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“We Survive but We Don’t Thrive”: Perceptions of Black Undergraduate Student Representation and Support at UChicago

Project description

Black undergraduate students at elite universities are continuously advocating for greater representation and support. Recently, these discussions of diversity and representation at elite universities have become far more nuanced. This is due to the growing relevance of both racial and ethnic background to Black student experiences of belonging and support. The University of Chicago (UChicago) is no exception. A case study conducted at the University found that while ethnic background does influence Black students’ feelings of belonging and support, it was not the most determinant factor of Black students’ experiences at and perceptions of UChicago. Rather, these discussions of ethnic background and feelings of underrepresentation revolved around how Black students positioned themselves in relation to UChicago's predominantly white non-Black campus and administration. In interrogating differences in how UChicago as an organization understands Black students and their needs, and how Black students understand their experiences and needs this project was able to consider potential remedies.

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**“We Survive but We Don’t Thrive”:  
Perceptions of Black Undergraduate Student Representation and Support  
at The University of Chicago**

By

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## **ABSTRACT**

Black undergraduate students at elite universities are continuously advocating for greater representation and support. Recently, these discussions of diversity and representation at elite universities have become far more nuanced. This is due to the growing relevance of both racial and ethnic background to Black student experiences of belonging and support. The University of Chicago (UChicago) is no exception. A case study conducted at the University found that while ethnic background does influence Black students' feelings of belonging and support, it was not the most determinant factor of Black students' experiences at and perceptions of UChicago.

Rather, these discussions of ethnic background and feelings of underrepresentation revolved around how Black students positioned themselves in relation to UChicago's predominantly white non-Black campus and administration. In interrogating differences in how UChicago as an organization understands Black students and their needs, and how Black students understand their experiences and needs this project was able to consider potential remedies.

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## INTRODUCTION

Black students at elite universities are continuously advocating for greater representation. In recent decades, these discussions have become far more nuanced. In September of 2017 the Black Students United (BSU) organization at Cornell University delivered a list of demands to university administrators. One of these demands was for the school's admissions office to "actively increase the presence of underrepresented Black students on [Cornell's] campus."<sup>1</sup> The students defined underrepresented Black students as "Black Americans who have several generations (more than two) in this country." In their demands, the students pointed to the disproportionate representation of international and first-generation African and Caribbean students as a lack of investment in Black students whose families were directly impacted by American slavery.

In the weeks following the release of this demand, a Harvard student wrote a response that Cornell BSU "incorrectly implies that African and Caribbean immigrants and first-gens do not feel the effects of racism or 'American fascism' as much as their peers from non-immigrant backgrounds."<sup>2</sup> He argued that a class based approach to admitting Black students (focusing on low income Black students) would create a more accurate proportional representation of the Black community without alienating Black Immigrant students.

Many elite universities have been criticized for one, treating Black students as a monolith and two, for admitting Black Immigrant students at a greater proportion than Black American.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Black Students United, Cornell University. <https://www.scribd.com/document/360033913/Black-Students-United-at-Cornell-Demands-September-2017>

<sup>2</sup> Ibe, Chimaoge. October, 20 2017. "Wrong Targets: Black Xenophobia and Cornell's BSU." Harvard Political Review.

<sup>3</sup> Jaschik, Scott. October 9, 2017. "Who Counts as a Black Student?". Inside Higher Ed. <https://www.insidehighered.com/admissions/article/2017/10/09/cornell-students-revive-debate-whom-colleges-should-count-Black>.

The University of Chicago (UChicago), like many elite schools, shies away from situating its interest in admitting minority students within the context of historical disadvantage and instead focuses on the merits of diversity. Using UChicago as a case study (through organizational research and interviews with students) this thesis will address two foundational questions. First, how do higher education institutions understand the need to represent Black students and the needs of these Black students? Second, how does this understanding diverge from the ways in which Black students at these institutions understand their Blackness and their needs as Black students?

Questions of Black student representation sit within a broader topic of race-based diversity policy and justification. Thus, this thesis will also consider the origin of race-based diversity policy in the United States and how the justification for policies like affirmative action have evolved over time. My specific interest is in policy geared toward increasing Black access to and representation within higher education institutions. For the purposes of my thesis, the use of the term Black Immigrants will refer to first or second generation Black Immigrants while Black Americans will refer to Black individuals with non-immigrant parents and multiple generations in the United States.

Shifts in the ethnic makeup of the United States' Black population (the result of a massive increase in African immigration after the 1970s) have complicated the ways in which race-based diversity policies manifest. A report released by the University of Pennsylvania and Princeton University found that despite accounting for only 13% of the total Black population, foreign-born Blacks comprise 27% of Black students at the top 28 universities the study surveyed.<sup>4</sup> These proportions are more extreme in samples of elite Ivy League universities. More than 40% of Black

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<sup>4</sup> Bennett, P. R. and Lutz, A. 2009. How African American is the net Black advantage? Differences in college attendance among immigrant Blacks, native Blacks, and Whites. *Sociology of Education*, 82. 82.

students in the Ivy League are from immigrant families. The overall population of Black students at these elite institutions is generally less than 7% of the total student population.

Studies from the Pew Research Center make it possible to evaluate the access that Black Immigrants versus Black Americans have to higher education institutions. Common indicators of access include socioeconomic status, parent education level, and place of residence. In order to account for the social factors influencing access this paper will include the work of authors such as Mary Waters<sup>5</sup>, who studies the ways in which first and second-generation Black Immigrants experience racialization in the United States. These two bodies of research provide insight into why the ethnic breakdown of Black students at elite higher education institutions are so heavily weighted with Black Immigrant students.

In order to engage with the questions posed by this project I will first provide an organizational analysis that investigates the ways in which UChicago publicizes its interests of diversity and the support of Black students. This organizational analysis will then be placed in conversation with interview and survey data gathered from current Black undergraduate students at UChicago. The findings from these analyses will ultimately be translated into recommendations that will attempt to mediate organizational ideas of Black representation and support at UChicago with the perceptions of Black student interview and survey participants.

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<sup>5</sup> Waters, Mary C. 1994. Ethnic and racial identities of second generation Black Immigrants in New York City. *International Migration Review* 28, no. 4: 795-820

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The increased representation of Black Immigrants in the United States has complicated the ways in which race is understood and experienced in the United States. These dynamics are particularly salient in conversations regarding the manifestation of policies such as affirmative action, which aim to rectify the U.S.' long history of racial injustice. Affirmative action policy intentionally considers an individual's race, ethnicity, or sex for the purposes of expanding opportunities for racial minorities and women.

In the context of education, affirmative action policies aim to improve racial minorities' chances of being admitted to, attending, and graduating from universities and colleges. These efforts vary in intensity—from simple outreach activities to quota systems that explicitly favor minority applications.<sup>6</sup> Numerous legal challenges to these policies on the basis of the constitution's equal protection clause have led many institutions to shy away from affirmative action language in their efforts to diversify their student bodies. Interestingly enough, institutions insistent on maintaining race conscious admission policies have successfully argued for these policies (with restrictions) on the basis of the contribution of these policies to the education of students. This shift to the merits of diversity and the educational and social value it provides students is reflected in how institutions are evaluated by prospective students. A racially diverse student body has become one factor in a school's national reputation and something that students consider when applying to schools. For example, *U.S. News and World Report's* diversity index measures schools based on the proportion of racial minority students (although this can conflict

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<sup>6</sup> Kulik, Carol T., and Loriann Roberson. 2008. "Diversity Initiative Effectiveness: What Organizations Can (and Cannot) Expect from Diversity Recruitment, Diversity Training, and Formal Mentoring Programs." *Diversity at Work*, edited by Arthur P. Brief, 265-317. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

with selectivity measures).<sup>7</sup>

Opinions of where Black Immigrants should be positioned in relation to race conscious policies is varied. These conclusions are rooted in determinations of whether Black Immigrants possess more or similar privileges to Black Americans. In order to engage with this and similar questions, it's important to understand first, the conditions allowing for the increase in Black immigration to the U.S. and two, the characteristics of Black Immigrants in the U.S. A 2015 Pew Research Report provides extensive data on these topics.<sup>8</sup>

### Black Immigration to the United States

Today, 3.8 million Black Immigrants live in the United States. This is more than four times the number in 1980, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data. Black Immigrants now account for 8.7% of the nation's Black population, nearly triple their share in 1980. African immigration is the main source for the rise in the Black Immigrant population. Between 2000 and 2013, the number of Black African immigrants living in the U.S. rose 137%, from 574,000 to 1.4 million. Africans now make up 36% of the total foreign-born Black population, up from 24% in 2000 and just 7% in 1980. (PEW) Nigeria and Ethiopia are the two largest birth countries for African immigrants in the U.S. The majority of Black Immigrants are from the Caribbean with Jamaica and Haiti being the two largest source countries.

At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Blacks accounted for one fifth of the U.S. population, the

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<sup>7</sup> Berrey, Ellen. 2015. *The Enigma of Diversity: The Language of Race and the Limits of Racial Justice*. Page 65.

<sup>8</sup> Anderson, Monica. 2015. "A Rising Share of the U.S. Black Population Is Foreign Born; 9 Percent Are Immigrants; and While Most Are from the Caribbean, Africans Drive Recent Growth." Pew Research Center, Washington, D.C.: April.

vast majority of this population was brought to the U.S. as African slaves. After the ban of the slave trade and the implementation of restrictions on non-European immigration the number of Blacks arriving in the United States slowed. It wasn't until the 20<sup>th</sup> century that Black immigration to the U.S. sharply increased. There were a number of policy changes encouraging this. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 repealed national origins quotas that had been in place since the 1920s. The new policy emphasized family reunification and skilled immigrant labor. The Refugee Act of 1980 also increased Black immigration by providing immigrants from conflict areas such as Ethiopia and Somalia the ability to seek asylum in the United States. The Immigration Act of 1990 was also passed, which increased the number of legal immigrants that entered the U.S. every year with a preference given to "priority workers".<sup>9</sup> These policy changes, while increasing Black immigration to the United States overall, also gave preference to highly skilled and educated Black Immigrants.

### The Plight of Black Americans and Black Immigrants in America

In 2012 the Migration Policy Institute released an in-depth report detailing circumstances of Black children in the United States. The report focused on three subsections of the Black population: children of African immigrants, children of Caribbean immigrants, and children of Black Americans. While the report doesn't specifically focus on studying indicators for future educational outcomes, the report's findings provide the necessary data to draw these conclusions independently. Longitudinal education based studies highlighted connections between childhood circumstances and educational success. Indicators of educational achievement include

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<sup>9</sup> Immigration Act of 1990, Pub. L. No. 101-649, 104 Stat. 4978 (1990).  
Priority worker: "The alien has extraordinary ability in the sciences, arts, education, business, or athletics which has been demonstrated by sustained national or international acclaim and whose achievements have been recognized in the field through extensive documentation.

socioeconomic status, parental engagement, and parental education level.<sup>10</sup> Within this scope, children of Black Immigrants have stronger indicators for educational success when compared with Black American children. The children of Black Immigrants are much more likely than children of Black Americans to have parents who are college graduates: 33 percent versus 18 percent for fathers and 26 percent versus 15 percent for mothers.<sup>11</sup> While education level is not uniquely correlated with parental engagement, parents with high levels of education, having successfully navigated the process themselves, may be better equipped to assist their own children in the process. Black Immigrants also have higher socioeconomic status than Black Americans. 45 percent of Black Immigrants' children live in low-income families, a substantially smaller share than Black children of Black Americans (63 percent). Black children with African-born parents are more likely than their counterparts with Caribbean-born parents to live in low-income families (49 percent and 43 percent, respectively).<sup>12</sup>

The data suggest that when evaluating Black children purely on basic indicators for educational achievement, the children of Black Immigrants have a stronger likelihood of academic success than the children of Black Americans. That being said, the children of Black Immigrants remain at a substantial disadvantage when compared with the children of White Americans. Nineteen percent of Black Immigrants' children live in families with incomes below the federal poverty threshold compared with 7 percent of White children in immigrant and native-born

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<sup>10</sup> Dubow, Eric F., Paul Boxer, and L. Rowell Huesmann. "Long-Term Effects of Parents' Education on Children's Educational and Occupational Success: Mediation by Family Interactions, Child Aggression, and Teenage Aspirations." *Merrill-Palmer quarterly (Wayne State University. Press)* 55.3 (2009): 224–249. PMC. Web. 5 Nov. 2017.

<sup>11</sup> Hernandez, Donald J. 2012. *Changing Demography and Circumstances for Young Black Children in African and Caribbean Immigrant Families*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute. Page 13.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. Page 22.

families.<sup>13</sup> Further, the children of Black Immigrants must navigate potential language and sociocultural barriers to American society.

### Identity Performance

The ways in which Black American and Black Immigrant college students engage with their racial and ethnic identity as well as the identities of others will be referred to as Black performance or the performance of Blackness. The idea of identity performance was coined by philosopher Judith Butler in her theory of gender performance and performativity—the concept that gender identities are constituted through stylized repetitions of bodily acts and that these acts are constructed by heterosexual gender norms.<sup>14</sup> Through her work, Butler argues that gender is not something one is, it is something one does; a verb than a noun, a “doing” rather than a “being”.<sup>15</sup> Individuals have taken on roles and act in ways such that their acting and role-playing becomes essential to their gender identity and the gender they present to the world. These behaviors develop an internal and external impression of what it means to be a man or woman.

The bedrock of Butler’s work is directly applicable to conversations of racialization and the ways in which Black individuals experience and present their racial identity. In her book *Racial Imperatives*, Nadine Ehlers bridges this gap by considering how Butler’s theory of performativity lends itself to discussions of racial identity formation.<sup>16</sup> Ehlers argues that the binary of Blackness and Whiteness, as it has been constructed in the United States, is the normative framework by which racial subjects are formed. Individual subjects are categorized through this framework and

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid. Page 21.

<sup>14</sup> Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. Page 25

<sup>16</sup> Ehlers, Nadine. *Racial Imperatives: Discipline, Performativity, and Struggles against Subjection*. Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2012.

reproduce the norms associated with their assigned racial identity through bodily acts such as dress, language, and gestures. These racial categories and the significance derived from them have been produced and reproduced in the United States through a variety of institutions. Ehlers contends that the significance given to these racial categories is evidenced by practices in sites such as courtrooms, schools and workplaces. The force of these categories compels individuals to assume normalized racial positions and evaluate the racial identities of others through normalized markers of Blackness and Whiteness.

In her book *Black Identities* Mary Waters conducts an in-depth study of West Indian first and second-generation immigrants and discusses the more nuanced aspects of the Black Immigrant experience.<sup>17</sup> While Waters' research concerns West Indian immigrants, many of her conclusions could be related to other sections of the Black Immigrant population. Waters finds that when West Indians arrive to the U.S., their knowledge of English, skills and contacts, and optimistic ideas regarding the "American Dream" and upward mobility facilitate their integration into the American economic structure. Many of the immigrants Waters interviews buy into the racial stereotypes of Black Americans and differentiate themselves from this group by focusing on their West Indian identity. White Americans respond to this because they perceive the success of West Indian immigrants in work and school as confirmation that the economic and social disadvantage of Black Americans is the product of their cultural failure and not structural forces.

Waters finds that over time, the optimism of West Indian immigrants is challenged by the realities of being Black in the United States. In the face of institutional racism and racial bias on a day to day basis the West Indian immigrants in Waters' study realize they are perceived first and foremost as Black in America. The second-generation immigrants in the study who lacked visible

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<sup>17</sup> Waters, Mary C. 1994. Ethnic and racial identities of second generation Black Immigrants in New York City. *International Migration Review* 28, no. 4: 795-820.

markers of their cultural identity (such as an accent) explained that they would intentionally assert their ethnic identities by identifying as the children of immigrants in order to distance themselves from stereotypes of Black Americans.

“Whites tend to let those of the second generation know that they think of them as exceptions to the rule, with the rule being that most Blacks are not good people. However, these young people also know that unless they tell people of their ethnicity, most Whites have no idea they are not Black Americans.”

Waters’ analysis, particularly its engagement with the perception of Black Immigrants as the “model Black minority”, is important to understanding both how higher education universities perceive Black applicants as well as the experiences that Black students have at elite institutions, which are dominated by White students. The idea that Black Immigrants are the exception to racial stereotypes is evident in the language used to describe these students. When a Ghanaian American student was accepted into all 8 Ivy League Schools in 2014 a college admissions expert stated “being a first-generation American from Ghana helps him stand out because he’s not a typical African American kid.”<sup>18</sup> This and similar sentiments that place Black Immigrants as ‘not really Black’ gesture to the importance of performativity to understanding the ways in which Black Immigrants are positioned in America and elite American colleges more specifically.

### Ethnic Background and the Black College Student Experience

The question that remains is: to what extent is this this idea of “Black Immigrant exceptionalism” acted upon in higher education spaces and does it play a significant role in the disproportionate representation of African and Caribbean immigrant students at elite higher

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<sup>18</sup> Chiles, Nick. “Ghanaian-American Accepted at All 8 Ivy League Schools.” *Atlanta Black Star*, Atlanta Black Star, 1 April 2014, [atlantaBlackstar.com/2014/04/01/kwasi-enin-ghanian-american-accepted-at-all-8-ivy-league-schools/](http://atlantaBlackstar.com/2014/04/01/kwasi-enin-ghanian-american-accepted-at-all-8-ivy-league-schools/).

education institutions? Waters' conversations with second generation immigrants also suggests that the idea of the "model Black minority" plays a significant role in how Black adolescents understand and convey their identities. Ideally, the independent research that will accompany this thesis (interviews with undergraduate Black students at UChicago) will attempt to account for whether this dynamic persists on the University campus and in what spaces it is most prevalent.

While studies confirm that the overrepresentation of Black Immigrants is higher in private versus public institutions and within more selective rather than less selective schools, the significance of these ethnic differences has shown to disappear upon matriculation. The National Longitudinal Survey of Freshman (NLSF) surveyed the cohort of freshmen entering 28 selective colleges and universities in the fall of 1999. They found that Black Immigrants constituted 29 percent of freshmen entering private institutions but only 23 percent of those enrolling in public schools. This dynamic was heightened within the Ivy League. Students of immigrant origin made up 41 percent of entering Black freshmen. There were few differences in the social economic backgrounds of Black Immigrant and Black American students across many indicators such as income, parental employment, and peer support. The most significant difference was that Black Immigrant fathers were significantly more likely to have graduated from college and to hold advanced degrees than the fathers of Black American students. Black Immigrants were also more likely to attend private school, have lower exposure to violence, and grow up in integrated neighborhoods.

In their study of the NLSF results, researchers from Princeton University and the University of Pennsylvania posit that that the similar indicators of Black Immigrants and Black Americans reframe common understandings of the overrepresentation of Black

Immigrants.<sup>19</sup>

They argue that it isn't that immigrant origins are necessarily favored in the admissions process; rather, children from immigrant families have come to exhibit the traits and characteristics that are valued by admissions committees. Interestingly enough, once on campus, Black Immigrant and Black American students earn comparable grades and display a similar performance gap relative to Whites. The relative advantages of Black Immigrant students are not converted into high grades and academic achievements in the ways one would expect. Essentially, the environmental factors that depress Black academic performance below that of Whites with similar backgrounds similarly impact Black Immigrant and Black American students on elite college campuses.

While interviews with Black American and Black Immigrant UChicago students will not yield information on academic performance, these conversations will provide insight into how students feel as members of the University community and more specifically, the Black student community at UChicago. In determining whether these students navigate the UChicago in similar or dissimilar ways it becomes possible to understand how (and whether) ethnicity influences student experience. More importantly, the extent to which UChicago policy should and can reflect this nuance.

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<sup>19</sup> Douglas S. Massey, Margarita Mooney, Kimberly C. Torres, and Camille Z. Charles, "Black Immigrants and Black Natives Attending Selective Colleges and Universities in the United States," *American Journal of Education* 113, no. 2 (February 2007): 243-271

## METHODOLOGY

A mixed-methods approach was used to address the research questions posed. In order to gain insight into how UChicago understands the experiences and needs of Black students I did an organizational analysis of UChicago diversity statements and resources. This organizational data was supplemented with interview and survey data. I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 31 Black-identifying undergraduate students at the University of Chicago.<sup>20</sup> Analysis of interview responses was supplemented with data from 38 survey responses.

### Organizational Analysis

The UChicago admissions office page as well as the University's diversity and inclusion page were the main sources of organizational analysis. These sources were selected in order to understand the way in which UChicago markets its interest in diversity and the ways in which it perceives itself as actualizing these values. Another point of analysis was a diversity initiative released in the fall of 2017, which was prompted by the results of the 2016 UChicago Campus Climate Survey. Content of the initiative is essential to identifying how the University translates students' critiques to policies and programs. Further, the initiative provides a gauge of whether these survey findings altered UChicago's understanding of their diversity goals and the methods by which these goals could be actualized.

Among other things this organizational analysis included identifying common language used in diversity resources as well as the student organizations and campus resources available to support Black students. Conducting an in-depth review of resources and the ways in which they are publicized provides insight into how the University understands the needs of "diverse"

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<sup>20</sup> See Appendix A for discussion of my position as researcher.

students.

In order to gauge the precedent for targeted resources for undergraduate Black students, a review of resources provided to Black students at similarly positioned universities was also conducted. Since UChicago competes with other top universities to attract the best and brightest applicants, the colleges selected for comparison were those ranked higher or similarly to the University. The U.S. College News National University rankings for 2018 was used to select the colleges used for comparison.<sup>21</sup> Colleges selected were: Princeton, Harvard, Yale, and Stanford. Northwestern was also selected because it is the second most selective private college in Illinois and possesses a similar national reputation to UChicago.

### Interview and Survey Analysis

Interview and survey participants were recruited by posting in UChicago Facebook groups including those affiliated with the Organization of Black Students (OBS), the African Caribbean Students Association (ACSA), and the UChicago class pages for first through fourth years in the colleges. I also posted flyers in the Center for Identity and Inclusion and Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture. Advertising interviews in a variety of campus locations was in an effort to create a sample equally representative of Black Immigrant and Black American students. Interviews were conducted in January, February, and March of 2018 in private rooms at an on-campus library. Compensation of \$12 was provided to each interview participant as incentive and in acknowledgement of the potential sensitivity of the subject matter. Funding for interview compensation was provided through the Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture as well as the University of Chicago Dean's Fund.

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<sup>21</sup> "The 10 Best Universities in America." U.S. News & World Report. 2018. <https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges/rankings/national-universities>.

Interviews were semi structured and included approximately 12 questions.<sup>22</sup> All participants are asked to sign a consent form before each interview. Interviews were recorded and quotes were transcribed in order to ensure accurate representation of participant thoughts. Responses were coded into a variety of different themes such as: perceptions of Black representation on campus and perceptions of targeted support to Black students. The main challenge of this methodology was gathering enough interviews to compare Black Immigrant students with Black American students.

In order to increase the sample size, data was also collected using a survey.<sup>23</sup> This survey was publicized in conjunction with interviews in order to account for students wishing to participate more anonymously. Survey participants interested in being compensated for an interview were able to opt in at the conclusion of the survey form. This ensured that their survey responses could be matched to their interviews, minimizing the risk of duplicate surveys. Interview participants who had yet to complete the survey were asked to do so following their interviews. Post-interview surveys were sent via email to track completion. The survey gathered general information on Black students as well as their perceptions of Black representation on campus. It covered a variety of basic demographic questions (ethnicity, socioeconomic status, family background) as well as participants' opinions on a variety of questions using a Likert scale. Participants were asked to select disagree, neutral, agree, and agree in response to questions about Black representation at the University of Chicago. The benefit of using both surveys and interviews is that the anonymity and convenience of surveys (compared with interviews) increases the likelihood of honest participation. Further, since the University does not publicly provide data on how University of Chicago students ethnically identify, this survey provides a

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<sup>22</sup> See Appendix B for interview questions.

<sup>23</sup> See Appendix C for survey questions.

way to gauge breakdowns within the Black undergraduate community. Surveys were not compensated and required less than 5 minutes to complete. Qualtrics was used to create and circulate the survey.

## DATA AND RESULTS

### Organizational Analysis

The University's statement on diversity, and the office of college admissions page on diversity are two central locations by which current and prospective members of the UChicago community can learn about how UChicago understands and creates diversity.<sup>24</sup> From these two pages, there are links to information on student organizations, programming, and other resources available to underrepresented students.

The University statement on diversity, signed by University president Robert J Zimmer, bases UChicago's interest in and dedication to diversity within UChicago's commitment to rigorous inquiry. Essentially, curating a university with diverse perspectives will yield the intellectually challenging environment that the University boasts. The statement also posits that this interest in diversity has spanned the entirety of the UChicago's existence. Among other things, the letter cites that the University has never denied women entry and that the first doctorate earned by a Black woman in the U.S. was awarded at the University in 1821. Further, the University contends that these efforts extend to the Chicago Southside community as a whole citing UChicago medical center and UChicago charter schools as evidence of UChicago's commitment to engaging with and bettering the Southside.

UChicago identifies a variety of main issue areas within its mission of diversity. These areas are highlighted by the sub-tabs on their diversity statement and include: Academics, Student Resources, Community (Chicago and specifically the Southside), Business Diversity, and

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<sup>24</sup> "Diversity and Inclusion." The University of Chicago. <https://diversity.uchicago.edu/>. "College Admissions." The University of Chicago. <https://collegeadmissions.uchicago.edu/studentlife/diversity>.

Workplace Diversity. For the purposes of this thesis, the main focus will be student resources since this thesis covers diversity and its relationship to student life.

The University college admissions page allows prospective students to learn more about diversity through their “student life tab.” The office quotes a 2003 initiative on minority issues report, which states that being willing to hear from diverse perspectives is essential to identifying potential unintended biases. Similar to the University statement on diversity, the admissions message is that they have always promoted and appreciated diversity because it is a prerequisite to an environment of rigorous inquiry. The office highlights their own multicultural student advisory committee, which is a group of student volunteers that work with the admissions office to promote diversity. Although the online information about the committee is not online, it is still active. There is also an attached “culture and community” brochure which profiles a few minority students speaking on their experiences at UChicago.

Both the Diversity and Inclusion and College Admissions Diversity pages include links to a variety of different offices on campus that serve the goals of diversity and inclusion. While they do include a number of offices that support student life generally and by default students of color, the only office dedicated to the academic and social success of minority students as its sole focus is the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs (OMSA).<sup>25</sup>

Vision:

The Office of Multicultural Student Affairs (OMSA) creates intentionally diverse and inclusive communities, serving as a bridge builder by engaging students and members of the University community of all backgrounds to ensure personal, academic, and professional growth and success.

On their website, OMSA acknowledges national and global events potentially impacting students and encourages students impacted by these issues to support each other and stay

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<sup>25</sup> The University of Chicago. “Office of Multicultural Student Affairs”. <http://omsa.uchicago.edu/>.

connected to OMSA and other similar offices. The offices linked on the website include: The Center for Identity and Inclusion (CII), Student Counseling Service, Office of Spiritual Life, Dean on-call, campus and student life.

Similar to the University's main page on diversity and inclusion, the OMSA vision includes a mention to the importance of diversity to a rigorous academic community. At the same time, OMSA addresses the necessity for supports to this "diverse" community and the power dynamics at play in terms of how diversity is actualized on campuses. Their vision identifies three main efforts:

1. OMSA amplifies the voices of and advocates for students of marginalized identity groups to enhance their student experience.
2. OMSA provides a space for members of the UChicago community to learn more about different backgrounds and strengthen their cultural sensitivity.
3. OMSA provides opportunities for the UChicago campus to engage in challenging conversations about issues of diversity and inclusion.

The OMSA page is the first University linked site that discusses UChicago's campus climate and its shortcomings. OMSA also includes a link to the University's 2016 Campus Climate Survey.<sup>26</sup> This reference to the climate survey is significant because the survey revealed a number of campus climate issues related to minority students. Black undergraduate students were one of the populations reporting the most difficulty navigating UChicago and dissatisfaction with the campus environment. Among the minority groups reporting high rates of discrimination were respondents identifying as two or more races/ethnicities (27%), and Black (25%). Among those who identified as Black, 68% of those who experienced discrimination and or harassment considered transferring or applying to another University, 38% considered dropping out or quitting, and 78% considered not recommending the University

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<sup>26</sup> The University of Chicago. 2016. "Spring 2016 Campus Climate Survey". <https://voices.uchicago.edu/climatesurvey/files/2016/09/UCM300717.ClimateSurveyReport.v4.111716-zl5tj8.pdf>

to a prospective member of the UChicago community. The 2016 climate survey results are not mentioned on any of the main University diversity websites.

In the fall of 2017 the University released their diversity initiative to members of the UChicago community.<sup>27</sup> This initiative was developed in conversation with a variety of University members and stakeholders in response to the 2016 campus climate survey results. The introductory statement from University president Robert J. Zimmer and provost Daniel Diermeier reiterate the University's belief in the intertwined nature of rigorous inquiry and diversity. This is the first instance in which the president and provost acknowledge mechanisms by which these values can be celebrated together. More importantly, this statement acknowledges shortcomings in the University's purported dedication to diversity and inclusion.

“This in turn demands actively confronting certain climate issues on campus that may impede inclusion. As a university community, taking such climate issues seriously and openly addressing them is critical for ensuring that all faculty, students, and staff are able to fully participate in open discourse on campus and thus fully benefit from and contribute to the deeply enriching and challenging academic environment characteristic of the University of Chicago.”

Methods and strategies for the 2017 initiative are outlined in a statement by Vice Provost Melissa Gilliam. These are scheduled to take place over the next two academic years (into 2020-2021) and were developed through campus conversations, meetings with individual and groups of students, and the recommendations of the University Advisory Council. There are four main strategies that will be executed over these two years:

1. Provide an infrastructure to support diversity and inclusion.
2. Foster a climate that is inclusive of all on campus.
3. Develop and support the people who comprise our University.
4. Engage in our community.

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<sup>27</sup> The University of Chicago. October 2017. “Diversity + Inclusion Initiative: Initial Activities”. <https://cpb-us-w2.wpmucdn.com/voices.uchicago.edu/dist/1/709/files/2017/10/PRO3211.18.Diversity-and-Inclusion-Plan.101617-FINAL-1naij4q.pdf>.

All aspects of this initiative implicate undergraduate Black students at UChicago. For the purposes of this thesis, which is primarily concerned with the entrance of and support of Black undergraduate students, analysis will be focused on the initiative's reference to on-campus student resources and admission. There are three umbrella categories these two areas fall under: infrastructure, inclusive climate, and people.

In reference to “diversity infrastructure” the initiative outlines a few strategies. First, all divisions, schools, departments, and administrative units will be supported in creating their own tailored diversity and inclusion plans. The Office of the Provost will support these efforts in by providing templates, toolkits, workshops, and consultation. Second, the University is committed to investing in the appointment of key diversity leaders. The two positions highlighted: a director for the Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture (CSRPC) and a director for the Center for Identity + Inclusion (CII). These two centers are important to the support of students of color, particularly Black students, and have struggled to get the necessary support they need to properly meet the needs of the students relying on them. The CII has not been fully staffed in over 4 years, and only recently hired an executive director after a 2-year vacancy.

The CSRPC, while an academic center, also serves to advocate for and meet the needs of Black students. In addition to housing the Comparative Race and Ethnic Studies major, which is the closest thing the University has to a Black or African American studies major, the CSRPC houses and is affiliated with faculty and graduate students of color who act as mentors to and advisors for Black students. The CSRPC also often holds dialogues and opens its community lounge to students of color. For example, in the spring of 2017 the CSRPC responded to a racist event on campus by opening its space to students who wanted to discuss the incident.

Third, the University commits to centralizing and better updating their diversity resources. This is a rather salient point because a significant number of the more specific University sites on

student resources and diversity efforts have outdated or inaccurate information. The OMSA website includes links to programming that no longer exists; some of the organization's supplementary sites have not been updated since 2014. Similarly, the University Diversity Advisory Council (made up of faculty members and students) page has not been updated since the last leadership message was posted in January of 2015.

In response to the climate survey's findings of the negative campus interactions experienced by minority students, the initiative proposes a variety of steps to fostering an inclusive climate. First, the University commits to providing the University community access to resources that will support "skills such as communicating, listening, and working in diverse groups" as well as inclusive teaching practices. Second, a small grants program is open to campus members with ideas on how to create a more inclusive and diverse campus. Third, working groups with key stakeholders will be assembled to discuss solutions to identified problems.

In their introduction of the diversity initiative the University confirms the importance of campus community diversity to inclusive environments as well as the idea that diversity fosters diversity. Meaning, if UChicago has minority students they will attract minority students. These two contentions are valid, particularly considering the climate survey's indication that an overwhelming number of Black students have considered not recommending the University to prospective students. Foreseeably, if UChicago had an inclusive climate, prospective Black students would be more likely to apply and accept admission because current students wouldn't dissuade them. Interestingly enough, in their sub-strategy section on "people" the University does not propose increased efforts to increase student diversity through admission. Rather, they focus on faculty and staff hire.

The only gesture to admission in this initiative is in reference to the UChicago "No Barriers" program, which the initiative identifies as an important part of efforts to fostering

diversity and inclusion.<sup>28</sup> While true that this program improves access to UChicago and benefits minority students, due to its focus on low-income students, the extent to which this program bolsters the inclusion of these students once arriving on campus is unclear.

Another interesting aspect of the initiatives discussion of “people” within and around the University community, which at times includes Chicago at large and more specifically the Southside of Chicago, is the omission of any efforts to admit more students from Chicago and the Chicago Southside. This is despite the extensive connection UChicago has to educating students living in the Southside, such as through the 4 University charter schools, the Urban Education Lab, and UChicago student-run tutoring programs. The University uses the phrases “investment”, “engagement”, and “transferral of resources and talents” in reference to its efforts to embrace its place on the Southside. And yet, these efforts do not include the most valuable resource UChicago has to offer, its college education program.

#### *UChicago and Other Top Institutions’ Targeted Resources for Black Students*

One of the University’s main points of pride is its status as a prestigious institution and its US news ranking as the third best university in the country.<sup>29</sup> As UChicago has climbed in ranking the undergraduate application pool has grown, causing the admissions rate to decrease. As UChicago competes with other top schools to attract the best and brightest students, particularly minority students, its student makeup, academic offerings, and diversity policies will be compared to other similarly ranked schools. The following page includes two tables highlighting the Black student populations at other highly ranked American universities and the Black-centered academic

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<sup>28</sup> University of Chicago, No Barriers Program. <https://nobarriers.uchicago.edu/>.

<sup>29</sup> College Rankings. 2017. U.S. News. <https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges/university-of-chicago-1774>.

offices and support centers they provide. Conceivably, Black prospective students applying to and being offered admission to UChicago would also gain admission to similarly ranked schools. Assuming their financial aid offerings are similar, Black students may evaluate schools' supportive services and racial makeup.

Compared to other top schools, UChicago lags in its enrollment of Black students. UChicago also has less institutionalized support for Black students. While there are only four schools in Figure 2 with spaces to Black student life, UChicago is the only University without either an academic or student life space dedicated to Black studies and the social support of Black students. The UChicago CSRPC and the Comparative Race and Ethnic Studies (CRES) major consider race and ethnicity broadly, encompassing a wide variety of identities. Other universities have similarly all-encompassing centers such as the Carl A. Fields Student Center at Princeton and the Macmillan Center at Yale but these more general spaces are not a substitute for resources specifically targeted to Black students.

**Figure 1:** Black undergraduate student representation at top American universities

University	Percentage of Black Students within the Undergraduate Population
Princeton College	8.0%
Harvard College	14.6%
<i>University of Chicago</i>	5.3%
Yale College	6.8%
Stanford College	6.0%
Northwestern College	10.0%

**Figure 2:** Institutional resources for Black undergraduate students at top American universities

University	Targeted Resources to Black Undergraduate Students
Princeton College	African American Studies Department Carl A. Fields Center for Equality + Cultural Understanding
Harvard College	African and African American Studies Department Center for African Studies
<i>University of Chicago</i>	<i>Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture</i> <i>(Comparative Race and Ethnic Studies Major)</i> <i>Center for Identity + Inclusion (Office of Multicultural Student Affairs)</i>
Yale College	Macmillan Center; Council on African Studies Department of African American Studies Afro-American Cultural Center
Stanford College	African & American Studies Department Black Community Services Center Black Dorm
Northwestern University	Department of African American Studies Program of African Studies Multicultural Center The Black House

## Interview and Survey Analysis

Thirty-One Black students were interviewed for this thesis project, which is approximately 10% of the undergraduate Black student population at the University of Chicago. Of the participants, 18 (58%) were Black Immigrant students and 13 (42%) were Black American students. Among the Black Immigrant participants, 61% were of African origin, 28% were of Caribbean heritage and 11% had both African and Caribbean heritage. Women were 61% of interview participants, which is an accurate representation of the gender distribution within the Black undergraduate student population.

Survey data was used to supplement analysis of interview responses. There were 38 survey responses. The tables below provide additional descriptive information about respondents. Unlike interview participation, there was equal representation of Black Immigrant and Black American students among survey respondents (each represented 50% of participants). Within the Black Immigrant respondents, only 4 (22%) were first generation immigrants. Similar to interview participants, the majority of survey respondents identified as women.

Demographics of Survey Respondents	
<i>Ethnic Background of Black Immigrant Respondents</i>	
African	13 (68%)
Caribbean	4 (21%)
African and Caribbean	2 (11%)
<i>Gender</i>	
Male	14 (37%)
Female	24 (63%)

In general, interview participants described their experience at UChicago as marginalized. The way in which they characterized this experience was in relation to different actors within the University of Chicago community. These actors include: the Black student community, Black student organizations, White students and the predominantly White, non-Black UChicago campus community, and the UChicago administration (including faculty and staff). Black students' perceptions of the influence of these actors on their experiences at UChicago are complex with some Black students feeling primarily positively toward certain actors and primarily negatively towards others.

### The Black Undergraduate Student Community at UChicago

While Black students primarily described the Black community as a source of support and a unifying force, they also reported instances in which the Black community could marginalize individual Black students.

#### *The Black Student Community as Unifying*

In response to the question “how would you describe the Black community at UChicago” interview participants used similar descriptors: “tight knit”, “small”, “fluid.” Students noted that though the community is small, Black students are able to turn to each other for support due to their shared experiences of discomfort on campus.

“Our struggles with the financial aid office, the feeling of being the only Black student in your classes, having to explain cultural nuances to your White peers...those experiences we can all relate to.”

Interview respondents cited these struggles as uniting Black students. Students noted that negative interactions regarding race with non-Black students pushed them to form strong friendships with individual Black students. One student commented that the necessity of these supportive relationships coupled with the small size of the Black student resulted in unlikely

friendships being forged.

“[The Black community] as a whole is pretty small. Because of this close-knit community people are forced into a lot of relations with people who have the same background as them even if they are not as close originally.”

The importance of community and solidarity was stressed by participants through discussions of the comfort they received from participation in Black-affinity student groups and friendships with Black students.

The significance of the Black community was described by Black students in reactionary terms. Due to the proportionally small number of Black students on campus the respondents' negative experiences in the UChicago environment heightened existing feelings of marginalization on campus. Black-affinity student groups and an individual's tie to the Black community became important points of support that existed in contrast and at times in opposition to the broader UChicago environment.

Interview participants identified Black student groups as providing the greatest support for Black students (as compared to University programming). Participants contrasted the support and resources coming from the Black students to the lack of support they felt from other UChicago actors. All interview participants identified Black student run organizations as the greatest point of targeted support on campus. One Black American participant stated:

“The majority of resources [for Black students] have been through student organizations and the ones I have found that haven't been student organizations I have found through other students. List hosts are helpful too but that is not done by the school.”

Participants acknowledged that Black student groups improved their experience as Black students. However, the support these organizations did was contrasted against the perceived ambivalence of other actors at UChicago.

“There's ACSA/OBS and they try to make the environment better for Black students on campus but at the same time I don't think it's necessarily their job. UChicago, should have a part in that.”

Since the actors identified as providing the greatest support to Black students (which happen to be other Black students) are perceived as undependable, there is an air of anxiety regarding their ability to fulfill the needs of the Black student community. The importance of these Black student groups is largely due to necessity, but Black students largely reflected that these groups are not enough.

### *The Black Student Community as Isolating*

Students commented that relying on student organizations to provide support results in certain cohorts of students experiencing better support than others. The vibrancy and impact of student organizations are highly dependent on the students leading and participating in them. Fourth year interview participants affirmed the cyclical nature of this supportive network; they noted that their first-year experiences with ACSA and OBS contrasted widely from those of current first years in the college. One fourth year student explained that since their first year, ACSA and OBS had become more organized, collaborative and welcoming.

Despite describing these groups as welcoming and sources of support, students also reported that the Black community can be isolating and uncomfortable for some Black students. Two of the fourth-year students interviewed specifically referenced feeling unwelcome at OBS and ACSA events during their first year, but more welcome in their third and fourth years. Feeling welcome or unwelcome was often related to ethnic background. One student provided an example of an experience at ACSA where they felt unsure of their participation:

“It’s easier to feel comfortable in OBS than ACSA just from my personal experience...I felt like I was in this cultural gray area. I remember going to this ACSA event where someone was talking about how if you were not full African or Caribbean he wouldn’t marry you...and that lead to a lot of personal conflict. I think OBS...as long as you’re a person of color it’s easy to feel comfortable.”

While participants did identify the Black community as a point of support, it could also

operate in ways to make individual Black students feel isolated or unsure of their positionality within the Black community. Ethnic background was one factor identified as creating feelings of isolation; for Black American students interviewed, this was particularly true.

Black Immigrant and Black American survey participants perceived the breakdown of these two student groups similarly (thus this table does not differentiate respondents based on their background).

Survey Responses: <i>“There is relatively equal representation of Black Immigrant (first and second-generation immigrants from Africa, the Caribbean, etc.) and Black American students at UChicago.”</i>	
Agree	4 (11%)
Neutral	13 (34%)
Disagree	19 (50%)
Not available	2 (5%)

25 (81% of) interview participants identified Black Immigrant students as more highly represented on campus than Black American students. The breakdown was quantified in a variety of ways: as 60 to 40 and 70 to 30 Black Immigrant to Black American students. Three interview participants perceived Black Americans as being more represented than Black Immigrant, two felt they were equally represented, and one participant chose not to comment on the breakdown. One Black American student explained the tension they felt surrounded by Black Immigrant students:

“You look around and you realize you are a minority within a minority--outnumbered 3 to 1. If OBS didn’t exist and there was only ACSA, I don’t feel there would be a place I could exist.”

While the Black American students interviewed did not resent the presence of Black Immigrant students, five of the eleven Black American students interviewed felt that the disproportionate numbers could heighten feelings of isolation. Isolation was described

in two main ways. First, as a product of the small number of Black students on campus. Second, as a result of ethnic background and limited cultural touch points by which to connect with other Black students. Discussions of student participation in OBS and ACSA provided a particularly rich space in which to discuss this reality.

At UChicago, OBS and ACSA are organizations on campus targeted toward Black-identifying students. The basic mission of these two organizations is to support these students and their cultures. In their survey and interview responses students predominantly cited involvement with these two organizations and the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs (OMSA). A small number of students cited involvement with the Organization of Latin American Students (OLAS).

Events and gatherings organized by OBS and ACSA range from strictly social study breaks and group outings to guest lectures and small group discussions. During the 2017-2018 school year both these groups hosted small group discussions. OBS held a variety, one of which was on misogyny in the Black community. In the winter, ACSA hosted a discussion on historical trauma and its impact on the African Diaspora; the conversation focused on the experiences of Black Immigrants (specifically African immigrants). The distinction between social and specifically cultural events is important to understanding when and why students feel discomfort or isolation.

When participants were asked if Black American and Black Immigrant students were equally comfortable in both organizations, responses were varied. All students who had attended OBS and ACSA events in the past said they felt welcome at both, but three of the eleven Black American students interviewed felt less comfortable at ACSA events. All Black American students recognized that Black American students could feel less comfortable at ACSA than at OBS whereas Black Immigrants could feel comfortable in both. Two students felt they could not

comment on differences between the two organizations because they had not interacted with them. Black Immigrants were more likely to perceive both organizations as equally accessible to Black students.

One Black American student noted that while she was not actively uncomfortable with attending events at ACSA, she would not actively seek out the space for herself. When asked:

“Are you as comfortable attending ACSA events as OBS events?” She responded:

“Not particularly, I just don’t know much about that racial demographic, it doesn’t make me uncomfortable...I don’t feel alienated...I might go with a friend...but I don’t know if I would be the first person to go.”

One student explained this phenomenon by saying that it is easier for Black Immigrants to “double dip” since they belong within the broader UChicago Black community but also have their own specific ties to countries in Africa and the Caribbean. On his own comfort participating in these spaces he noted:

“It can feel hard because you don’t know when you are intruding in other people’s space...of course I can go because I’m African American but it’s also a question of what do I do...what do I do with a space that is welcoming to me but not necessarily for me.”

Other Black American students echoed this sentiment, it was not a point of resentment, simply a matter of fact. This, even slight, discomfort in spaces created by ACSA was described as a combination of not having the same cultural touch points and also grappling with the ways in which they could participate. One student highlighted this point by commenting that they participated in ACSA events to “support” the organization but that they did not feel ownership over the space created by ACSA.

One student with past involvement in the cultural organizations acknowledged the somewhat uneven movement of people between the two groups and attributed it to the nature of ACSA as a cultural organization.

“It’s innate within the club...not a lot of Black Americans would call themselves African or

Caribbean but Black Immigrants would call themselves Black.”

Another interview participant echoed this sentiment, explaining that since they occupied a cultural gray area (one of their parents was a second-generation Caribbean immigrant), OBS often felt like a more comfortable place in which to participate.

“It’s often overlooked how ACSA could help facilitate students exploring cultures that they didn’t necessarily grow up completely immersed in but that are still a part of their heritage and they would want to learn more about--not that they want to appropriate those cultures...I feel like currently that isn’t the ACSA mentality which I think leads to skepticism of people wondering if they can participate.”

Ultimately, the concerns of interview participants regarding the scopes of both organizations is a product of the environment in which these organizations exist. At the University of Chicago, the only resources geared to Black students are two student-run organizations led by 13-person student boards. References made by fourth year students to years when ACSA geared itself almost exclusively to students with direct immigrant backgrounds are indicative of this point. The work and impact of student organizations are destined to fluctuate because they are most likely to reflect the experiences and interests of those running them.

### White Students and the Broader UChicago Community

While ethnic background had a demonstrated influence over the role of Black student organizations and participation in these organizations, its relevance to other aspects of the UChicago experience appeared complex and at times contrary. Suggesting that Black students understood their experiences differently when discussing their experiences in relation to the University’s broader White and non-Black community.

Regarding the relevance of ethnic background, two Black American students perceived Black Immigrant students as being more accepted into the campus community. This was explained using dynamics they identified on campus and within the broader American society.

All participants referenced common stereotypes of African parents as being strict and hyper- focused on academic success as contributing to society and the campus’ perception that Black Immigrant students are well suited to excel at UChicago environment. While the majority of survey respondents agreed that ethnic background impacts Black students’ experiences, Black American respondents have a greater consensus on the issue and agreed with the statement at higher numbers than Black Immigrant respondents. This was reflected in student interviews as well.

Survey Responses: <i>“Ethnic background impacts the way Black students are perceived and treated at the University of Chicago” mirrored the interview responses to questions of ethnic background.</i>			
	Black Immigrant	Black American	Total
Agree	9	14	23 (61%)
Neutral	4	2	6 ( 16%)
Disagree	5	3	8 (21%)
NA	1	1	2 ( 5%)

Those who perceived ethnic background as relevant to the perception and treatment of Black students attributed this to societal perception of Black Immigrants as high achieving and the “model Black minority.” One Black Immigrant student noted:

“There’s a certain amount of privilege that comes from having a quote ‘exotic’ name compared to an American name when you’re applying for jobs...I’ve definitely heard of people when they see a Johnson name compared to an Illou name being discriminated against... [there are] all these negative stereotypes that come with being a Black American...whereas there’s this African exceptionalism like the model minority myth that continues on.”

Black Immigrant students pointed out that this idea of exceptionalism can be attributed to the intense filtering process by which Black Immigrants arrive in the United States. Students referenced African exceptionalism specifically.

“Africans are the fastest growing student population and look at the [African immigrant] professional population, and that’s more the result of being an immigrant. Let’s say we are talking about Nigeria...the people who have made it to America are the one percent of one percent of people. It’s not like everyone in Nigeria is succeeding at that level. There’s this filtering of people, the immigration process is not simple.”

Students theorized that these stereotypes influence how educational professionals understand the potential of Black students. One participant noticed the impact of these stereotypes on the treatment of Black students at her high school.

“In high school, it was always pretty clear—the Black Immigrant versus Black American—in a lot of cases Black American students were not given a lot of attention—Black African students especially those interested in STEM...teachers would put their whole weight behind”

While most students identified the existence of stereotypes of Black Immigrants and Black Americans, their contact with these stereotypes differed based on the contexts in which they grew up. Three of the eleven Black American students interviewed commented that prior to attending the University they had very limited contact with Black Immigrants whereas other Black American students who grew up around Black Immigrants were more aware of the tensions between the two groups. Black Immigrant students often discussed the dynamic by highlighting the ways in which Black Immigrants (particularly older immigrants) buy into negative stereotypes of Black Americans. Since the majority of Black Immigrants interviewed were second generation or had spent the majority of their lives in the United States, they identified as Black and American themselves.

One Black Immigrant student pointed out that while older Black Immigrants (their parents’ generation) differentiated themselves from Black Americans, younger Black Immigrants who had spent the majority of their lives in America did not. Other participants expressed similar sentiments and attributed the dynamic to having spent the majority of their lives in the United States. In addition to being immersed in American culture, students also referenced their

experiences of racialization growing up, of being Ethiopian or Nigerian at home, but Black at school. This tendency of Black Immigrant students to find themselves as operating within both immigrant and American communities could be attributed to why Black Immigrants were less likely than Black Americans to perceive ethnic background as impacting their treatment on campus.

### *White Students' Influence over Black Students' Experiences and Performances of Blackness*

While students did have thoughts on how ethnic background could impact the broader UChicago community's perceptions of different Black students, all agreed that it held more significance within the Black community. When asked if the broader UChicago differentiated Black students based on their ethnic background all interview participants said they did not. (There were exceptions to this, such as first generation Black Immigrant students with accents). And yet, similar to the discussions of why ethnic background could hold significance, interview participants described their understandings and experiences of Blackness in relation to White students. An important note is that in these discussions of how Black students are treated by and within the "broader UChicago community", the phrase "broader UChicago community" was synonymous with White students, White faculty, and White administration.

One Black Immigrant student stated: "We are identified first as Black and we are treated as such."

A Black American student agreed: "Outside of our [the Black] community...White people don't care like 'oh you're Nigerian...no you're just Black...and you are treated as such.'"

All interview participants agreed that the main determinant of how a Black student is perceived or treated is the way in which that student "performs" their Blackness. This was considered relevant both within the Black community and the broader campus community. Students noted that this performance was more relevant than ethnicity in regards to how the majority population of the UChicago community (namely White students and professors)

perceives Black students.

“I don’t think that a lot of White people can tell the difference between types of Blackness and the ways that people show Blackness, but once you speak or act or do particular things that have stereotypical ties to Blackness that’s how people differentiate between the Blackness that they feel safe with and the Blackness that they don’t feel safe with.”

Students used a variety of different ways to describe performativity in terms of how Black students navigate social and academic life in majority White environments. Phrases to describe performances of Blackness most accepted by the majority populations of UChicago included “palatable”, “comfortable”, and “less urban” Blackness. Students attributed Black students’ abilities to conform as being related to the environments in which they grew up. Often, this was coded with references to socioeconomic status and place of residence. Students of a higher socioeconomic status who lived in predominantly White neighborhoods or students who attended schools with predominantly White students were perceived to be more used to navigating predominantly White spaces and being accepted by these spaces.

One student felt that the idea of “palatable” Blackness relates to whether a Black student is perceived to fit into UChicago’s campus culture and UChicago student archetype.

“I think that here [UChicago], we are always being looked at to see if we actually belong here so I feel like the Black people who more easily or more accurately represent what a UChicago student is--they have an easier time here. I mean obviously we all belong here—but a person who is a bit louder or a little rough around the edges...there is definitely a difference. Don’t make too much noise—literally and figuratively. When you’re talking, but also don’t cause controversy, don’t challenge the ideas that this university seems to love.”

Deviating from this campus culture was tied to superficial characteristics such as speech and dress as well as the ways in which Black students positioned themselves in relation to the campus community and University as an institution. Positionality concerned the extent to which Black students politicized their presence on campus and criticized the University’s actions or values. Interestingly enough, the latter descriptors of a student’s performance of Blackness were

considered far more important to how the Black student community perceives its members.

“[An acceptable performance of Blackness] is characterized by this need to constantly express your Blackness in a way that is immediately recognizable.”

28 (90%) of the Black students interviewed identified with the idea that identity performance was a main factor determining student acceptance into the Black community. References to “recognizable” Blackness often related to calling out problematic behaviors in peers, being vocal about issues facing Black people in America, and maintaining close proximity to Black students and the Black community.

While some interview participants said their personal perceptions of individual Black students were not affected by those students’ actions and associations, 20 (65% of) participants referenced a variety of signs that impacted their perceptions of students whom they did not know. Indicators included not associating with any Black students and identifying as conservative on social issues impacting Black Americans. The most commonly cited indicator was participating in Greek life. Students specifically referenced the fraternity culture at UChicago and cited race-related incidents in the last four years. One example was a construction themed Cinco de Mayo party thrown by a campus fraternity; students on campus, particularly students of color were upset by the party’s insensitivity to the Latino community.<sup>30</sup>

“I’ve seen Black kids who are in frats and I’m like...did you not get the memo that was circulated to the rest of us? They perform it [their Blackness] in a way that’s not threatening to White students and so the White students around them don’t have to think about their role in the systems that impact their Black friend.”

One interview participant involved in Greek Life commented on this dynamic, noting that most of the Black students they knew in Greek life were raised in predominantly upper middle

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<sup>30</sup> Abbass, Jorge Ernesto Clavo. May 10, 2017. “FIJI Responds to Allegations of Racism at Construction-themed Party.” The Chicago Maroon. <https://www.chicagomaroon.com/article/2017/5/10/fiji-responds-allegations-racism-construction-them/>.

class White areas. They felt that this was likely why these students were able to perform their Blackness in a way that White students felt comfortable with, but that this meant being alienated from the Black student community.

“Black students in Greek life tend to come from upper middle class White areas. When you come here you are more attune to interacting with upper middle class White students. So, you’re not going to be performing your Blackness in the same way thus you’re not going to mesh well with the cultural organizations. I get it [the tension Black students feel about Black students participating in Greek life], I understand where they are coming from, but it kind of sucks.”

Social media was referenced in a number of interviews as a location for determinations of appropriate performances of Blackness. Facebook is used by a large number of UChicago undergraduates; a variety of public groups and pages exist where students can share content related to the UChicago student experience. One such page is “UChicago Secrets”, which posts anonymously submitted content. These pages and groups garner a great deal of traffic, with many users liking and commenting on the posts of others. The visibility of individual activity on these forums has transformed Facebook into a space where students can gauge the social and political opinions of their peers.

Backlash regarding the aforementioned party in the spring of 2017 resulted in a number of memes being posted and circulated shaming the fraternity for its actions. There were also a number of submissions made to UChicago Secrets questioning the outrage of students of color to the fraternity’s actions. One submission specifically referred to Black students and loosely read “if Black students hate this school so much, why do they come here”; this resulted in Black students voicing their frustrations in the comments of this and similar posts. One Black student, a member of the fraternity responsible for the party, wrote a comment in defense of the fraternity that chided Black students for their responses. The backlash resulting from this comment resulted in the

alienation of the Black student who defended the fraternity's actions and also implicated other Black students involved in Greek life as sharing the same sentiments.

And yet, other Black students who referenced this incident and its implications for Black students involved in Greek life mentioned their discomfort with "policing" other students' Blackness.

"People perceive you as less Black [if you're a part of Greek life] which I think is a problem. I think Black people should be able to freely be diverse in the mind as well. I think having Black republicans is great because I think they should be able to believe different ideas even if I think they're wrong. I think Black people should be allowed to be wrong [just like] other groups."

Discussions of this "policing" of Blackness were often interconnected with the fact that the Black student population is small. Despite slight increases in recent years, Black students still account for less than 6% of the undergraduate student population. The size of this community makes each individual Black student and their actions hyper-visible to other Black students. This is particularly true in periods where controversial incidents occur on or off campus (such as the construction party).

Interview participants often couched their identification of Black students performing their Blackness in "unacceptable" ways with reference to how these students engaged with controversial campus events and associations. During these instances, when the Black student community looks within itself for support and validation, students perceived as deviating from the collective consciousness of Black students are most likely to be identified. Foundationally, these conversations of acceptable and unacceptable performances of Blackness focused largely on how Black students engage in solidarity with other Black students and the Black community.

Performances of solidarity are seen as indications of support for Black students as well as an indicator of an individual's celebration of Blackness itself.

“The main thing [about ‘acceptable’ performances of Blackness] is identity or pride. If you’re Black and you can scream it at the top of your lungs and say you’re proud--you’re accepted more. If you have some belief about what it means to be Black as opposed to I’m Black and that’s just the way it is.”

The tone by which Black interview participants discussed their experiences at UChicago demonstrated an almost constant state of discomfort and the way in which students navigate this discomfort is through building relationships with and receiving support from others with shared experiences. For many of the Black students interviewed it appeared that at a predominantly White institution like UChicago, being uncomfortable is inherent to the Black experience. Perhaps it is because of this that Black students are suspicious of those who appear comfortable enough to not seek close proximity to other individual Black students or the Black student community as a whole.

#### University of Chicago College Administration

##### *UChicago Administration as Antagonistic to Black Students*

The constant discomfort that Black students identified feeling on campus was in large part attributed to their perceptions of the University administration as ambivalent to their existence and experiences on campus. Interview participants’ discussions and critiques of Black undergraduate representation highlighted this. Overall, when discussing the University administration, Black students felt their relationship to be negative and even antagonistic.

Survey Responses: <i>“Black students are well represented among the undergraduate student population”</i>	
Agree	0 (0%)
Neutral	3 (8%)
Disagree	33 (87%)
Not available	2 (5%)

As reflected by survey responses, all interview participants considered Black students an underrepresented population at the University. Participants referenced this underrepresentation in a variety of different ways: student population, Black faculty and staff, as well as University investments. For the students interviewed, numerical representation, even if it existed, would not be enough. Rather, students want to see themselves in their campus environment, not only in their peers but also in their coursework and teachers.

“In certain ways, Black students are represented...they are represented in a very tokenized way...many times Black faces are put on boards...that don’t actually represent Black people...they are just there to show ‘hey we have diversity and representation’ so in certain ways Black bodies are represented, but Black interests are not.”

The idea of the token Black student was a constant theme in interviews. Students noted that the University’s marketing and discussion of diversity often neglects to discuss the difficult experiences of the students who are “diversifying” the campus. One student explained this disconnect between the facts used by the University to highlight diversity and the stories behind them.

“What gets to me the most is that this University parades around its Black students but they don’t like to acknowledge the type of bullshit these students have to go through on campus from students and from administrators. It’s one thing to say [UChicago] gave the first PhD to a Black woman but it’s another [to pretend] she was supported by the administration or the students here. If you’re going to really look at her story it’s not going to paint the university in a good light.”

All participants voiced similar sentiments regarding their impression of University administration; one student expressed that “Black students may survive at UChicago, but they do not thrive”. Black students felt that the University administration is unwilling to engage with or address the negative experiences of Black students in the absence of intense pressure. One example provided was the 2016 campus climate survey, which was initiated following months of intense advocacy by students of color. Interview participants who referenced the campus climate survey noted that even with concrete data regarding the uniquely negative experiences of Black students, Black students were still struggling to receive targeted resources.

*UChicago Administration, Black Students, and the Black non-UChicago Community*

Black students viewed their relationship with UChicago admin as parallel to UChicago’s relationship with Black people outside the UChicago community and identified UChicago as being ambivalent and antagonistic to both. Students’ thoughts on the Cornell BSU recommendation highlighted this dynamic.

At the conclusion of each interview, participants were read the Cornell BSU demand and asked about their thoughts on the recommendation as well as its relevance to the University of Chicago. In response to the recommendation, all interview participants agreed that UChicago should increase the Black American population. Survey responses showed similar results:

Survey Responses: <i>“UChicago should work to increase the number of underrepresented Black students at UChicago (as suggested by the Cornell BSU)”.</i>	
Agree	27 (71%)
Neutral	6 (16%)
Disagree	3 (8%)
Not available	2 (5%)

Three interview participants expressed concerns over the wording of the recommendation; specifically, its reference to Black American students being most impacted by “White supremacy and American slavery”. One Black Immigrant student elaborated:

“I think it’s problematic towards the end...it’s a very American mindset to think that racism and all these institutions only affect Americans...Black people everywhere, all around the world, experienced White supremacy. The scars of slavery and imperialism are felt even in Nigeria even in Kenya.

There was also concern regarding the potential divisiveness of the issue (both within and outside of the Black community) as well as the complications of implementing policy inspired by the recommendation. Among other things students commented on the lack of data regarding the ethnic breakdown of Black students at UChicago as well as the difficulty of determining at which generational point students with more immediate immigrant backgrounds would be considered Black American. Multiracial students would complicate these determinations as well. Further, there was some concern that the experiences and struggles of Black Immigrant students would be erased by this focus on Black American students.

Outside of these types of criticisms, every interview participant agreed that the recommendation was valid insofar as all students should feel represented on their campuses. Students also agreed with the Cornell BSU’s assumption that while the experiences of Black American and Black Immigrant students may be similar, they are not the same and should not be treated as such. Ultimately, participants agreed that schools like UChicago should at a minimum do the work to understand if and why their Black undergraduate student populations are skewed toward Black Immigrant students.

Of respondents agreeing with the statement, 15 (48%) cited increased efforts to recruit students from the Southside of Chicago as a way to increase the representation of Black American students at UChicago. One student noted that a large number of the Black students at UChicago

hail from places outside Chicago, despite the fact that schools in urban areas often draw heavily from the students in the school's state and surrounding communities. When asked whether this dynamic implicates the Cornell BSU recommendation as applicable to UChicago the student responded:

"It almost feels like it is more applicable here."

Another student commented that "UChicago imports its Black students", arguing that a large number of the Black students they knew on campus were from outside of Chicago despite the demographics of the city and the Southside. Various students recalled their surprise upon arriving at UChicago to find that the majority of Black students were not from the Southside. A Black American student who tutors students in different Southside communities argued that this dynamic is problematic considering UChicago's efforts to market itself as a member of and contributor to the Southside community.

"A lot of kids don't even know about UChicago. When I was doing Bound and I went to Bronzeville...those kids don't know about UChicago, and its #3 in the country. If they know about it it's not one of their goals, it's not an option. UChicago is like 'yeah, we're such a part of Chicago, a part of the Southside' but no they're not...the most those kids can benefit from UChicago is their parents getting a job here."

Students' frustrations with the small Black student population, specifically the low population of Black Americans, were often explained in reference to the public image UChicago projects and the way it markets itself to prospective students. The majority of visible Black people on UChicago's campus are not students or members of the school's faculty but rather school shuttle drivers, dining and residence hall staff, and the security guards stationed around campus. While UChicago does employ members of the Southside, its willingness to facilitate the education of members of the Southside is far less visible. The types of community engagement that UChicago is comfortable with—the establishment of 4 charter schools, public art projects, and employment of residents—is limited. Interview participants whose families lived in Chicago

or the Southside as well as those who actively participated in Southside tutoring programs were particularly critical of the invisibility of UChicago as a viable option for Southside students.

A Black American student who grew up on the Southside noted that when applying to college, UChicago was never advertised as an option. Another student also hailing from the Southside reiterated this, pointing out that UChicago's own charter school, which is 3 blocks away from the school campus, has only sent 3 students to the University in the 8 years that it has been open. Students contrasted recruitment of students from Southside schools with the University's intense recruitment of students from Chicago high schools in the North part of the city such as Whitney Young and Northside Prep. One student hypothesized that they knew 10 Black students from Chicago proper, but less than 5 from the Southside specifically. Interview participants who were asked about the number of Black students they knew who were from the Southside often repeated the same names.

A number of students framed their support for the Cornell recommendation similarly, by focusing on access to resources and the visibility of UChicago as an option for Black students in Chicago and more specifically, low income students. The question of why Southside students are not visible at the University of Chicago is not one that can be answered by this thesis.

Nonetheless, the tendency of interview participants to bring up UChicago's relationship to the Southside in their discussions of Black representation on campus gestures to two important things. First, Black students' frustrations with perceived disconnects between the purported values and initiatives of UChicago and the reality of the University's policies and practices.

Second, that how UChicago interacts with and treats Black people, even if they are not on campus or affiliated with the university, affects Black undergraduate students that are on campus. Meaning, Black students are cognizant of how race functions to create exclusion both on and off

UChicago's campus, which only furthers their perception of UChicago administration as being fundamentally at odds with Black students and their needs.

*UChicago Administrators as Supportive and Independent*

At the same time that participants referenced "UChicago" or "UChicago administration" in these ways that placed them as inherently in contradiction to the support or benefit of Black students, they also spoke highly of individual staff and faculty that they identified as working on behalf of Black students. Interview participants would discuss and situate these staff and faculty as if they were outside of and separate from the UChicago administration, but these offices and centers are themselves fundamentally a part of UChicago administration. Many Black students describe UChicago administrators as inherently in opposition to Black interests. Consequently, those working with and in favor of Black students are perceived as operating outside of UChicago in the same way Black students themselves feel they operate outside UChicago.

Students cited the Center for Identity and Inclusion and the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs as the main institutional supports available to Black students. While students were appreciative of the CII space and its staff, they explained that the minimal staff and high turnover make it difficult for Black students to sustainably utilize available resources. Further, since the center's resources exist for the general minority student population, participants referenced competing with other racial minority student groups for the CII's funding and space.

A less common resource cited was the Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture (CSRPC), which has also offered itself up as a space for supporting minority students despite its formal role as an academic center.

"Whenever there's some big event like [for example] Ferguson or Charlottesville, they always have a meet and greet with snacks and say 'come, vent your frustrations'. They seem to enjoy taking on that supportive role. I appreciate that they try to create community and a self-care space."

Outside of their participation in student groups, the resources that Black students accessed to navigate their UChicago experience were often related to aspects of their experience unrelated to race—their academic pursuits, and their status as first generation or low-income students.

Students explained that there were few targeted resources to Black students, and that the more comprehensive supports utilized by Black students were those that were targeted toward their low-income status, not their race. These supports include the Center for College Student Success (CCSS) as well as programming through the Questbridge scholarship and Odyssey Scholarship. Approximately half of survey respondents (19) identified themselves as Odyssey Scholars—8 Black Immigrant respondents and 11 Black American respondents.<sup>31</sup> Students involved with these offices noted that they could at times operate as Black-affinity spaces since many of the people utilizing the offices resources are Black students and students of color more broadly.

Students used a variety of anecdotes to express their appreciation for the CII, OMSA, and the CCSS pointing both to the physical resources provided to them (the emergency fund, free printing, access to meeting space), as well as the support and accessibility of the administrators that work at these centers. While not all students referenced personal relationships with CII and CCSS staff, all referenced these administrators in positive ways and identified them as actively working to better the experiences of Black students.

Student argued that if UChicago demonstrated a stronger interest in increasing support for Black students, they would be able to attract and retain more students. While true that UChicago

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<sup>31</sup> Odyssey scholarship recipients are low income students whose families have incomes under \$90,000. Recipients are entitled to free health insurance, a funded internship after their first year in the college, access to scholarship money for studying abroad, and supportive programming to connect with other Odyssey scholars.

has clearly been able to enroll and retain a number of Black students, interview participants noted that this was not because students are excited to attend. Eleven (35% of) interview participants stated that they attended UChicago because of the financial aid package they received and stated that of the Black students they knew on campus, very few attended because it was their first-choice school. One student specifically referenced choosing UChicago over the University of Pennsylvania for financial reasons, despite preferring UPenn. They mentioned visiting the campus and being attracted to the school's (comparatively) larger Black student body, its Black cultural house, and the availability of Black studies options. Black student support services at UPenn and Stanford were referenced by three other interview participants as potential models for UChicago.

## DISCUSSION

Student interview and survey responses raised a wide variety of themes regarding the Black undergraduate experience at UChicago. At their core, these themes demonstrated that Black undergraduate students (as expressed by interview participants) feel underrepresented, under supported and that the nuances of their experience are unrecognized. By definition, Black students are a part of the UChicago campus community, but in their interviews participants separated themselves and other Black students from “UChicago” and “UChicago administration”. Similarly, while staff at supportive offices such as the CII and CCSS are by definition included in the vague “UChicago administration”, it was evident in interviews that students did not consider them to be. The tendency of participants to separate Black students and those supporting Black students from the “UChicago community” demonstrates that these students felt themselves and their best interests to be inherently at odds with UChicago. This also lends itself to interview participants’ hyper awareness of the University’s relationship to the predominantly Black Southside of Chicago, as well as the connections drawn between that relationship and UChicago’s relationship to Black students.

Within UChicago’s Black student community ethnic background fails, to some extent, as a point of rigorous analysis. This is because Black students described their navigation of UChicago as more intensely related to White students and the nature of UChicago as a predominantly White university. The small size of the Black community appeared to result in students chiefly concerning themselves with creating a strong support system focused on a shared experience of Blackness. Individual Black students’ acceptance and role within the black community was also discussed in relation to White students and the broader White, non-Black

UChicago community through descriptions of acceptable and unacceptable performances of Blackness.

In spite of this, ethnic background still had a demonstrated importance to interview participants. Particularly for the Black American participants who perceived Black Immigrants being more represented, ethnic background is a factor that they both notice and are affected by. This was most clearly highlighted by the discussion of OBS, ACSA, and the manner by which the two student groups function. The nuance with which Black students expressed experiencing their Blackness at UChicago was not always captured by Black student organizations or the greater college. Perhaps if there were more Black students it would be possible to create a wider range of student organizations. Or perhaps if the University of Chicago provided more representation of Black students and people through their academic and supportive offerings, there would be more space for Black students to see themselves in the campus environment.

The University's reliance on Black students to create their own networks of support is not unique. UChicago does not provide targeted support to any racial minority group, but students with greater campus representation have the capacity to create more resources for themselves and to capture a wider range of experiences. For example, Asian students make up approximately 18.5% of the UChicago undergraduate population and there are a number of active student organizations on campus geared to their support.<sup>32</sup> Asian students also have access to two active multicultural Greek organizations: one fraternity and one sorority. While not affiliated with the University, these are additional options for students interested in joining affinity spaces.

Expectations for Black students to provide their own resources are unfeasible not only because this student population is small, but also because students do not have the adequate time or

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<sup>32</sup> The University of Chicago. "Winter Quarter 2018 Census Reports". <https://registrar.uchicago.edu/sites/registrar.uchicago.edu/files/uploads/Winter2018-Census.pdf>.

resources. It is hard to imagine that the leaders of ACSA and OBS (roughly 30 students)—who are themselves attempting to navigate UChicago’s academic, extracurricular, and social landscape as Black students--are equipped to support and capture the nuance of 321 students’ experiences of being Black at UChicago.

Currently, the resources UChicago dedicates to diversity and inclusion treat all racial minority students, their experiences, and their needs as the same. Organizationally, UChicago understands diversity broadly and does not account for the specific needs of different racial minority groups. UChicago cannot account for the experiences of every Black student, but at the most basic level it is important to acknowledge that Black students’ experiences are unique from other racial minorities on campus. If anything, the discussion of ethnic background and the underrepresentation of Black American students at UChicago demonstrates that not only do Black students experience marginalization differently from other racial minorities, Black students also experience their Blackness differently from each other.

Interviews demonstrated that while students could estimate the ethnic breakdown of Black students and the reasoning behind such breakdowns, no data exists to verify these hypotheses. Black student responses to the Cornell recommendation demonstrate that ethnic background is relevant to representation and should at the very least be tracked. While likely rooted in some reality, without data it is difficult to determine the exact nature of the issue or its potential remedies. UChicago can bridge the disconnect between their understanding of Black student’s needs and the actual needs of Black students by paying attention to nuances of experience and providing resources that validate these nuances.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

### Recommendation 1:

UChicago should create targeted resources for Black undergraduate students.

Currently, the affinity resources available to Black students at UChicago are primarily those created by students--the Organization of Black Students and the African and Caribbean Students Association. The Office of Multicultural Student Affairs and broader Center for Identity and Inclusion also provide support to Black students, but their resources are spread across all racial minority students which can create competition.

Changes in the structure and resources of OMSA have immediate impact on students of color since this office is the main campus support specific to students belonging to racial minority groups. The pitfalls of this model were particularly evident in the 2017-2018 school year when the OMSA office had only one person on staff for the fall quarter and zero staff for the majority of the winter quarter, before returning to being singularly staffed for the spring quarter. Particularly in the winter quarter, other staff persons at the CII were stretching their time to maintain OMSA programming. This made it difficult for students to access the resources and programming they needed.

Similar to other top-tier schools, UChicago should dedicate a space on campus to Black student life and support. Peer institutions have created these types of spaces in a variety of different ways. At Stanford, the Black Community Services Center (among other things): supports Black student organizations and affiliations, engages Black alumni, and celebrates the work and accomplishments of Black Stanford students.<sup>33</sup> The center is led by two staff persons and also employs 21 undergraduate students that assist with programming.

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<sup>33</sup> Stanford University. "Black Community Services Center". <https://bcsc.stanford.edu/>.

A Black center at UChicago would also guarantee students a resource not subject to the fluctuations inherent to resources provided by students; it would also provide a consistent space for student organizations to meet and grow their membership. Further, providing this space would communicate to current and prospective Black students that UChicago recognizes the unique experiences and challenges of Black students navigating a predominantly White campus. Similar to Stanford, UChicago could create this affinity space and house all Black student focused resources and programming within the space--making it easy for prospective and first year Black students to find targeted resources on campus.

#### Recommendation 2:

The Comparative Race and Ethnic Studies major should be transitioned into a department.

The Comparative Race and Ethnic Studies major is the only centralized major in which undergraduate students can devote themselves to race studies. Since the major is not housed within a department, it relies heavily on cross-listed classes. This makes it difficult for students to gain a comprehensive education in the fields of African, Caribbean, or Black studies. In the absence of a department, students are not guaranteed multiple course offerings in their specific areas of interest. Rather, course offerings fluctuate based upon the course interests of CRES affiliated faculty and graduate students. Peer universities with departments dedicated to Black studies with affiliated majors in African and Caribbean studies are better equipped to provide students with comprehensive course offerings that expose students to a wide range of subjects.

A large number of the lecturers and faculty of color at UChicago are affiliated with the CRES major and more broadly, the Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture. Providing this major with the institutional backing that accompanies departmental status can serve to attract Black scholars to the center. More importantly, it ensures that the academic pursuits and interests

of CRES majors, (the majority of which identify as students of color) are supported to the same extent as other college majors. Further, the placement of UChicago in a city and area with a rich history of Black intellectualism demands greater attention and celebration. Departmentalizing CRES and creating specific majors in the various areas of Black studies would affirm UChicago's recognition of Black studies as a vital academic pursuit and by default, provide Black students more representation within their coursework.

Recommendation 3:  
UChicago should grapple with student and public perceptions  
of its relationship with the Southside community.

The neighborhood of Hyde Park has a rich history that, similar to the rest of the Southside of Chicago, is oriented around Black identity and Black history. In its public image, UChicago positions itself as a proud member of the Chicago Southside community and cites the different ways in which it engages and celebrates this community. And yet, this public image is detached from how Black students at UChicago (specifically those from Chicago and the Southside) understand the University's relationship with the campus's surrounding communities. Black students' concerns regarding the low representation of Southside high school students in the college, as well as the relationship between the University's police force and the Southside community are testament to this. As evidenced by this project's data, Black students at UChicago relate their relationship with UChicago administration as parallel to UChicago's relationship with the predominantly Black community surrounding the University campus.

UChicago must grapple with why Black students perceive the school's administration and values as being fundamentally antagonistic to Black people both affiliated and unaffiliated with the college. More importantly, UChicago must consider how these perceptions can be altered. Ultimately, the support of Black students at UChicago should have a place within this

conversation. Investing in the study of Black history and the support of Black students is within itself a celebration of Blackness; a step in the right direction. Recruiting more Black students, particularly those who live in Chicago and the Southside, is also a relevant consideration in light of the value that a degree from UChicago holds and the significant investment that it represents.

## CONCLUSION

The results of the 2016 campus climate survey remain an accurate portrayal of how Black undergraduate students feel at the University of Chicago. A disconnect exists between how UChicago understands Black students and their needs, and how Black students understand their experiences and needs. The survey and interview data gathered for this project demonstrate that members of the Black student community feel underrepresented, under supported, and that their needs are misunderstood by those outside of the Black community. These feelings of underrepresentation are further heightened for Black American students who identified Black Immigrant students as constituting the majority of the Black student population. However, while ethnic background was expressed to be important, Black students perceived their shared experience of Blackness as the primary reason for their feelings of marginalization on campus.

Ultimately, while this underrepresentation could be improved through a general increase in the Black student population, this must be complemented with initiatives that intentionally attract Black students to the University and support existing students. In order to attract Black students and compete with similarly situated schools, UChicago must demonstrate to prospective Black students that they will be both represented and supported during their time on campus. This representation and support cannot lie solely in Black student numbers and the provision of financial aid. These efforts must also translate to the creation of spaces where Black students can gather and create community, the existence of academic programs that center Black culture and history, and the recognition that diversity within Black students is as important as campus-wide diversity.

## **APPENDIX A: Position as a Researcher**

Study participants were all current undergraduate students that identify as Black. My personal involvement in the Black undergraduate student community likely affected my data collection. Participants may have been more candid about their perceptions of Black representation, since I could understand their references to campus events and people within the Black student community. A potential negative of this personal connection is that participants may have altered their responses due to their knowledge of my ethnic background (I am an Ethiopian immigrant) and involvements on campus. Some study participants were students I had previous interaction with through my participation in OBS and ACSA.

## APPENDIX B: Interview Questions

- How would you describe the Black community at UChicago?
- Can you tell me a little about your ethnic background?
- Do you feel Black students are represented at the University of Chicago?
- Would you describe your experience at UChicago as similar to other Black students at UChicago?
- How would you describe the breakdown between Black Immigrant and Black American students?
  - o How would you describe the dynamic between Black Immigrant and Black American students?
- Are you involved in any cultural organizations, multicultural offices, or similar programs on campus?
- Do you think that these distinctions impact the way cultural organizations like OBS/ACSA function?
  - o Do you think these distinctions impact the ways in which Black students are perceived/treated?
- Do you think that Black students are treated differently based on how they “perform” their Blackness?

*We demand that Cornell Admissions come up with a plan to actively increase the presence of underrepresented Black students on this campus. We define underrepresented Black students as Black Americans who have several generations (more than two) in this country. The Black student population at Cornell disproportionately represents international or first-generation African or Caribbean students. While these students have a right to flourish at Cornell, there is a lack of investment in Black students whose families were affected directly by the African Holocaust in America. Cornell must work to actively support students whose families have been impacted for generations by White supremacy and American fascism.*

- What are your thoughts on the Cornell recommendation?
- Do you think the Cornell recommendation is applicable to UChicago?
  - Why or why not?
- How might adopting this recommendation be difficult or problematic?
- How do you feel about the “diversity/inclusion” resources UChicago provides to Black students?
  - o Are there certain backgrounds that are better supported? In what way?

## APPENDIX C: Survey Questions

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Q1 What year are you in the college?

☐ First year (1)

☐ Second year (2)

☐ Third year (3)

☐ Fourth year (4)

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Q2 How would you describe yourself? (Check all that apply)

☐

Male (1)

☐

Female (2)

☐

Trans man (3)

☐

Trans woman (4)

☐

Gender queer/Gender non-conforming (5)

☐

Different identity (please state): (6)

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Q3 What is your racial/ethnic identity? (Check all that apply)

☐

Black/African American (1)

☐

Asian (2)

☐

Hispanic or Latino (3)

☐

Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (4)

☐

White (5)

☐

Other (Please elaborate): (6)

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Q4 Are you a first-generation college student?

☐ Yes (1)

☐ No (2)

---

Q5 Do one or both of your parents hold a degree from a 4-year institution?

☐ Yes (1)

☐ No (2)

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Q6 Do you receive financial aid from the University?

☐ Yes (1)

☐ No (2)

---

Q7 Are you an Odyssey scholar?

☐ Yes (1)

☐ No (2)

---

Q8 Approximately how much financial aid do you receive each academic year? (OPTIONAL)

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Q9 Where were you born? (Country is enough.)

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Q10 Where were your parents born? (Country is enough.)

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Q11 Where were your grandparents born? (Country is enough.)

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Q12 What is your immigration status?

☐ U.S. Citizen (1)

☐ Permanent Resident (2)

☐ Non-U.S. Citizen (3)

☐ Other/Prefer not to answer (4) \_\_\_\_\_

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Q13 Are you an international student?

☐ Yes, I am from: (1) \_\_\_\_\_

☐ No (2)

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Q14 Where (country, state, city) did you complete the majority of your high school education?

---

Q15 Did you attend a public or private high school?

☐Public (1)

☐Private (2)

☐Other: (3) \_\_\_\_\_

---

Q16 What is the zip code of your permanent residence?

\_\_\_\_\_

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Page Break

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Q17 Are you involved in any cultural student organizations on campus? **Please list all organizations you are involved or affiliated with.**

\_\_\_\_\_

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Q18 Please indicate your initial thoughts (agree, neutral, disagree) on the following statements:

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Q19 Black students are well represented among the undergraduate student population University of Chicago.

☐Agree (1)

☐Neutral (2)

☐Disagree (3)

---

Q20 At UChicago there is a representation of Black students from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds.

☐ Agree (1)

☐ Neutral (2)

☐ Disagree (3)

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Q21 Within the UChicago Black undergraduate student population there are students that share my socioeconomic background.

☐ Agree (1)

☐ Neutral (2)

☐ Disagree (3) Q22 Within the UChicago Black undergraduate student population there are students that share my ethnic background.

☐ Agree (1)

☐ Neutral (2)

☐ Disagree (3)

Q23 Earlier this year, Cornell University's Black Students United requested that Cornell Admissions come up with a plan to actively increase the presence of underrepresented Black students at the University. The BSU defined underrepresented Black students as "Black Americans who have several generations (more than two) in this country."

"The Black student population at Cornell disproportionately represents international or first-generation African or Caribbean students. While these students have a right to flourish at Cornell, there is a lack of investment in Black students whose families were affected directly by the African Holocaust in America. Cornell must work to actively support students whose families have been impacted for generations by White supremacy and American fascism."

*The following questions will give you an opportunity to share your thoughts on this initiative.*

Q24 Black Immigrant students (first and second-generation immigrants from Africa, the Caribbean, etc.) dominate the Black student population at UChicago

☐ Agree (1)

☐ Neutral (2)

☐ Disagree (3)

Q25 There is relatively equal representation of Black Immigrant (first and second-generation immigrants from Africa, the Caribbean, etc.) and Black American students at UChicago.

☐ Agree (1)

☐ Neutral (2)

☐ Disagree (3)

Q26 UChicago should work to increase the number of underrepresented Black students at UChicago (as suggested by the Cornell BSU).

☐ Agree (1)

☐ Neutral (2)

☐ Disagree (3)

Q27 Instead of the recommendation above, UChicago should work harder to increase the general Black student population.

☐ Agree (1)

☐ Neutral (2)

☐ Disagree (3)

Q28 Ethnic background impacts the way Black students are perceived and treated at the University of Chicago.

☐ Agree (1)

☐ Neutral (2)

☐ Disagree (3)

## Soreti Teshome

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### EDUCATION

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The University of Chicago	Chicago, IL
<i>Bachelor of Arts in Public Policy; Comparative Race and Ethnic Studies</i>	Expected June 2018

### SKILLS

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Language: Spanish, written and conversational proficiency; Amharic, basic proficiency  
Computer: Proficient in Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, Excel

### INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE

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<i>Programming Intern</i>	September 2016 — Present
University of Chicago Office of Multicultural Student Affairs	Chicago, IL

- Provide general administrative and programming support to office staff
- Developed a 16-week curriculum for a pilot student program aimed to deepen students' understandings of race and its intersections with, among other things, class, gender, and sexuality

<i>Criminal Defense Investigative Assistant</i>	June — September 2017
Brooklyn Defender Services	Brooklyn, NY

- Provided case support to lawyers and investigators: located and interviewed case witnesses, ran background checks on witnesses and police officers, reviewed video surveillance footage, diagrammed crime scenes, and served subpoenas

<i>Jeff Metcalf Justice Reform Intern</i>	June — September 2016
The Illinois Justice Project	Chicago, IL

- Collaborated with ILJP interns and staff in the development of a policy memo advocating for stronger training requirements for Illinois attorneys practicing in juvenile court
- Developed an independent research project on the use of cash bail in Cook County and submitted a 12-page research paper to ILJP for future development

<i>Woodlawn East Community and Neighbors Analyst</i>	March — June 2016
Campus Catalyst Consulting	Chicago, IL

- Worked in a group of 5 to analyze the financial documents of an affordable housing nonprofit and developed frameworks for improving its financial standing
- Created a 30-page deliverable of recommendations and steps to implementation that was submitted for course credit

<i>Evaluation Intern</i>	June — September 2015
The North Lawndale Employment Network	Chicago, IL

- Developed and administered a client survey, utilized 63 responses in the creation of a report and presentation
- Conducted an evaluation of internal programming through interviews with 20 clients and external partners, consolidated findings into a report

## Soreti Teshome

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### LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

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*Youth Advisory Board Member* July 2016 — June 2017  
Illinois Juvenile Justice Commission Chicago, IL

- Met once a month with the general board and weekly with the expungement committee
- Collaborated with juvenile justice reform advocates in Chicago to address the limited use of juvenile expungement resources in Cook County and the state of Illinois, this resulted in the creation of an online interactive webinar

*Logistics Chair* October 2015 — September 2017  
TEDxUChicago Chicago, IL

- Managed catering, booked rooms, reserved equipment, and made travel arrangements for speakers and performers
- Organized the selection and management of 15 student event volunteers

*Student Advisory Council Member* May 2016 – September 2017  
University of Chicago Office of Multicultural Student Affairs Chicago, IL

- Met monthly to provide feedback to OMSA staff regarding student programming and community engagement
- Identified ways in which the OMSA office could better serve the needs of multicultural student communities on campus

*Community Conversation Facilitator* October 2015 — June 2016  
University of Chicago Office of Multicultural Student Affairs Chicago, IL

- Received over 20 hours of dialogue facilitation and leadership training throughout the academic year
- Organized and facilitated campus-wide discussions about issues of social justice and diversity twice a quarter

*Emerging Minds Project Cohort Member* November 2014-May 2015  
University of Chicago Office of Multicultural Student Affairs Chicago, IL

- Engaged in conversations about social justice, identity, and diversity to become and help peers to become more culturally competent leaders

*Independent Review Committee Member* October 2015 — June 2016  
University of Chicago Police Department Chicago, IL

- Provost appointed committee—1 year term limit
- Met as needed to review individual complaints against UCPD, UCPD reports, and related procedural issues

### HONORS AND GRANTS

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2018	Dean's Fund Recipient
2014-2017	Dean's List
2017	Harry S Truman Scholarship
2015	Pozen New Leaders Scholar Award