"THIS IS NOT NORMAL": TALKING TRUMP IN UNDERGRADUATE DIVERSITY COURSES

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ABSTRACT

Aim/Purpose	The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how faculty members teaching undergraduate diversity courses at liberal arts colleges in the southern United States addressed the outcome of the 2016 presidential election in their classrooms.
Background	Humanities and social science faculty teaching undergraduate diversity courses faced the decision of whether, and how, to address the 2016 U.S. presidential election in their courses. Diversity courses represent a compelling context for examining this event, as instructors must routinely tackle charged and controversial topics and such courses have become the subject of debates around purpose, course content, and instructional methods.
Methodology	This study draws upon one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with 38 faculty members teaching required undergraduate diversity courses at three predominantly White liberal arts colleges in the southern United States.
Contribution	Understanding faculty members' approaches to handling a critical political event sheds light on how faculty in multiple contexts might prepare for difficult dialogues in their classrooms. This study can serve to prompt reflection about how campuses engage with contemporary controversies in an era of reduced public trust in higher education and skepticism that free speech is a fundamental value of higher education. This study also offers a contribution to understanding how faculty members' and students' social identities including race and gender influence the dynamics of classroom discussions about contemporary controversies.

Findings	Drawing upon the curricular processes detailed in the multicontextual model for diverse learning environments, findings from this study address faculty members' personal post-election reactions, concern for minoritized students, decisions whether to disclose their political leanings, and their attempts to promote multiple perspectives, civility, and disciplinary connections to the political climate.
Recommendations for Practitioners	Faculty members, educational developers, and administrators can use this study to consider how to address challenging and controversial events in the classroom and how to protect academic freedom to teach about and learn from these events.
Recommendation for Researchers	Researchers can advance understandings of how contemporary controversies and discussions of the political climate play out in college classrooms by investigating faculty and student experiences in multiple disciplinary, institutional, and regional contexts.
Impact on Society	Higher education institutions in the United States face increasing public scrutiny and calls for greater accountability. Professors, in particular, are often caricatured as partisan ideologues intent upon indoctrinating students to particular political positions. A better understanding of how faculty members consider and approach discussions of a critical event may help shed light on the reality of many college classrooms and the self-reflective approaches to handling controversy faculty members may espouse.
Keywords	politics, 2016 election, college faculty, diversity courses, diversity requirement, general education, academic freedom, liberal arts colleges, qualitative

INTRODUCTION

U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos delivered these words to the Conservative Political Action Conference in 2017:

> The faculty, from adjunct professors to deans, tell you what to do, what to say, and more ominously, what to think. They say that if you voted for Donald Trump, you're a threat to the university community. But the real threat is silencing the First Amendment rights of people with whom you disagree (quoted in Jaschik, 2017, para. 3).

Echoing a common refrain from many on the political right, DeVos's comments painted a portrait of college professors as politically liberal, prone to indoctrinating their students into leftist viewpoints, and disinterested in — if not outright hostile to — the open exchange of political ideas in the classroom. Indeed, Trump's surprising ascent to the presidency in the 2016 election offered a set of decisions for college faculty members across the curriculum to make: Should they acknowledge the presidential election in class? If so, how should they structure discussion? What support might they offer distraught students or those wishing to celebrate the victory? Should faculty share their own political viewpoints? Such questions arose at a moment of renewed controversy over the role of and protections for free speech on college campuses (Ben-Porath, 2017; Chemerinsky & Gillman, 2017; Palfrey, 2017) and an increase in "anti-elitist backlash against the university" (Read, 2018, p. 1).

In addition to these questions, instructors of undergraduate diversity courses (who are most often in the humanities and social sciences) faced the task of deciding whether to provide explicit links between the election and course content addressing issues of identity and inequality including race, immigration, gender, religion, and economics. Required undergraduate diversity courses are common at four-year colleges and universities nationwide, as 60% of the membership of the Association of

American Colleges and Universities has adopted at least one such course (Hart Research Associates, 2016). While courses are often designed with goals for students to learn about cultures other than their own or how to communicate across differences (Schneider, 2001), the courses sometimes become sites of controversy and heated debate, including increased student resistance to faculty of color and women faculty members who may teach a disproportionate number of such courses (Kadowaki & Subramaniam, 2014; Moore, Acosta, Perry, & Edwards, 2010; Perry, Moore, Edwards, Acosta, & Frey, 2009). Thus, the required undergraduate diversity classroom is an ideal space to consider faculty and student reactions to the 2016 election.

This paper examines the experiences of social science and humanities faculty members navigating the political climate in the context of teaching undergraduate courses that fulfill general education requirements for diversity. We take up the research question: How did faculty members teaching required undergraduate diversity courses address the 2016 U.S. presidential election in their classes? We aim to document how faculty members at three predominantly White liberal arts colleges in the southeastern United States described handling the 2016 election in class and, thus, to help faculty consider how to address future controversies in their classrooms. Scholars have demonstrated the challenges of teaching diversity courses, particularly for faculty members with minoritized identities of race and gender (e.g., Moore et al., 2010; Perry et al., 2009), while other scholars have explored faculty political affiliations and how faculty approach discussing politics in the classroom (e.g., Mariani & Hewitt, 2008; Woessner & Kelly-Woessner, 2009). This study offers a contribution at the intersection of these topics by exploring how diversity course instructors addressed the 2016 election in their classrooms and reflected on their teaching approaches for this controversial event. Given sustained public scrutiny of higher education and perceptions that faculty attempt to indoctrinate students to particular political positions, this study helps to shed light on how one group of diversity course instructors addressed a critical controversy in their classrooms.

RELEVANT LITERATURE

FACULTY POLITICAL AFFILIATIONS AND POLITICS IN THE CLASSROOM

Researchers investigating college faculty members' partisan affiliations generally conclude that a plurality, if not a majority, of faculty align with the Democratic Party and/or liberal policy positions. In a survey of 16,112 full-time undergraduate faculty at 269 four-year institutions, 49% of faculty characterized their political views as liberal, 27% middle of the road, 12% conservative, 11% far left and less than 1% far right (Eagan et al., 2014). However, the proportion of conservative, moderate, and liberal faculty varies by academic discipline and institutional context. Rothman, Kelly-Woessner, and Woessner (2011) noted that in the courses "where political, social, and moral issues are most likely to be discussed, the social sciences and the humanities, faculty are the most politically imbalanced" (p. 78) which may "contribute to the appearance that the campus is even more politically homogenous than the facts indicate" (p. 81). A national survey of 1,417 full-time faculty members revealed that 44% classify themselves as liberal, 46% as moderate, and 9% as conservative, with proportionally more conservatives in the community college sector and in fields including business, computer science, and engineering (Gross & Simmons, 2007), echoing findings from a 1999 study that found more self-identified Republicans in the sciences and professional fields than in social sciences and humanities (Rothman et al., 2011).

In the 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure, the American Association of University Professors (n.d.) called upon faculty members to "be careful not to introduce into their teaching controversial matter *which has no relation to their subject* [emphasis added]" (para. 10). Popular narratives depict college classrooms as sites where liberal faculty members attempt to convince students of the superiority of their political beliefs (e.g., Horowitz, 2006). Research, however, generally does not support such a claim. Students' political beliefs may become more liberal during their time in college, but such a change is not necessarily attributable to instructors' partisan

affiliations (Mariani & Hewitt, 2008). While more students enter college labelling themselves as liberals instead of conservatives, "students become increasingly appreciative of both liberals and conservatives at the same rate" (Rockenbach et al., 2017, p. 5) after their first year of college, according to a study with 7,194 college students at 122 institutions. One national study found that institutional religious affiliation and student gender and socioeconomic status, but not faculty members' political orientations, are related to changes in students' political affiliations in college (Mariani & Hewitt, 2008). A study of political science professors found that faculty "generally try to shield their own political beliefs from students" (Woessner & Kelly-Woessner, 2009, p. 349). Though perhaps not widespread, incidents of faculty forcefully discussing their political beliefs occasionally capture media attention. An Orange Coast College student recorded a professor calling Trump's election "an act of terrorism" (quoted in Flaherty, 2017, para. 1). Meanwhile, the web site Professor Watchlist asks students to report faculty who "discriminate against conservative students, promote anti-American values and advance leftist propaganda in the classroom" (quoted in Flaherty, 2016, para. 1).

DIVERSITY COURSES AND POLITICS

Diversity courses routinely tackle politically charged issues such as economic inequality, LGBTQ civil rights, racism, and religion. Much of the current research on diversity courses focuses on student outcomes including cognitive development (Bowman, 2010), moral development (Hurtado, Mayhew, & Engberg, 2012), and prejudice reduction (Denson, 2009). One study found that diversity course taking was associated with increased social or political activism, but not related to holding liberal political beliefs (Pascarella, Salisbury, Martin, & Blaich, 2012). In a systematic review of student outcomes from diversity courses (both required and optional), Denson and Bowman (2017) examined 92 studies and found 25 with positive findings (primarily on diversity-related outcomes such as "promoting racial understanding, multicultural awareness, and positive quality of interactions with diverse others," p. 73), 13 with non-significant findings, and 62 with mixed findings.

While researchers have addressed student outcomes from taking diversity courses, less has been written on the faculty members who design and teach such courses (Denson & Bowman, 2017; Nelson Laird & Engberg, 2011), and, in particular, how politics may come up in class. Within these courses, professors may navigate student resistance, heated discussion, and personal attacks, all while considering how student enrollments and evaluations might affect their pursuit of reappointment, promotion, and/or tenure (Kadowaki & Subramaniam, 2014; Moore et al., 2010). While some scholarship has examined the social identities that faculty members bring to their classrooms (Chesler & Young, 2007; Pittman, 2010), the limited research examining the experiences of instructors teaching diversity courses detailed the emotional labor undertaken by faculty members (Miller, Struve, & Howell, in press), including increased student resistance to faculty of color and women faculty members (Kadowaki & Subramaniam, 2014; Moore et al., 2010; Perry et al., 2009). Researchers in one study found that introducing diversity content in coursework provoked student bullying of faculty (May & Tenzek, 2017).

Perry et al. (2009) studied the experiences of 20 faculty members of color teaching diversity courses at a predominantly White institution in the Midwest, finding that challenges to the instructors' authority and credibility were commonplace. In response to student resistance and devaluation of their expertise, faculty members developed responses including depoliticization, defined as "an in-class process used to manage direct challenges to professorial credibility and authority by instructors minimizing or controlling the politicized and/or contentious nature of their subject matter" (Perry et al., 2009, p. 96-97). This strategy entailed continuous anticipation and monitoring of topics that might be considered controversial, emotional, or overtly political. Instructors also reported bringing multiple sources of evidence related to prejudice and racism to avoid the perception that they spoke only from their own experience (Perry et al., 2009).

SOCIOPOLITICAL CONTEXT OF THE U.S. SOUTH

The history and context of the region in which this this study took place — the South — likely influenced instructors' approaches and the tone and content of political discussions. The institutions included in this study are located in states that were part of the Confederate States of America during the Civil War. Subsequently, the states passed Jim Crow laws enforcing racial segregation and leaving a legacy of segregated cities, neighborhoods, and schools for decades to follow (Biggs & Andrews, 2015; Morris & Monroe, 2009), including the three institutions in this study that did not begin to integrate until the 1960s. Today, states in the South are generally considered "red states," with "red-state politics … often categorized as traditional individualistic tendencies with policies reflecting traditional social values and conservative attitudes with limited government interventions" (Han, Scull, Nganga, & Kambutu, 2018, p. 2). Common political issues in such states include "interracial and single sex marriages, abortion, immigration, official language mandates" (Han et al., 2018, p. 2).

Though studying specific geographic and regional contexts may reveal unique insights about education in both K-12 schooling and higher education, most scholarship in education does not spotlight the South, which scholars assert is a missed opportunity to fully understand topics including African-American student achievement and identity (e.g., Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009; Morris & Monroe, 2009) as well as multicultural education (Asher, 2005) and education policy (Minor, 2008), including what Minor (2008) referred to as "*segregation residual* … the current-day distribution of individuals, services, or educational opportunities by race that resembles trends found during the civil rights era" (p. 862, emphasis in original). This regional backdrop sets the stage for our discussion of diversity courses and how course instructors approached discussion of the 2016 election.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is grounded theoretically in the multicontextual model for diverse learning environments in higher education (DLE; Hurtado, Alvarez, Guillermo-Wann, Cuellar, & Arellano, 2012). The DLE model functions as a "holistic model accounting for climate, educational practices, and student outcomes" related to diversity (Hurtado et al., 2012, p. 42). The DLE focuses on the campus climate for diversity in higher education as well curricular and co-curricular processes that contribute to student outcomes (Hurtado et al., 2012). Recognizing that campuses exist within larger systems, the diverse learning environments model focuses on macro-level contexts (community, policy, and socio-historical contexts) and institutional contexts (historical, organizational, compositional, psychological, and behavioral dimensions) that affect the climate (Hurtado et al., 2012).

Specifically, this study is guided by the DLE model's framework for examining curricular processes, including four elements: (1) course content, (2) pedagogy/teaching methods, (3) instructor identities, and (4) student identities. By taking into account multiple dimensions of the campus climate for diversity, Hurtado et al. (2012) asserted that "monitoring dynamics surrounding an institution as well as between actors within the institution is as important as monitoring students' behaviors and perceptions" (p. 101). Though the DLE model does not explicitly address partisan ideology or political beliefs, it can be a useful frame for considering the role that the 2016 presidential election had on campus and, in particular, within undergraduate courses addressing diversity.

METHODS

This paper presents results of a basic qualitative study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) consisting of one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with faculty members teaching required diversity courses at three liberal arts colleges. We examine how these diversity course instructors addressed the 2016 presidential election in their classrooms. We sought to generate findings that would illuminate the common threads of participants' sense making of their experiences reacting to and addressing the election. In line with a basic qualitative research approach, we focus on "(1) how people interpret their experi-

ences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 24).

These interviews were part of a larger multiple case study on diversity courses required as part of general education programs. The interview protocol was structured around curricular components of the DLE model including course content, pedagogy/teaching methods, instructor identities, and student identities (Hurtado et al., 2012). The study took place at three predominantly White, liberal arts-focused higher education institutions in the Southeastern United States. We selected colleges in the South because of the specific cultures and histories of the region relative to racial oppression and segregation, gender and sexuality norms, and political discourses. Criteria for selecting institutions included the common regional context of the South and bachelor's degree-granting institutions with at least one stand-alone diversity course requirement. Criteria also included accessibility of the research sites (e.g., IRB approval, ability of the researchers to collect data in person).

As we began data analysis, we found fairly consistent themes across interview participants from the three institutions, leading us to present themes common across the participants rather than focusing on cross-case or institutional analysis.

RESEARCH SITES AND PARTICIPANTS

All three colleges included in this study are predominantly White, liberal arts-focused institutions in the Southeastern U.S. founded in the 1800s. We provide brief portraits of these institutions below and follow up at the start of the findings section with additional information about institutional context relative to the political climate and external pressures perceived by faculty members.

Regional College (RC), a pseudonym for a mid-size public institution that began as a teaching college, prides itself on small class sizes. The college is located in an urban area and focuses on undergraduate education but also offers several graduate programs. In recent years, the campus has grappled with demands to change the name of campus buildings named after White supremacists. RC has the most racial diversity of the three institutions in this study, with enrollment of African American students at about one-third of the college, and other students of color and international students making up another 10% of the student body. RC requires completion of both a global diversity course as well as a standardized first-year experience course that emphasizes diversity.

Elite College (EC) is a highly selective, private liberal arts college, with about 70% White students. Located in a suburban area, the college draws students and faculty from around the nation and globe. While EC is formally affiliated with a Protestant church denomination, church influence over the college has waned in recent decades, and religious life offerings on campus explicitly appeal to interfaith dialogue and students of multiple religious backgrounds. The vast majority of students live on campus and many participate in competitive sports and fraternities and sororities. EC has required a diversity course since the 1990s and more recently added a requirement focused on inequality and identity to supplement the diversity requirement. Faculty committees spent several years discussing the addition of the new requirement and considering whether it should replace or supplement the existing requirement that, in the view of some faculty, focused too much on diversity as defined by global geography to the exclusion of topics such as racism in the region and United States, gender and sexuality studies, and disability studies.

Selective College (SC) is also private, highly selective, and 70% White. Located in an urban area, SC required a diversity course beginning in the 2000s. SC is no longer affiliated with the Protestant church denomination of its founding; the campus offers religious support and organizations for students of a variety of religious traditions in addition to Christianity. In addition to the undergraduate college, SC includes several well-regarded professional schools. Participation in study abroad, athletics, and fraternities and sororities is high among undergraduate students. Leading up to and since the 2016 election, several bias incidents were perpetrated against Muslim students and students of color, and controversies over free speech pervaded the campus discourse.

Once the three institutions were identified, the lead researcher contacted administrators with responsibility for diversity in academic and/or student affairs and began to negotiate access to the colleges, including clearance from Institutional Review Boards, which each honored the IRB approval from our home institution. Then, the lead researcher purposely recruited information-rich cases by personally contacting all faculty members via email who taught courses satisfying diversity requirements across two semesters. Course and faculty information came from each college's publicly available course schedule. Though we contacted all faculty who taught diversity courses that met general education requirements, as defined by the colleges, we noted that faculty in humanities and social science disciplines taught virtually all of these courses.

Collectively, the 38 participants have 678 years of college teaching experience. The participants included 14 tenured faculty, 11 non-tenure-track faculty, seven tenure-track faculty, and six administrators who also taught courses part-time. In terms of race and gender, there were 12 White women, 11 women of color and multiracial women, eight White men, and seven men of color and multiracial men. Participants included faculty teaching in both social sciences (21) and humanities (17).

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The findings presented in this paper are based on one-on-one interviews with faculty members teaching required undergraduate diversity courses. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes and two hours, with an average duration of about 1 hour and 15 minutes. Using a semi-structured process, open-ended questions were devised in advance to address topics from the theoretical framework and existing literature on diversity courses, but flexibility was provided to follow up on specific areas of interest for the participant and/or researcher in a conversational manner. Corresponding to the DLE model (Hurtado et al., 2012), major sections of the interview protocol focused on course content, pedagogy/teaching methods, instructor identities, and student identities. Most relevant to this paper, within the pedagogy/teaching methods portion of the interview, the protocol included questions about how faculty members have reacted to and addressed the 2016 election and national political climate. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Due to the volume of data generated from interview transcripts and the focus of this manuscript, the researchers identified and analyzed only the transcript excerpts that addressed the 2016 election.

By analyzing data, we aimed to generate "recurring patterns that characterize the data," and to present "the researcher's understanding of the participants' understanding of the phenomenon of interest" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 25), in line with a basic qualitative research approach. Analysis for this project began with the two researchers reading all interview transcripts, then writing and discussing analytic memos on possible themes, patterns, similarities, and dissimilarities within and across interviews. Interview transcripts were the primary data analyzed for this paper. Once the excerpts of transcripts that addressed the political climate and the 2016 election were identified, the researchers inductively recoded these data using a constant comparative approach (Charmaz, 2014), identifying codes such as disclosure of political beliefs, personal despair, and desire to promote dialogue. We also developed codes derived from the theoretical framework and extant literature (e.g., instructor identity, student identity). All codes were organized and recoded to group like codes. Finally, themes derived from the reorganized codes are presented in this paper. While we begin the findings section with a brief description of how institutional context related to faculty members' approaches, we devote the majority of the section to present thematic findings common to participants at all three sites.

TRUSTWORTHINESS AND RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY

Several strategies were employed to promote trustworthiness of the study (Creswell, 1998; Creswell & Miller, 2000). We engaged in member checking by sharing interview transcripts with participants and seeking corrections and feedback. Second, we reflected on researcher positionality and biases through reflective memos and in conversation with two peer debriefers (education faculty members).

Third, we analyzed discrepant information and disconfirming evidence throughout analysis and noted examples in the findings section that did not fit the general pattern of findings.

Because researchers function as the research instruments in any qualitative study, it is vital to address researcher motivations, positionality, and bias. I (first author) am an assistant professor of higher education. During the first part of my career working in student affairs, I taught intergroup dialogue courses that fulfilled diversity requirements, which sparked my interest in faculty experiences and the implementation of diversity course requirements. I simultaneously reflect on my own approaches toward addressing current social and political issues in the classroom, often without fear of retribution, which I view as connected to how I am perceived as a White able-bodied cisgender man. I (second author) am an international doctoral student in educational leadership. I have taught undergraduate social science courses in my home country. My position as a female Muslim student in the post-9/11 and war on terror United States has raised my interest toward diversity and social justice topics.

FINDINGS

In this section, we detail the themes from faculty interviews in which faculty expressed concern for students' well-being, weighed disclosure of political beliefs, attempted to facilitate dialogue following the election, connected class discussions to course content, and debated whether to play "devil's advocate" to surface multiple viewpoints.

Before presenting thematic findings from faculty interviews across institutions, we briefly address the role of institutional context in shaping teaching approaches and decisions related to the political climate. Institutional context affected how faculty members chose to address the election in class. Faculty acknowledged that conservative students and/or Trump supporters may be looking for examples of "liberal bias" in the classroom and responded to perceived external pressures that varied by institutional type. Faculty at Regional College, a public institution drawing the vast majority of its students from within its conservative state, tended to disclose their political affiliations less freely than their counterparts at Elite and Selective colleges. They provided more examples of Trump supporters speaking up in class discussions and also tended to assume that Trump supporters were present even if they did not disclose their support in class. Several faculty also mentioned the role of public funding provided by the state legislature and thus potential attention and rebuke from state officials. By contrast, at Elite College and Selective College, both wealthy, private colleges that drew faculty and students from across the nation, relatively more faculty chose to acknowledge or disclose their political beliefs in the classroom, perhaps indicating a greater sense of security in their positions than those at public institutions. Faculty at these two institutions, however, wanted to avoid the reality or perception that their colleges functioned as progressive bubbles, isolated from the political mainstream of the country. We now turn to thematic findings across interviews at the three institutions.

CONCERN FOR STUDENTS' WELL-BEING

Prior to considering whether and how to address the election in the classroom, faculty members teaching required undergraduate diversity courses acknowledged their own emotional reactions to the election outcome. Faculty members recognized that their personal reactions could affect their teaching and other work, a position from which they empathized with their students. Their primary concern in addressing the election often centered on the experiences and wellbeing of their students, among whom they noticed distress and distrust. Faculty often focused their attention on minoritized students (groups named by faculty included Muslim, LGBTQ, Latinx, immigrant, disabled, Asian/Asian American, and African American students) on campus following the hateful rhetoric emanating from the Trump campaign and supporters.

Faculty noticed students' engagement with and reactions to the election. For example, Jess noted that, "A lot of my students have come in sort of on edge, or with certain things that they're just carrying with them, whether they're mad about things that are happening politically or they're mad that

people are mad about things that are happening politically." In particular, faculty noticed the reactions of minoritized groups in their classes. Nancy shared, "I had a number of African American students who were absolutely devastated. Not only were they devastated, they were afraid." Kathleen noticed similar reactions, but also believed the moment offered more importance to her teaching of diversity: "Queer students who were sobbing the day after the election. Talking about going home for Thanksgiving and having to be with family members who voted against their rights. I think it's made my teaching more relevant than ever." Multiple faculty members contacted individual students they believed might be reacting to the election. Joy said that many of her students belonged to minoritized groups, whom she contacted after the election: "Many of my students who were minorities did not go to class because they were appalled. They were absolutely appalled, so I spent a lot of time also checking up on them, like my Muslim students."

At Selective College, several Islamophobic and racist incidents on campus including verbal and written slurs heightened faculty members' concerns for targeted student populations. Chris noted that at the beginning of the class following the election,

> I practically started crying when I told them—I am going to start crying now—I hope you all feel like you are in a safe environment. And I did not mean like intellectual, but … I want you to feel valued, that you belong here, because I know that I often feel like I do not belong here.

In considering whether his students felt that they belonged, Chris referenced his own experiences of marginalization as a gay man living in the South. Gwen also noted, "We have taken a lot of steps back with the election of Trump. We have hate speech on campus; we have inappropriate remarks to students who look Chinese. … A lot of Muslim students who feel very vulnerable feel basically that the [Selective College] community has left them out to dry."

WEIGHING DISCLOSURE OF POLITICAL BELIEFS

Though most faculty members disclosed their backgrounds and personal experiences when relevant to course content, the majority of faculty members chose not to disclose their partisan affiliation or political ideologies. In deciding not to disclose, instructors primarily considered their authority within the classroom and decided that they wanted to avoid even the appearance of trying to influence students' political beliefs and avoid the perception that grading and evaluation could be tied to political positions. In choosing not to disclose his political affiliations, Michael noted that he does "a good job of trying not to take a very solid political position either way or the other," and that he believed his students knew that he evaluated them based on politically neutral criteria. Because of instructors' authority, Amy believed that "humility and tolerance … should be embraced in teaching this [diversity] course. I think that allows the learning process to be two ways, and I think in this kind of course, it has to be two ways, or you're not going to get the most out of the kids." Thus, non-disclosure of political positions amounted to a pedagogical strategy designed to enhance learning. Jeanne chose not to disclose her political beliefs, but found at times she wanted to agree with her students criticizing Trump: "At some point you want to go, I mean me, too. … But my job is to make sure everyone's voice is being heard. But the look on the students' faces is horror that this kid has admitted [voting for Trump]. Again, this is a reflection of who [Trump] is, because this is not normal."

A few faculty members reflected that they noticed student demeanor or behavior change after they had intentionally or unintentionally disclosed political beliefs. Rita said, "I have to be a little more careful now," and recalled an incident when she made a negative comment about Trump in class. She connected the incident to larger trends in the political climate: "Part of the problem we're having in this country is that people are not willing to have conversations across the spectrum, because they feel like they're being shut down in one way or the other. So I don't want to be that person." Rita used the incident to reflect on her position as an authority figure in the classroom and to resolve not to be "so firmly transparent on my position that I shut them down."

The few faculty who acknowledged direct disclosure of political beliefs in the classroom included two White senior faculty members at Elite College and one White adjunct faculty member at Regional College. Nancy, a part-time faculty member at RC, shared she responded openly to students' questions about her own reaction to the election. Daniel acknowledged that it was more difficult earlier in his career to disclose his political beliefs. He viewed disclosure as part of his duties as a faculty member: "That's what academic freedom is about, right? I earned my tenure; I'm going to let you know what I think. I'm going to let you know it's my opinion. I tell students you don't have to tell me what my opinion is on the test, but this is where I stand." Kathleen, also at EC, disclosed her political beliefs, but felt conflicted about how to handle politics in her classes:

> I just feel an ethical obligation to oppose this president. … So yeah, I mean I don't go on rants, I don't wear 'resist' buttons, but I've got trans students, and I've got students of color, and I've got first gen students, and I've got students who are immigrants or children of immigrants. So I don't feel like I'm on thin ice showing myself to be an ally. … But I've never really brought [politics] into the classroom to the extent that I do now. It just feels like a different moment.

Though Kathleen felt conflicted about sharing her political positions, she felt a duty to support students from minoritized groups, which in her view entailed talking about politics.

FACILITATING DIALOGUE IN CLASS

In considering how to address the election in the classroom, instructors admitted struggling and questioning whether they used the most effective approach. Most faculty addressed the election in class, particularly in the immediate days after the election, regardless of course content. The day after the election, some faculty members made attendance optional to acknowledge students' range of reactions. In addressing the election, instructors sought to create a space of relative safety where students emotionally impacted by the election could share their perspectives, but they also tried to set a respectful tone where disagreement could occur.

Most faculty provided at least some time for discussion immediately following election day. Sydney started her class by asking students to consider the parameters for the conversation: "I was asking, how do we talk about this? What do we do when there are such significant differences that are not easily resolved, but we want to try and have a meaningful conversation?" In the course of the conversation, one student stated that "people are just going to realize how dumb they were" by voting for Trump. The following class, Sydney said to her students, "I realize that if you were a Trump supporter, you probably had a very different experience of that conversation. … I want to acknowledge that that is what happened, and, to the extent that you might have felt isolated, then … I am recognizing that and … I apologize for that."

In opening discussions on politics, faculty believed that the classroom might be one of the only spaces where students might engage in conversations with those who hold opposing political views, and they sought to create guidelines for discussion. Rita said that the classroom is, "possibly the only opportunity our students will have to engage in civil discourse. … They can't isolate themselves socially. … And it's an opportunity missed if we don't create an environment where people feel safe to open up, whatever they think." The classroom could function as a training ground for having similar conversations outside of class. Because the instructors taught courses with diversity content, they had experience discussing controversial issues. Violet tried to keep discussions focused on policy rather than "just bashing one of the candidates or the other." Laurel relied on clear ground rules and felt students needed an outlet to have respectful conversations about the election: "I feel like this class is an environment for them to process it, get the nerves out as much as possible and then they can go out and have intelligent conversations with people about difficult issues without getting angry, getting upset and shutting down."

CONNECTING TO COURSE CONTENT AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

When possible, faculty sought to connect the political climate to relevant course content and learning outcomes. Classes in political science and anthropology provided direct connections, while some faculty in areas such as English, history, and the fine arts worked to make the connections more direct or did not attempt to address the election after November. Joe, an anthropologist, shared: "So I try to keep current global and local issues as part of the potential raw material. Because, you know, in anthropology we have so many potential examples for everything that we talk about." Another anthropologist, Priscilla, remarked: "[This moment] offers the acid test. If I'm saying all along anthropology is relevant and what we're doing in this classroom should make you see things that are happening right now around you in a new way." Political science courses also offered direct connections to the election. Bill saw current events including the election as a mandate to continually update his courses. "This semester, I'm struggling with how do I introduce and talk about the changes in racial politics that have been brought about by the Trump phenomenon and which are still unfolding and have brought a new dimension, it's actually an old dimension, but it's a new in the sense it's been gone for a long time."

History faculty were divided on the question of making connections to present-day politics. Kate, in attempt to create connections, created an assignment asking students to bring in the oldest photo from their family they have: "So, asking the students to think about a historical artifact, a photo in context, but then also relate the context to their current situation. I want them to start to make these connections, especially in the political culture, in which, for example, most of my students are bringing in pictures of newly arrived immigrants, because those, again, are some of the oldest pictures in a family." Annie, another history faculty member, saw connections to content but struggled in how to integrate current events: "I haven't figured out how to get that discussion started in a way that isn't me making the parallel and forcing a lens that I would like to come about more organically." Another historian, James, shared that he did not make direct connections, a stance which aligned with his philosophy of avoiding "making extensive commentary on sort of presidential politics because, I feel they pay you to teach them, not to listen to you, your views on X, Y, Z outside of your expertise."

Many instructors hoped that discussions about the election could support broad learning goals such as developing critical thinking and effective communication skills. Instructors chose to start and facilitate interactive discussions about the election rather than lecturing. Faculty welcomed multiple viewpoints and only asked that students defend their beliefs and viewpoints with the use of evidence. When controversial positions came up in class, Violet asked students to

> spend 10 minutes writing about the fallacies in one of the two viewpoints, you pick. They do that. Okay, now spend 10 minutes writing about the fallacies in the other viewpoint, which kind of, hopefully, forces them to realize that nobody is 100% right in this.

PLAYING "DEVIL'S ADVOCATE"

Faculty recognized an overall liberal majority both on their campuses and in their classrooms, while acknowledging the strong possibility of one or more Trump voters being present—whether Trump voters spoke or not. Faculty members, particularly those at Elite and Selective Colleges, worried that their institutions were perceived as liberal bubbles. Kate said that,

> My worry is that institutions like [Elite College], that have a reputation for being very liberal and progressive, we've become islands. I think that's less of a risk here because of the commitment of our president in particular to keeping engaged in the community … I think the only way to break down that stereotype is to be in the community, to be doing whatever your field is, to be doing service, with students.

Gwen, a faculty member at SC whose spouse worked in a conservative area, said, "I see a very different picture than what you see here in the [Selective College] bubble." She explained that those outside

of the college, "don't trust us and they think that we are idiots and that we are just completely divorced from reality. I think that this is, again … a symptom of what's wrong, that we have to go and actually experience and learn from the grassroots." Gwen concurred with Kate's notion that more experiential and service learning could help improve understanding.

About half of the faculty participants, men in particular, noted that they intentionally played the "devil's advocate" in class, attempting to foreground alternate viewpoints. Leo, talking about a student who had multiple classes with him, explained that,

> if you asked him what my leanings were on different kinds of issues, he wouldn't be able to tell you. I don't want to exert any of that kind of stuff on them. I want to ask them questions, play devil's advocate and make them think about what they really feel.

Similarly, Jeffrey asked students to "be able to put yourself in someone else's shoes," when addressing a generalization voiced in class that all Trump voters are racist. If a similar incident occurs in his class, Jeffrey said, "I'd like to think that I'd be able to handle it. But, you know, you really can't prepare. … And it's very much spontaneous how you deal with these things. You just hope you do it the right way."

By contrast, some faculty — often women — sought to surface multiple viewpoints but acknowledged that they could not always effectively play "devil's advocate" for the Trump administration. Beyond assuming that Trump supporters were present in class even if they did not share their views openly, some faculty tried to remind students that there likely was a diversity of political opinions. Amy claimed that she tried "to present alternative views" when there was no disagreement and "to remind students who are vocal, that there's a reason why our country is divided, and that means probably that our classroom is divided." Jeanne said that she tried to surface multiple viewpoints in class, a task that has become more difficult in the current political climate: "It's just very hard for me personally to play devil's advocate for Donald Trump. What is the devil's advocate of these things? … I try very hard to keep things sort of neutral."

DISCUSSION

In their study of faculty members teaching diversity courses, Perry et al. (2009) concluded that the "pedagogical skills necessary for the required diversity-education classroom are complex, extensive and may be beyond the skills that are modeled in current classrooms or represented in typical instructional training and development programs on campuses" (p. 100). The findings of this study support such a conclusion. Through the lenses of the four curricular processes outlined in the multi-contextual model for diverse learning environments in higher education (Hurtado et al., 2012; see Figure 1), humanities and social science faculty members teaching diversity courses grappled with their personal reactions to the 2016 elections and weighed disclosure of their political views in the classroom and the relationship between (non)disclosure of political stances and their social identities such as race, gender, and sexuality (instructor identities), expressed support for minoritized students who might be targeted (student identities), sought to facilitate a respectful, interactive discussion about politics (pedagogy), and considered whether and how to connect the current national political climate to their course (course content). In this section, we seek to consider questions prompted by the findings of this study in light of the DLE model. These questions reflect our desire to understand faculty members' experiences from their perspectives while also interrogating the power imbalances that shaped individuals' experiences and how these experiences may inform faculty engagement with contemporary controversies and electoral politics within courses — and diversity courses in particular — beyond the 2016 election, as faculty are destined to face challenging events in the future that they may choose to address in their classrooms.

How did faculty members' personal post-election reactions and struggles influence their teaching, both consciously and unconsciously? Though prior research has attempted to quantify faculty political affiliations (e.g., Eagan et al., 2014; Gross & Simmons, 2007; Rothman et al., 2011), this study contributes to understanding

how faculty reflected on their own teaching of required diversity courses and approaches to discussing politics in these courses. Instructors' decisions to bring up the election in class or to disclose their own political leanings appeared, for some, to hinge on their race/ethnicity, gender, and tenure status. The three participants in this study who felt comfortable to openly share their political views were White faculty members—two of them senior, tenured faculty members. Faculty members of color and untenured faculty members were generally less open about their political views. This suggests that tenured faculty members and White faculty members likely felt secure to share their views or that they would receive support from colleagues and the institution in case of complaints. This finding echoes previous research on the challenges faced by faculty members of color teaching diversity courses (Kadowaki & Subramaniam, 2014; Moore et al., 2010; Perry et al., 2009), particularly the notion that faculty often attempted to engage in depoliticization to maintain their credibility and authority (Perry et al., 2009). Some instructors discussed relying on their personal experiences with marginalization due to race or sexuality to empathize with their students and to contact students who might be struggling after the election. Gender also seemed to play a role in whether faculty chose to play the "devil's advocate" in class discussions following the election, with men in this study more often adopting this tactic than women.
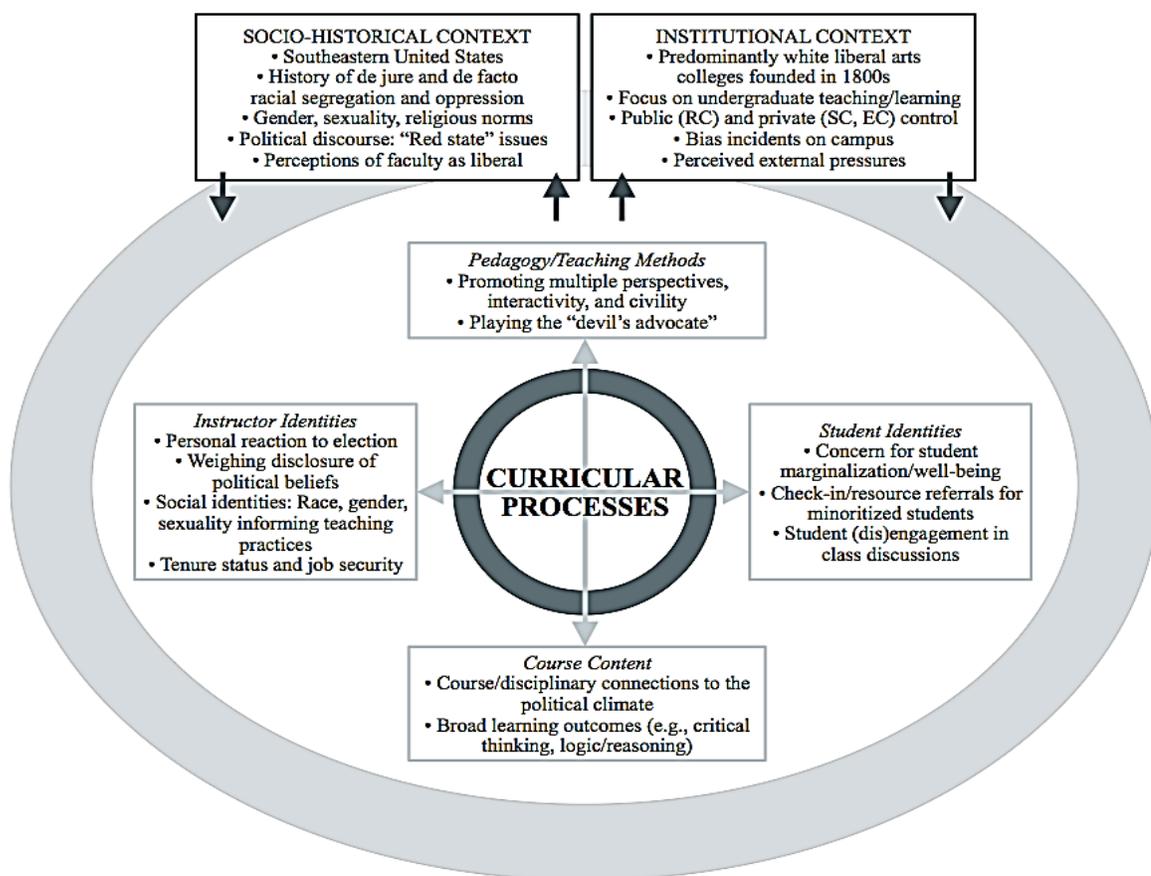
Figure 1. Interpreting faculty perspectives via curricular processes of the multicontextual model for diverse learning environments (adapted from Hurtado et al., 2012)

Even those who actively injected politics in the classroom or disclosed their own leanings took care not to stand on a soapbox, a stance found in previous research (Woessner & Kelly-Woessner, 2009), but to connect current events with relevant content, often asking students to think critically in making such connections. Given that this study focused on a particular subset of faculty members (i.e., humanists and social scientists teaching courses with diversity content) likely to be more liberal than

their counterparts in other disciplines (Rothman et al., 2011), it is unsurprising that faculty expressed awareness of perceptions of faculty as liberal, but took great care to avoid being perceived as indoctrinators bent on changing students' political beliefs. While the faculty members who disclosed their political stances framed disclosure in terms of honesty, ethics, or duty, it should be noted that faculty who did not disclose also often positioned their choices as duties or moral obligations as teachers. These findings underscore that decisions to bring up contemporary controversies such as electoral politics or for instructors to voice their own political stances are complex questions that will vary depending on one's disciplinary background, social identities, and context. While the 2016 elections offered one vivid example of these decision points, faculty are faced with decisions of whether and how to bring current events and aspects of their own backgrounds into the classroom, and diversity courses in particular, on an ongoing basis.

Did concern for minoritized students extend to action? Participants in this study exhibited a high degree of concern for their students. Most often, this concern centered on minoritized populations that participants believed were targeted both in rhetoric and substance by the Trump campaign and administration. These populations were, in several cases, the subjects of harassment and marginalization on campus as well as instances of verbal taunts, slurs, and vandalism during the election season. Faculty members spoke of engaging in emotional labor (Kadowaki & Subramaniam, 2014; Moore et al., 2010; Perry et al., 2009) including sharing their support for students in class, offering to connect students to resources, and checking in with students one-on-one, as well as attempting to provide space for marginalized students to be heard. However, concern for students also extended to a desire for Trump voters, likely a numerical minority in many classrooms, to be able to share their views without being personally attacked. Several faculty members expressed weariness that Trump supporters might paint themselves as the victims in their classrooms when they were silent. Regardless of particular student viewpoints, faculty saw the election as a chance to reiterate that students can and should share their views, but should think critically and provide evidence to support those views. In responding to the 2016 election — and perhaps any controversial social or political issue in the classroom — some faculty members saw themselves walking a tightrope between actively and vocally supporting greater equity and full inclusion of minoritized groups while ensuring that all voices, even dissenting voices with which faculty personally disagree, are heard. Such impulses may leave no group fully satisfied.

Are faculty prepared to take on charged conversations by drawing upon tried and true teaching methods they have used in the past? Who benefits from discussions framed around culturally specific notions of civility and respect? Faculty members expressed a desire to connect the presidential election to their course content, and many, if not all, of the disciplines represented in this study offered the chance to do so directly. Disciplinary context mattered a great deal in this study and faculty in disciplines such as political science, history, and anthropology exhibited a greater willingness to make connections explicit than faculty in other disciplines. Even if the content they were teaching did not offer such direct connections, faculty felt that in the short term following the election, some processing of current events in class was necessary. In opening a space for discussion, faculty members largely drew upon what they already knew to encourage participation: setting ground rules or parameters for conversation (e.g., time limits, off-limits topics), promoting respectful and civil discourse, and playing the "devil's advocate" if a particular viewpoint was not voiced. However, several faculty expressed an unwillingness to play "devil's advocate" following the election and skepticism that all sides deserved equal time or a balanced approach to class discussion, revealing that such strategies may be insufficient in discussing contemporary controversies in the classroom. In devising a longer-term approach to discussing the Trump administration, faculty faced greater challenges and shared that they perceived the situation as largely unprecedented in their careers.

These challenges suggest that faculty could engage in dialogue and learning about addressing contemporary social and political issues in their classroom, opportunities which might provide a space to question the cultural underpinnings of civility, respect, and the parameters of polite conversation that

often exclude discussion of politics in social settings. Demands for civility and equal time might ring hollow when incivility and hateful rhetoric defined the 2016 general election campaign and Trump's rhetoric in particular (Palfrey, 2017). Examining campus free speech controversies, Ben-Porath (2017) concluded that "civility in itself is not a useful tool for protecting free speech, supporting inclusive and free inquiry, or enabling the development of open-mindedness and engagement in class" (p. 96), noting that civility "seems to allow only 'appropriate,' noble forms of expression to count as civil, whereas those that are traditionally ascribed to women and to 'lesser' cultures—excitement, anger, tears—continue to be rejected and censored" (p. 97). Palfrey (2017) argued that equitable free expression has "rarely existed: some people are able to speaker louder and more freely than others" (p. 13). This study did not bear out that opportunities to discuss these tensions were occurring, at least in the short term following the 2016 election, but they are desperately needed, as faculty are largely left to contemplate engagement in difficult conversations on their own and may not be fully prepared to lead the conversations.

What role did institutional context play in instructors' decisions to engage with electoral politics in the classroom? Though we focused on presenting findings across the three colleges, context-specific norms at each of the three institutions emerged, as faculty at each institution appeared to be responding to specific perceived external pressures. Crucially, though variation existed among the three institutions, each institution was situated in a conservative state with "red-state politics" (Han et al., 2018, p. 2) that informed how instructors described they and their colleges would be perceived. At the public regional institution, instructors demonstrated a greater awareness that the institution was connected to the state, and that funding and support for the institution waivered depending upon perceptions of higher education held by lawmakers and the public. At the public institution, more faculty members assumed there would be Trump supporters in their classes, noting that the vast majority of the student population grew up in the conservative state. Conversely, at the private, selective liberal arts colleges—which drew from a more national and global student body—faculty members more often worried that the institution was, or would be perceived as, disconnected from society: a liberal bubble. Faculty at the two private colleges tended to disclose their political views more freely than their public college counterparts, perhaps because the colleges were not directly subject to the wishes of conservative state legislators. These findings suggest that no college or faculty member, regardless of context, is immune from pressures that might be overtly or covertly exerted by state legislators, governing boards, donors, parents, or students. Again, however, these pressures present opportunities for sustained connection and conversation among faculty and other campus stakeholders about institutional mission and how the aims of the institution manifest (or not) in the classroom and whether students are appropriately challenged and supported.

LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS

This study is delimited primarily by the context and characteristics of its participants; namely, faculty members teaching courses with diversity content required as part of general education programs at three colleges in the South. Participants were recruited according to the colleges' classifications of which courses met diversity requirements. Humanities and social science faculty taught virtually all of these courses; thus, by design, this study does not examine the experiences of faculty in other disciplines. One limitation of this study is that faculty members who self-selected to participate might espouse stronger personal commitments to the issues under discussion than faculty who did not volunteer to participate.

IMPLICATIONS

This study primarily leads to implications for faculty members and those who teach courses with diversity content in particular as well as academic administrators with the resources to support and operationalize these implications on a larger scale. Diversity courses are ripe for examination of and connection to current political issues, but engaging in discussions about politics presents several con-

siderations and risks. As evidenced in this study, faculty members do not necessarily feel prepared to address the current national political climate in their classrooms. In some cases, long-practiced teaching methods seemed inadequate to meet the current moment. Such a reality requires that all faculty members consider a number of factors, and the DLE model's curricular processes provide a useful guide for faculty introspection.

In terms of instructor identities, faculty members must first consider the lenses and biases they bring to teaching and how their backgrounds and experiences might serve to alternately connect with or alienate particular students. Instructors must also question whether and how they come to know their students' backgrounds and identities. Though some students will gladly share sensitive information in large group discussions, many others might be more willing to share their perspectives if faculty engage in a range of instructional strategies. Though some current events such as the 2016 election are too momentous to ignore in the classroom, faculty must also grapple with how to draw connections from current controversies to their disciplinary content and expertise. Depending upon faculty members' social identities and relative job security, such conversations might be taken on willingly or avoided. Though this point concerns faculty labor issues beyond the scope of this study, faculty and administrators ought to consider which instructors truly have the academic freedom to engage substantively in controversial issues in their classrooms.

Though institutional leaders should afford faculty members the academic freedom to teach within their content areas, they must also consider how to support instructors who bring controversial topics into their courses. Faculty members might face consequences from such charged discussions within student evaluations or decreased enrollment in future courses. Educational opportunities for faculty might examine approaches to engage with diversity and politics in the classroom. At the extreme, faculty might come under attack from groups internal and external to the institution, and senior administrators ought to consider in advance how to support those facing scrutiny.

While this qualitative study offers an in-depth portrait of faculty experiences in specific contexts, quantitative research, including national surveys of faculty members, might provide a broader picture and illuminate differences in perceptions across factors such as rank, experience, institutional type, and region. Further research might examine whether and how faculty beyond social science and humanities disciplines address the political climate in their classrooms, including in courses that focus on diversity and equity issues. Research might also address the nexus between instructors' social identities such as race, gender, and sexuality and their (non)disclosure of personal views and (non)engagement with contemporary sociopolitical issues in the classroom.

CONCLUSION

This study documented how faculty teaching required diversity courses at three colleges in the southeastern U.S. reacted to and addressed the 2016 presidential election within their courses. Implications of this study may help faculty, educational developers, and administrators consider how to address controversial and sensitive issues of national and global importance that will undoubtedly continue to emerge. Indeed, faculty in this study noted self-reflection on whether they handled discussions about the election or supported all of their students effectively, and several faculty expressed a lack of preparation to handle the difficult dialogues that ensued. These challenges intersect with current debates in higher education on free speech, civility, and academic freedom, as well as the influence of faculty members' and students' social identities in the classroom, and this study can inform continued research to understand the ways in which free expression and academic freedom play out for minoritized faculty and students in particular.

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