

# Social Identity and Inclusion: Undergraduate Student Experiences at the University of Michigan

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- This research started as a semester-long class project that Sara Cohen, Dan Green, and Terra Molengraff (with two other students) did as part of Sara Soderstrom's Organizational Studies 410 class, a core research methods course for Org Studies Seniors.
- Their preliminary results on students' experiences at UM were interesting and prompted the four of us to continue this work, first as an independent study and later as a funded research project.
- We would like to acknowledge the funding from the Center for Public Policy in Diverse Societies at the Ford School of Public Policy. We could not have continued this research without their support.

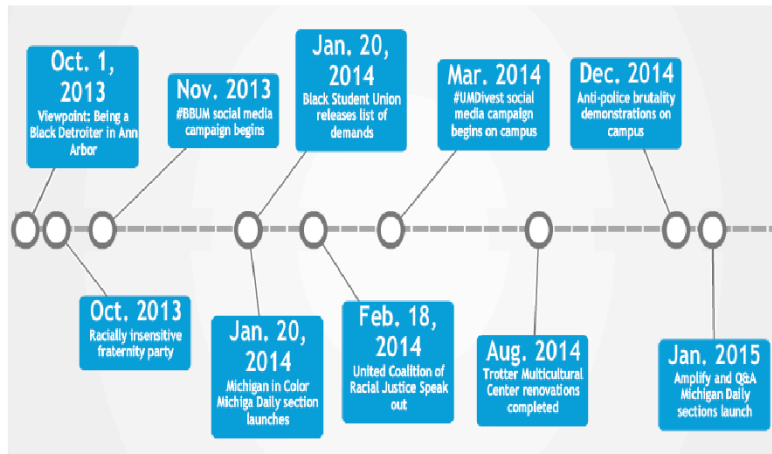
## Agenda

- Context: Student Inclusion and Diversity at University of Michigan
- Social Identity Exercise
- Research Insights



- The presentation is structured in three parts: a) an overview of the context at UofM, b) a reflection activity for us all to complete as a group, and c) preliminary insights and analysis from the research thus far.

## Timeline of Events



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- This timeline shows the events from Fall 2013 through Winter 2015 that frame the activism, dialogue, and happenings on campus surrounding our research.

## Viewpoint - October 2013



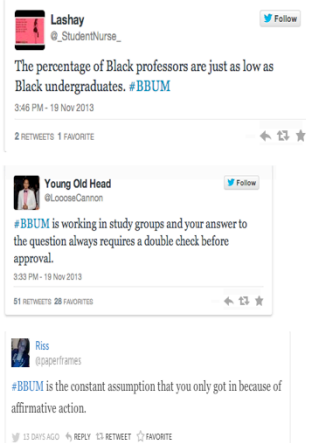
“We are 40 minutes away from Detroit, a city with a black population of at least 80 percent. But what is our black enrollment here at Michigan? Only about 4 percent. Worse yet, black enrollment has fallen 30 percent since 2006.”

“I never even thought of being a Detroiter as an identity until I came to college. Now, it is an identity I hold with pride to show the University that you really don’t know Detroit like you think you do.”



- Viewpoint published in the Michigan Daily by fellow researcher Dan Green discussing growing up in Detroit and now living in Ann Arbor and people’s perceptions of Detroit
- First viewpoint published in Fall 2014 that discussed social identity within the context of student experience at U of M

## #BBUM - November 2013



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- Twitter social media campaign #BBUM (Being Black and University of Michigan)
- Went viral with more than 10,000 tweets from November 19-21, 2013
- During online campaign a physical chalk board was created on the Angell Hall Posting Wall on November 20 for students to write and discuss their #BBUM and the campaign
- Attracted local and national attention
  - Michigan Daily Staff and 'U' Students discussed #BBUM and personal experience on HuffPost Live talk (January 21, 2014)
  - Featured in the NYTimes news blog (February 24, 2014)

## Black Student Union's 7 Demands - January 2014



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- During Henry Belafonte's keynote address at Hill Auditorium for the Martin Luther King Jr. Day Symposium students announced the BSU's seven demands in seven days.
  - Demands included offering affordable housing closer to campus, moving the Trotter Multicultural Center to a more central location, and increasing black representation on campus

## Michigan in Color Inaugural Article - January 2014

**The Michigan Daily**  
Wednesday, February 11, 2015

**OPINION**

NEWS SPORTS OPINION ARTS BLOGS THE STATEMENT ANN ARBOR  
EDITORIALS COLUMNS VIEWPOINTS LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### MiC Drop: Let's talk about race

By RIMA FADLALLAH, Michigan in Color Editor  
and JERUSALEM GERREZIABHER, Michigan in Color Editor  
and KAYLA UPADHYAYA, Michigan in Color Editor  
Published January 20, 2014

Tweet 3 Like 442

PRINT | E-MAIL | LETTER TO THE EDITOR

MiC check 1, 2, 1, 2. Can you hear us? Because we're here.

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*"MiC will create a space where we, as people of color, are free to unapologetically express and be ourselves as we discuss our ideas, goals, dreams and experiences while fostering this collaborative and creative space."*

- Same day as the Black Student Union's seven demands the Michigan Daily created a new opinion section providing a "space for and by people of color"
- Around 100 articles have been published since the launch. We use 49 articles that were directly related to university experience as part of our data set.
- In the inaugural article the editors explained the goals and purposes of the section
  - **"a place for people of color to voice their opinions and share experiences that are overshadowed by dominant narratives** — or the history, stories and perspectives that privilege conformity and make it into the mainstream, marginalizing all other narratives in the process."
  - "We want to challenge the historical whiteness of The Michigan Daily by creating this long-needed space that will hopefully lead to a more inclusive newsroom and a better informed campus."
- This provides an unprompted, formal space for students of color to openly voice their experiences.

## Speak-Out - February 2014

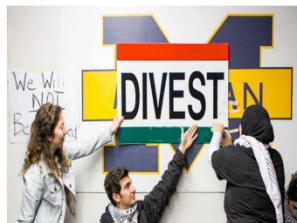


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- United Coalition for Racial Justice all night “Speak Out” in the UGLI held on February 18, 2014
  - Invited students to speak about experiences as students at the University and how they were affected by the lack of diversity



## Student Activism Driving Dialogue



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In addition to the previous events there were other forms of student activism across campus prompted by national issues as well as the creation of more formal spaces for students discussion.

- Sexual Assault on Campus - Protest on Diag listing seven demands that reference safety in spaces such as Greek Life and Athletics
- Student Activism referencing issue important to students
  - UMDivest - Students protests in the CSG chambers and numerous viewpoints and MiC pieces discussing an inclusive space for student voice and opinion
  - Die In during December's commencement address, one of three that semester
- New sections started in Michigan in Color (January 2015)
  - Amplify (Black voices) and Q&A (Queer in Action)
  - Providing a formal space for these students to discuss their experiences
- These spaces and activism demonstrates the idea that social identity has become a top issues for students and across the university

## President Schlissel's Inauguration Speech

*"...I want Michigan to be known as a place where mutual respect does not require agreement, where differences of perspective are treated with sensitivity, and where we all become advocates for, and experts in, civil discourse..."*

September 5, 2014



- As part of his inauguration speech, President Schlissel noted the importance of discourse and mutual respect.
- We are interested in understanding where this is fostered in the University and how we may strengthen this so that all students feel a greater sense of belonging and inclusion.

## Social Identities and Educational Experiences



[Neil deGrasse Tyson Clip](#)

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- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KEeBPSvcNZQ#t=3690>; Starting at the 1:01.30 point
- When we thought about the role social identities play in our educational experiences, we found this clip speaks to how they manifest themselves.
- Neil deGrasse Tyson discusses his experience with race and being a physicist and how the conversation must focus on the lived experiences of individuals.

## Group Reflection: Social Identity Exercise

- Goal: Understand how our social identity group memberships impact our experiences and points of view AND understand how both the differences and similarities of those individual experiences may relate to our interactions with students, faculty, and staff
- Complete the identity grid with consideration for how social identities may influence your University of Michigan experience
- Share the identity grid with a neighbor
  - ~ Practice active listening!
- Debrief



- This is an exercise developed by the Program on Intergroup Relations (IGR).
- It can be used in many contexts like classrooms, student organizations and dialogues.
- If you would like to use this exercise or want to learn more, feel free to contact us or reach out to IGR ([igr.umich.edu](http://igr.umich.edu)).

## Social Identity Debrief

- Why are inequality, privilege, status, and power important to consider for teaching, service, and research?
- How do social identities influence our experiences on campus?
- How does this vary in different types of settings?



- Please note: the debrief questions may vary based on the context of this exercise. For example, when Sara Soderstrom does this in class, the questions focus on how social identities may influence group work, research, and/or experiences in organizations, pending the goals of the discussion.

## Research Questions

What influences students' feeling of inclusion on campus?

- What activities and spaces enable a sense of inclusion for UM students?
- How does this vary for different social identity groups?
- How might the University support greater inclusion on campus?



- After reflecting on the concerns with diversity and inclusion on campus, we focused our research on trying to understand what influences students' feeling of inclusion on campus, and what activities and spaces may improve, or dampen, that.
- We are also interested in understanding how this may vary for students of different social identities.
- We would love to continue discussions with faculty, staff, and students on campus about how UofM, and all of us, can support greater inclusion.

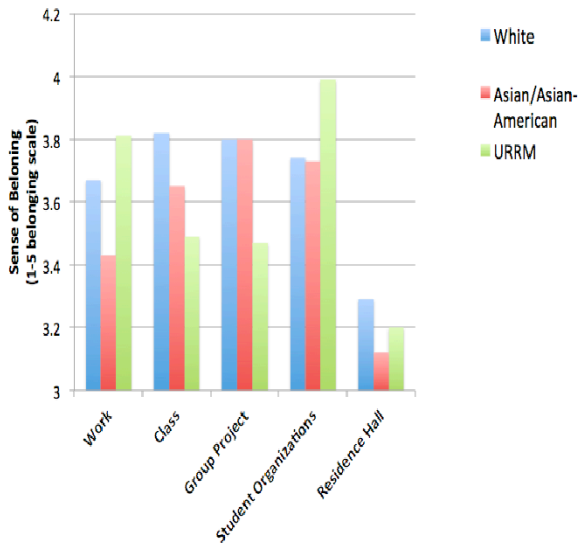
## Multi-Method Research Design

- Data Collection
  - Survey of undergraduate students
    - November 2014
    - 492 completed, 200 partially completed
    - First wave, random student sample
    - Second wave, targeted student sample
    - No statistical difference between waves by social identities
    - Future analyses: regression analyses
  - Archival data
    - Michigan Daily articles
    - #BBUM tweets
  - Observations of public campus events
  - Interviews with students, faculty, and staff (Planned for March, April 2015)
- Data Analysis
  - Coding of qualitative data (ongoing; open-ended survey responses, articles, observations, interviews)
  - Statistical analysis (ongoing; survey responses)



- The research is on-going and we are excited to share some of our preliminary results.
- We used a multi-method approach, collecting survey data, observations, and archival data. We have recently received IRB data for interviews and will conduct interviews in March and April 2015.
- It is important to note that the survey was sent asking students to share about their experience at UofM. We purposefully did not mention diversity or inclusion in the invite, as we were concerned about biasing our responses. Questions about diversity and social identity were located at the end of the survey.
- We used an inductive approach to coding the qualitative data (open-ended survey responses, archival data, etc.). Two team members coded a subset of the data independently to explore emergent codes. We discussed these as a team to develop a coding dictionary. Then two team members completed the coding, again independently, and finally these codes were checked for consistency.
- We have used stata for statistical analysis of the survey responses. This analysis is ongoing.
- Some key definitions:
  - Underrepresented racial minorities: Students who stated a racial identity of American Indian or Alaskan Native; Black or African-American (Hispanic And Not Hispanic); Latino, Latina, Hispanic; and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander.
  - First generation students: Students for whom neither parent graduated from college
  - Low socioeconomic status: Students who's household income is less than \$50K per year.

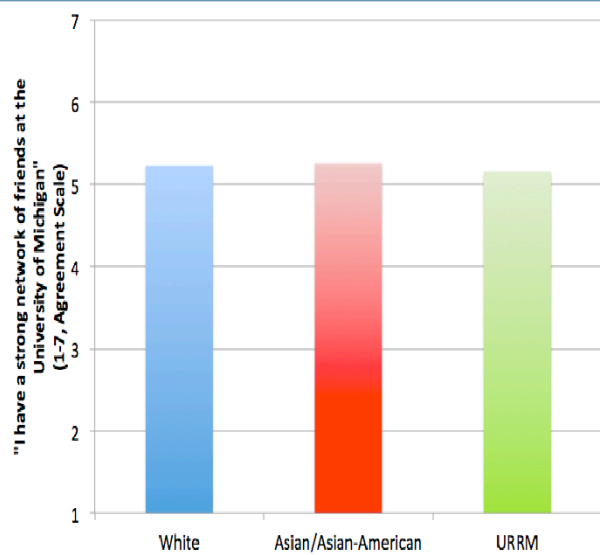
## Students' Sense of Belonging Varies by Space and Social Identity



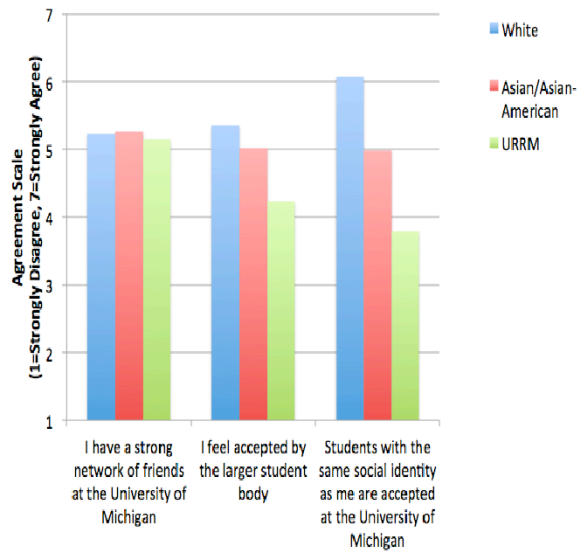
- URRM feel significantly less belonging in class or group projects
- Residence Halls have the lowest sense of belonging for all student groups
- Underrepresented racial minority students (URRM) feel significantly greater belonging at work and student organizations



## White, Asian/Asian-American, and URRM Students report similarly strong networks at UM...

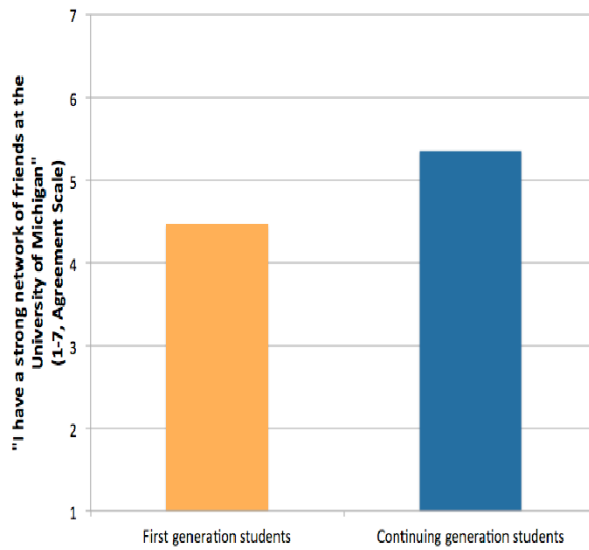


## ... But different levels of acceptance at University of Michigan



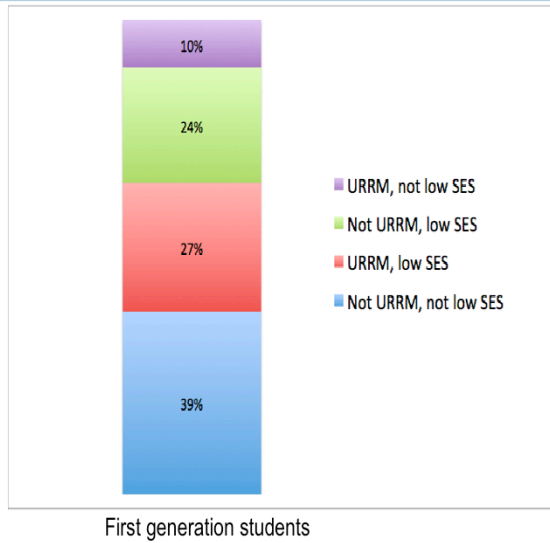
- White students feel **less accepted individually** than they believe other white students are
- URRM feel **more accepted individually** than they believe other URRM students are
- Overall, white students feel more accepted than Asian/Asian-American students or URRM

## First generation students report less strong friendship networks at UM



- Comparisons by race, gender, college do not show this difference
- Similar challenge for students of low socioeconomic status
- Potential implication: Importance of support for less visible minority social identities and/or along intersectional identities

## Example: Intersectionality of First Generation Students



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- It is important to consider first generation status as a social identity in and of itself, as it is not captured by race and/or socioeconomic status alone.

## What defines students' sense of belonging (or not belonging)?

### Spaces

- **Definition:** Finite location invested in meaning and value (Gieryn, 2000)
- **Codes (8):** Academics, Activism, Athletics, Greek Housing/Event, Residence Hall, Social Event, Student Organizations, UM Programming
- **Examples: Student Organization**
  - **Belonging:** *My involvement in the campus farm has really aided my transition to the university. I get to be with super cool people while also helping the environment.*
  - **Not Belonging:** *[Student Organization] meetings are filled with almost only [people of one social identity], and most people are only looking forward instead of helping those around them.*

### Mechanisms

- **Definition:** Processes and experiences that facilitate feelings of belonging/not belonging
- **Codes (9):** Academic Affirmation, Personal Background, Friendship, Greek Life, Inclusion, Michigan Identity, Party Culture, Shared Interests, Social Identity
- **Examples: Social Identity**
  - **Belonging:** *When the campaign #BBUM happened I felt like I belonged because it was a time when so many people like me were coming together*
  - **Not Belonging:** *...then going beyond that being black just feels out of place a lot since most of my friends and peers aren't, and I come from an area where it is majority black. Then having your friends make racial faux pas such as touching my hair all the time and assuming I have to like ignorant rap to consider myself black.*

- In coding the qualitative responses to our questions about experiences with belonging/not belonging, we used inductive coding approach, creating codes based on repeated themes and answers from participants' responses to our questions. What emerged from the data was that students were talking about belonging and not belonging in two different ways: Spaces and Mechanisms, both defined above.
- We created multiple codes for both Spaces and Mechanisms and we will explain the specific relevance of those later in the slides.
- Listed above are two examples of codes, one Space and one Mechanism, that show up in students' experiences with both belonging and not belonging.

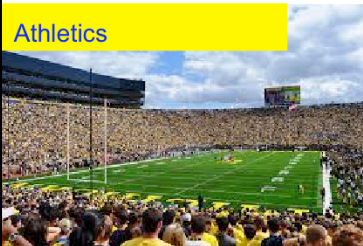
# Greatest Sense of Belonging

## Spaces

### Student Organizations



### Athletics



## Mechanisms

### Shared Interests

*"When I was in MRC, I felt like I belonged because everyone shared my values in education and science."*

*"I felt like I belonged with my Science Learning Center study group for Chem 210; we all were striving for the same goal and had fun doing so."*

### Michigan Identity

*"Michigan students generally share my values and appreciation for hard work and the importance of studying and being intellectual. That's sometimes that makes me feel like I belong here as opposed to my home town where academia wasn't always a priority for most of my peers."*

*"The best immersion scenarios are the sports events and rallies. One can really become a part of the greater university."*

## Generalizable Findings

### Spaces

- In general, students reported experiencing the greatest sense of belonging in:
  - Athletic settings - Participation in and spectating at UM sporting events or events surrounding/supporting athletics
  - Student organizations - Participation in, affiliation with a university recognized student organization

### Mechanisms

- The mechanisms that contributed to the greatest sense of belonging were:
  - Shared interests - Holding real or perceived similar or dissimilar feelings in regard to a specific group or to the larger university
  - Michigan identity - Symbolism, being Michigan students, inclusion associated with/by merit of going to Michigan, having that identity, or exclusion by not sharing pride, spirit, identity with going here, not associating individual self with that feeling

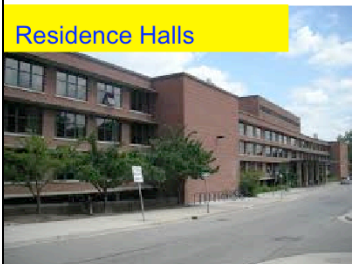
# Most Frequent Types of Not Belonging

## Spaces

### Academics



### Residence Halls



## Mechanisms

### Academic Affirmation - "Leaders and Best"

*"I don't feel like I belong during classes. Sometimes I feel as if I don't belong in certain classes because I may not perform as well as others."*

*"I felt like I didn't belong to the greater university community when I went to convocation. My fellow students are dauntingly intelligent, and I cannot perceive myself as their equal. I feel as if I am participating in a game of catch-up every day."*

*"I know Michigan is very competitive, but when everyone feels like they need to cover up their weaknesses it distances people."*

### Social Identity

*"I think about how the majority of white students never have to ask themselves what a non-white person's experience looks like, how the segregation on this campus perpetuates the lack of awareness of minority experiences here, how instead of feeling like this campus is my own, I feel like a temporary resident whose sense of belonging expires with her Mcard." (Michigan in Color)*

## Generalizable Findings

### Spaces

- Students reported with high frequency, experiences with not belonging in:
  - Academic settings - Majors, minors, formal interactions with professors, classroom experiences, specific schools/colleges, research.
  - Residence Halls - Specific residence halls on campus, on campus housing, both as a location of a feeling of belonging/not belonging or a factor that fosters sense of belonging/not belonging

### Mechanisms

- The Mechanisms that emerged most frequently around not belonging were:
  - Academic Affirmation - Feelings of belonging/not belonging dependent on real or perceived merit of scholarship/performance/acceptance relative to other students. Connection to other students in classes
  - Social Identity - Feelings of belonging/not belonging derived from either real or perceived acceptance related to Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Sexual Orientation, Ability Status, Religion, etc.
- How do we instill a sense of leaders and best without triggering an imposter syndrome?

## Spaces and Mechanisms of Belonging Vary by Social Identity: White Students



- Greek Life and Party Culture associated with feelings of not belonging with greater frequency for white students than for any other social identity
- *"At the beginning of the semester when all the frats and sororities were rushing, and everyone was talking about it, I felt out of place. I could honestly care less about Greek life, but it means a LOT to a lot of students, so I couldn't really connect there."*
- *"I personally choose not to drink or use drugs. However, I feel like there is a major focus on those things at the college, and it can make people like myself uncomfortable in certain situations."*

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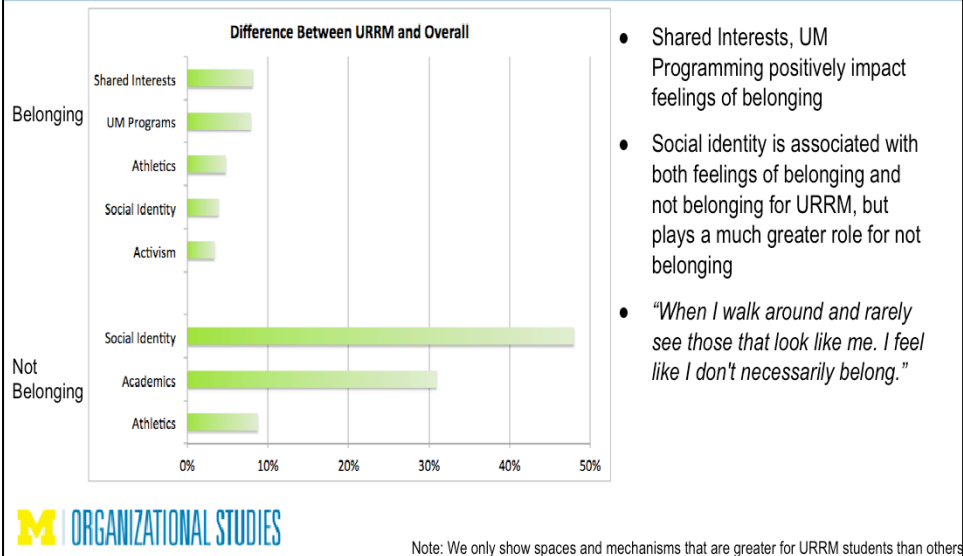
While there were generalizable findings from our data, it is important to note how experiences of and the specific Spaces and Mechanisms associated with belonging and not belonging vary by social identity.

### Mechanisms

- White students reported feelings of not belonging associated with the Greek Life and Party Culture with greater frequency than any other social identity.
  - Greek Life - Feelings of belonging/not belonging associated with presence of Greek Life in spaces such as classes, residence halls, parties. Participation/Lack of participation
  - Party Culture - Party culture as symbol/activity not as space - the prevalence of drinking/partying on campus, in dorms, at parties.



## Spaces and Mechanisms of Belonging Vary by Social Identity: Underrepresented Racial Minority Students

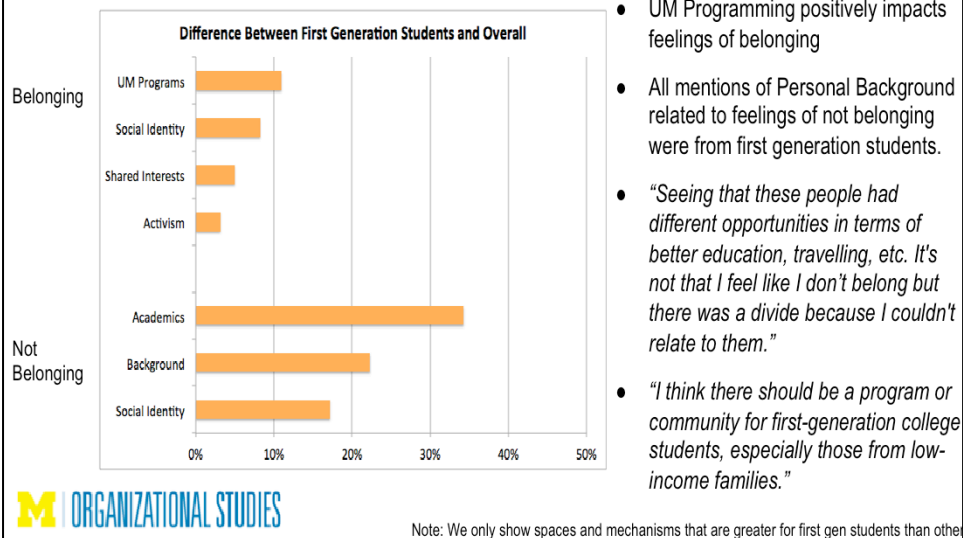


- Shared Interests, UM Programming positively impact feelings of belonging
- Social identity is associated with both feelings of belonging and not belonging for URRM, but plays a much greater role for not belonging
- *"When I walk around and rarely see those that look like me. I feel like I don't necessarily belong."*

Here we have a figure depicting the difference between the responses from URRM specifically and Overall regarding the Spaces and Mechanisms that contribute to belonging/not belonging. The experiences of URRM students differs dramatically along several lines.

- Shared Interests and UM Programming positively impact feelings of belonging for URRM students
- Social identity is associated with both feelings of belonging and not belonging for URRM, but plays a much greater role for not belonging
  - While there was a difference of only 5% in reports of social identity associated with belonging between URRM and Overall, there was a difference of nearly 50% associated with feelings of not belonging

## Spaces and Mechanisms of Belonging Vary by Social Identity: First Generation College Students

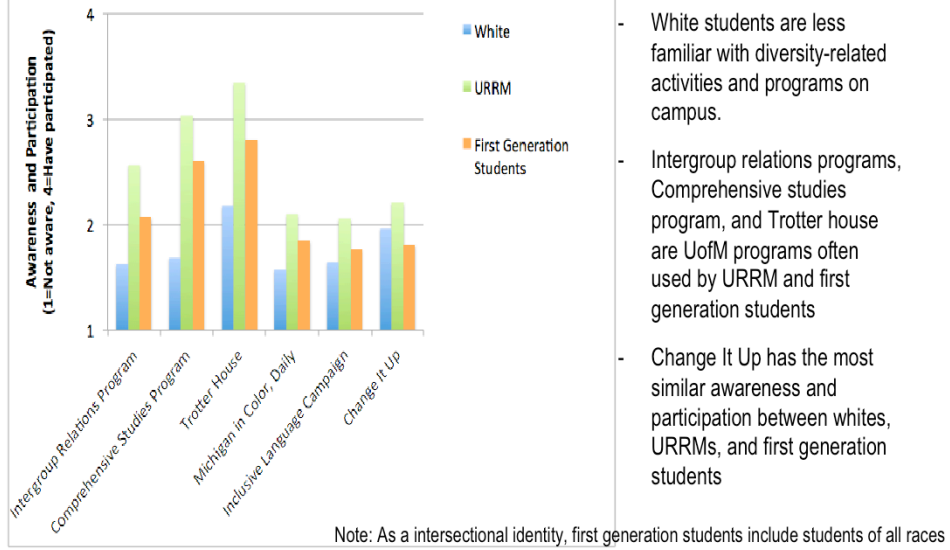


- UM Programming positively impacts feelings of belonging
- All mentions of Personal Background related to feelings of not belonging were from first generation students.
- *“Seeing that these people had different opportunities in terms of better education, travelling, etc. It’s not that I feel like I don’t belong but there was a divide because I couldn’t relate to them.”*
- *“I think there should be a program or community for first-generation college students, especially those from low-income families.”*

The figure above represents the difference between the responses from First Generation Students specifically and Overall regarding the Spaces and Mechanisms that contribute to belonging/not belonging.

- UM Programming positively impacts feelings of belonging for First Generation Students, signaling that existing University programs and events are reaching and affecting the students that need them.
  - This is significant because, as we examined briefly in slide 20, it is important to note how the intersection of factors such as race, socioeconomic status, and background comprise first generation status as a social identity, and how that intersectionality renders it less visible and often less recognized by structural and institutional interventions on campus.
- All mentions of Personal Background related to feelings of not belonging were from First Generation Students
  - Personal Background is a code that encompasses references to students’ socioeconomic status as well as their cultural upbringing, knowhow, and capital that affect the way they experience the University environment.

## Knowledge and Use of Campus Activities Around Inclusion also Vary by Social Identity



- White students are less familiar with diversity-related activities and programs on campus.
- Intergroup relations programs, Comprehensive studies program, and Trotter house are UofM programs often used by URRM and first generation students
- Change It Up has the most similar awareness and participation between whites, URRMs, and first generation students

## Considerations

- **Double edges of “Leaders and Best”**  
Significant aspect of “Michigan Identity” that is a cornerstone of students’ sense of belonging, but also triggers sense of not belonging and imposter syndrome
- **Lack of acceptance at UM by underrepresented racial minorities**  
Strong personal friendship levels strengthen the experience of URRM, as especially noted by finding shared interests with others and use of UM programs. However, a strong sense of not belonging due to low numbers of students who share their social identity, as well as in academics, present challenges.
- **Implications of less visible social identities and/or intersectionality**  
First generation students and students of low socioeconomic status have lowest friendship networks; and note importance of UM programs to find others with shared interests and experiences
- **Where are dialogue and interactions between diverse students? How can this be fostered?**  
Students’ social identities influence their UM experience. It’s important to consider how to both provide underrepresented students with spaces and programming that uniquely support them, as well as foster interactions across diverse groups of students. Specifically considering events that signal our “Michigan Identity,” student organizations and academic structures are important given their large roles in students’ sense of belonging.

# Thank you!

# Questions?

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Center for Public Policy in Diverse Societies

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