Resource Paper

In the Hands of Students:

The Charge of a Minority-Serving Institution Student Council at a Dual-Designated Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution and Hispanic-Serving Institution

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ABSTRACT

The *U.S. News and World Report* has ranked the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) as being one of the most racially diverse institutions, and UNLV has received dual-designations as an Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution and Hispanic-Serving Institution. Concurrently, pervasive physical threats, student demands for change, and results of a campus climate survey created a peremptory need to center the cultural wealth of minoritized students to organize and coalition build. This essay focuses on the UNLV Minority-Serving Institution (MSI) Student Council (MSISC) and its charge to lead campus initiatives that promote success for minoritized students to become a truly *serving* MSI. Written by one of the MSISC members and their advisor, we historicize the MSISC's creation and share ideas for similar MSI-focused student committees and task forces.

INTRODUCTION

Since the inception of the *U.S. News and World Report*'s campus racial and ethnic diversity ranking, the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) has been consistently ranked (UNLV, 2021). Recently, UNLV was part of a four-way tie for being the most diverse institution in the United States (ibid.). In the fall of 2021, 66.9 percent (20,525 of 30,679) of UNLV's enrolled undergraduate and graduate student population identified as racially minoritized (UNLV, n.d.-a.). In 2015 and 2016, UNLV was awarded its first Title III Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution (AANAPISI) Part A and Part F grants, respectively, from the U.S. Department of Education. Five years later, in 2020 and 2021, UNLV was again awarded Title III AANAPISI Part A and Part F grants. In 2019, UNLV was awarded federal funding through the National Science Foundation Improving Undergraduate Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Education (IUSE) Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) grant. In short, since 2015, UNLV has been awarded five grants directly tied to the AANAPISI and HSI designations. Receiving these grant awards meant that UNLV met the U.S. Department of Education eligibility requirements as an AANAPISI and HSI, institutions enrolling at least 10 percent and 25 percent of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) and Latinx undergraduate students, respectively, and meeting requirements detailed in the Higher Education Act Section 312(b) eligibility criteria of Title III and Title V programs.

However, enrollment-defined AANAPISIs and HSIs are not necessarily mission driven to educate AAPI and Latinx[1] students as is the case with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) and Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities (TCCU), which were created for the discrete purpose of educating Black and Native American students (Espinosa et al., 2017; Gasman et al., 2015). Thus, enrolling "critical masses" of AAPIs and Latinxs, as well as other racially minoritized students, does not automatically equate to institutional policies, practices, and programs that address racial equity and justice (Alcantar et al., 2020). Despite UNLV's national diversity ranking and AANAPISI-HSI[2] designations, there remained pervasive threats on campus as experienced by racially minoritized students, the voices of primarily Black students advocating for change, and stark results reflected by an externally conducted campus climate survey.

While other scholars have examined the impact of Minority-Serving Institution (MSI)-funded initiatives (e.g., Museus et al., 2018;

Nguyen et al., 2018; Teranishi & Alcantar, 2019), this essay addresses what other ways funded MSIs can serve their students beyond federally funded programs. This essay is framed by the following question: *How do funded MSIs serve minoritized students beyond the U.S. Department of Education and other federal MSI grant funding?* This essay traces the process and progress of involving students in one campus's effort toward embracing the status of and being a truly *serving* MSI through the creation and work of the MSI Student Council (MSISC), a student council not funded by federal AANAPISI or HSI grant funding. We focus on the UNLV MSISC and its charge to lead campus initiatives that promote success for minoritized students. Written from the vantage point of one MSISC member and their advisor, we historicize the context leading to the creation of the MSISC, highlight activities and initiatives from the first year, and share preliminary lessons learned. Through the lens of our lived experiences, we document features that influence the success of the MSISC to offer ideas for other institutions desiring to create or sustain similar student-centered committees, models, or task forces at MSIs.

TRACING THE MSISC TIMELINE

Black students at UNLV were instrumental in paving the way for the MSISC, reminiscent of how Black activists have historically led the way in U.S. civil rights movements and laid the foundation for issues faced by other minoritized groups to be brought to the forefront. In 2018, members of an African American sorority found an anonymous, handwritten note in the UNLV library (Hart, 2018). In plain sight, the note read: "Kill the Blacks." This act of hate left students concerned for their safety. The extent of the campus response was an email from the UNLV undergraduate student government president at the time to inform the student body about the note. In October 2019, some UNLV classes were cancelled following the finding of a shooting threat written on a bathroom stall targeting African Americans and supporters of U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders. UNLV students shared their frustrations about the university's response with administrators following the incident (Miller, 2019). As a result of student disapproval, Black UNLV students advocated for change.

Upset about the lack of response following the campus threat, one of the integral demands that Black students and their allies called upon was for UNLV administration to have a climate assessment, which was later conducted by the National Assessment of Collegiate Campus

Climate (NACCC) through the University of Southern California. The climate assessment was completed in the spring of 2020, drawing from responses of 3,706 out of 22,819 UNLV undergraduates (16.2 percent; National Assessment of Collegiate Campus Climates, 2020). Reporting on the six NACCC survey content areas, key assessment findings demonstrated how Students of Color experienced many of the same racial stressors that Black students at UNLV were experiencing:

- Mattering and Affirmation: Fifty-four percent of Students of Color perceived they mostly matter or strongly matter in classes with white professors compared to 60 percent of their white peers. Students of Color and white students reported equally high levels of affirmation from professors of Color.
- Cross-Racial Engagement: Fifty-six percent of undergraduate Students of Color reported feeling moderately encouraged or extremely encouraged about having conversations about race with other Students of Color whereas 32 percent of white students reported to feel similarly encouraged or extremely encouraged to have conversations about race with Students of Color.
- Racial Learning and Literacy: Students of Color reported to feeling more likely to be open when talking about race with other Students of Color compared to their white peers. Twenty-four percent of white students compared to 20 percent of Students of Color indicated not learning about race anywhere on campus.
- Encounters with Racial Stress: Forty-four percent of Students of Color felt moderately or extremely included on campus in comparison to 47 percent of their white peers. Considering experiences of racial microaggressions, 28 percent of Black and 19 percent of Native American/Alaska Native respondents indicated they had been asked or expected to represent views of their entire racialized group in class discussions; one in three Black student respondents had experienced race-related jokes that made them uncomfortable; and 9 percent of Black and 6 percent of Middle Eastern undergraduate respondents had been asked for their identification by campus police. Regarding overt racism on campus, more Students of Color reported directly experiencing or hearing about instances of overt racism (54 percent of Arab students, 35 percent of Asian/South Asian students, 56 percent of Black students, 45 percent of Hispanic/Latinx students, 56 percent of Middle Eastern students, 50 percent of Native American/Alaska Native students, 38 percent of Native Hawaiian/Pacific

Islander students, 47 percent of students who indicated "Two or More Races") than their white peers (40 percent).

- Appraisals of Institutional Commitment: Forty-three percent of white students reported to believe campus administration dealt with racism or racist incidents moderately effectively or extremely effective compared to 37 percent of Students of Color.
- Impact of External Environments: One in two Students of Color experienced feelings of frustration and anger because of off-campus racism.

The NACCC identified that hostility on campus was creating an unwelcoming climate for many of its students. Although student activism leading to the campus assessment was initially focused on anti-Black racism at UNLV, the NACCC illustrated the racialized realities for Students of Color and the need to improve the climate for all students at UNLV. Following the NACCC, UNLV Student Life formed a committee of staff professionals and student leaders within the Division of Student Affairs to review the NACCC findings and make suggestions regarding which assessment recommendations on which the Division of Student Affairs should take action.[3]

Together, the physical threats made in public campus spaces, the voices of primarily Black students demanding for change and resources, and the NACCC results created a peremptory need to center the cultural wealth of minoritized students to organize and coalition build. Although the university revived the university's MSI Task Force, a committee of faculty, administrators, and staff across campus "dedicated to advancing student success initiatives for campus Students of Color, including promoting educational equity and eliminating the achievement gap" during the fall 2019 semester, the absence of a student voice at UNLV became clear (UNLV, n.d.-b). Coupled with a change of focus from new university leadership, as UNLV began to reflect on ways to best serve, issues of racial inequity and social justice became more prevalent across the country in the wake of George Floyd's murder. National tragedies and coverage only made the wounds deeper and issues more pressing.

During the summer of 2020, two proposals moved to the attention of senior administrators at UNLV: the Anti-Black Racism Task Force[4] and the MSISC. The Associate Vice President (AVP) for Campus Life (second author) developed a proposal to the VP for Student Affairs to allocate $200,000 to start the MSISC, envisioned to be an advisor-led council of students representing all classifications and who were

nominated by UNLV faculty and staff who were a part of the MSI Taskforce. The MSISC would also be sponsored by the VP of Students Affairs with the charge and support of the UNLV Provost/Executive VP to represent the student voice of the MSI Taskforce. Unlike previous efforts of the MSI Taskforce, the goal was to institutionalize students' voices. While both the Anti-Black Racism Task Force and the MSISC were approved in the same summer, the remainder of the present essay focuses on the MSISC. Nonetheless, it is important to honor the role Black students had in paving the way for the creation of both the Anti-Black Racism Task Force and the MSISC at UNLV.

By the fall of 2020, the MSISC was formed. In addition to upholding the founding mission of the MSI Task Force, the MSISC has a particular focus on taking "important steps at ensuring that student-facing programs, service models, and policies exist to help historically underrepresented students thrive at UNLV" (MSI Student Services Committee, 2020). In effect, the MSISC has a unique role of giving student council members an opportunity to lead changes on campus. This initial charge can be seen as a parallel call-to-action for Students of Color on the MSISC to mobilize and reimagine a university system space that truly "serves" minoritized students.

DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFTS IN THE DESERT

Contextualizing advocacy efforts around the creation of the MSISC are demographic shifts in the state and the university. Related to UNLV's eligibility for AANAPISI and HSI funding, changing demographics in Nevada has seen growth in Asian American, Pacific Islander, and Latinx populations, seeming to parallel UNLV's ability to meet both the AANAPISI and HSI eligibility criteria. Latinxs are the second-largest racialized group in the state with 29.2 percent calling Nevada home (U.S. Census, 2020) and were recorded to have an 81.9 percent population increase in Nevada (Legislative Counsel Bureau, 2011). Driven by UNLV's status teetering at the cusp of meeting federal HSI eligibility requirements, there was an effort at the university to "recount" students to meet the federal threshold, actively asking students whether they identified as Latinx. While AAPIs currently account for about 10 percent of Nevada's population (U.S. Census, 2020), Asian Americans, particularly, were recorded to have the largest population increase, at 116 percent, of any racialized group in Nevada over a decade (Legislative Counsel Bureau, 2011). This growth parallels how Asian Americans are the fastest-growing racialized group

in the nation (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021). Nevada saw a 102.3 percent increase in the population of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders (NHPI), including NHPI with other race(s) from 2000 to 2010 (Legislative Counsel Bureau, 2011).

Although a historically white institution (HWI), the growth of racially minoritized students enrolled at UNLV seems to have led the university to pivot in its own branding. UNLV has been leaning into and promoting its diversity scorecard (UNLV, n.d.-c). Considering the general population shifts within Clark County and the State of Nevada, it appears that increased racial diversity happened to UNLV as an unintended consequence as opposed to UNLV actively recruiting a diverse student population. Reviewing data from the National Center for Education Statistics (2009, 2019), Figure 1 and Figure 2 represent the fall 2009 and fall 2019 enrollment of UNLV undergraduates and graduate students, respectively, by race. Figure 1 shows how enrollment of undergraduates identifying as Asian, Black, Latinx, and Two or More Races has increased in the last decade. Figure 2 indicates that graduate enrollment of Latinx students has increased from 2009 to 2019. However, ethnicity in disaggregation as well as mixed race and multiracial in disaggregation are not captured or made clear by these national data.
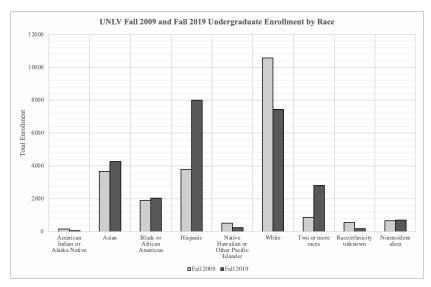
Figure 1. UNLV Fall 2009 and Fall 2019 Undergraduate Enrollment by Race.

Sources: Data from National Center for Education Statistics (2009, 2019).
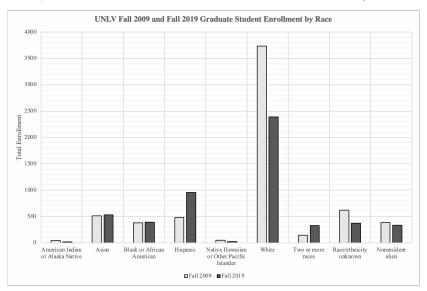
Figure 2. UNLV Fall 2009 and Fall 2019 Graduate Enrollment by Race.

Sources: Data from National Center for Education Statistics (2009, 2019).

Enrollment is important in thinking about AANAPISI-HSIs, given that these designations require institutions meet specific enrollment criteria. Nonetheless, scholars have argued the idea of *servingness* as moving beyond enrollment, building this argument by critically looking at HSIs and the extent to which they "serve" Latinx students (Garcia 2017, 2019; Garcia et al., 2019). Based on their systematic review of research literature on HSIs, Garcia and colleagues (2019) contend that servingness is multidimensional and offers a framework for identifying multiple structures for serving (e.g., compositional diversity, grants, mission and value statements, programs, services) and external influences on serving (e.g., alumni, community leaders, governing boards, legislation). Moreover, research has pointed out how HSIs are also enrolling a larger share of Black and Native American students than their HBCU and TCCU counterparts (Núñez et al., 2015). Thus, understanding what AANAPISI-HSI servingness looks like at UNLV has implications for AAPI, Latinx, and other racially minoritized students. This underlines the need for intentional action around MSI designations. For example, examining the organizational change factors through Nevada's HSIs, Martinez (2015) recounts the role of legislators and campus individuals who "worked internally to

clarify misconceptions and provide definitions of what it meant to be an emerging HSI" (p. 25). A challenge, therefore, is how to intentionally align policies, practices, and programs on campus to support the increasing number of AAPI, Latinx, and other minoritized students. We explore the role of one model, the MSISC, in helping UNLV move toward being truly *serving* through the hands of students.

About the MSISC

The MSISC was created during critical junctures of threats being experienced on campus, student advocacy led by Black students, and a need for student voice on the MSI Task Force, all framed by a nationwide racial reckoning. While not funded by the federal AANAPISI or HSI grants, the MSISC still aims to meet the missions intended by these MSI designations.

Organizationally, the MSISC falls under the MSI Task Force Student Services Subcommittee and the larger MSI Task Force, reporting to the UNLV Provost/Executive VP (UNLV, n.d.-b.). The MSISC is not like traditional student governments in that its members are not elected members running with specific platforms. Instead, members are vetted by university administrators and faculty. Members have equal status on the council as there is no executive board (e.g., chair, secretary). Moreover, each member receives a stipend.

Twelve students were selected to serve on the inaugural MSISC in the 2020–21 academic year. The inaugural MSISC was a mix of undergraduate and graduate students, ranging from third-year undergraduates to Ph.D. candidates and representing different colleges, schools, majors, and certificates including accounting, anthropology, Asian American studies and history, classical studies, finance, journalism, higher education, history of East Asia and Latin America, online teaching and learning, psychology, program evaluation and assessment, and public health. About one-third are undergraduate seniors, one-third are master's and doctoral students, and one-third are undergraduate juniors. Students identify as women, men, nonbinary, and gender queer. Three-fourths of the MSISC are first-generation U.S. college students, students whose parent or guardian has not received a four-year U.S. baccalaureate degree. Notably, the MSISC is a multiracial and multiethnic coalition, as council members identify as Asian (i.e., Filipino), Black/African American (i.e., Haitian), Latinx (i.e., Puerto Rican, Mexican American), and mixed race (i.e., African American and European). As such, the MSISC members have an opportunity to

adopt and develop a "panminority racial consciousness," a "we-ness" amongst Students of Color (Ocampo, 2013, p. 318).

The MSISC meets monthly with their advisor, a university administrator who is a member of the larger MSI Task Force and chairs the MSI Task Force Student Services Subcommittee. The role of the MSISC advisor is to provide close mentorship and guidance to MSISC members. Finally, the MSISC supports both university-wide engagements as well as individual MSISC member-led initiatives, a feature that will be described in more depth.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth model is used as an analytical and practical tool to frame and understand the work being done through the MSISC. Yosso (2005) identifies six types of cultural capital that Students of Color draw on: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistance. The MSISC members build and further cultivate their held cultural knowledges vis-à-vis their individual initiatives and campus wide efforts. Through their work, MSISC members share their motivations and visions with fellow students, staff, and faculty, recounting stories of disappointment, resistance, and success.

MSISC Member-Led Initiatives

Rather than talking about or around students, the MSISC empowers students to lead and organize initiatives not already existing or bolster initiatives in which they identify as important to invest. The main feature distinguishing MSISC is the individual MSISC member-led funded initiatives (i.e., intervention, policy, program). This funded initiative feature sets the MSISC apart from registered independent student organizations because funding is not always guaranteed for student organizations. The MSISC initiatives also differ from elected student government members' agendas or platforms, as those tend to fluctuate from year to year. Although MSISC members often select initiatives that are personal and speak to their experiences or observations in navigating life and being a student at UNLV, MSISC member-led projects are geared toward serving minoritized students.

MSISC member-led initiatives position students to enact change on their own terms while also tying back to what the MSISC represents, especially initiatives that address equity and justice. Leveraging council members' lived experiences, the initiatives often emerged from

what members see is lacking at the institution and what they identify as needing investment as they see fit. MSISC members develop proposals with a budget justification, helping them build a sense of contribution and individual efficacy. Council members are later connected with campus partners, such as UNLV faculty or staff, to support the proposal. As such, by giving some institutional power to MSISC members, these funded proposals concurrently entice UNLV faculty and staff to work with members of the MSISC. Acknowledging the assets and resources that students bring with them (Yosso, 2005), the MSISC member-led initiatives are embodiments of and activate the forms of capital that MSISC members already possess.

Exemplifying Yosso's (2005) *aspirational capital* is "Rise to the Challenge," an initiative developed by an MSISC member to address the low number of first-generation and Students of Color attending graduate school. Accepting up to four undergraduates each year, "Rise to the Challenge" matches students with a graduate mentor through the UNLV Graduate College and provides financial assistance to cover one standardized preparation course, one standardized test, and application fees for two degree programs at UNLV. The MSISC member maintained high aspirations for fellow students to pursue graduate education and had begun to carve a path of possibility for other first-generation students and Students of Color.

Interested in supporting students on academic probation, one MSISC member worked on an initiative entitled "Back on Track." Building from their existing knowledge about campus resources, this MSISC member leveraged *social capital* to help them move "Back on Track" forward and arranged a guest speaker series with roundtable discussions for faculty, staff, and students. The roundtables focused on sharing best practices for assisting students on academic probation, including advice related to programmatic successes and challenges, and addressing remote learning amid a pandemic.

Leveraging their *linguistic capital*, or the ability to draw upon "multiple language and communication skills" (Yosso, 2005, p. 78), two council members created podcasts through the KUNV 91.5 radio station at UNLV. One podcast, "You Goin' Listen," centered issues concerning historically underrepresented students. Twelve episodes were recorded to discuss topics such as Black history, colorism, cultural appropriation, and ableism. The other MSISC member created two podcasts with "Let's Talk UNLV," an existing podcast show at UNLV, to highlight the Free Palestine movement and local

grassroots organizations fighting injustices that subjugate minoritized communities. Creating these podcasts gave MSISC members an opportunity to tap into and enhance their communication skills while connecting them with an established university radio station. MSISC initiative funding paid for the airtime, use of the radio station space, and the radio station technician who was responsible for recording and editing.

Another MSISC member (first author) has been leaning into their *navigational capital* and *resistant capital* in pursuing an initiative to systematize disaggregating race and ethnicity data at UNLV through the "Count Us In" initiative, a title giving credit to the student-led "Count Me In" data disaggregation advocacy efforts in the University of California system (Poon et al., 2017). Leaning into their *resistant capital*, the first author chose "Count Us In" to help UNLV examine the heterogeneous Communities of Color it is enrolling, employing, and serving, pushing UNLV to expand beyond the mandated racialized categorization from the U.S. Department of Education. Leaning into their *navigational capital* from previous professional experiences, the first author has been working with the university's institutional research office and student affairs to advocate for UNLV's adoption of race and ethnicity data disaggregation of undergraduate and graduate students on official forms. During the first year, the first author worked on a pilot survey in collaboration with UNLV Student Affairs to test an expanded ethnicity and tribal affiliation list with additional options for Asian, Black or African American, Latinx, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and Native American or Alaska Native, as well as write-in spaces. Sent to all enrolled undergraduate and graduate students, the survey received nearly 6,000 responses. In May 2021, this survey received a UNLV Student Life Assessment Committee outstanding assessment recognition for collecting data that offers programs and services a more nuanced understanding and insight into the students whom they serve.

In the spirit of both UNLV's AANAPISI-HSI designations and relatively new R1 (very high research activity) Carnegie Classification status in 2018, one MSISC member advocated for $12,000 to be invested into the Open Article Fund through UNLV University Libraries. Leveraging their *navigational capital*, the MSISC member's interest in the fund was motivated by an aim to promote publishing activity among graduate students, and particularly historically underrepresented graduate students, whom the MSISC member cited as having

lower rates of academic publishing. Moreover, according to the council member, funding for publishing activity was not available for graduate students. Partnering with the UNLV University Libraries, the MSI Graduate Student Open Access Fund was created (UNLV University Libraries, 2021).

Reflecting on the 2020–21 academic year, MSISC members identified working with thirty-one academic and nonacademic UNLV departments for their initiatives. More than two-fifths (41.7 percent) of the MSISC members planned to continue working on the same initiative in the 2021–22 academic year. In all, the MSISC can be seen as a space that has facilitated student agency and cultivated partnerships with university faculty and staff in MSI-focused efforts.

A Year in Review

Like many other U.S. institutions moving to remote learning and teaching because of COVID-19, the MSISC's first operating year was virtual and required creativity. During the fall semester, the MSISC supported university-wide events including Homecoming Week and First-Generation Week. During Homecoming Week, the MSISC hosted a virtual trivia night with cash prizes featuring facts about UNLV and MSIs. During First-Generation Week, the MSISC sponsored a scholarship raffle to enrolled first-generation students and a first-generation student essay contest focusing on themes of survival, translation, and firsts.

During the spring semester, the MSISC sponsored UNLV's inaugural MSI Week, an opportunity to highlight UNLV's role as a dually designated MSI. The MSISC members also brainstormed ways to broadly support the UNLV community. The council offered a week-long lunch event at the dining commons in appreciation of the dedication of Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE) healthcare workers, made a $40,000 donation to match the donation of the Charles Schwab bank to the UNLV Supporting Our Students Emergency Relief Fund, and made a $5,000 donation to the UNLV Undocumented Student Program and the Immigration Clinic. Moreover, during MSI Week, the MSISC worked toward increasing public dialogue around MSIs as well as their public presence. MSISC members were featured in the "Let's Talk UNLV" podcast and hosted a moderated panel with faculty discussing directions and implications for UNLV as an MSI, AANAPISI, and HSI.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The MSISC bolstered the capacity for UNLV to work toward its MSI designations through the hands of students. Driven by the vision to transform the university, the MSISC goes beyond one-month heritage celebrations to work on intentional and systemic change. MSISC student leaders are at the helm to create, extend, and improve campus policies, practices, and programs. To offer ideas for adoption, we document the opportunities and challenges the MSISC faced in implementation including (a) capitalizing on the opportunity and securing university buy-in, (b) using unrestricted funding, (c) considering membership, compensation, and turnover, (d) selecting an advisor, and (e) navigating cross-campus partnerships.

Capitalizing on the Opportunity and Securing University Buy-In

The existence of the MSISC signals an opportunity for the members, and the institution at-large, to learn more about MSIs, especially the designations that the institution holds. Over the year, it even became clear that the MSISC members had disparate information around MSI (i.e., AANAPISI, HSI) eligibility and designations. In response, there were activities and events used to educate and market UNLV's MSI status(es) both within the MSISC and with the campus community. Generally, these activities and events included a brief primer on how and why MSIs, in general, and specific designations (i.e., AANAPISI, HSI) emerged and evolved.

Following articulation around the purpose of the MSISC, the creation and sustainability of the MSISC requires both intention and dedicated funding resources. This requires buy-in from university administration to invest in the MSISC. In short, for logistic success, any similar MSISC must have a foundation to support future MSISC efforts.

Using Unrestricted Funding

The MSISC uses unrestricted funding that gives council members the flexibility to support the range of member-led initiatives and programming. Unlike funds earmarked for specific uses, unrestricted funding does not have stipulations on spending and can be allocated to identified institutional needs. In the case of the MSISC, this unrestricted funding was generated from campus business partnerships (e.g., banks, bookstores, food/beverage vendors) with UNLV Student Affairs. In contrast, other types of financial accounts (e.g., donor/gift,

state) at UNLV involve types of funds that may be tied to specific use across colleges, departments, and units.

While there is no conflict with the work of the MSISC initiatives and existing federal AANAPISI and HSI grants at UNLV, university leadership determined that using unrestricted funds through the Division of Student Affairs was the best way to financially support the council. Federal MSI funds have potential restrictions that may otherwise render certain students (e.g., DACA, international, nondegree seeking) ineligible. Using a state account would restrict spending for honoraria and hosting. Gift accounts must follow criteria established by the donor. Some university account funds also have narrow purposes. For example, while organized in good faith by the MSISC, the NSHE healthcare workers appreciation lunch would not have otherwise been funded by the UNLV Student Life fee programming account where the majority of recipients were strictly university employees and not students. The MSISC unrestricted funds were able to cover the dining hall hosting expenses instead. Using unrestricted funds is a strategic opportunity for the MSISC to sponsor activities and initiatives that could support more students and campus community at large.

Considering Membership, Compensation, Turnover

The procedure for the MSISC member selection involved nominations from faculty and staff and included questions about student nominees. The nomination form asked the following prompts: "Why would your nominee be a good fit for the MSISC?," "Provide an example of this student's leadership, mentorship or advocating experience," and "Please list the nominee's current involvement commitments." It was challenging to identify a member from UNLV's professional schools (i.e., dentistry, law, or medicine). Time constraints and requirements for professional students may make serving on the council challenging. More work may be needed to recruit a member from one of the professional schools or ways to include professional school students' ideas or needs. Nonetheless, UNLV was successful in recruiting master's and doctoral students to serve on the MSISC, creating a unique opportunity for undergraduate and graduate students to serve on the same council.

UNLV MSISC members are provided a monthly stipend and work up to twelve hours per month during the academic year. At the same time, roughly eight out of the twelve MSISC members work in some other capacity at the university. Therefore, it is important

that the advisor and campus partners understand the demand on students' time. Moreover, because the MSISC members are compensated only during the academic year, there is an opportunity to explore summer internships for members wishing to work during the summer. This is not uncommon as UNLV has similar student positions whereby resident assistants, admissions tour guides, and student government leaders receive compensation for their work during the summer months.

There is also the need to balance MSISC student leader turnover as members graduate, seek other leadership opportunities, or secure employment opportunities that may conflict with MSISC service. When any of these happen, the council may consider whether immediately recruiting to fill the vacancy or waiting the following semester or academic year to fill the vacancy aligns with what the student leaders identify works best. Toward the end of the MSISC's first year, the advisor solicited MSISC members' feedback around vacancies, and the student leaders thought it best to hold off filling vacancies to allow the current MSISC members a chance to get to know each other first. This was not surprising when considering how the MSISC has mostly operated remotely since August 2020.

Selecting an Advisor

The advisor must be carefully chosen. Reflecting on the UNLV MSISC, we suggest that the advisor not hold an entry-level position at the institution. The UNLV MSISC advisor (second author) is the AVP for Student Life. Considering the UNLV chain of command, the AVP reports to the VP of Student Affairs who reports to the Provost. As such, not only can the AVP leverage their position to work alongside key administrators, but they are also clued in on significant campus initiatives and have the ability to move resources (i.e., funding, personnel, time) to get behind initiatives. In short, selecting an advisor who is connected to administration and knowledgeable of university resources can assist the student council in facilitating campus conversations and completing council members' activities and initiatives.

Navigating Cross-Campus Partnerships

Finally, the MSISC wrestled with a double-edged sword of invisibility and visibility especially during its first year. Initially, the MSISC operated somewhat on the margins, struggling to get its name "out

there." However, once campus stakeholders realized that the MSISC had funding opportunities and influence, more stakeholders began flocking to the MSISC for partnership, especially as it came to cosponsored programming both small and large scale, speaker series, or other investment in funds or council member time. This requires keen consideration and whether such partnerships align with the MSISC.

CONCLUSION

The UNLV MSISC aims to center minoritized students in a coconstructed environment that gives students agency to push for new or support existing initiatives, policies, practices, and programs that students identify as what is needed. As a student-centered and student-led model, the MSISC creates an opportunity for UNLV to lean into the *servingness* of being an MSI by being responsive to the needs of students by empowering students to decide in what the institution should invest. Students simultaneously hold roles of being activists, advocates, and leaders, building upon and fostering their cultural capital during their council appointment.

Moreover, the UNLV MSISC broadens the spaces in which students have a say. MSISC members leverage funding and networking resources, particularly through member-led initiatives, to define what being a truly serving MSI can start to look like. Moreover, the campus partnerships position the MSISC member-initiated projects toward institutionalization to sustain initiatives beyond the service time of individual MSISC members. While not limited to MSIs, the MSISC is just one example of how institutions can think creatively around how to better embody their MSI status(es) regardless of the U.S. Department of Education federal AANAPISI, HSI, and other MSI grants. This essay gives credence to involving students in MSI efforts that are often spearheaded solely by administrators or faculty. The MSISC recognizes what students can bring and makes them part of decision-making tables.

Although the extent to which similar models can be adopted at other universities will depend on campus buy-in, capacity, funding, and leadership, among other considerations, what is clear is the opportunity to intentionally engage with Students of Color in identifying initiatives to improve the campus environment for all. The MSISC meets students *where they are* instead of *where they should be*. The MSISC supports efforts of racial and other dimensions of equity and justice by having students lead the charge.

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Most of all, we want to acknowledge the inaugural MSISC. Their work has been inspiring, intentional, and pioneering, and it truly defines what it means to serve students. These nonelected student leaders identify existing gaps in programs and services that impact Students of Color while providing an avenue to effect change while working alongside key faculty and administrators in a concerted effort to improve the student experience at UNLV. We honor their exemplary commitment and courage in advocating for such change, even in the face of challenge.

NOTES

1. While the eligibility for HSIs, for example, relies on meeting certain enrollment percentages, scholars have uncovered how organizations, such as the Hispanic Higher Education Coalition (HHEC), recommended that the HSI designation should not hinge on the enrollment percentage alone (Valdez, 2015). Moreover, there were select postsecondary institutions (e.g., Hostos Community College, Boricua College) established for the historic purpose of serving Latinx populations in the United States (Núñez et al., 2015).
2. Designations are listed in alphabetical order to not privilege one over the other (Alcantar et al., 2020).
3. The NACCC Committee at UNLV is expected to wrap up their work in the 2021–22 calendar year.
4. The Task Force, which later became the Anti-Black Racism Task Force, came as a result of and under the leadership of former UNLV President Marta Meana. Once the Task Force was formed, the members of the Task Force decided to call themselves the Anti-Black Racism Task Force.

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