), 4(ii).

Ongoing IRB review and approval by this organization is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities impact the exempt determination, please submit an amendment to the HRPP for a determination.

This exempt determination does not apply to any collaborating institution(s). The Virginia Tech HRPP and IRB cannot provide an exemption that overrides the jurisdiction of a local IRB or other institutional mechanism for determining exemptions.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

<https://secure.research.vt.edu/external/irb/responsibilities.htm>

(Please review responsibilities before beginning your research.)

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Determined As: **Exempt, under 45 CFR 46.104(d) category(ies) 2(ii), 4(ii)**
Protocol Determination Date: **August 18, 2022**

ASSOCIATED FUNDING:

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this protocol, if required.

Invent the Future

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY
An equal opportunity, affirmative action institution

Appendix B. Interview Participant Recruitment Letter

IRB Submission for Institutional Critique and Black Feminist Thought: Predominantly White Institutions and Racialized Diversity Rhetorics IRB# 22-389

Principal Investigator/Researcher: Derek N. Mueller/Amilia N. Evans
Email Subject: Recruiting Current VT Faculty for Predominantly White
Institutions and Racialized Diversity Rhetorics Dissertation
Project Interviews

RECRUITMENT LETTER (Faculty interview participants)

Date to be inserted

Dear name of participant,

My name is Amilia N. Evans. I am a Rhetoric and Writing doctoral candidate in the Department of English at Virginia Tech. I am conducting an institutional-level research study to understand how diversity discourse, as racialized language at predominantly white institutions, causes harm to multiply-marginalized communities while impeding the progress of institutional diversity, as well as capture the experiences of diversity practitioners, specifically Black women. This study's potential outcome is a counterstory to the dominant narrative of data derived from a diversity discourse analysis in this study. The counterstory intends to center and amplify Black women diversity practitioners' experiences and voices, respectively, and other multiply-marginalized communities. Also, this study proffers a report and an opportunity for continued research on diversity discourse, as diversity rhetorics, to present alternatives for existing diversity data collection and communications. The diversity rhetorics report would be a shareable document with suggestions for university leadership regarding a mitigation plan to reduce racial harm caused by dominant diversity discourse.

I am contacting you to find out if you would be interested in being a research participant in this study. This letter acts as an invitation to you to participate in the research as a faculty participant. If you chose to participate, this would be voluntary and you would have the right to withdraw at any time. We will interview no more than 10 faculty, with each interview scheduled for 2 hours in length. To be eligible, participants must be current VT faculty and at least 18 years of age.

I would like to conduct an online interview with you via Virginia Tech Zoom. I would also like to audio and video record the interview, for the purpose of assisting with accuracy of data collection and transcription. During the interview process, you do not have to answer any questions if you do not want to.

If you are interested in participating, I am willing to provide you with additional information about the research and to set up a time convenient for us to meet online. While it may not be the case, it is anticipated that I or a member of my research team may have to follow up with you after our initial meeting for further elaboration if there are important themes that are uncovered

from our overall research process after your interview and which we believe the research could further benefit from your input.

There is the risk that you may find some of the questions asked to be sensitive as we will be asking about your background and your experiences. All information will be kept in the strictest confidence and data will be kept on protected cloud storage. All interviews will be private. Recordings are immediately uploaded to cloud storage after interviews to the protected account mentioned above. I will also not use your real name in any written publications resulting from this data collection and we will not speak about these interviews with anyone except those involved in this study. Only myself and members of the research team will have access to the information collected.

If you agree to participate, please indicate your availability for an online interview by clicking on the link to the When2Meet scheduler below. At the time of your interview we will provide you with a consent form which you can consent to if you would like to proceed with the interview.

Thank you in advance for agreeing to be involved in the creation of this new knowledge.

[Link to When2Meet]

Sincerely,

.....

Appendix C. Interview Participant Consent Letter

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

Consent to Take Part in a Research Study

Title of research study: Institutional Critique and Black Feminist Thought:
Predominantly White Institutions and Racialized Diversity Rhetorics IRB #22-389

Principal Investigator: Derek N. Mueller dmueller@vt.edu

Research contact: Amilia N. Evans amevans1@vt.edu

Key Information: The following is a short summary of this study to help you decide whether or not to be a part of this study. More detailed information is listed later on in this form. Thank you for your participation in this diversity research project conducted by Amilia N. Evans (Rhetoric and Writing Doctoral Candidate, English Department, Virginia Tech). This institutional-level research study is designed to understand the power, privilege, and positionality of Black women as diversity practitioners as well as how diversity discourse, as racialized language at predominantly white institutions, causes harm to diversity practitioners and multiply-marginalized communities, occluding the progress of institutional diversity. This study's potential outcome is a counterstory to data derived from a diversity discourse analysis in this study that centers and amplifies Black women diversity practitioners and other multiply-marginalized communities. Also, this study proffers an opportunity for continued work on diversity discourse as risk communication to develop alternatives to existing diversity data collection and communication documented in a report. The report would be a shareable document with suggestions for university leadership regarding a mitigation plan to reduce racial harm caused by existing dominant diversity discourse.

You were asked to participate in a faculty interview because of your experience and role at Virginia Tech with institutional diversity efforts. This research will be used for a dissertation study, publications and as input for developing diversity language and programs at predominantly white institutions (PWIs) for the recruitment and retention of underrepresented students at Virginia Tech and other PWIs. There will be a total of 10 participants over the age of 18 involved in the study, the majority of whom are faculty who work in diversity-related positions at Virginia Tech. No more than 10 faculty participants are being recruited to be interviewed. Please read the below carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.

Detailed Information: The following is more detailed information about this study in addition to the information listed above.

Who can I talk to?

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, talk to the Principal Investigator at dmueller@vt.edu.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB). You may communicate with them at 540-231-3732 or irb@vt.edu if:

- You have questions about your rights as a research subject
- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team
- You cannot reach the research team

Consent to Take Part in a Research Study

- You want to talk to someone besides the research team to provide feedback about this research

How many people will be studied?

There will be up to 10 participants over the age of 18 involved in the study, the majority of whom are faculty who work in diversity-related positions at Virginia Tech. No more than 10 faculty participants are being recruited to be interviewed.

What happens if I say yes, I want to be in this research?

If you say yes to participate in this research project, Institutional Critique and Black Feminist Thought: Predominantly White Institutions and Racialized Diversity Rhetorics, you will be interviewed by Amilia N. Evans, doctoral candidate. We will use an interview guide during the interview which is anticipated to last approximately 2 hours in length. This interview will be held virtually via Virginia Tech Zoom. These interviews will be audio and video recorded.

What happens if I say yes, but I change my mind later?

You can leave the research at any time, for any reason, and it will not be held against you.

If you decide to leave the research, contact the investigator so that the investigator can stop the interview process and immediately delete any audio/video recording and transcriptions of these recordings. Once you have withdrawn there will be no follow up regarding additional interviews and all information provided will be deleted.

Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me? (Detailed Risks)

During this interview you will be asked questions concerning your professional life. Some examples of these questions include questions about your job responsibilities; to describe the process for developing diversity programs and initiatives in your role and Virginia Tech's diversity mission and vision. If there are any questions you would rather not answer or that you do not feel comfortable answering, you can state so clearly and we will move on to the next question. There is a low risk that by being a part of this study you could experience psychological or emotional distress and that you will be provided with a list of techniques and resources to help you address this psychological or emotional distress and information about institutional resources that can assist you that are within close proximity. There is also a low risk that the final dissertation research paper for this project may include information that will make it possible for anyone who knows you to identify you based on the details you provide and about your life. You understand that this possible identification can cause you to experience ostracism from your community or family. You understand that in consenting to this interview you are agreeing to accept possible identification as a risk.

Please note that this study is not meant to gather information about specific individuals and that the information you provide will be combined with that of other research participants to gather information. You will be given an opportunity to view the final dissertation research paper prior to publication and can withhold your consent for some or all sections of the dissertation

Consent to Take Part in a Research Study

research paper which you believe might identify you. Your name and the names of other individual participants will not be used in the final dissertation research paper.

What happens to the information collected for the research?

We will make every effort to limit the use and disclosure of your personal information, including research study records, only to people who have a need to review this information. We cannot promise complete confidentiality. Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the IRB, Human Research Protection Program, and other authorized representatives of Virginia Tech.

Only Dr. Derek N. Mueller, Amilia N. Evans, and the research team (dissertation committee) will have access to pre-publication information you provide and that all information you provide during and upon completion of this project, will be kept in the strictest confidence and data will be kept in protected cloud storage. The interviews will be kept private in Amilia Evans's password-protected cloud storage account. At no time will the researchers release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent.

The Virginia Tech (VT) Institutional Review Board (IRB) may view the study's data for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human subjects involved in research.

If identifiers are removed from your private information or samples that are collected during this research, that information or those samples could be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research studies without your additional informed consent.

The results of this research study may be presented in summary form at conferences, in presentations, reports to the sponsor, academic papers, and as part of a thesis/dissertation. Additionally, the results will be used to inform the construction of diversity language and programs at predominantly white institutions (PWIs) that will be used to enhance the recruitment and retention of underrepresented minorities at Virginia Tech and other PWIs.

Can I be removed from the research without my OK?

Yes, you may be removed from the research without your okay. As researchers, we have an ethical responsibility to remove a participant if it is in the participant's best interest. Furthermore, since the goal of the research is to engage in "safe" conversations, anyone who is being disrespectful or rude to another participant or about a topic will also be asked to remove themselves.

What else do I need to know?

We will offer to share your individual research results with you. You may accept or decline these results.

Appendix D. Interview Questions

IRB 22-389 Faculty Interview Questions

Institutional Critique and Black Feminist Thought: Predominantly White Institutions and Racialized Diversity Rhetorics

Introduction: Thank you for agreeing to interview with me today. The purpose of this interview is to gain an understanding of whether there is a gap between Virginia Tech's expressed diversity goals and experiences of diversity practitioners, specifically Black women, as well as the role of diversity discourse in making institutional diversity progress. The interview is divided into three sections and should not take more than two hours. The first section is asking about the practitioner's background information and definition of diversity; the second section is asking about the role and responsibilities of the practitioner's diversity work; and the third section seeks information on the institution's participation in addressing diversity-related concerns.

Section I: Background Questions

1. What is your position title and role here at Virginia Tech?
2. What criteria did you use in making the decision to work at Virginia Tech?
 - a. How did you find out about the institution?
 - b. How did you make a determination that this would be an institution you would like to attend?
 - i. Why did you consider Virginia Tech?
 - c. What did you hear, both positive and negative about the institution?
 - i. Did this influence your decision at all?
3. What is your understanding of (or how do you imagine) a diverse, equitable, and inclusive institution? How does your identity and institutional experiences inform your perspective?
4. What is your take on how institution's can arrive at a diverse, equitable, and inclusive community?
5. Who would you say are the diversity practitioners of this institution?

Section II: Role in Diversity Work/Experience

6. What is your (and your office's) responsibility in developing diversity programs? What other positions in your office/department are responsible for diversity work?
7. What modalities do you use to engage in diversity discourse with the institution's community?
8. Does your role necessitate collaboration? How often do you collaborate on diversity efforts?
9. Can you please discuss diversity projects you have developed or participated in and some of the people you worked with? What is the process for implementing diversity initiatives? Names of the people are not required, but if you can mention their role in the diversity work you're describing.

10. Would you say there are predominant races (or nationalities) and/or genders that you often collaborate with?
11. What is your job responsibility for addressing racial incidents/concerns?
12. What has served you best in doing this work well?
13. What are the practical/everyday obstacles that you face in doing this work?
14. Aside from your work responsibilities, what are your goals as it relates to diversity issues that you would like to resolve?
15. What have you seen in the world of diversity discourse (e.g., statements, videos, texts, climate surveys, testimonies, etc.) that are most effective? Most transformative discourse/language that has led to change?

Section III: Institutional/Leadership Responsibilities with Diversity

16. What institutional diversity information do you find important to share internal and external to the institution? And, why?
17. If any, what kind of disconnects do you find between diversity discourse and the actions required to meet the institution's diversity goals?
18. What is your understanding of the college president's role in addressing diversity concerns and campus racial incidents?
19. What other positions that may not be prevalent in diversity discourse but you find necessary in keeping the institution's community and its stakeholders abreast of diversity concerns and making progress?
20. Are you receptive to follow-up that takes no more than 30 minutes of your time?

Appendix E. University Council Roster

University Council 2022-2023 Members

Chair - President (non-voting chair)

Tim Sands	Chair	ex officio
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Secretary of University Council (non-voting)

April Myers	Secretary	ex officio
-------------	-----------	------------

Vice President for Policy and Governance (non-voting)

Kim O'Rourke		ex officio
--------------	--	------------

Vice Presidents (By virtue of position)

Cyril Clarke	Executive VP and Provost	ex officio
Amy Sebring	Executive VP and Chief Operating Officer	ex officio
Daniel Sui	Senior VP for Research and Innovation	ex officio
Bryan Garey	VP for Human Resources	ex officio
Menah Pratt	VP for Strategic Affairs and Diversity	ex officio
Frances Keene	VP for Student Affairs	ex officio

Dean of the Graduate School (By virtue of position)

Aimée Surprenant		ex officio
------------------	--	------------

Vice Provost for Undergraduate Academic Affairs (By virtue of position)

Rachel Holloway		ex officio
-----------------	--	------------

College Deans (By virtue of position)

Alan Grant	Agriculture and Life Sciences	ex officio
Daniel Givens	Veterinary Medicine	ex officio
Laura Belmonte	Liberal Arts and Human Sciences	ex officio
Rosemary Bleszner	Architecture, Arts, and Design	ex officio
Kevin Pitts	Science	ex officio
Paul Winistorfer	Natural Resources and Environment	ex officio
Julia Ross	Engineering	ex officio
Robin Russell	Business	ex officio
Lee Learman	Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine	ex officio

Dean of University Libraries (By virtue of position)

Tyler Walters		ex officio
---------------	--	------------

Dean of Honors College (By virtue of position)

Paul Knox	ex officio
-----------	------------

Department Heads Council Executive Committee Co-Chairs (By virtue of position)

Vacant	2023
Dwayne Edwards	Biological Systems Engineering 2023

Senate Leadership and BOV Representatives (By virtue of position)

Robert Weiss	President of the Faculty Senate	2023
Rachel Miles	Designee of the Immediate Past President of the Faculty Senate	2023
Robin Queen	Vice President of the Faculty Senate	2023
Holli Gardner Drewry	President of the A/P Faculty Senate	2023
Janice Austin	Vice President of the A/P Faculty Senate	2023
Jennifer Jones	Secretary of the A/P Faculty Senate	2023
Serena Young	President of the Staff Senate	2023
LaTawnya Burleson	Vice President of the Staff Senate	2023
Bruce Harper	Secretary of the Staff Senate	2023
Caroline Lohr	President of the USS	2023
Shahed Sanuri	Interim VP for Shared Governance for the USS	2023
Jamal Ross	VP and Representative to the BOV for the USS	2023
Ainsley Cragin	VP for Issues and Policy for the USS	2023
Ben Beiter	President of the GPSS	2023
Chloe Robertson	VP of the GPSS	2023
Noor Tasnim	Director of Communications & Secretary of the GPSS	2023
Anna Buhle	Graduate & Professional Student Representative to the BOV	2023

Faculty Senators from each of the Academic Colleges

Carla Finkelstein	Science	2023
Masoud Agah	Engineering	2023
A.K. Ward Bartlett	Business	2025
Leigh-Anne Krometis	Agriculture and Life Sciences	2023
Daniel Hindman	Natural Resources and Environment	2024
Nathan King	Architecture, Arts, and Design	2024
Evan Lavender-Smith	Liberal Arts and Human Sciences	2023
Virginia Buechner-Maxwell	Veterinary Medicine	2024
Azziza Bankole	Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine	2023

A/P Faculty Senator

Lujean Baab	TLOS	2025
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Staff Senators

Jamie McElfresh	Department of Management	2023
Callan Bartel	Office of the Vice President for Finance	2024
Nicole Akers	College of Engineering	2025

Representatives from the Commission on Equal Opportunity and Diversity

Melissa Faircloth	Representative from the American Indian & Indigenous People's Alliance	2025
John Gray Williams	Representative from the LGBTQ+ Caucus	2024
Kelly Oaks	Equity and Accessibility	2025
Shania Clinedinst	Black Caucus	2024

Representative from the Commission on Outreach and International Affairs

Jan Helge Bøhn	Chair of COIA	2025
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