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**The Civil Right to Belong:  
A Case Study on Immigrant Integration of Muslim Students in Educational Institutions**

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy in Public Policy and Administration at  
Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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## **List of Abbreviations**

AANHPI	Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander
AMEMSA	Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim, and South Asian
AAMEMSSAA	African, Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim, Sikh and South Asian
CAIR	Council on American Islamic Relations
DEI	Diversity, equity, and inclusion
DOJ	Department of Justice Civil Rights Division
EEOA	Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974
EEOC	Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
MASSA	Muslim, Arab, Sikh, and South Asian Students
MSA	Muslim Students Associations
OCR	Department of Education Office of Civil Rights
OPEP	Department of Education Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development
Patriot Act	Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001
Title IV	Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. §§ 2000(c) et seq. (Desegregation of Public Schools and Colleges)
Title VI	Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. 2000(d) et seq. (Discrimination in Federally Funded Programs)
Title IX	Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972
VIA	Vancouver Index of Acculturation
9/11	September 11, 2001

## **Abstract**

### **THE CIVIL RIGHT TO BELONG: A CASE STUDY ON IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION OF MUSLIM STUDENTS IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS**

By Mamoonah Hafeez Siddiqui

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Public Policy and Administration at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2022

Dissertation Director: Dr. Saltanat Liebert, Associate Professor, Public Administration

Constitutional equal protection values serve as social integration policies for new Americans and generations that follow. They promise equal opportunity, fair treatment, protection from unlawful discrimination, and freedom to preserve cultural identities in their new communities. However, in times of national security crises and political polarization, the disjuncture in the way equal protection doctrines have been historically implemented often reflect deep-rooted inequities that impact underrepresented communities. American Muslims are one such community in which members have experienced anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant sentiment particularly after 9/11 and political polarization on immigration and civil rights policies. The study explores the equal protection doctrine as a mitigator to these challenges. Utilizing a mixed-methods case analysis, this study examined social integration experiences of Muslim students in public institutions of higher education and the impact of administrative civil rights practice on social integration. The study revealed that while educational institutions have started to administer civil rights through a more holistic lens of diversity, equity, and inclusion, Muslim students with diverse immigrant experiences continue to rely primarily on in-group student support systems to find a sense of belonging, valued identity, cultural citizenship, and sense of

safety from anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiment on campus. The study suggests that students' lack of trust in institutional support systems is a primary factor that impedes cohesion between students and their institutions. The researcher proposes that civil rights administrators are bridge builders who through embedding systemic trust-building initiatives can lead their institutions to advance meaningful integration of students on campus.

*Keywords:* civil rights, educational institution, equal protection, immigrant integration, Muslim

## CHAPTER I

Civil rights doctrines, particularly the Equal Protection Clause of the United States Constitution, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and state anti-discrimination statutes, are foundational bedrock principles that undergird United States' immigrant integration policy.<sup>1</sup> These civil rights principles promise immigrants an equal opportunity, fundamental fairness, and freedom from discrimination and harassment as they establish roots in their new communities. New immigrants who experience unlawful discrimination or harassment or other inequities rely upon the legitimacy of federal civil rights doctrines and corresponding state laws and policies to integrate successfully as they work towards economic mobility, linguistic proficiency, and meaningful civic participation. These civil rights values reify diverse cultural and social identities within the larger majority society. As such, the values inherent in civil rights embody the notion of belonging and social inclusion in a nation new Americans<sup>2</sup> now call home.

However, in times of national security crises<sup>3</sup> and civil rights related social unrest/political polarization,<sup>4</sup> the disjuncture in the way civil rights doctrines have been historically interpreted and implemented in national, state, and local governmental institutions as public policies and practices often reflect deep-rooted structural inequities and biases that have

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<sup>1</sup> The Migration Policy Institute defines immigrant integration as the “process of economic mobility and social inclusion for newcomers and their children. As such, integration touches upon the institutions and mechanisms that promote development and growth within society, including early childhood care; elementary, postsecondary, and adult education systems; workforce development; health care, provision of government services to communities with linguistic diversity, and more. Successful integration builds communities that are stronger economically and more inclusive socially and culturally” (Benton & Nielsen, 2013; Liebert & Rissler, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> For purposes of this study, the term “new American” is used interchangeably with the term “immigrant.”

<sup>3</sup> i.e., war, foreign and domestic terrorism and violence by militant extremist groups and radicalized individuals and groups.

<sup>4</sup> i.e., Civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s; August 2017 Charlottesville Unite the Right Rally, 2020 Racial Justice Protests, January 2021 United States Capitol Attack, anti-immigrant political rhetoric during the 2016 Presidential election and 2016–2020 presidency.

contributed to disparate repercussions<sup>5</sup> for the marginalized communities<sup>6</sup> meant to be protected by civil rights doctrines. American Muslims are one such community that has experienced such disparate repercussions.<sup>7</sup>

The intensification of *Islamophobia*<sup>8</sup> and implementation of restrictive public policies<sup>9</sup> have disproportionately impacted American Muslims and those perceived to be Muslim after the tragic national security breaches on September 11, 2001 (9/11). That moment in history spawned a post 9/11 political and societal climate suspicious of Muslims, particularly immigrant Muslims, as a national security threat. This suspicious climate was again exacerbated during the 2016 Presidential election period and Presidency marked by four years of civil rights related unrest and political polarization in which certain political candidates, political leaders, and the President of the United States reified a political narrative of immigrants, including Muslim immigrants, as a national security threat.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> i.e., Jim Crow laws, Japanese internment camps, policies resulting in mass incarceration of Black and Brown men; racial and religious profiling policies and practices at traffic stops and airports; secret surveillance at religious institutions and college campuses.

<sup>6</sup> Within the context of this study, the term “marginalized communities” is used to describe individuals and communities who have experienced discrimination and harassment on the basis of their innate characteristics, including race, ethnicity, color, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability among others.

<sup>7</sup> For purposes of this study this study, the term *Muslim* is used as an adjective to describe “American” identity. Moreover, the researcher underscores the fact that Muslims are not a monolithic group; Muslims represent a variety of immigrant, racial, ethnic, cultural, and political experiences as well as a wide spectrum of religious and personal experiences that shape their doctrinal interpretation of Islam and degree of religiosity (Pew Research Center, 2018b).

<sup>8</sup> Scholars have described the phenomenon of discrimination and harassment towards Muslims (and those who are perceived as Muslims) as *Islamophobia*, a fear of Islam and Muslims, which manifests itself in oppression, occurring on both individual and structural levels (Ali et al., 2011; López, 2011; University of California, Berkeley, 2013; Younis, 2015).

<sup>9</sup> Post 9/11 restrictive national security policies include the Patriot Act and overt and covert religious profiling policies at airports and places of worship.

<sup>10</sup> For example, 2016 Presidential candidate Trump advocated for the complete and total shutdown of Muslim immigration to the United States and proposed that all American Muslims should carry identification badges and be listed in a national registry. Once becoming President, he issued an Executive Order on January 27, 2017,

Americans continue to grapple with a political climate consumed by a pervasive fear of foreign and domestic terrorism by militant extremist groups and radicalized individuals who use Islam to justify their violence. While Muslims are a growing presence in the United States, they continue to face negative views from the public. The Pew Research center recently reported that over the last 20 years, the American public has been politically divided on whether Islam is more likely than other religions to encourage violence, and a notable partisan polarization on this question has emerged (Mohamed, 2021). Most notably, this fear and apprehension towards immigrant Muslims as a national security threat has galvanized an unprecedented rise in hate crimes, civil rights violations (i.e., discrimination and harassment), and marginalization of American Muslims, and those perceived to be Muslim, on the basis of the intersecting categories of immigration status, religion, race, ethnicity, color, national origin, ancestry, and/or cultural practices (Adams, 2011; Cashin, 2011; Council on American-Islamic Relations, 2013; Crenshaw, 1991; Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2013; Gaskew, 2009; Ingraham, 2015; Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, 2020; Jilani, 2013; Kishi, 2016; Lichtblau, 2015; Mohamed, 2021; Nadal et al., 2012; Pew Research Center, 2009, 2013; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2011, 2016; Wright, 2014). Wike and Grim (2010) suggest that perceptions of national security threats drive these prejudicial attitudes and actions towards immigrant Muslims in Western societies.

This unique phenomenon raises a broader question on the role that civil rights doctrines play in the post 9/11 integration experiences of immigrant Muslims, particularly those who are first- and second-generation American, and also multigenerational American Muslims who continue to be perceived as perpetual “foreigners” and a national security threat. There is minimal research on the issue of immigrant integration within the context of the American

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temporarily barring noncitizens from seven majority-Muslim nations from entering the United States and tweeting on the same day that its purpose was to keep “radical Islamic terrorists” from the U.S.



Muslim experience.<sup>11</sup> The Pew Research Center Survey on American Muslims (2011) reported that most American Muslims seem well “integrated” into American society, a hasty conclusion derived simply from one survey answer stating that 56% of American Muslims report that most Muslims who make their homes in the United States today want to adopt American customs and way of life. However, sociological and psychological research on American Muslims, particularly the youth (high school/college), suggests that experiences of *Islamophobia*, discrimination, perceptions of microaggression,<sup>12</sup> and fears of violence have had a detrimental impact on educational outcomes, psychological well-being, and sense of nation, belonging, and identity (Awaad et al., 2021; Bonet, 2011; Joshi, 2020; Mir & Sarroub, 2019; Nadal et al., 2012; Riddy & Newman, 2006, 2008). Arguably, the political dynamics of the twenty-first century have increasingly constrained the meaningful integration of Muslim youth. In fact, many experiences of hate crimes, civil rights violations, and marginalization experienced by Muslims, and those perceived to be Muslim, are occurring in elementary, secondary, and higher education settings (Abdelkader, 2015; American Civil Liberties Union, 2016; Council on American-Islamic Relations, 2015a; Duncan, 2015; George, 2016; Mir & Sarroub, 2019; Mogahed & Chouhoud,

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<sup>11</sup> As reported by Pew Research Center, the immigrant experience is deeply ingrained in the fabric of Islam in America. Most U.S. Muslim adults (58%) are first-generation Americans, their presence in America owing largely to the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act that lowered barriers to immigration from Asia, Africa and other regions outside Europe. It is significant to note that U.S.-born American Muslim population is also considerable (42%), consisting of descendants of Muslim immigrants, converts to Islam (many of them Black/African American), and descendants of converts (April 18, 2018). When Pew Research Center surveyed American Muslim adults in 2017, the findings revealed important similarities between foreign-born and U.S.-born Muslims (Pew Research Center, 2018b).

<sup>12</sup> Microaggression may be defined as daily acts of indignity on the basis of an innate characteristic; sudden, derogatory, or hostile non-physical aggression or interaction between individuals of a different race, culture, gender, sexual orientation, or ability, consciously or unconsciously perpetrated, based on assumptions about race, culture, gender, sexual orientation, or ability, that most individuals have absorbed from their own established cultural heritage. These same assumptions, or internalized belief systems, may seep into public civic institutions, including government, schools, the corporate sphere, and personal lives (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Pierce et al., 1977; Sue, 2010; Tatum, 1997).

2017; Ochieng, 2017; PBS Newshour, 2016; Shammas, 2009, 2015; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2016; Talbot, 2015; Svokos, 2015; Woodrow, 2016).

In response to this rising trend since 9/11, the United States Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (OCR) and United States Department of Justice Civil Rights Division (DOJ) have taken strong policy action to protect Muslim and immigrant students, and those perceived to be such, from unlawful discrimination and harassment through the issuance of “Dear Colleague” letters, practical resources, and fact sheets (collectively referred to as “guidance documents”). A “Dear Colleague” letter is an official public correspondence prepared by a federal agency official to provide policy, legal, and/or technical interpretation of federal law on a particular civil rights related matter. A “Dear Colleague” letter serves as persuasive guidance and provides practical ways for government institutions to implement federal law and policy. The OCR and DOJ issued “Dear Colleague” letters remind educational institutions of their legal responsibilities relating to compliance with federal civil rights laws prohibiting discrimination and harassment on the basis of actual or perceived race, religion, or national origin amid international and domestic events that create an urgent need for safe spaces for students. The OCR and DOJ issued resources and fact sheets are also guidance documents that help educators and parents understand what types of harassment and other forms of discrimination may violate federal civil rights laws that the OCR and DOJ enforce.

Over the years since 9/11, the OCR and DOJ have a series of guidance documents, including “Dear Colleague” letters, resources, and fact sheets, to assist school officials, educators, students, families, and communities promote a more positive school climate for immigrants, Muslims, and other marginalized communities experiencing discrimination and harassment on the basis of race, religion, or national origin in their educational setting. “Dear

Colleague” letters issued since 9/11 include a September 19, 2001 publication asking educational institutions to respond to serious incidents and threats of violence directed towards persons perceived to be Arab Americans, Middle Eastern and South Asian origin; a 2005 publication reaffirming OCR and DOJ’s commitment to enforcing civil rights laws protecting students perceived to be of Middle Eastern or South Asian descent, Jewish Americans, and Sikh from religious and national origin discrimination; and a November 2015 publication urging college campuses to tackle the issue of discrimination and harassment on campuses and to lay out solutions to foster supportive educational environments, including students who may be experiencing discrimination or harassment during this most recent international political climate hostile towards refugees from Islamic countries like Syria and Iraq. The OCR and DOJ resources and fact sheets issued since 9/11 include “Combating Discrimination Against Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) and Muslim, Arab, Sikh, and South Asian Students (MASSA) Fact Sheet” in June 2016, “Know Your Rights: Title VI and Religion Fact Sheet” in January 2017, and “Combating Discrimination Against Jewish Students Fact Sheet” in January 2017, and “Confronting Discrimination Based on National Origin and Immigration Status” in August 2021. While the OCR’s mission in issuing guidance documents is to ensure equal access to education and to promote educational excellence through vigorous enforcement of civil rights in our nation’s schools, the DOJ mission in issuing these guidance documents is to uphold the civil and constitutional rights of all persons, particularly the most vulnerable members of our society.

This researcher asserts that these OCR and DOJ issued guidance documents are prime examples of immigrant integration policies. They embody the celebrated Constitutional values of equal protection and The Civil Rights Act of 1964, supporting *in practice* diverse cultural and

social identities within the larger community of students. In particular, they encourage educational leaders at K–12 schools and institutions of higher education to take an affirmative and proactive lead in safeguarding students from discrimination and harassment based on religion, race, color or national origin (including perceived religion, race, color or national origin) that may occur towards particular marginalized groups, especially during politically volatile periods such as national security crises and domestic civil rights related social unrest. These federal policies let state educational agencies and local educational institutions across the nation know that they *should* interpret Constitutional values in a way that affirmatively protects and supports students who may feel marginalized and unfairly targeted due to a political climate paralyzed by a heightened sense of fear, anger, and apprehension towards immigrants and religious minorities.

This dissertation study delves into examining the impact of these civil rights doctrines as immigrant integration policies meant to support meaningful integration of American Muslim students in educational institutions. Given the ongoing political tensions relating to *Islamophobia* and the demographic statistic that American Muslims are projected to be the largest non-Christian religious minority in the United States by 2040 largely due to migration trends (Pew Research Center, 2016), deepening understanding of American Muslim youths' integration experiences in educational institutions is a salient and robust topic for public policy and administration research. Although sociological literature has explored various facets of psychological well-being and sociological identity of American Muslim youth in the face of discrimination and perceived microaggression in a post 9/11 era, a central aspect that remains to be explored is the role that civil rights policies and administrative practices in educational institutions play in facilitating the meaningful integration, particularly inculcating a sense of

social inclusion and belonging, of immigrant American Muslim youth during a political era of heightened anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant sentiment. This researcher seeks to explore this timely policy issue from a social justice perspective.

To further this curiosity, the following two research questions guide this dissertation:

1. What are the social integration experiences of Muslim students enrolled in institutions of higher education?
2. What is the impact of administrative civil rights policies and practices on the social integration of Muslim students enrolled in institutions of higher education?

Chapter II of this dissertation begins with a review of the literature and concludes with theoretical considerations that substantiate this study. The review of the literature includes a summary of (a) the historical and contemporary experiences of Muslims in the American landscape, with an emphasis on migration and post 9/11 racialization<sup>13</sup>; and (b) the role of civil rights law and diversity, equity, and inclusion policy in public education. The theoretical frameworks that guide this proposed research include Lipsky's (1969) construct of street-level bureaucracy and the construct of social integration through the lens of immigrant integration and minority youth.

Chapter III of this dissertation consists of the research methodology designed to explore the research questions. The methodology proposed for this study is a qualitatively-driven convergent mixed-methods research design that utilizes a collective case study approach to generate theory on this policy issue (Corbin & Strauss, 2007; Creswell, 2009; Eisenhardt, 1989;

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<sup>13</sup> Given that the scope of the study is within the context immigrant integration, the researcher limits its participants to the subset of American Muslims whose parents migrated to the United States since the abolishment of the National Origins Quota System and Asiatic Barred Zone during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s. The researcher acknowledges and affirms the experiences of Black Muslims as a community significantly marginalized by White Supremacy and intends to address this social justice issue in a future study. This researcher does not intend to exclude this integral and valued subset of American Muslims from this study for any other reason.

Stake, 1994). To answer part of the first research question, the researcher used a quantitative survey to understand the extent to which Muslim students with diverse immigrant experiences are socially integrated in the college setting (including incidents of microaggression, bias, discrimination, and hate incidents). The researcher also conducted qualitative focus group interviews with students to understand more in depth their experiences of social integration on campus. The researcher also conducted qualitative interviews with college administrators to assess the impact of administrative civil rights policies and practices on the social integration of Muslim students enrolled in college. Qualitative research is appropriate in conducting initial explorations when the phenomenon of study has received little empirical attention, as in the case of immigrant Muslims and American Muslim youth (Morrow & Smith, 2000); and is also well-positioned to address issues of social justice (Mayan & Daum, 2014), as it gives a voice to those whose views are rarely heard. The case study approach is a research strategy that focuses on analyzing complex dynamics within bounded systems to provide an in-depth picture (Eisenhardt, 1989; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1994). In this case study approach, the units of analysis selected are three institutions of higher education located within the southeastern region of the United States.

Chapters IV, V, and VI of this dissertation provide the results of the data collection. The data collection technique is comprised of a survey, focus groups, and in-depth semi-structured interviews. The survey captures descriptive statistics that describe the range of various demographics of the sample population of first, second, and multi-generation American Muslim students enrolled in institutions of higher education, and summarizes general experiences of social integration in the college setting. Follow-up focus groups composed of a purposive sample population of students who completed the student survey further explore the detailed and nuanced experiences of integration in the educational setting. In addition, in-depth semi-

structured interviews conducted with a purposive sample population of select college administrators involved in student civil rights complaints processes provide data on (a) the institutions' diversity, equity, inclusion and civil rights policies and procedures pertaining to Muslim students; and (b) the administrators' discretion in implementing and enforcing these policies and procedures in response to Muslim students' complaints of discrimination and harassment on campus.

Chapter VII of this dissertation evaluates the data collected from the three case studies and develops conclusions, assertions and generalized theoretical propositions about the policy issue addressed (Eisenhardt, 1989; Stake, 1994). The data collected is analyzed to formulate themes and conclusions relating to the integration experiences of immigrant Muslims students in their educational institution and the role that civil rights related educational institution policies and practices play in this dynamic. The analysis includes a comparative summary of the similarities and differences between (a) the three cases examined, (b) the integration experiences of Muslim students, (c) the educational institutions' discrimination and harassment policies and practices, (d) and the administration of discrimination complaints among Muslim students. The data is further analyzed through a postmodern critique to deconstruct the multiple perspectives and multiple realities of students and institutional authority across the three case studies, deconstruct the complexity of global conflicts and national politics that have marginalized this category of students, deepen understanding of the dynamics that influence the interpretation and implementation of federal civil rights and equal protection principles at the state and local administrative level, and develop a grounded theory that contributes to the knowledge of this policy issue. Themes, conclusions, and grounded theory generated from this study provide guidance and insight on ways in which public policy and administrative practice can play a

meaningful role in eliminating societal injustices experienced by American Muslim youth and foster their meaningful social integration (Denzin, 1978; Farmer, 2010; Merriam, 2009). This researcher hopes to develop an immigrant integration policy model of “*the civil right to belong.*”

This research study has significant public policy implications, especially considering the fact that American Muslims made up almost 1% of the United States’ population, or about 3.1 million individuals in 2015, and are projected to become the second largest faith group in the United States and make up 2.1% of the United States’ population (or 8.1 million people) by the year 2050 (Pew Research Center, 2016). Cultivating the successful integration of American Muslim communities, particularly the youth who will shape the future of the United States, is a crucial component to promote social justice of a marginalized community in American society. This nation’s education system plays an important role in facilitating fundamental fairness, providing equal opportunities, advancing social justice and equity, supporting diverse cultural and social identities of American Muslim students, and fostering an authentic sense of belonging. Not doing so could potentially have very detrimental effects for the internal cohesion of this nation. How well American Muslim youth in the United States integrate socially may depend on how well local, state, and national educational leaders and policymakers take visible and effective steps to address individual experiences of marginalization, civil rights violations, and incitement of hate violence, as well as foster a sense of social belonging for a group of individuals who are grappling with experiences of “othering”<sup>14</sup> based on their religious or perceived religious ideology and cultural immigrant experiences (Feagin, 2013; hooks, 2002; Pharr, 1998).

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<sup>14</sup> Individuals or groups who do not fit into an aspect of the dominant group are often times “othered,” i.e., marginalized, excluded and/or subjugated by those who do fit into aspects of the dominant group (Feagin, 2013; hooks, 2002; Pharr, 1998).



## CHAPTER II Review of the Literature and Theoretical Considerations

### Muslims in the American Landscape

#### *Migration*

Muslims have historically been an integral part of the United States since the establishment of the American Colonies in the sixteenth century. Some of the first Muslims in America were forced to migrate to the United States as slaves from Africa over the period of the Atlantic Slave Trade between 1526 and 1867.<sup>15</sup> Scholars estimate that anywhere from a quarter to a third of the enslaved Africans brought to the United States were Muslims. Although enslaved people were denied freedom of religion, many did practice their faith in secret and pass it on to their children (Interfaith Alliance & Religious Freedom Education Project of the First Amendment Center, 2012). It has also been well documented that the Founding Fathers who eventually structured the democratic government of the United States thought about the relationship of Islam to the new nation and were prepared to make a place for Muslims within the American landscape (Hutson, 2002). In particular, Founding Father Thomas Jefferson specifically advocated for the recognition of religious rights of Muslims as part of his campaign for religious freedom in Virginia (Hutson, 2002).

A second wave of migration of Muslims from Muslim majority countries began in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and continued until the 1920s (Interfaith Alliance & Religious Freedom Education Project of the First Amendment Center, 2012). During this time, large numbers of Arabs from the Ottoman Empire (mostly from present day Lebanon and Syria) arrived in the United States to work on farms, as entrepreneurs, and in the automotive industry (Suarez, 2007).

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<sup>15</sup> African Americans began to rediscover their African Islamic roots after the Great Migration of Blacks from the South to the Northern cities after World Wars I and II. The re-emergence of African American Islam has been a consistent phenomenon during the twentieth century until the present (Interfaith Alliance & Religious Freedom Education Project of the First Amendment Center, 2012).

Although the majority of these immigrants (almost 90%) were Arab Christians, there were sizable clusters of Muslims, most of whom settled in the Midwest. During that time, the largest Arab Muslim population settled in Detroit and Dearborn, Michigan. The earliest mosque built in the United States is likely to have been built by Albanian Muslims in Maine, 1915 or in Ross, North Dakota in 1929 (Ghazali, 2001). The oldest still-standing mosque built in 1934 is reported to be in Cedar Rapids, Iowa (The Pluralism Project, 2020).

In the early 1900s, a series of national policies restricted the immigration of Muslims from Muslim majority countries. The Asiatic Barred Zone (1917–1952) excluded the immigration of all persons from Asia. The National Origins Quota System (1921–1965) confined immigration as much as possible to Western and Northern European nations, and restricted the immigration of Muslims from the Middle East.

As American society entered into the era of the first Civil Rights Movement against racial segregation and discrimination, Congress finally barred racial restrictions on immigrant visas and American citizenship pursuant to the Immigration and Nationality Act in 1952, and abolished the National Origins Quota System and Asiatic Barred Zone in 1965. With these significant immigration policy change, a greater number of Muslims began to migrate to the United States (López, 1996).

Therein began the third and largest wave of Muslim immigrants in the 1960s and 1970s. This category of Muslim migrants became integral beneficiaries of the Civil Rights Movement. Most Muslims who migrated to the United States during this time period migrated from the regions of South Asia, Southeast Asia, Central Asia, Middle East, and North Africa to further their education and pursue greater opportunities. About 2% of Muslim immigrants indicate that they arrived in the United States before 1970, about 6% of Muslims emigrated in the 1970s,

about one-in-ten Muslims immigrated in the 1980s, and about one-in-five Muslims immigrated in the 1990s (Pew Research Center, 2017c).

Over the last twenty years, there has been another significant influx of migration from Muslim majority countries (Pew Research Center, 2017c). Approximately 26% Muslims have migrated between 2000 and 2009, and three-in-ten Muslims have emigrated in the United States since 2010. Over half of the projected growth of the American Muslim population from 2010 to 2015 was due to migration trends (Pew Research Center, 2017c)

The American Muslim population is currently estimated to be 3.45 million people of all ages (1.1% of the total Muslim population), including 2.15 million adults, and made up heavily of immigrants and children of immigrants from around the world (Pew Research Center, 2017c). Among first generation Americans, the highest number of Muslims have emigrated from South Asia (35%). Approximately 23% were born in other parts of Asia-Pacific region, including Iran and Indonesia. Approximately 25% of first-generation American Muslims emigrated from the Middle East-North Africa region. Approximately 9% of first-generation American Muslims emigrated from sub-Saharan Africa. Approximately 4% of first-generation American Muslims were born in Europe, and about 4% emigrate from elsewhere in the Americas (Pew Research Center, 2017c). Delving deeper into these statistics, about 15% of Muslim immigrants are from Pakistan, 11% of Muslim immigrants are from Iran, 7% of Muslim immigrants are from India, 6% of Muslim immigrants are from Afghanistan, 6% of Muslim immigrants are from Bangladesh, 5% of Muslim immigrants are from Iraq, 3% of Muslim immigrants are from Kuwait, Syria, and Egypt.

While nearly six-in-ten American Muslims (58%) are first generation Americans, having been born in another country, approximately 18% of Muslims are second generation Americans,

people who were born in the United States and who have at least one parent who was an immigrant (Pew Research Center, 2017c). Approximately 24% of Muslims are United States natives, or multigenerational Muslims, with parents born in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2017c). The vast majority of Muslims living in the United States are American citizens (82%), including 42% who were born in the United States and 40% who were naturalized. Approximately 18% of American Muslims are not American citizens (Pew Research Center, 2017c).

American Muslims are racially and ethnically diverse (Pew Research Center, 2017c). In general, a plurality of 41% identify as White, a category that includes people who describe their race as Arab, Middle Eastern, or Persian/Iranian. About 28% identify as Asian. About 20% identify as Black or African American. About 8% identify as Hispanic and 3% identify with another race or multiple races.

Whereas the majority of these Muslim immigrants chose to make their permanent home in the United States seeking better economic and social opportunities, a smaller number of Muslim migration also stems from refugees and asylees fleeing war and persecution from Muslim majority nations including Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, Burma, Syria, and Sudan. The Pew Research Center (2017a) reported that Muslims made up nearly half (46%) of United States' refugee admissions in 2016, which was nearly 39,000 individuals. The United States is currently experiencing its largest influx of Muslim refugees, asylees, special immigrant visa holders, and humanitarian parolees who were evacuated from war torn Afghanistan and are now resettling in the United States, a number estimated at 80,000 Muslim migrants.

Pew Research Center (2018a) estimates that the number of American Muslims will double by 2050, and are projected to reach to 8.1 million people, or 2.1% of the total population.

Even before 2040, Muslims are projected to become the second largest religious group in the United States, after Christians.

### ***National Security Politics and Public Opinion***

The tragic national security breach that occurred on 9/11 by terrorist group Al-Qaeda propagating “holy war” on American soil utterly transformed American life as contemporary society understands it. Americans were shocked and devastated, and safety from international terrorism became the primary concern for the nation. Accordingly, the American government took swift action and responded to this threat by developing and implementing restrictive immigration, national security, and foreign policies that sought to prevent, curtail, and deter the cycle of extremist violence against the United States. Initial post 9/11 policies implemented by the executive and legislative branches included the implementation of the Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001 (Patriot Act) and the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security in 2002.<sup>16</sup> Since that time, a climate of fear and apprehension resulting from acts of extremist violence committed by radicalized “Islamic” groups asserting anti-western ideology, such as ISIS and the Taliban, has continued to grow and fester well into the twenty-first century, notwithstanding the expiration of parts of the Patriot Act in recent years.<sup>17</sup> The most recent terrorist attacks in Europe, notably the two Paris attacks in 2015 and Brussels attack in 2016, and the two mass shootings in the United States, in San Bernadino, California in 2015 and Orlando,

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<sup>16</sup> The Patriot Act, which was enacted six weeks after the events of 9/11 to prevent future terrorist attacks, significantly expanded the search and surveillance powers of the federal government. The Department of Homeland Security was created in November 2002 to safeguard the United States against terrorism.

<sup>17</sup> The provisions of the Patriot Act have evolved over the years. Various provisions of the Patriot Act have been challenged in court for unconstitutionality and abuse by federal authorities. In 2015, the United and Strengthening America by Fulfilling Rights and Ensuring Effective Discipline Over Monitoring Act replaced the Patriot Act restoring and modifying several of the provisions of the Patriot Act. The 2020 reauthorization of this legislation is unresolved because the House and Senate were unable to reconcile their differences.

Florida 2016, propelled the executive branch of the United States to implement executive action severely restricting and vetting Muslim immigration and refugee resettlement into the United States.<sup>18</sup> Historically, courts have exercised extreme deference in sustaining most of these restrictive national security and immigration policies when such policies have come under judicial review, including the Executive Order referenced above.<sup>19</sup> This historical deference has reshaped the interpretation of key Constitutional principles, a historical reality in times of turmoil when the nation comes face to face with the perpetual tension between balancing liberty and security

These public policies have reinforced public opinion and societal narrative that sees Islamic ideology as a threat to the West; and public opinion increasingly weary and anxious towards the ideologies of Islam and Muslims, and its perceived incompatibility with Western ideals of democracy and secular culture, despite empirical data underscoring that Muslims are the overwhelmingly largest group of victims of the violence propagated by these extremist groups. Sensationalized media coverage and widespread anti-Muslim public statements made by public officials at the federal, state, and local level, particularly during the 2016 presidential election and 2016–2020 Presidency, has further fueled the public perception of Muslims as a

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<sup>18</sup> On January 27, 2017, President Trump issued Executive Order 13769 “Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States,” temporarily barring noncitizens from seven majority-Muslim nations from entering the United States. It was amended as Executive Order 13780 on March 6, 2017 and amended a third time on September 24, 2017 to overcome Constitutional hurdles and a string of lawsuits. This Executive Order was perceived by many as a discriminatory ban of Muslims into the United States (i.e., “Muslim ban”), and created significant political polarization. After nation-wide high profile litigation, the United Supreme Court upheld the latest version of the Executive Order on June 26, 2018. The Executive Order was eventually rescinded on the first day President Biden took office on January 20, 2021.

<sup>19</sup> For example, in *Korematsu v. United States*, 323 U.S. 214 (1944), the United States Supreme Court upheld President Roosevelt’s Executive Order issued ten weeks after the bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japan’s military. This Executive Order authorized the Secretary of War and the armed forces to remove people of Japanese ancestry to detention/internment camps. The order set in motion the mass transportation and relocation of more than 120,000 Japanese Americans, two-thirds of whom were American citizens, into detention/internment camps.

monolithic faith group that has a penchant towards terrorism.<sup>20</sup> According to Younis (2015), a 2015 Gallup poll reported that 43% of Americans harbor some degree of prejudice towards Muslims. A 2016 study in Minnesota (Edgell et al., 2016) found that Muslims are the most disliked group in the United States, after atheists.<sup>21</sup> The study found that their disapproval has almost doubled from 26% 10 years ago to 45.5% in 2016. A 2019 Pew Research Center survey asked Americans to rate members of nine religious groups on a “feeling thermometer” from 0 to 100, where 0 reflects the coldest, most negative possible rating and 100 the warmest, most positive rating. Overall, Americans gave Muslims an average rating close to 50 degrees. A 2021 Pew Research Report found that Muslims still generally face negative views from the public, despite their growing presence in the United States (Mohamed, 2021).

This anti-Muslim sentiment is further exacerbated by White Christian privilege and supremacy (Joshi, 2020). Christian privilege undergirds United States’ institutions and cultural practices, offers advantages to Christians as they lead their lives, and disadvantages for members of minority religious groups. Joshi (2020) posits that Christian privilege is also entangled with

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<sup>20</sup> According to a 2014 poll, Republicans view Muslims more negatively than any other religious group (Pew Research Center, 2014). Before the 2012 presidential election, Republican candidate Gingrich said Muslims should hold public office in the U.S. only if they publicly renounce *Shariah* (Islamic law) (Iftikar, 2016). 2012 Republican candidate Huckabee called Islam “the antithesis of the gospel of Christ” (New York Post, 2015). 2016 Presidential Candidate Trump advocated for the complete and total shutdown of Muslim immigration to the United States and proposed that all American Muslims should carry identification badges and be listed in a national registry (Johnson, 2015). 2016 Presidential Candidate Trump also said in an interview to Anderson Cooper that “Islam hates us.” (Schleifer, 2016). 2016 Presidential Candidate Carson stated that he would not advocate that the United States put a Muslim in charge of this nation. Congressional leaders and many state governors moved to halt assistance and resettlement for Muslim refugees fleeing Syria and Iraq on the basis of their religion (Chishti et al., 2016). Once becoming President, Trump issued several Executive Orders that sought to significantly curtail migration from Muslim majority countries in an effort to keep “radical Islamic terrorists” from entering the United States (Merica, 2017).

<sup>21</sup> The purpose of this study was to analyze anti-atheist sentiment in the United States. The study found that Muslims surpassed Atheists as the least accepted group. Respondents were asked to provide a Likert response ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree with the following statement, “This (group) does not all agree with my vision of American society.” The following groups were included: Atheists, Muslims, homosexuals, conservative Christians, recent immigrants, Hispanics, Jews, Asian Americans, African Americans, spiritual but not religious, and White. Respondents were comprised of 50,000 adults through a probability-based representative sample of 97% of American households.

notions of White supremacy. White Christian supremacy reifies the notion that the United States is a Christian nation, thus racializing Muslims of color. This sentiment has been further exacerbated after the events of 9/11. For example, White Christianity's positive association with patriotism helps to explain the post 9/11 national trend of immigrant shopkeepers, including Muslims, hanging up American flags and signs that read "God Bless America" to prove their loyalty and commitment to their nation (Joshi, 2020).

This anti-Muslim sentiment in the United States continues to grow and fester for several underlying reasons: (a) the apparent powerlessness of nation states to effectively deter the ongoing and erratic pattern of geo-political violence committed by extremist groups and lone-wolf extremists all over the world, whose radicalized ideology is rooted in the pretext of Islamist politics and anti-western sentiment;<sup>22</sup> (b) national and state politics, particularly the 2016 presidential election rhetoric and ensuing executive public policies in 2017 that target Muslims and essentialize the complex and multifaceted problem as a battle between Western democracy and Islamic culture, a binary paradigm that pits non-Muslims against all Muslims as a monolithic group; (3) and growing White supremacist terrorism and extreme right-wing terrorism since 2015 (Bureau for Counterterrorism 2019, 2020).

This international and national political climate has, in effect, complicated and muddled the relationship between the United States government, the majority American culture, and American Muslims, particularly immigrant communities establishing roots in American society. Public perception of American Muslims has transformed from a "model" minority community to

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<sup>22</sup> The recent takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban after United States Military withdrawal is a poignant example. It is significant to note that the overwhelming majority of Muslims all over the world, including Muslim scholars and Islamic organizations strongly condemn these geo-political acts of violence as an aberration of the tenets of Islam (Wright, 2014). Moreover, the Department of State (2012, 2015) reports that the largest number of victims of violent extremism committed under the pretext of Islamic ideology to date are Muslims.



a “suspect class” (Lee & Kumashiro, 2005). On one hand, their lives, like those of everyone else in the United States are under attack. On the other hand, they are perceived as a potential threat to the safety of their neighbor (Bayoumi, 2012; Kurzman et al., 2011; Sirin & Fine, 2007). Many American Muslims perceive that they are being targeted by their own government, through the courts (trend of judicial deference to government action that limit civil liberties and civil rights of individuals to guard national security interests), Congressional policies (such as the Patriot Act and aggressive foreign policy towards Islamic countries that promote an “US v. THEM mentality”<sup>23</sup>), executive action (such as the January 27, 2017 and March 6, 2017 Executive Order Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States),<sup>24</sup> and covert agency actions (such as secret surveillance, racial profiling and unlawful searches and long-term detention without due process, i.e. Guantanamo Bay and others). These experiences are analogous to the experiences of Japanese Americans after the attacks on Pearl Harbor (Akiyama, 2008; Arnold, 2014; Ibrahim, 2008).

Since 9/11, a vast number of American Muslim communities in the United States have progressively experienced a sense of disenfranchisement, exclusion, disparate treatment, intimidation, racial profiling, harassment, hate crimes, and discrimination in school (Blad, 2016; Bonet, 2011), the workplace (Ali et al., 2015; Padela et al., 2015), and in community public spaces such as houses of worship (Jilani, 2013; Mishra, 2013; Nadal et al., 2012; Sirin &

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<sup>23</sup> “You’re either with us or against us.” George W. Bush (Merskin, 2006).

<sup>24</sup> It is significant to note that the constitutionality of the January 27, 2017 and March 6, 2017 executive orders banning travel of citizens from select Muslim majority countries into the United States have been challenged in courts all over the country as a violation of the Equal Protection Clause and Establishment Clause of the United States Constitution, with plaintiffs alleging that this executive action was in fact motivated into existence not because of evidence of national security threats from these targeted countries, but motivated by an animus or hate towards Muslims. Although historically, courts tend to defer to national security interests, the overwhelming evidence of animus against Muslims collected by the plaintiffs in these cases is propelling the courts to move these cases forward (Brinkema, 2017; Canby et al., 2017). The role of the courts in this matter has been a source of hope for many American Muslims, especially the court rulings finding these Executive Actions unconstitutional.

Katsiaficas, 2011). The trend of discrimination and hate crimes against Muslims has steadily continued, and surged to very high levels subsequent to the series of European terrorist attacks and two mass shootings by American Muslims in 2015 and 2016, and most significantly during and after the 2016 Presidential election campaign rhetoric (Adams, 2011; Cashin, 2011; Council on American-Islamic Relations, 2013, 2015b; Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2013; Gaskew, 2009; Ingraham, 2015; Khan, 2016; Pew Research Center, 2009, 2013a, 2016, 2017b; Potok, 2016; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2016a; Wright, 2014). The Federal Bureau of Investigations reported that hate crimes against Muslims (including at mosques) increased by 67% in 2015, reaching 9/11 levels (Khan 2016; McCaskill, 2016; Potok, 2016). Pew Research Center (2016) reported that the number of physical assaults (aggravated or simple assaults based on anti-Muslim bias) and intimidation (threatening bodily harm) against Muslims in the United States reached 9/11-era levels in 2015. In a January 2016 Pew Research Center survey, most Americans (six out of ten) reported that there is a great deal of discrimination against Muslims in the United States today, and about three-quarters of Americans (76%) also said discrimination against Muslims in the United States is increasing. The Southern Poverty Law Center reported 112 hate crimes targeting Muslims between November 9, 2016 (the day after the 2016 presidential election) and December 12, 2016. Moreover, they report that anti-Muslim hate groups have tripled from 34 in 2015 to 101 in 2016 (Potok, 2016). A 2021 Pew Research Report found that Muslims report encountering more discrimination, especially since the 2016 Presidential election (Mohamed, 2021). While the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (2019) latest hate crime statistics report indicates that reports of anti-Muslim incidents have decreased over the last two years, these incidents continue to be the second largest category of hate crimes, after anti-Semitic incidents.

Scholars have described this phenomenon of discrimination and violence towards Muslims (and those who overtly appear as Muslims) as *Islamophobia*, an exaggerated fear, hatred, and hostility towards Islam and Muslims, which manifests itself in oppression, occurring on both individual and structural levels, and is perpetuated by negative stereotypes and targeting resulting in bias, discrimination, and the marginalization and exclusion of Muslims from social, political, and civic life (Ali et al., 2011; López, 2011; Meer & Modood, 2009; University of California, Berkeley, 2013; Younis, 2015). For example, as a result of heightened national security concerns, Muslims and those perceived to be Muslim have become the target of microaggressions, in acts such as racial profiling routinely at airports, security entrances for events, college campuses, and even in their private domains by security representatives and by law enforcement authority (Jilani, 2013; Nadal et al., 2012).

Sociological and psychological research suggest that experiences of discrimination, perceptions of microaggression<sup>25</sup>, and fears of violence among American Muslims, especially immigrants and youth, have had a detrimental impact on their physiological and psychological well-being (Bonet, 2011; Nadal et al., 2012; Riddy & Newman, 2006, 2008). According to a 2021 study published by JAMA Psychiatry, Muslims are two times more likely to have attempted suicide compared with other religious groups (Awaad et al., 2021). The findings in a cross-sectional study of American Muslim youth, conducted by Sally Bonet (2011), have suggested that the Patriot Act has contributed to the over targeting of American Muslim families

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<sup>25</sup> Microaggression may be defined as daily acts of indignity on the basis of an innate characteristic; sudden, derogatory, or hostile non-physical aggression or interaction between individuals of a different race, culture, gender, sexual orientation, or ability, consciously or unconsciously perpetrated, based on assumptions about race, culture, gender, sexual orientation, or ability, that most individuals have absorbed from their own established cultural heritage. These same assumptions, or internalized belief systems, may seep into public civic institutions, including government, schools, the corporate sphere, and personal lives (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Pierce et al., 1977; Sue, 2010; Tatum, 1997). Individuals who experience microaggressions in their lives are likely to exhibit negative mental health symptoms, such as depression, anxiety, negative effect, and lack of behavioral control (Nadal et al., 2012).

and students, and thus, has had damaging effects on Muslim youth educational outcomes, psychosocial well-being, and sense of nation and belonging. In examining the relationship between discrimination and psychological health, Hodge et al. (2015) found that Muslims who reported being called offensive names were more likely to report clinically significant levels of depressive symptoms compared with those who were not called offensive names. Samari (2016) examined the relationship between Islamophobia and health of Muslim Americans and found that Islamophobia can negatively influence health outcomes and health disparities. Abbasi, a Muslim mental health expert, explains that many Muslim children are being cast as the “other” and forced to choose an identity (rather than being allowed to choose both); and fears that the increase in bullying incidents in school makes Muslim students more susceptible to suicide, stating in an interview with National Public Radio that “...many Muslim children are carrying a very heavy burden and one more brick can be the breaking point” (Ochieng, 2017). Social integration experiences of Muslim youth will be examined within the backdrop of this current political climate.

## **Constitutional Values in Public Education**

### ***Federal Laws and Policy Guidance***

Since *Brown v. Board of Education*<sup>26</sup> and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, developing and sustaining public policies that promote equal protection and equal opportunities in the areas of race, religion, and national origin have been major goals for educational institutions in the United States. A variety of federal laws prohibit discrimination and harassment on the basis of race, color, religion, and national origin in schools and institutions of

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<sup>26</sup> In this case, the United States Supreme Court held that separate schools for Black students and White students violate the Equal Protection Clause of the United States Constitution.

higher learning. These laws have been developed from the values espoused in the Equal Protection Clause of the United States Constitution.<sup>27</sup>

First, *Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964* (Title VI) prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, and national origin by any entity (public or private) receiving Federal financial assistance. It states:

No person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.

Title VI's protections apply to all public elementary and secondary schools and colleges and universities—public or private—that receive federal financial assistance. Title VI also protects students of any religion from discrimination, including harassment, based on a student's actual or perceived shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics, *or* citizenship or residency in a country with a dominant religion or distinct religious identity.<sup>28</sup> These protections extend to all aspects of institutional programs and activities. The OCR enforces Title VI. When enforcing Title VI, the OCR works to (a) ensure equal access to educational services and benefits and to (b) prevent acts of retaliation against those who report Title VI violations.

*Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964* (Title IV) gives the United States Attorney General authority to address certain complaints of discrimination alleging denials of equal protection to students based on race, color, national origin, sex, and religion by public schools

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<sup>27</sup> “No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.”

<sup>28</sup> Even though Title VI does not expressly prohibit discrimination based solely on religion per se, discrimination against persons belonging to religious groups violates Title VI when the discrimination is based on the religious group's actual or perceived shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics, rather than solely on its members' religious practices (Duncan & King, 2015).

and institutions of higher education and the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974 prohibits deliberate segregation on the basis of race, color, and national origin. The Equal Opportunities Section of the United States Department of Justice enforces Title IV and the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974. The DOJ also plays a significant role in enforcing Title VI and may intervene in private suits alleging violations of education related anti-discrimination statutes and the Equal Protection Clause.

The OCR and DOJ have developed a series of guidance documents that interpret these federal civil rights laws and provide guidance to public schools and institutional of higher education in developing their own civil rights policies and practices. Guidance documents issued by the OCR and DOJ include “Dear Colleague” letters, practical resources, and fact sheets. The “Dear Colleague” letters are official public correspondences that provide policy, legal, and/or technical interpretation of federal law on a particular civil rights related matter effecting the nation’s schools. A “Dear Colleague” letter serves as persuasive guidance and provides practical ways for educational institutions to implement federal law and policy. The OCR and DOJ issued “Dear Colleague” letters remind educational institutions of their legal responsibilities relating to compliance with federal civil rights laws prohibiting discrimination and harassment on the basis of actual or perceived race, religion, or national origin amid international and domestic events that create an urgent need for safe spaces for students. The OCR and DOJ issued resources and fact sheets are also guidance documents that help educators and parents understand the types of discrimination that may violate federal civil rights laws that the OCR and DOJ enforce.

In response to the backlash experienced by certain racial, ethnic, and religious minorities in the aftermath of 9/11, the OCR and DOJ have issued several federal guidance letters on discrimination and harassment on the basis of race, religion, or national origin in the context of

the educational setting. On September 19, 2001, the OCR issued a “Dear Colleague” letter reminding educational institutions of their responsibilities relating to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act in protecting students who are or perceived to be Middle Eastern or of South Asian origin, against harassment and threats of violence:

I write to ask your help in responding to a problem that has arisen following the terrible events of the past several days, and that threatens some of our nation's students. There have been increasing news reports of incidents of harassment and violence directed at persons perceived to be Arab Americans or of Middle Eastern or South Asian origin, including children. Arab American parents have publicly expressed fear about the safety of their children at school. These occurrences are extremely disturbing to me and are of major concern to the Department of Education.

In 2004, the OCR and DOJ reaffirmed its commitment to enforce civil rights laws protecting students perceived to be of Middle Eastern or South Asian descent from religious and national origin discrimination in a letter to state boards of education. The OCR issued a letter urging educational leaders to comply with the federal laws prohibiting discrimination and harassment on the basis of race, religion, or national origin. Excerpts from the letter are highlighted below:

... since the attacks of September 11, 2001, OCR has received complaints of race or national origin harassment commingled with aspects of religious discrimination against Arab Muslim, Sikh, and Jewish students...As we pass the third anniversary of September 11, 2001, we must remain particularly attentive to the claims of students who may be targeted for harassment based on their membership in groups that exhibit both ethnic and religious characteristics, such as Arab Muslims, Jewish Americans and Sikhs. President George W. Bush and Secretary Rod Paige have both condemned such acts of bigotry. As

President Bush has said, “those who feel like they can intimidate our fellow citizens to take out their anger don’t represent the best of America, they represent the worst of humankind, and they should be ashamed of their behavior.” OCR has conducted countless outreach initiatives since September 11, 2001, to assure members of affected communities that their civil rights will be protected. Groups that face discrimination on the basis of shared ethnic characteristics may not be denied the protection of our civil rights laws on the ground that they also share a common faith. Similarly, the existence of facts indicative of religious discrimination does not divest OCR of jurisdiction to investigate and remedy allegations of race or ethnic discrimination. OCR will exercise its jurisdiction to enforce the Title VI prohibition against national origin discrimination, regardless of whether the groups targeted for discrimination also exhibit religious characteristics.” Thus, for example, OCR aggressively investigates alleged race or ethnic harassment against Arab Muslim, Sikh, and Jewish students. (Marcus, 2004)

In November 2015, United States Secretary of Education Arne Duncan inquired “...whether college campuses are safe and welcoming to every student, regardless of race, religion, background and identity” (Duncan, 2015). She convened campus leaders from around the country, including presidents, faculty, legal experts, and student leaders, to tackle the issue of discrimination and harassment on campuses and to lay out solutions to foster supportive educational environments. They developed the following seven ways for college campuses to address these challenges:

- Institute a statement of values: This statement can set the tone for students on campus.



- Teach cultural competency: Cultural competency is a core message that colleges and universities should be teaching (and learning) as a foundational component of what it means to be an educated American.
- Make “teachable moments”: Shining a light on issues while recognizing the worth of all students can help heal and create a sense of community on campuses. Protecting free speech can sometimes mean protecting the right to hold and express views that are at odds with strongly held values. Campuses should not ignore the dissonance this creates, but use these moments to reflect, discuss and underscore the institution’s values independent of expressed views that may be anathema to those values.
- Lead from the top: When an incident occurs, institutional leadership have a key role in assuring students of their commitment to a safe and welcoming environment for all students and faculty.
- Diversify leadership and faculty: Diversity is critical to ensuring academic and social success. Diversity fosters a climate of healthy interaction among people from different groups, contributing to varied experiences, and ensuring students feel welcomed.
- Deal swiftly with complaints: When there is a complaint, colleges and universities must take immediate and appropriate action to investigate. If harassment has occurred, the school must take prompt and effective steps to end it, eliminate the hostile environment, and prevent its recurrence.
- Support student-led efforts: Students can serve as experts on their lived experiences, helping to make colleges and universities safe spaces. But the campus and broader community must own the work. (Duncan, 2015)

This recent OCR effort culminated into the most recent December 31, 2015 “Dear Colleague” letter urging educational leaders to be sensitive to minority students who may be experiencing discrimination or harassment during this most recent international political climate hostile towards refugees from Islamic countries like Syria and Iraq:

Today, our country and the broader international community are facing a range of difficult and complicated issues, including how to provide protection and assistance to the historic levels of vulnerable individuals displaced from their homes due to conflict and persecution. This includes millions of families who are fleeing violence in Syria. These refugees have captivated so much attention and are fleeing precisely the type of senseless and violent attacks that have occurred here in the United States and elsewhere recently. The United States must continue to welcome these refugees seeking safety and a new start in life. At the same time, we remain deeply committed to safeguarding the safety and security of the American people. We can and must do both.

On the eve of this new year, we are writing to enlist your help, as educational leaders, to ensure that your schools and institutions of higher education are learning environments in which students are free from discrimination and harassment based on their race, religion, or national origin. A focus on these protections, while always essential, is particularly important amid international and domestic events that create an urgent need for safe spaces for student.

As we stand by our principles as a nation and continue to welcome refugees to our communities, we also must be vigilant about maintaining safe, respectful, and nondiscriminatory learning environments for all students in our schools and institutions.

Of course, discrimination and harassment are not new, and they are not limited to the treatment of refugees or those who are associated with them. (Duncan & King, 2015) These “Dear Colleague” letters issued over the years since 9/11 reaffirm the obligations of schools and institutions of higher learning under federal civil rights laws to prohibit discrimination based on actual or perceived race, religion, or national origin particularly amid international and domestic events that create an urgent need for safe spaces for students.

The most recent OCR/DOJ guidance documents also include resources and fact sheets to assist school officials, educators, students, families, and communities in promoting a more positive school climate. The OCR and DOJ resources and fact sheets issued since 9/11 include “Combating Discrimination Against Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) and Muslim, Arab, Sikh, and South Asian Students (MASSA) Fact Sheet” in June 2016, “Know Your Rights: Title VI and Religion Fact Sheet” in January 2017, and “Combating Discrimination Against Jewish Students Fact Sheet” in January 2017, and “Confronting Discrimination Based on National Origin and Immigration Status” in August 2021. These resources provide suggestions to help schools and institutions of higher learning uphold and maintain safe learning communities, and most importantly, encourage schools to take proactive steps to foster welcoming and inclusive environments for students of different backgrounds and beliefs. The impact of the most recent OCR federal guidance letter at the state and local level is the subject of this study.

In addition to education polices underscoring the need to administer civil rights and a fair and equitable way (especially during political turmoil), the federal government, policy makers, and education leaders all over the nation have in more recent years strengthened efforts to encourage institutions of higher education to advance the values of diversity, equity, and

inclusion (DEI) through an equal protection lens. While Title VI civil rights violations are addressed through legal processes, incorporating the values diversity, equity, and inclusion come from shifting behavior and cultural practices (Hilton et al., 2021). For example, the Department of Education Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development (OPEP) developed resources to assist institutions of higher education to use legally permissible strategies to promote student body diversity on their campuses, address educational inequities and opportunity gaps, and create a welcoming campus community for all students (Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development, 2016). This document provides promising practices relating to underrepresented populations on the basis of race and ethnicity.

Recent social unrest and political turmoil have brought to the forefront unaddressed societal inequities that have further underscored the need to strengthen equal protection values from a DEI perspective in higher education. Examples include heightened awareness of the extent of sexual violence against college women, the tragedies of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and the increase in incidents of violence and racism towards Asian communities since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. These events have served as a catalyst for institutions to look more deeply into their diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives to bring about needed cultural changes (Hilton et al., 2021). Accordingly, policymakers and higher education leaders all over the nation have created offices for DEI, added diversity statements to their websites, asked faculty to provide diversity statements, made efforts to attract faculty and students from a wider range of ethnic, racial, and demographic background, and created Title IX coordinator positions (Wiersma-Mosley & DiLoreto, 2018; Nunes, 2021).

## *Civil Rights Violations in Schools*

The OCR investigates complaints of discrimination based on actual or perceived membership in groups that exhibit both ethnic and religious characteristics and resolved such complaints by requiring recipients to change their nondiscrimination policies and responses to reports of discrimination. A recent report compiled by the OCR finds that in the fiscal year 2019, the OCR received over 3,673 Title VI-related complaints, and has seen an increase in the number of national origin and shared ancestry complaints in recent years, including complaints filed by Muslim students (Office of Civil Rights, 2019). OCR has found violations and required substantive remedies in cases involving students subjected to anti-Semitic threats, slurs, and assaults; Muslim students targeted for wearing a hijab; and Middle Eastern and Sikh students taunted and called terrorists (Office of Civil Rights, 2019). However, there are no empirical statistics that break down this data to discern the discrimination or harassment towards American Muslims within the intersecting categories of race, religion, or national origin.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, state and local complaints of discrimination and harassment in educational institutions are confidential in nature and not easily available to the public.<sup>30</sup>

In evaluating the number of OCR reports, state and local grievance processes/litigation related to civil rights violations in the school setting, it is critical to consider scientific research indicating that students, regardless of minority status, are more likely to take “extralegal”<sup>31</sup> than formal legal actions in response to perceived rights violations (Morrill et al., 2010, p. 651).

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<sup>29</sup> The OCR is authorized to release certain information to the public, including the name of the school or institution, the date the complaint was filed, the type of discrimination included in the complaint; the date the complaint was resolved, dismissed, or closed; the basic reasons for OCR’s decision, or other related information.

<sup>30</sup> The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) (20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99) is a federal law that protects the privacy of student education records from release to the public.

<sup>31</sup> A range of actions apart from legal recourse.

Despite the notion that federal civil rights laws and landmark Supreme Court cases expanding the interpretation of students' civil rights<sup>32</sup> provide a basis to equitably resolve problems of inequality, injustice, intolerance, segregation, and exclusion in the education setting (Morrill et al., 2010), many researchers have demonstrated that individuals rarely turn to lawyers or the courts when they define experiences as rights violations (Baumgartner, 1988; Black, 1983; Bumiller, 1987, 1988; Cooney, 1998; Engel & Munger, 2003; Ewick & Silbey, 1998; Felstiner et al., 1980; Friedman, 1985; Fuller et al., 2000; Galanter, 1983; Miller & Sarat, 1980; Morrill et al., 2010; Scheingold, 1974), particularly socially disadvantaged racial and ethnic groups (Black, 1976; Bumiller, 1987, 1988; Curran, 1977; Engel & Munger, 2003; Mayhew & Reiss, 1969; Miller & Sarat, 1980; Morrill et al., 2010). Morrill et al. (2010) describe this phenomenon as a “paradox” between legal rights as a sought-after guarantee of social justice and legal rights as a little-used means to redress in the face of social injustice (Morrill et al., 2010, p. 652). Their research suggests that data relating to civil rights violation reports, including civil rights litigation, do not necessarily provide an accurate depiction of the actual numbers of discrimination and harassment experienced by American Muslims.

In 2015, the Council of American-Islamic Relations conducted a survey on the impact of school bullying and discrimination on California Muslim students ages 12–18 to understand how comfortable they felt attending their schools and participating in classroom discussions, and discover to what extent they were subjected to bias-based bullying and harassment at school (Council on American-Islamic Relations, 2015a). Bullying has been defined by [stopbullying.gov](http://stopbullying.gov) as unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance, and includes behavior that is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over

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<sup>32</sup> Examples include *Brown v. Board of Education*, *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent School District*, *Goss v. Lopez*.

time. Fifty-five percent of the American Muslim students surveyed reported being subjected to some form of bullying based on their religious identity. This statistic is twice as high as the national statistic of students reporting being bullied at school (Stopbullying.gov, 2014). Many students experienced multiple types of bullying; however, the most common type of bullying American Muslim students faced was verbal at 52%. The survey also found that one in five students said his or her administrators, coaches, school safety officers or teachers made offensive comments about his or her religion or allowed other students to make offensive comments at school. Moreover, 33% of students felt teachers and administrators were not responsive to their religious accommodation requests. American Muslim youth continue to identify student-teacher relations as needing improvement. Many students' comments referenced increased problems in the classroom during discussions about 9/11, mainly due to teachers either failing to address harassment by other students against Muslim students or discriminating against Muslim students themselves (Council on American-Islamic Relations, 2015a). The Council of American-Islamic Relations in California conducted a follow-up study in 2018–2019 examining how Muslim students felt about their school environment, how they express or maintain their Muslim identity, and the extent of anti-Muslim bullying and harassment students experience. The study compared response patterns to the earlier school bullying survey and found minimal improvement in school environments for Muslim students (Council on American-Islamic Relations, 2019).

In 2016, two Maryland organizations conducted surveys of 300 Muslim youth in Montgomery County and Silver Springs and reported similar findings (George, 2016) in K–12 public schools. The survey in Silver Springs, conducted by the local Muslim Community Center, found that nearly one-third of Muslim students in grades three through twelve reported experiences of insults or abuse at least once because of their faith, and also found that more than

one in ten reported that they were physically harmed or harassed at least once because of their religion (George, 2016). The survey in Montgomery County, conducted by the local International Cultural Center, found that many Muslim students felt harassed, humiliated, bullied, or abused by classmates during the past six months because of their Islamic faith, and ten percent of the students surveyed reported a teacher or administrator had treated them unfairly during the past six months (George, 2016).

Mogahed & Chouhoud, (2017) reported that Muslim students in K–12 educational institutions feel a negative effect from the political climate. Specifically, their comprehensive American Muslim poll found that more than two in five (42%) Muslims with children in K–12 school report bullying of their children because of their faith, compared with 23% of Jews, 20% of Protestants, and 6% of Catholics. In addition, a teacher or other school official is reported to have been involved in one in four bullying incidents involving Muslims.

The researcher has been unable to find similar empirical research conducted for Muslim students enrolled in institutions of higher education. Thus, the subject of this study—the social integration experiences of Muslim students enrolled in educational institutions of higher educational, within the context of this political climate—is new terrain being explored.

## **Theoretical Considerations**

### ***Social Integration***

Social integration may be defined as a dynamic and principled process where all members move toward a safe, stable and just society by mending conditions of social disintegration and social exclusion, fragmentation, and polarization, and by expanding and strengthening peaceful social relations and coexistence, collaboration, and cohesion (Jeannotte, 2008; United Nations Division for Social Policy and Development; 2005). Key concepts within



this definition include inclusion and cohesion. Social *inclusion* is equated with the achievement of at least four levels of *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*: physiological, safety, love/belonging, and esteem (Maslow, 1943, 1954; Jeannotte, 2008). Social *cohesion* is based on the willingness of individuals to cooperate and work together at all levels of society to achieve collective goals (Jeannotte et al., 2002; Jeannotte, 2008).

Seminal sociologist Emile Durkheim (1893) believed that social integration is created through social interactions that form a collective consciousness that bind individuals together (Boundless, 2016). He argued that individuals are bonded to society by two forms of integration: attachment and regulation. Attachment is the extent to which an individual maintains ties with members of society. Regulation involves the extent to which an individual is held in the fabric of society by its values, beliefs, and norms (Berkman & Glass, 2000). Durkheim (1897) posits that the degree to which an individual is integrated into the fabric of societal institutions lessens the likelihood that someone experiences anomie, or the breakdown of social bonds. For purposes of this study, this basic construct of social integration is further examined through the lenses of immigrant integration within American society and minority youth integration within the school setting to reflect the population being studied.

### ***Immigrant Integration***

Immigration experiences influence the social integration of most American Muslims, as the majority of Muslims currently residing in the United States are immigrants, or first-generation Americans, from the regions of South Asia, Southeast Asia, Central Asia, Middle East, and North Africa, or second- and third-generation Americans personally connected to the immigrant Muslim community, and likely attuned to issues that affect immigrants (Humphries et al., 2013; Pew Research Center, 2015). Immigrant integration has been defined as the *two-way*

process of inclusion of newcomers (as individuals and as a group) as well as the internal cohesion of the societies that are affected by immigration (Jimenez, 2011; LaCroix, 2010; Tubergen, 2006). Inclusion in the context of immigration is the process that allows members of immigrant groups to attain, usually gradually and approximately, the opportunities and valued societal goals afforded to long-term native citizens, including improved socioeconomic position and acceptance in a broad range of societal institutions (Alba & Foner, 2014). LaCroix (2010) defines immigrant inclusion as the process whereby immigrants become participants in particular sub-sectors of society, including education, labor market, welfare system, political representation, and civic engagement. Similarly, the Migration Policy Institute defines immigrant integration as the process of economic mobility and social inclusion for newcomers and their children (Migration Policy Institute, 2021). As such, integration touches upon the institutions and mechanisms that promote development and growth within society, including early childhood care; elementary, postsecondary, and adult education systems; workforce development; health care; provision of government services to communities with linguistic diversity; and more. Successful integration builds communities that are stronger economically and more inclusive socially and culturally (Benton, 2013; Liebert & Rissler, 2021; Migration Policy Institute 2021). Jimenez (2011) outlines five dimensions of immigrant integration comprised of language proficiency, socioeconomic attainment, residential locale, political participation, and social integration. He finds that children of immigrants, regardless of their ethno-racial group tend to outperform their parents in educational attainment, occupational status, wealth, and home ownership.

Accordingly, immigrant integration within the context of the United States and the Constitutional value of equal protection may be understood as a process through which the whole

population acquires civil, social, legal, political, human and cultural rights, which creates the conditions for greater equality, granting new members a role as equal partners in society (Castles et al., 2002, p. 113; LaCroix, 2010) in which minority groups are supported in maintaining their cultural and social identities, since the right to cultural choice is intrinsic to democracy (Kymlicka, 1995). Although the United States has no coordinated national immigrant integration policy, in that immigrants are largely expected to use their own resources, family and friendship networks, or the assistance of local community organizations to thrive economically and socially (Bloemraad & Graauw, 2012; Jimenez, 2011), Constitutional principles relating to freedom, liberty, justice, equality diversity, and equity as implemented by Congress in the form of civil rights, due process, and equal protection (anti-discrimination) laws, and interpreted by key Supreme Court cases through judicial review, have served as integration policies that protect minority immigrant groups and facilitate their successful and meaningful incorporation into American society.<sup>33</sup>

Table 1 explains how United States Constitutional values serve as integration policies for immigrants, or new Americans.

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<sup>33</sup> Immigrant integration as applied in the U.S. immigration system presupposes that *assimilation* is not a value that is embodied within the Constitutional values of liberty, justice, diversity, equality, and equity. The term assimilation may be defined as a *one-way* process of adaptation in which newcomers are expected to give up their prior linguistic, cultural, and social characteristics, adopt the values and practices of the mainstream receiving society, and become indistinguishable from the majority population (LaCroix, 2010). Assimilation is an integration construct advocated by several European nations, including Germany, France, and Britain, based on the principle of homogeneity and building a national identity (LaCroix, 2010). For example, The French parliament has passed several laws on when and where women can wear headscarves: Many Muslim women wear headscarves publicly as a religious practice of modesty but are prohibited from doing so in certain settings.

**Table 1**

The Role of Constitutional Values as Immigrant Integration Policies

Constitutional values	Constitutional doctrines	Empowers immigrants	Facilitates positive integration
Liberty, diversity, equality, and inclusion	1 <sup>st</sup> Amendment: <sup>34</sup> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Freedom of Expression</li><li>• Establishment Clause</li><li>• Free Exercise Clause</li></ul>	Supports freedom to preserve diverse religious, cultural, and social identities	Fosters inclusion and sense of belonging which leads to increased participation in community and civic engagement
Equal opportunities, justice, fundamental fairness, and equity	14 <sup>th</sup> Amendment: <sup>35</sup> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Equal Protection Clause</li><li>• Due process</li></ul>	Allows immigrants to redress discriminatory experiences in employment, schools, and community (places of public accommodation)	Enables equal opportunities and equitable treatment in labor and employment, educational attainment, and fair housing among others

These federal principles and doctrines require federal, state and local legislatures, governments and agencies to develop and implement anti-discrimination policies and administrative procedures that empower this often marginalized group to redress discriminatory experiences related to disparate treatment, exclusion, harassment, hostile environment,

<sup>34</sup> “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.” While the topic of free speech is not within the scope of this study, it is important to note that the First Amendment protection of free speech is not absolute. The United States Supreme Court has ruled that government may sometimes be permitted to restrict speech. While hate speech and offensive speech on the basis of protected category may be protected by the First Amendment as viewpoint expression, true threats, incitement to violence, fighting words (face-to-face personal insults that are likely to lead to an immediate fight), and severe and pervasive harassment are not considered protected speech (Brandenburg v. Ohio, 395 U.S. 444 (1969); Chaplinsky v. New Hampshire, 315 U.S. 568 (1942); Davis v. Monroe County Board of Education, 526 U.S. 629 (1999); Virginia v. Black, 538 U.S. 343 (2003); Watts v. United States, 394 U.S. 705 (1969)).

<sup>35</sup> “...No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.”

threatening or otherwise harmful action, and retaliation based on personal characteristics, including religion, race, ethnicity, color, immigration status, national origin, and/or ancestry. Such policies and administrative procedures are meant to facilitate the positive integration of immigrant groups in the areas of labor and employment, educational opportunities, housing, law enforcement, immigration and traveling, and government and community interaction. However, policies and procedures are only as equitable as the institutions and administrators implementing them. Anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiments may distort the interpretation and implementation of these policy measures meant to create equal opportunities, further social justice, fundamental fairness and equity, and support diverse cultural and social identities of immigrant minority communities.

LaCroix (2010) argues that it is the failure to develop an inclusive and tolerant society, which enables different ethnic minorities to live side-by-side and in relative harmony with the local population of which they form a part, that inevitably leads to discrimination, social exclusion, and the rise of racism and xenophobia. In this twenty-first century political climate, migration of Muslims into the United States is intensifying fears and apprehensions about the idea of value incompatibility and a culture clash between Islam and the Western world, the perceived security threat and societal burden of allowing Muslim refugees from Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Somalia and other Islamic nations to resettle into the United States, and enduring beliefs that immigrants “steal” the few remaining good jobs from deserving individuals (LaCroix, 2010). Thus, it is now necessary for the United States public policy and administration to find new ways to foster immigrant integration in order to counter or curb twenty-first century rising political tensions relating to American Muslims (LaCroix, 2010).

## *Minority Youth*

Schools and institutions of higher education are important social contexts that influence the integration experiences of adolescents and young adults in the school setting. Psychologists have found strong links between social integration and school belonging, loneliness, peer acceptance, academic achievement, and engagement in school (Anderman 2002; Benner & Wang, 2014; McNeely et al., 2002; Wolfer et al., 2012). Baumeister & Leary (1995) posit that human beings are social beings, driven by an interpersonal desire to be connected with other people, and motivated by a fundamental need to belong, especially in adolescence and young adulthood. Many researchers suggest that detrimental consequences of poor integration during adolescence and young adulthood (such as low frequencies of peer interaction and low levels of peer acceptance) include social isolation, social pain, and problematic forms of internalized or externalized behavioral reactions, and poor physical well-being (Caspi et al., 2006; Eiesenberger et al., 2003; Gottman, 1977; Margolin, 2007; Qualter & Munn, 2003; Twenge et al., 2001, 2003; Wolfer et al., 2012).

In psychological literature, sense of belonging has been defined as the subjective feeling of deep connection with social groups, physical places, and individual and collective experiences (Allen et al., 2021). It is a fundamental human need that predicts numerous mental, physical, social, economic and behavioral outcomes. Sense of belonging has been conceptualized as an aspect of interpersonal relatedness most dissimilar to loneliness and most closely associated with social support (Hagerty et al., 1996; Russell et al., 1984). Loneliness is presumed to be a consequence of failing to connect with others (Hagerty & Patusky, 1995), whereas the perception of support is believed to arise from notions that one is structurally integrated into a social network and has adequate resources available (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Hoffman et al. (2002)

developed a sense of belonging scale grounded in this psychological literature to measure students' sense of affiliation and identification with their school community.

Tinto (1987), a positivist social integration theorist suggests that postsecondary institutions serve as functional vehicles for incorporating the young into society by way of their integration into college life. A meaningful way in which students can become integrated in postsecondary life in educational institutions of higher education is by participating in formal and informal social systems, outside of the formal academic structure of educational institutions (Baker & Velez, 1996). Both informal interactions with faculty and staff and the more formal participation in extra-curricular activities fosters social integration. Implicit in this positivist model of social integration is the notion that success in college life is contingent upon a process that in part is predicated on the individual's ability to separate from previous communities, the assumption being that the minority student will need to undergo a cultural shift rather than the institution (Tierney, 1992).

Tierney (1992), a critical sociologist, asserts that some positivist models of social integration (like Tinto) have the effect of merely inserting minorities into a dominant cultural frame of reference that is transmitted within dominant cultural forms, leaving invisible cultural hierarchies intact (Tierney, 1992). Accordingly, minorities are likely to have disruptive cultural experiences in college given that the dominant culture in the United States is White.<sup>36</sup>

Sociologist Olneck (1990) similarly observes that the dominant language of integration is the voice of White middle-class education professionals speaking about “problem”<sup>37</sup> groups and

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<sup>36</sup> For the great portion of American history, higher education colleges and universities were designed to educate a clientele that was overwhelmingly composed of White males who came from the middle and upper classes (Tierney, 1992).

<sup>37</sup> i.e., problem of acculturation, problem of having one foot in two separate cultures. Tierney (1992) ponders whether a student's “problem” of acculturation is really an institution's inability to function in a multicultural world.

about the solutions to the problems posed by diversity (Olneck, 1990, p. 163; Tierney, 1992, p. 611). Tierney argues that this approach to social integration has potentially harmful consequences for minority students, and advocates that institutions consider culturally responsive ways to engage, or integrate, minority students in which diversity is highlighted and celebrated.

The process that ethnic minority youth undergoes while adjusting to mainstream culture is known as acculturation (Makarova, 2019). Acculturation in this context refers to changes in behavior and attitudes through contact between individuals from different cultural backgrounds (Berry, 2006). For minority youth, family and school are the two main contexts where acculturation unfolds. Characteristics of the school influence the process of acculturation and outcomes (Makarova, 2009). Thus, school adjustment of ethnic minorities is highly important outcome of the acculturation process (Berry et al., 2011). The Vancouver Index of Acculturation (Paulhus, 2013; Ryder et al., 2000) is a scale that has been developed to measure acculturation as a bi-dimensional construct consisting of the extent to which people endorse aspects of their heritage culture<sup>38</sup> and mainstream American culture.<sup>39</sup>

A small number of researchers have studied social integration of ethnic/religious minority youth. Ghaffar-Kucher (2015) studied working class Pakistani American youth and found that schools and communities send the message that being Muslim and being American is not compatible, and result in internal conflict among youth. On one hand, families present Islam as a type of cultural capital that can guide youth and help them navigate their lives by being a “good Muslim.” That group of youth long for the “homeland” which they try to create in their new

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<sup>38</sup> Heritage culture in this context refers to the original culture of one’s family/ancestors (other than American) (Paulhus, 2013). It may be the culture of one’s birth, the culture in which one has been raised, any culture in one’s family background, or a culture that influenced previous generations of one’s family.

<sup>39</sup> Mainstream American culture may be described as values espoused by the dominant Christian faith traditions, influences of Western/European civilization, and American popular culture.



home. Another group of youth long for a world where assimilation into the dominant group is expected and accepted. As a result, rather than view being Muslim and American in an additive way, youth believe that they can only be one or the other, which often translates into placing themselves outside the realm of American cultural citizenship (Ghaffar-Kucher, 2015). In Canada, Baker (2013) studied the minority refugee youth population in Newfoundland and Labrador and found that experiences of racialized name calling by peers had a negative effect on their social integration, and recommended that increased efforts by teachers and administrators are needed to help combat peer racism.

Psychology scholar Beverly Tatum (1997, 2017) studies patterns of racial identity development, including self-segregation of minority students through childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. As minority adolescents grow and develop their identity, natural encounters with racism and White privilege lead to an exploration of what it means to be perceived as a minority student. For example, Muslim students, including students of Asian, Middle Eastern, and North African heritage, may struggle with Islamophobia and being stereotyped as a “terrorist.” This developmental process includes experiences of isolation and search for positive racial identity aided by having the support of in-group peers (Tatum, 2017). Tatum (2017) posits that racial grouping begins in middle school, even among children who have known each other since kindergarten. She recognizes the equal value of separating students to affirm identity and buffer from racism in their environments, *and* integrating White students and students of color to connect along lines of difference in ways that support a deeper understanding of race and racism for the purpose of creating a more just society (Tatum, 2017).

This study explores the role that United States institutions of higher education play in the social integration experiences of Muslim students. Do educational institutions proactively

consider culturally responsive ways to engage, or integrate, minority students, or do they simply react to complaints of civil rights violations? Do institutions expect the minority student to assimilate into the majority school culture, or do they foster a climate of inclusiveness and cohesion that values diverse social identities?

### ***Street-Level Bureaucracy***

Michael Lipsky (1969) introduced the concept of “street-level bureaucrat” to develop a critical theory of political behavior of certain government officials and the impact of their behavior on the public they serve. Lipsky (1980, 2010) describes street-level bureaucrats as government officials who maintain day-to-day fact-to-face contact with the public in the regular course of their work, have relatively high impact on public citizens’ lives, and have significant independence in decision-making (administrative discretion).<sup>40</sup> Administrative discretion is the flexible exercising of judgment and decision making delegated to street-level bureaucrats (Bovens & Zouridis, 2002; Lipsky, 2010). To the public, the street-level bureaucrat is the face that represents government, the *real* policy maker, policy interpreter, and policy implementer (Lipsky, 2010).

When combined with substantial discretionary authority and the requirement to interpret policy on a case-by-case basis, the difference between government policy in theory and policy in practice can be substantial and troubling (Lipsky, 2010). The core dilemma is that street-level bureaucrats are assigned to help people or make decisions about them on the basis of individual cases, but the structure of their job makes this impossible. Reasons for their difficulties include bureaucratic problems arising from unattainable or contradictory expectations about job performance; ambiguous agency goals; inadequate resources; huge caseloads; and threat and

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<sup>40</sup> Examples of street-level bureaucrats include teachers and educational administrators.

challenges to their authority. They are forced to adopt practices such as rationing resources, screening applicants for qualities their organization favors, routinizing client interactions by imposing the uniformities of mass processing on situations requiring human responsiveness (Lipsky, 2010). Bureaucrats cope with some of these challenges by developing psychological mechanisms like routines and simplifications to make their tasks easier to manage. However, stereotyping and other forms of biases, including racial, class, and implicit bias, significantly inform the ways in which psychological mechanisms like simplifications and routines are structured in certain situations, and as a result, exacerbate conflict (Lipsky, 2010). Most significantly, this behavior leads to the institutionalization of the tendency to stereotype and/or incorporate bias in administrative discretion. Lipsky (2010) finds that therein lies a paradox in which the public primarily perceives bias (i.e., prejudice, dehumanization, discrimination) while the street-level bureaucrat primarily perceives his or her own response to bureaucratic necessities as neutral, fair, and rational.

This paradox has a cumulative detrimental impact on the life chances of the public meant to be served by street-level bureaucrats. Lipsky (2010) posits that minority group members especially depend upon governmental bureaucratic structures for fair treatment because of their subordinate status in society, yet street-level bureaucrats have inherent difficulties in fairly serving minority groups and other stigmatized individuals for the reasons explained above.

Implicit bias in administrative discretion is harmful to the public, especially minority groups (Lipsky, 2010). Kang & Banaji (2006) found that most people, even those who embrace nondiscrimination norms, hold implicit biases that might lead them to treat minority groups in discriminatory ways. Rachlinski et al. (2009) studied the criminal justice system and found that implicit racial bias of White Americans can translate into biased judicial decision making of trial

judges.<sup>41</sup> Specifically, they found that trial judges harbor the same kinds of implicit racial biases as other White Americans; that these biases can influence their discretionary judgment; but that given sufficient motivation, judges can compensate for the influence of these biases. They observed that a professional commitment to equality, unlike a personal commitment to the same ideal, appeared to have limited impact on automatic racial associations among the judges in their study. Moreover, Abrams et al. (2012) found evidence of significant interjudge disparity in the racial gap in incarceration rates, providing support for their assertion that at least some judges treat defendants differently on the basis of their race. Although the studies of Rachlinski et al. and Abrams et al. focus on the racially disparate treatment in the criminal justice system focusing on the Black/White binary, implicit racial bias arguably influences additional realms of discretionary decision making for other racial, ethnic, and religious groups in administrative practice.

Because policy implementation comes down street-level bureaucrats, they bear the greatest responsibility to interpret Constitutional principles, laws, and policies in moral, ethical, and socially equitable manner (Alexander, 1997; Frederickson, 1990; Lipsky, 2010). However, Gooden (2014) contends that social equity, specifically racial equity, is a *nervous* area of government that has stifled street-level bureaucrats, leading to an inability to seriously advance the reduction of inequities in government. She underscores the gap between the Constitutional and democratic *principles* of fundamental fairness and equality and the practical *implementation* in delivering public service in an equitable way; she argues that this gap between theory and practice perpetuates social inequities across organizations that compound and reinforce one another through “structural racism” (Gooden, 2014, p. 12; 2015):

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<sup>41</sup> Rachlinski et al. (2009) defines implicit racial bias as stereotypical associations so subtle that people who hold them might not even be aware of them.

Despite the long-standing commitment to fairness as an administrative principle, administrators must be humbled by the realization that they have contributed to the discrepancy and in many places helped to institute inequality in the past by enforcing discriminatory laws and using their broad discretion to advance exclusionary social mores. (Smith, 2002)

Similarly, Alexander (1997) theorizes that attitudes towards race is an integral and often invisible component of customary morality as practiced by street-level bureaucrats that excludes certain individuals or groups, or maintains their subordinate status on the basis of race through long-standing and systematic policies (Alexander, 1997; Alexander & Stivers, 2010). For example, Stivers (2007) argues that racism shaped the public administrative response towards the victims of Hurricane Katrina. She found that discriminatory government policies and processes over decades resulted in disproportionate harm to African Americans during the storm and its aftermath; in fact, when the crisis came, administrators at all levels chose to take refuge in regulations rather than act creatively to save lives and reduce misery (Stivers, 2007).

This study explores the institutional practices of educational administrators as they relate to interpretation and implementation of civil rights policies and procedures that impact Muslim students in the educational setting. How do educational administrators manage bureaucratic challenges in deterring and addressing civil rights violations and marginalization of Muslim students? Does bias in administrative discretion play a role in the administration of civil rights complaints? Does bias in administrative discretion influence social integration of undergraduate Muslim students enrolled in their institutions?

### **CHAPTER III Methodology and Research Design**

The purpose of this research study is to explore the relationship between (a) the social integration experiences of American Muslim college students in their educational setting within the context of a social and political climate imbued in anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant sentiment, and (b) administrative discretion within institutions of higher education as it relates to interpretation and implementation of federal civil rights policies and procedures that impact Muslim students in the educational setting.

To further this purpose, the following two research questions guide this study:

#### **Research Question One**

What are the social integration experiences of first, second, and multi-generation American Muslim college students enrolled in public institutions of higher education? In particular, how does societal and political anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant sentiment shape Muslim college students' social integration experiences in their educational setting?

The sub-questions of Research Question One include:

- What factors promote social integration of American Muslim youth in their educational setting?
- What factors deter the social integration of American Muslim youth in their educational settings?
- How do American Muslims mitigate their experiences of civil rights violations and/or marginalization in the educational setting?

This researcher operationalizes the term social integration to include social integration within the campus setting as a microcosm for social integration in American society. The researcher used the following indicators to deconstruct social integration: two-way process of

*inclusion* of Muslim students (sense of belonging; perception of safety/fear of violence; valued identity; cultural citizenship, experiences of discrimination, microaggression, bias incidents, and hate incidents) and *cohesion* within larger campus community and society in general (acculturation, frequency of contact with non-Muslim students; engagement in campus life and activities; school initiatives on preventing civil rights violations and microaggressions; anti-discrimination policies and administrative procedures that redress discriminatory experiences related to disparate treatment, harassment, hostile environment, threatening or otherwise harmful action based on personal characteristics, including religion, race, ethnicity, color, immigration status, national origin, and/or ancestry; and proactive efforts to support diverse identities) (Durkheim, 1893, 1897; Jeannotte, 2008; Jimenez, 2011; LaCroix, 2010; Ozyurt, 2013; United Nations Division for Social Policy and Development, 2005). Table 2 explains how the themes in the literature review and theoretical frameworks were used to operationalize the construction of the term “social integration” within the context of analyzing Research Question One. Table 3 essentializes the indicators of social integration as operationalized by the researcher and grounded through her literature review.

**Table 2**

## Operationalizing Social Integration from Theory

Two-way process of inclusion and cohesion (Jimenez, 2011)			
Inclusion		Cohesion	
Theme(s)	Review of previous research	Theme(s)	Review of previous research
Sense of belonging	Jeannotte, Durkheim, Baumeister & Leary, Hoffman et al.	Acculturation	Berry, Makarova, Olneck, Ryder et al., Paulhus
Valued identity and cultural citizenship	Tierney, Kymlicka, Ghaffar-Kucher, Ozyurt	Frequency of contact/interaction with Muslim and non-Muslim students and engagement in school life/activities	Tatum, Ozyurt, Durkheim, Hoffman et al., Tinto
Perception of safety and fear of violence	Maslow, Joshi	Effectiveness of institutional anti-discrimination policies and practices	Durkheim, LaCroix, OCR, Lipsky
Experiences of civil rights violations, microaggression and marginalization, hate incidents	Joshi, Nadal et al., Ibrahim, Bonet, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Council of American-Islamic Relations, OCR, DOJ	Culturally responsive ways for institutions to proactively engage minority students in which diverse social identities are supported	Tierney, LaCroix, OCR, Hilton et al., Lipsky, Tatum



**Table 3**

Indicators of Social Integration

Inclusion	Cohesion
Sense of belonging	Acculturation
Perception of safety	Frequency of contact between Muslim and non-Muslim students; engagement in campus life and activities
Identity, esteem, and degree of cultural citizenship	Institutional efforts to address microaggression, bias incidents, civil rights violation (discrimination), and hate-motivated incidents [reactive]
Freedom from microaggression, bias, civil rights violations (discrimination), and hate-motivated incidents	Institutional efforts to support diverse identities, including providing reasonable accommodations for religious practices [proactive]

**Research Question Two**

What is the impact of administrative civil rights policies and practices on the social integration of undergraduate Muslim students enrolled in institutions of higher education?

The sub-questions of Research Question Two include:

- Do institutional civil rights policies and procedures contribute to mitigating American Muslim experiences of civil rights violations, microaggressions, fears of violence, and experiences of marginalization in their educational setting?
- Have civil rights policies and procedures contributed to promoting social integration of American Muslims in their educational institutions?
- Do educational institutions proactively consider culturally responsive ways to engage, or integrate, minority students?

- Do institutions expect the minority student to assimilate into the majority school culture, or do they foster a climate that values diverse social identities?
- How do administrators manage bureaucratic challenges in administering civil rights policies and procedures that impact Muslim students?
- Does bias in administrative discretion play a role in the administration of civil rights complaints?
- Does bias in administrative discretion influence social integration of undergraduate Muslim students enrolled in their institutions?

Table 4 explains how the themes in the literature review on Constitutional values in public education and the theoretical framework of Lipsky's (2010) street-level bureaucracy were used to explain the relationship between federal Constitutional values, doctrines, statutes, policies, guidance and state educational agency's application of federal doctrines, within the context of Research Question Two.

**Table 4**

Infusing Constitutional Values of Civil Rights into Street-Level Bureaucracy

Constitutional values	Constitutional doctrine	Statutes	Judicial review	Agency interpretation and enforcement	State educational institutional policies and practices
Diversity, equal opportunities, justice, fundamental fairness equity, inclusion	Equal Protection Clause Freedom of Expression	Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title IV & VI) Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974	Examples include Brown v. Board of Education and Lau v. Nichols <sup>42</sup>	Department of Education Office of Civil Rights Department of Justice Civil Rights Division	Anti-discrimination policies, due process, complaint procedures, diversity initiatives, cultural competency training
Theory					Institutional practice

<sup>42</sup> Non-English-speaking Chinese American students in San Francisco claimed that they were being denied equal protection by the school system’s failure to provide additional English language instruction. While the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the students, it did so by relying on Section 601 of the 1964 Civil Rights Act rather than the Equal Protection Clause; Section 601 protects against discrimination on the basis of national origin. This case paved the way for future decisions regarding bilingual education.

## Research Design

The methodology utilized for this study is a qualitatively driven convergent mixed-methods research design through a collective case study approach to generate theory on this policy issue (Corbin & Strauss, 2007; Eisenhardt, 1989; Morse, 2017; Stake, 1994), in this case the civil right to belong. Convergent mixed-methods strategy allows the researcher to collect qualitative and quantitative data concurrently, analyze the two data sets separately, and merge quantitative and qualitative data in order to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research problem, and use results side-by-side to reinforce each other (Creswell, 2009). Researchers use this model to compare results, validate, confirm, or corroborate quantitative results with qualitative findings (Creswell, 2009).

The core component of this mixed-methods research is qualitative while the simultaneous supplemental component is quantitative (QUAL + *quan*) (Morse, 2017). The core component provides the theoretical drive; it is the complete method and forms the base for the integration of the supplemental component in the research narrative. The supplemental component adds important details that cannot be accessed by the core methods alone. Here, qualitative research is appropriate as the core component in this mixed-methods research to conduct initial explorations when the phenomenon of study has received little empirical attention, as in the case of American Muslim youth (Morrow & Smith, 2000). Qualitative research is also well-positioned to address issues of social justice (Mayan & Daum, 2014), as it gives a voice to those whose views are rarely heard. Quantitative research will add clarity and necessary detail about the population of Muslim youth being studied, including their demographics and general experiences of social integration. The point of interface of these two methods of data collection will occur at the analysis of findings.

The case study approach is a research strategy that focuses on analyzing complex dynamics within bounded systems to provide an in-depth picture (Eisenhardt, 1989; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1994). Case studies are also targeted at information-rich sources for in-depth understanding and can also be used to form policies or uncover contributing reasons for cause and effect relationships (Bhattacharya, 2017). In this case study approach, the units of analysis selected are three institutions of higher education located within the southeastern region of the United States. One educational institution is located in an urban/downtown campus setting, the second educational institution is located in a suburban college campus setting, and the third educational institution is located in a rural/agricultural campus setting. By examining students and administrators in each institution of higher education as a separate case study provides a more nuanced understanding that reflects the unique culture and dynamic prevalent at each institutional setting, and an additional variable that shapes student experiences. In addition, a cross-case interpretive analysis of three selected institutions of higher education deepens understanding and explanation and to enhance transferability to other contexts (Miles et al., 2020). Data collected from these case studies is triangulated to develop conclusions, assertions, and generalized theoretical propositions about the policy issue (Eisenhardt, 1989; Stake, 1994).

The time dimension of this study is a cross-sectional research design. The literature review conducted for this study also indicates that a cross sectional design has been the method of research and data collection generally used to explore perceptions and attitudes. For example, in a mixed-methods study to examine how American Muslim youth negotiate their identities post-9/11, Sirin & Fine (2007) conducted interviews of American Muslim youth ages 12–18. After analyzing the data collected from the interviews, the researcher found that the evidence

gathered suggests that government policy, social relationships, and media representation fundamentally affect youth development, varying by age, community, and context.

### **Sample**

The target population to answer Research Question One is comprised of first, second, and multi-generation American Muslim youth ages eighteen to twenty-nine who permanently reside in the United States, identify with the tenets of Islam, and are enrolled in an institution of higher education located in the southeast region of the United States. The researcher defines first-generation American Muslims as Muslims born in another country. The researcher defines second-generation American Muslims as Muslims born in the United States to first-generation American Muslim parents or Muslims who have resided in the United States for most of their life.<sup>43</sup> For second-generation and multi-generational Muslims, research indicates that the immigrant experience is often still deeply engrained in their life experiences.<sup>44</sup> The southeast region of the United States is an opportune section of the country to recruit this sample population because it has one of the largest growing Muslim populations, a majority who are immigrants, and includes a sizeable number of resettled refugees from Muslim majority countries. The Muslim population in the southeast region overall, and its Muslim immigrant population is a representative sample of the national average.

In this study, it is appropriate to select a purposive sample to produce information about perspectives and attitudes of a finite population of American Muslims. Given that American

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<sup>43</sup> The term 1.5 generation is sometimes used to refer to a generation of immigrants who were born in another country but spent most of their life, including their formative and adolescent teen years in the United States. For purposes of this study, the notion of 1.5 generation is incorporated into the term second generation.

<sup>44</sup> As reported by Pew Research Center, the immigrant experience is deeply ingrained in the fabric of Islam in America. It is significant to note that U.S.-born American Muslim population is also considerable (42%), the majority of whom consist of descendants of Muslim immigrants during the influx of migration from Asian, Middle Eastern, and African nations.

Muslims make up approximately one percent of the United States population, purposive samples that have the personal characteristics to help answer the research questions were selected. The researcher recruited Muslim student participants from her personal social network. The researcher is a member of the Muslim community in the southeast region of the United States. Accordingly, the researcher recruited a purposive sample of American Muslims within three institutions of higher education in the southeast region of the United States through personal connections and through reaching out to the leadership of the three institutions' Muslim Student Associations and other relevant university cultural organizations with large Muslim populations (i.e., Arab American cultural organizations and South Asian cultural associations). Additional participants were recruited through snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a common recruitment strategy for members of a small population that is closely connected. Each student was offered a \$10 Starbucks gift card to incentivize participation in the study. The variety in the selection of three sites allowed for a greater variation in the sample selection, and thus is aptly representative of the target population.

The target population to answer Research Question Two is comprised of key administrators employed at three institutions of higher education located in the southeast region of the United States. A purposive sample of educational administrators who develop, promulgate, interpret, and implement policies and procedures related to civil rights complaints resolution process and diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives were recruited to produce information about educational institutions. Examples of titles of such employees include Equity and Access Services' Civil Rights Investigator, Equal Opportunity and Civil Rights Coordinator, Diversity Coordinator, Compliance Director for Equal Opportunity, Equity, and Civil Rights,

College Equal Employment Opportunity Officer, and Council members or group members of diversity and inclusion initiatives.

Data saturation was the primary methodological principle used to determine the purposive sample size of students and administrators. Data saturation has been defined as a grounded theory criterion for discontinuing sampling and data collection or analysis; as the researcher sees similar instances over and over again, the researcher becomes empirically confident that a category is saturated (Bhattacharya, 2017; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Saturation is therefore closely related to the notion of theoretical sampling—the idea that sampling is guided by the emerging theory in which the researcher combines sampling, data collection and data analysis, rather than treating them as separate stages in a linear process (Bryman 2012; Dey, 1999; Saunders et al., 2018). Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe saturation as a matter of degree, arguing that there will always be the potential for the new to emerge. They suggest that saturation should be more concerned with reaching the point where further data collection becomes counter-productive, and where the new data does not necessarily add anything to the overall story or theory (Saunders, et al., 2018). Using this process of sampling, the researcher was able to expand the sampling based on new information gathered during data collection and analysis (Bhattacharya, 2017).

The researcher does not consider a traditional scientific efficient sample size formula (Henry, 1990) and acknowledges that the adequacy of data saturation as the sole criterion for obtaining a purposive sample size and for assessing quality data has been questioned by scholars (Guest et al., Charmaz, 2005). In addition to the inherent challenges of recruiting a diverse and representative sample of this small and underrepresented student population and limited number of civil rights administrators employed in university settings, the researcher asserts that the



postmodern technique utilized to deconstruct the multiple perspectives of the population of students and administrators called for a culturally congruent inquiry that challenges traditional structures of superiority of knowledge construction, i.e., quality over quantity (Bhattacharya, 2021). Thus, the researcher utilized variation sampling by selecting a sample size of students and administrators who could provide her varied and diverse perspectives until the themes appeared to be saturated at which point the researcher discontinued data sampling (Bhattacharya, 2017). The sample size of students was 70 and the sample size of administrators was 3. The researcher interviewed one administrator from each university due to the organizational structure: each university employed one key administrator to lead their Title VI civil rights office. The researcher asserts that, while this sample size may not be in the range of an efficient sample size, it met the criteria for a credible sample size (Henry, 1990).

### **Data Collection**

The data collection techniques utilized to explore Research Question One included self-administered surveys and focus groups. Muslim students were recruited to participate in a survey in the mode of an adapted self-administered questionnaire entitled the *Social Integration and Civil Rights Survey for American Muslim Students in Higher Education*.<sup>45</sup> The purpose of this survey was to collect descriptive statistics that describe the range of various demographics of the sample population and summarize general experiences of social integration in the college setting.

The researcher constructed this survey by building upon the following surveys: Vancouver Index of Acculturation (VIA) (Paulhus, 2013; Ryder et al., 2000); sense of belonging survey for college students (Hoffman, et al., 2002); Council on American Islamic Relations

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<sup>45</sup> See Appendix A: Social Integration and Civil Rights Survey for American Muslim Students in Higher Education.

(CAIR) of California Muslim Youth at School Survey (2015a);<sup>46</sup> and Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim, and South Asian (AMEMSA) Civil Rights Survey (Arab Film Festival, Council on American Muslim Islamic Relations, Islamic Center of Northern California, Islamic Network Group, 3<sup>rd</sup> I's South Asian Film Festival, Asian American Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy, 2015).<sup>47</sup> The researcher was also influenced by OCR's resources and Ozyurt's (2013) Social Acculturation Survey<sup>48</sup> in developing this survey.

The demographics captured through this survey include gender, age, birthplace, race/ethnicity, citizenship status, whether parents are first-generation American and their country of origin, college attending, student status, college living situation, and identifiable outward appearances of being Muslim. Gender, birthplace, race/ethnicity, college attending, whether parents are first-generation American and their country of origin, and outward appearances of being Muslim were self-reported. Age was collected by self-reporting of birth year. Citizenship status was measured by the categories of "U.S. citizen, dual citizen (simultaneous citizenship status in the U.S. and another country), refugee/asylee, student visa, permanent resident, other." Student status was measured by the categories of "freshman/first year, sophomore/second year, junior/third year, senior/fourth year, graduate student." College living situation was measured by

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<sup>46</sup> The CAIR-CA survey was developed by the Council for American-Islamic Relations to understand how comfortable American Muslim school students felt attending their schools and participating in classroom discussions, and discover to what extent American Muslim students were subjected to bias-based bullying and harassment at school; CAIR-CA surveyed 621 students between the ages of 11 and 18 who were enrolled in public and non-Muslim private schools throughout the state of California.

<sup>47</sup> The AMEMSA survey was developed in conjunction with Arab Film Festival, the Council on American-Islamic Relations, the Islamic Center of Northern California, the Islamic Networks Group, 3<sup>rd</sup> I's South Asian Film Festival, ZAWAYA, and Asian American Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy to reach a diverse cross section of the African, Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim, Sikh and South Asian (AAMEMSSA) community to understand their shared experiences with civil rights violations in a post-9/11 context.

<sup>48</sup> Ozyurt (2013) administered the Social Acculturation Survey to measure the degree to which an immigrant Muslim woman feels a sense of belonging to (or is alienated from) American society; more precisely, it contained specific questions on respondents' perception of and interaction with the larger non-Muslim American society, and how they juxtapose and negotiate their multiple (Muslim, ethnic and American) identities.

the categories of “on campus (dorms), off campus (with friends/roommates), off campus (with family/relative).” The students were also asked to report their own estimates of number of Muslim students enrolled at their college.

The survey also captured general experiences of social integration, including perceptions of school climate and the school’s diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives; heritage culture/acclulturation; sense of belonging; and experiences of discrimination and harassment. The climate of support and quality of college’s diversity, equity, and inclusion programs were captured by reporting “Excellent,” “Very good,” “Only fair,” “Poor,” or “Does not apply/Don’t know.”<sup>49</sup> The survey included a definition of heritage culture and students were prompted to select their heritage culture (Paulhus, 2013; Ryder et al., 2000). Once selecting a heritage culture, student experiences’ with their heritage culture were captured through a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree) to respond to statements. Sense of belonging experiences were captured through a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always) to respond to statements (Hoffman et al., 2002). Civil rights experiences were captured through a series of “Yes” or “No” questions in which students were provided an option to explain “Yes” or “No” answers in their own words. Civil rights experiences were also captured through a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Always) to 5 (Never) to respond to statements. The last two questions were open ended. The first question asked whether the student would like to add anything else about their experience as a Muslim student on campus. The final question asked students to provide contact information if they would be interested in participating in a focus group discussion to discuss their experiences in more detail.

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<sup>49</sup> The term “very” was used to describe “good”, and the term “only” was used to describe “fair” in order to provide a distinct demarcation between the similar terms “good” and “fair.”

A total of 102 students participated in the survey and 70 students completed the survey in its entirety. The sample of students who completed the survey were invited to participate in a focus group. The researcher acknowledges that a survey administered before the focus group discussion could prime the participants' responses during the focus group discussion which could skew the participant responses. However, the researcher opines that the greater benefit of administering the survey before the focus group discussion helps to break the ice before diving into a very sensitive topic, and encourages participants to start thinking about these experiences that are then discussed for more nuanced insight and deepened understanding.

Focus groups were conducted with American Muslim youth to explore experiences of social integration in the educational setting by allowing the social group interaction to facilitate the development of meaning (Merriam, 2009; Sue et al., 2007). Focus group methodology is an effective method of exploring a new area of investigation, creates a venue for members of a disenfranchised group to reframe their accounts and share their perceptions on a number of topics without necessarily coming to consensus, and enables the researcher to identify emerging patterns and themes of civil rights policies and social integration (Krueger & Casey, 2009; Nadal et al., 2012; Sue et al., 2007). A focus group can also encourage participation from those who are reluctant to be interviewed on their own (Kitzinger, 1995). The researcher believes that her role as an insider for focus group discussions with American Muslim students encouraged participants to elicit candid responses.

The recommended number of participants per focus group is six to ten, but some researchers have used up to fifteen participants or as few as four participants (Gibbs, 1997; Goss & Leinbach, 1996; Kitzinger 1995; MacIntosh, 1988). Numbers of groups vary, as some studies use only one focus group discussion with each of several focus groups, and others meet the same

group of participants several times (Burgess, 1996; Gibbs, 1997). Here, the researcher kept her focus group size at the lower range, to elicit more in-depth conversation and account for the sensitive nature of the topic.

Some of the focus group discussions were organized by gender to account for students who felt more comfortable engaging with students of their same sex. Other focus group sessions were organized by friend groups to elicit free flowing and candid discussion.

The focus group sessions were held virtually and lasted as long as the participants were willing to share experiences of social integration. Neutral locations, such as a virtual format, are helpful for avoiding either negative or positive associations with a particular site or building (Gibbs, 1997; Powell & Single 1996).

The researcher asked the participants open-ended questions to encourage a wide range and form of communication. The focus group questions were informed by the review of literature and theoretical frameworks. The focus group questions are included as Appendix B.

The open-ended focus group questions allowed participants considerable freedom in responding and are generally aimed at eliciting a variety of real-life examples of experiences (Sue et al., 2007). The researcher then probed with follow-up questions when appropriate. The researcher convened focus groups sessions until data saturation was reached. The researcher convened a total of 7 focus group discussions totaling sample population of 22 students. The data collected from the focus group discussions was recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions were coded to search for meaning (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007). The researcher then formulated thematic analyses (patterns of similar processes or worldviews that occurred repeatedly in the data) that deepen understanding of the research issue.

Paying attention to the unique underrepresented voices American Muslims allows them to explain how they make sense of their belonging, inclusion, identity, and cohesion in a nation that is their home, but where restrictive policies and the political climate, including public opinion, appear to be suspicious of their religion and/or immigrant status, and may have constrained their equal protection under the law. Discussion through a focus group allowed participants to share their experiences and perceptions of their educational institutions, providing a platform to highlight counter narratives that may not have been heard.

The data collection technique utilized to explore Research Question Two was in the form of in-depth semi-structured interviews with administrators who provide leadership to their departments of diversity, equity, and inclusion and offices of civil rights and equal opportunity. Recruitment was focused on administrators who develop and manage the complaint resolution process for student grievances pertaining to experiences of alleged civil rights violations and bias experiences on the basis of race/ethnicity, color, religion, and national origin. Interviews were used as the data collection method to deepen understanding of the following topics: (a) their familiarity and understanding of the OCR and DOJ guidance documents charging educational institutions to protect students from unlawful discrimination on the basis of race, religion, or national origin, (b) their familiarity with school policies and initiatives that address preventing and addressing unlawful discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, or national origin, (c) how they are interpreting and implementing their complaint and grievance procedures, in particular their experiences with Muslim students in the complaint process (on an anonymous basis), (d) basic perceptions of Muslims and Islam, and (e) their observations and experiences with Muslim students in the context of the current political climate. The researcher conducted the interviews virtually.

The interview questions were informed by the review of literature and theoretical frameworks. The interview questions are included as Appendix C. The researcher asked the participants semi-structured questions which are generally aimed at eliciting conversation including a variety of real-life examples of experiences (Sue et al., 2007). The researcher then probed with follow-up questions when appropriate. The researcher convened interviews until data saturation was reached. The researcher convened one interview per institution of higher education.

### **Data Analysis**

A critical postmodern perspective formed the ideological base for analyzing the three case studies in order to consider public policy action through a social justice lens. The quantitative data collected from the student survey was summarized to provide descriptive statistics of the range of various demographics and general experiences of social integration of the sample population of American Muslim undergraduate students enrolled in institutions of higher education. The qualitative data collected from the focus groups and interviews was analyzed through a grounded theory approach using a-priori, in vivo, and axial coding to search for meaning (Creswell, 2009; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007).

Prior to qualitative data analysis, the researcher developed a-priori code book grounded in the literature review, conceptual framework, and research questions (Miles et al., 2020). Table 5 lists the a-priori codes used in this study.

### **Table 5**

A-Priori Codes

Framework	Code	Description
Constitutional values within the context of immigrant experiences in educational institutions	Civil rights policies and practices	A set of guidelines and action plan designed to assist institutions of higher education carry out their legal and institutional responsibilities required for compliance with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, including but not limited to preventing and addressing bias, discrimination, and harassment, increasing participation of underrepresented groups, educating staff in their obligations, ensuring safety of underrepresented populations.
	Equal protection	The role of government institutions, including educational institutions in addressing experiences of discrimination, harassment, unfair or disparate treatment, and disparate impact of policies that systemically discriminate on the basis of race, religion, national origin and other protected categories.
	Equity	The role of government institutions, including educational institutions, in address experiences of microaggression, marginalization, and fears related to a protected category, including race, religion, and national origin.
	Diversity	The role of government institutions in advancing freedoms that support and celebrate diverse cultural, religious, and social identities.
	Immigrant integration	A process through which the whole population acquires civil, social, legal, political, human, and cultural rights, which creates the conditions for greater equality, granting new members a role as equal partners in society.
Street-level bureaucracy	Administrative discretion	Institutional practices of educational administrators and flexible exercising of judgment and decision making as it relates to interpretation and implementation of civil rights policies, procedures, and practices in a moral, ethical, and socially equitable manner. and perceived by the street-level bureaucrat as neutral, fair, or rational.
	Implicit bias	Inherent difficulties in fairly serving minority groups and other stigmatized individuals, including stereotyping on the basis of race, religion, national origin, and other protected classes, although perceived by the street-level bureaucrat as colorblind, thus perpetuating structural racism.



Framework	Code	Description
Social integration within the context of educational institutions	Cohesion	The role of educational institutions in preventing and addressing experiences of marginalization, microaggression, and civil rights violations experienced by minority populations in order to achieve collective goal of educational opportunities.
	Inclusion	Culturally responsive ways of supporting diverse social identities that result in a sense of belonging, cultural citizenship, valued identity, promoting engagement in campus life, and ensuring safety in the school climate

Once the focus group and interview data was recorded and transcribed, the researcher then developed in vivo and secondary axial codes. In vivo coding is a type of open coding used in the first cycle of qualitative data analysis, particularly for grounded theory. It places emphasis on the actual spoken words of the participants and relies on participants' voices to give meaning to the data. In vivo codes emerge from the participants' own language. In vivo coding is appropriate for studies that prioritize and honor the participants voice (Miles et al., 2020). Axial coding is used during the second cycle data analysis. Axial coding uses in vivo codes and participants quotes to identify relationships and patterns, and group them into categories.

The researcher utilized a traditional approach using a hard copy of the transcribed text to code the data. In the first cycle of analysis, the researcher read through the transcribed data several times, identified, and highlighted key words from the participants as initial in vivo codes. In the second cycle of analysis, the researcher used axial coding to assemble the data in new ways by reviewing the in vivo codes and participant quotes to identify relationships and patterns and group them into a coding paradigm that identifies the policy issue, explores causal conditions, specifies strategies, identifies the context and intervening conditions, and delineates the consequences for the policy problem (Creswell, 2009).

The descriptive statistics from the quantitative survey and coded data from the qualitative focus groups and survey were triangulated to formulate themes (patterns of similar processes or worldviews that occur repeatedly in the data), conclusions, and generate grounded theory to deepen understanding of the policy issue relating to the social integration experiences of Muslims students in their educational institution, as well as the role that school policies (grounded in Constitutional values of equal protection) play in this dynamic.

The data was analyzed through a postmodern critique to (a) deepen understanding of the social integration experiences of Muslim students within the nuanced understanding of current anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant sentiment, (b) deepen understanding of the role that administrative discretion plays in the development, interpretation, and implementation of federal policies, procedures and initiatives that protect Muslim students from experiences of civil rights violations and microaggression, (c) deepen understanding of the administrative role that educational institutions are in fact playing in the social integration of Muslim students in the educational setting on a day-to-day basis, (d) deconstruct the multiple perspectives between students and administrators that may reveal complex realities across the three case studies, (e) deconstruct the complexity of global conflicts and national politics that have marginalized this minority group, and (f) develop a grounded theory that contributes to the knowledge of this policy issue. The analysis includes a comparative summary between (a) the three cases studies examined, (b) the social integration experiences of Muslim students and the perceptions of administrators on Muslim students' social integration experiences, and (c) and the institutional policies developed as a direct result of the federal guidance. Themes, conclusions and grounded theory generated from this study may be ultimately used to advocate for ways in which public policy and administrative practice can play a meaningful role in eliminating societal inequities

experienced by American Muslim youth and foster their meaningful social integration and a sense of belonging (Denzin, 1978; Farmer, 2010; Merriam, 2009).

### **Limitations of Design**

There exist certain general limitations important to acknowledge. First, it is important to highlight the fact that American Muslim youth are not monolithic, but represent a diverse array of races, ethnicities, ancestry, immigration statuses, and unique life experiences, variables that can potentially influence social integration experiences, yet difficult to measure within the scope of this study. Second, this research was exploratory in nature and limited to a collective case study of three institutions of higher education. For these reasons, the conclusions are generalizable only to the extent of the population studied. Third, the sample size of the students and administrators are modest within the context of traditional scientific inquiry. However, the researcher's use of culturally congruent inquiry that challenges traditional structures of sample construction resulted in robust data saturation. In addition, each volunteer participant in the focus groups and interviews appeared to be enthusiastic about the range of questions, candid, and forthcoming in their responses. Fourth, since a primary focus of this research study is within the realm of higher education, American Muslim youth who do not pursue higher educational opportunities are excluded from the sample population studied, thus their experiences of social integration will not be represented in this study.

Most significantly, the researcher acknowledges the limitations based on her lived experiences and biases. Because qualitative research places the role of the researcher as the central means of data collection, identification of personal values, assumptions, and biases are required at the initial onset of the study (Fassinger, 2005). This acknowledgement allows the study to account for potential biases and assures that the contributions to the research setting,

methodology, analysis, and interpretations can be useful rather than detrimental (Sue et al., 2007). The researcher for the study considers herself an insider, in that she is a South Asian American Muslim who emigrated from Pakistan at the age of four. She also believes that civil rights violations exist and occur against Muslim immigrants in the United States. The researcher acknowledges that her religious background and cultural heritage and other biases may shape the way data were collected, viewed, and interpreted; every effort was made to ensure objectivity (Sue et al., 2007).

### **Institutional Review Board Approval Process**

Pursuant to United States Department of Health and Human Services regulations at 45 C.F.R. part 46, all proposed research projects that involve human subjects and that satisfy the definition of research must be reviewed prior to the activity beginning. This review is called “initial review” and is the first level of Institutional Review Board (IRB) review. The types of initial review are exempt, expedited and full. This study is exploratory research designed to generalize to theoretical propositions, involves interaction with human subjects, and obtains information about living individuals. Accordingly, the IRB approved this study through expedited review. The IRB approval letter is included in Appendix D.

One reason that this study met the IRB criteria for an expedited review is because there was minimal risk to the subjects in the study. Minimal risk, as defined in 45 C.F.R. § 46.102, means that the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests. Another reason this study met the criteria for expedited review is because this research fits into the following

category of expedited review pursuant to 45 C.F.R. §46.110: research on individual characteristics or behavior including research on perception and identity.

Ethical issues have been given a great deal of thought and consideration. The researcher provided the following reasonable assurances to the participants of the study: (a) the participants will not be harmed in any way, (b) information obtained from the survey will be recorded in such a manner that participants cannot be identified, and will not include any personally identifiable information, (c) confidentiality of data collected, and privacy of participants will be protected, (d) participants' responses will not be disclosed in such a way to place the participant at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to his or her financial standing, employability, or reputation, and (e) the research data will be kept locked in files until no longer needed, and then destroyed.

In addition, the researcher provided prospective participants the following information in writing: (a) description of the project as research and sufficient information for participants to determine any possible risks and benefits, (b) explanation of research procedures, and (c) statement that participation is voluntary, and participants may withdraw from the study at any time. These reasonable assurances and information about the research were memorialized in writing and included an informed consent notice. Prospective participants were also given an opportunity to ask any questions about the study. On a final note, the researcher did not intend to collect data from prisoners or individuals under the age of eighteen. These ethical considerations guide this study.

## **CHAPTER IV Findings from the Student Survey: “I feel like an outsider sometimes.”**

### **Introduction**

The next three chapters describe the findings of this research study and analyze the themes that emerge from these findings as they relate to the relationship between social integration experiences of American Muslim undergraduate students and the role of institutions of higher education in the administration of civil rights policies and practices. Chapter IV presents the descriptive statistics and general experiences of social integration as captured in the initial student survey. Chapter V analyzes the student focus group discussions that explore, in more depth, student social integration experiences in the educational setting. Chapter VI analyzes the administrator in-depth interviews and their institutions’ corresponding civil rights policies and practices to better understand the role of institutions of higher education in the administration of civil rights policies and practices and its impact on Muslim students.

This section summarizes the results of the *Social Integration and Civil Rights Survey for American Muslim Students in Higher Education*, a questionnaire developed by the researcher and administered to American Muslim students enrolled in three public institutions of higher education located in the southeast region of the United States. The questionnaire is included as Appendix A. Questionnaires were distributed with the assistance of the leadership of the Muslim Students Associations (MSA) at each of the three institutions of higher education examined. The MSA leaderships assisted the researcher in sharing the questionnaire among other organizations with significant populations of Muslim students, including organizations that are cultural in nature, such as Arab student organizations, Middle Eastern and North African student organizations, Pakistan student organizations, Black Muslim student organizations, and Bengali student organizations. The combined MSA leadership of the three institutions of higher

education reported that they distributed the questionnaire to an estimated 430 Muslim students. Additional participants were recruited through snowball sampling.

A total of 102 Muslim undergraduate students responded and participated in the questionnaire, and a total of 70 ( $N = 70$ ) of those respondents who participated in the questionnaire, completed the questionnaire in its entirety. The completion rate was 69%. After the first section (two multiple choice questions and one open-ended question), there was a drop in the number of respondents (102 to 81). Throughout the rest of the questionnaire, multiple choice answers saw similar uptake rates, however, eventually reduced from 81 to 68 responses by the end of the questionnaire. This dynamic indicates survey fatigue. In general, respondents were more likely to answer a multiple-choice question while fewer tended to answer open-ended questions.

#### ***Age and Gender (N = 70)***

The average age of respondents is 21. A total of 53.0% ( $n = 37$ ) of the respondents identify as male and a total of 44.0% ( $n = 31$ ) of the respondents identify as female. A total of 3.0% ( $n = 2$ ) of the respondents did not provide an answer to this question. While male students appear to have participated in the student questionnaire at a slightly higher rate than female students, the survey respondents are well-represented in gender diversity.

#### ***Birthplace (N = 70)***

A total of 68.6% ( $n = 48$ ) of the respondents were born in the United States and a total of 28.6% ( $n = 20$ ) of the respondents were born outside of the United States. A total of 2.8% ( $n = 2$ ) of the respondents did not provide an answer to this question. The results indicate that a sizeable majority of student respondents were born in the United States.

### ***Race and Ethnicity (N = 70)***

As an open-ended question, the proportion of self-identification regarding race/ethnicity are presented in the table below. While students of South Asian heritage make up over 50% of the respondents, the overwhelming majority of respondents identify (in descending order) as Asian descent, Middle Eastern descent, and African descent. Table 6 captures the descriptive statistics relating to race and ethnicity and a concatenated, region-based assessment of race/ethnicity.<sup>50</sup>

### ***Citizenship Status (N = 70)***

Regarding the citizenship status of the respondents, a total of 78.6% ( $n = 55$ ) of the respondents identified as citizens of the United States. A total of 8.6% ( $n = 6$ ) the respondents identified as dual citizenship holders. A total of ( $n = 1$ ) respondent identified as a permanent resident. A total of 7.1% ( $n = 5$ ) respondents indicated student visa status, and one student responded “other/international student.” A total of 2.9% ( $n = 2$ ) of the respondents did not provide an answer to this question. In general, the data indicates that the overwhelming majority of student respondents are citizens of the United States.

### ***Parent Immigrant Status (N = 70)***

Looking at whether the respondents’ mother is a first-generation immigrant, a total of 72.9% ( $n = 51$ ) of the respondents reported “Yes” and a total of 22.9% ( $n = 16$ ) of the respondents reported “No.” A total of 4.2% ( $n = 3$ ) of the respondents did not provide an answer to this question. When it comes to the respondents’ fathers, a total of 77.2% ( $n = 54$ ) of the

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<sup>50</sup> Some survey responses included multiple identifications of varying specificity. In the first table, the most specific level of Race/Ethnicity was recorded in order to preserve the integrity of individual identification. In the second table, Race/Ethnicity was concatenated based on the region their identification lies in. For example, if a respondent answered that they identified as Indian/Pakistani, they are categorized as South Asian. They would then end up in the same classification as someone who identified as solely Pakistani.



respondents reported “Yes” and a total of 20.0% ( $n = 14$ ) of the respondents reported “No.” A total of 2.8% ( $n = 2$ ) of the respondents did not provide an answer to this question. In general, the data indicates that the overwhelming majority of student respondents are second generation Americans.

### ***Institution of Higher Education (N = 70)***

Three institutions of higher education located in the southeast region of the United States were selected for this case study. A total 11.4% ( $n = 8$ ) of the respondents attend one of the three institutions selected for the case study (University A located in a suburban locality). A total of 24.3% ( $n = 17$ ) of the respondents attend the second of the three institutions selected for the case study (University B located in an urban locality). A total of 47.1% ( $n = 33$ ) of the respondents attend the third of the three institutions selected for the case study (University C located in a rural locality). A total of 17.1% ( $n = 12$ ) of the respondents did not provide an answer to this question or indicated that they attend a different institution of higher education.

Student respondents are fairly evenly distributed by undergraduate class year from first year to fourth year, with third year students at the higher range. A total of 34.4% ( $n = 24$ ) of the respondents are juniors or third year undergraduate students, 20.0% ( $n = 14$ ) of the respondents are freshmen or first year undergraduate students, 18.4% (13) of the respondents are sophomores or second year undergraduate students, and 15.8% ( $n = 11$ ) of the respondents are seniors or fourth year undergraduate students. A total of 8.6% (6) of the students are graduate students. A total of 2.8% ( $n = 2$ ) of the respondents did not provide an answer to this question.

The overwhelming majority of student respondents reside with other students on or off campus (81.5%,  $n = 57$ ). A total of 58.5% ( $n = 41$ ) of the respondents live off-campus with friends/roommates, a total of 23.0% ( $n = 16$ ) of the respondents live on-campus (dorms), and a

total of 15.7% ( $n = 11$ ) of the respondents live off campus with family/relatives. A total of 4.2% ( $n = 3$ ) of the respondents did not provide an answer to this question.

### ***Identifiable Outward Appearances (N = 70)***

Student respondents were asked to identify whether they dressed or groomed in a way that appears to outwardly exhibit religious belief and customs. For example, Muslim women may choose to adorn *hijab* (head covering scarf) and/or loose and long clothing that covers their entire body in public which signifies modesty and privacy in the Islamic belief system. Similarly, some Muslim men choose to adorn the thobe which is a long and loose robe culturally worn by many Muslim men in the Middle Eastern region. Muslim men may also choose to grow a beard to follow the custom of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) which signifies piety and devotion to following the example of the Prophet (peace be upon him). Finally, many Muslim women and men adorn necklaces with the word *Allah* (God) inscribed in Arabic.

Here, a total of 57.3% ( $n = 40$ ) of the respondents indicated that they do not dress or groom in a way that outwardly exhibits their religious belief or customs. A total of 39.9% ( $n = 28$ ) indicated that they do dress or groom in a way that outwardly exhibits their religious belief or customs. A total of 17.2% ( $n = 12$ ) of the respondents indicated that they wear hijab and modest clothing. A total of 18.6% ( $n = 13$ ) of the respondents indicated that they maintain a beard, and out of these responses, a total of 7.1% ( $n = 5$ ) of the respondents indicated that they maintain a beard, and wear a thobe or religious necklace on occasion. A total of 7.1% ( $n = 5$ ) of the respondents did not provide an answer to this question. Table 6 captures the descriptive statistics relating to students' self-identified outwardly exhibited religious belief and customs.

**Table 6**

## Demographics and Information on the Full Sample

Category	Frequency ( <i>N</i> = 70)	Percentage
Birthplace	<i>n</i>	
Afghanistan	1	1.4%
Bangladesh	2	2.9%
Ethiopia	1	1.4%
India	1	1.4%
Other	1	1.4%
Pakistan	6	8.6%
Russia	1	1.4%
Saudi Arabia	5	7.1%
Sudan	1	1.4%
United Arab Emirates	1	1.4%
United States	48	68.6%
No response	2	2.9%
Race/Ethnicity, self-reported	<i>n</i>	
Afghan	2	2.9%
African	1	1.4%
African American	3	4.3%
Afro-Arab	1	1.4%
Arab	4	5.7%
Asian	10	14.3%
Bangladeshi	1	1.4%
Bengali	1	1.4%
Ethiopian	1	1.4%

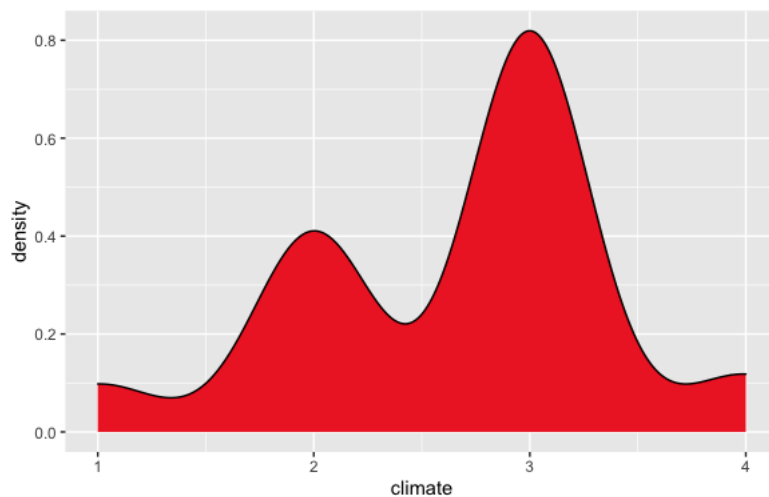
Category	Frequency ( <i>N</i> = 70)	Percentage
Indian	2	2.9%
Indian/Pakistani	2	2.9%
Kashmiri	1	1.4%
Middle Eastern	2	2.9%
Mixed race	3	4.3%
Nubian	1	1.4%
Pakistani	22	31.4%
Palestinian	1	1.4%
Punjabi	1	1.4%
South Asian	9	12.9%
<hr/>		
Race/Ethnicity, grouped by region	<i>n</i>	
African	4	5.7%
African American	3	4.3%
Asian	10	14.3%
Central Asian	2	2.9%
Middle Eastern	7	10.0 %
Mixed race	3	4.3%
South Asian	39	55.7%
No response	2	2.9%
<hr/>		
Identifiable dress/grooming	<i>n</i>	
Beard	13	18.6%
Beard and thobe or religious necklace	5	7.1%
Hijab and modest clothing	12	17.1%
No	40	57.1%
No response	5	7.1%

### ***Perceptions on School Climate and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Initiatives***

Perceptions on school climate and school diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives were captured through the social integration survey. Students answered two questions: “How would you rate the climate of support for Muslims in your school community” and “How would you rate the quality of your school's diversity, equity, and inclusion program.” Both items were completed on a 4-point scale (1 = Poor, 4 = Excellent). Students also had the option to indicate they did not know, but those responses were treated as missing data. In general, a majority of students maintained a positive view of their school climate ( $M = 2.66$ ,  $SD = .73$ ) and their university’s diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives ( $M = 2.77$ ,  $SD = .82$ ). The distribution of the responses is depicted in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

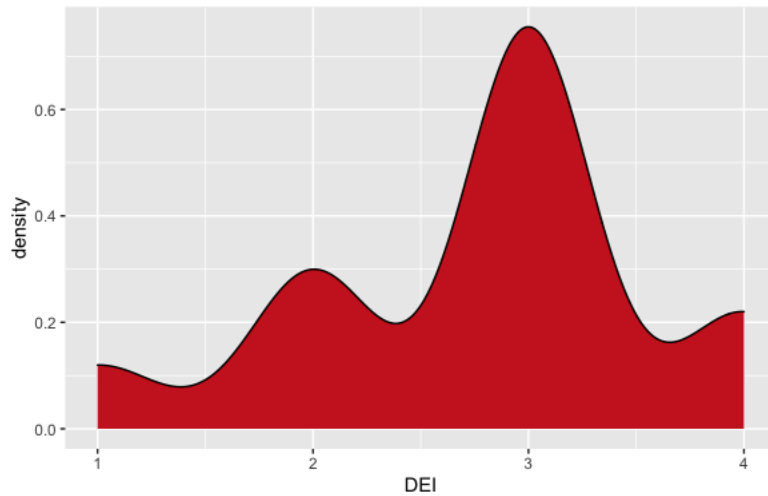
**Figure 1**

Response Distribution of Items Measuring Perceptions of School Climate



**Figure 2**

Response Distribution of Items Measuring Perceptions of School’s Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Initiatives



***Heritage Culture***

Student perceptions of their self-identified heritage culture in American society at large were captured through the social integration survey. For purposes of this study, heritage culture refers to the original culture of one’s family/ancestors (other than American) (Paulhus, 2013). It may be the culture of one’s birth, the culture in which one has been raised (i.e., Muslim practice), or any culture in one’s family background, or a culture that influenced previous generations of one’s family (e.g., South Asian, Arab, African, African American, European American). Table 7 provides a summary of the students’ self-identified heritage culture.

As part of the social integration survey that measures heritage culture, students completed a revised version of the Vancouver Index of Acculturation (Paulhus, 2013; Ryder et al., 2000). The scale measures acculturation as a bi-dimensional construct consisting of the extent to which

people endorse aspects of their heritage culture and mainstream American culture.<sup>51</sup> Ten items measure each construct. For this research, several of the original items were removed because they did not appear to be applicable to the essence of this study. An additional item (“Most of the people I live with when I attend school are of the same or similar heritage/culture as me”) was added to add heritage/cultural nuance to measuring sense of belonging. However, analyses revealed that this item did not correlate with the others in the scale, so it was not analyzed. The resulting scale included 9 items measuring endorsement of heritage culture ( $\alpha = .79$ ) and 8 items measuring endorsement of mainstream American culture ( $\alpha = .74$ ). The items included in each sub score are provided in Table 8. Items were completed on a 5-point scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree). Participants showed strong endorsement of both their heritage culture (mean = 4.26, standard deviation = .48) and mainstream American culture (mean = 3.60, standard deviation = .52), although it is evident that participants were more attached to their heritage culture. The distribution of the responses are depicted in Figure 3.

**Table 7**

Self-Identified Heritage Culture

Heritage Culture	Frequency ( $N = 70$ )	% of Respondents
Afghan	2	3.0%
African American, Sudanese	1	1.4%
African, Muslim	1	1.4%
Ahmadi Muslim	1	1.4%
Bangladeshi	1	1.4%
Bengali	1	1.4%

<sup>51</sup> Heritage culture refers to the definition above (Paulhus, 2013) while mainstream American culture may be described as values espoused by the dominant Christian faith traditions, influences of Western/European civilization, and American popular culture.

Heritage Culture	Frequency ( <i>N</i> = 70)	% of Respondents
Bengali, Muslim	2	2.9%
Desi	1	1.4%
Ethiopian, Muslim	1	1.4%
European American, third-generation Iranian	1	1.4%
Indian	1	1.4%
Middle Eastern	1	1.4%
Muslim	1	1.4%
Nubian, Egyptian	1	1.4%
Pakistani	14	20.0%
Pakistani, American	3	4.3%
Pakistani, American, Muslim	1	1.4%
Pakistani, Indian, Muslim	1	1.4%
Pakistani, Kashmiri	1	1.4%
Pakistani, Muslim	1	1.4%
Palestinian	1	1.4%
Saudi Arabian, Hadrami	1	1.4%
South Asian	3	4.3%
South Asian, Muslim	2	2.9%
South Asian, Pakistani	3	4.3%
South Asian, Pakistani, Muslim	1	1.4%
Sudanese, Muslim	1	1.4%
Sudanese, Turkish	1	1.4%
Turkic	1	1.4%
Turkic, Muslim	1	1.4%
No response	18	25.7%



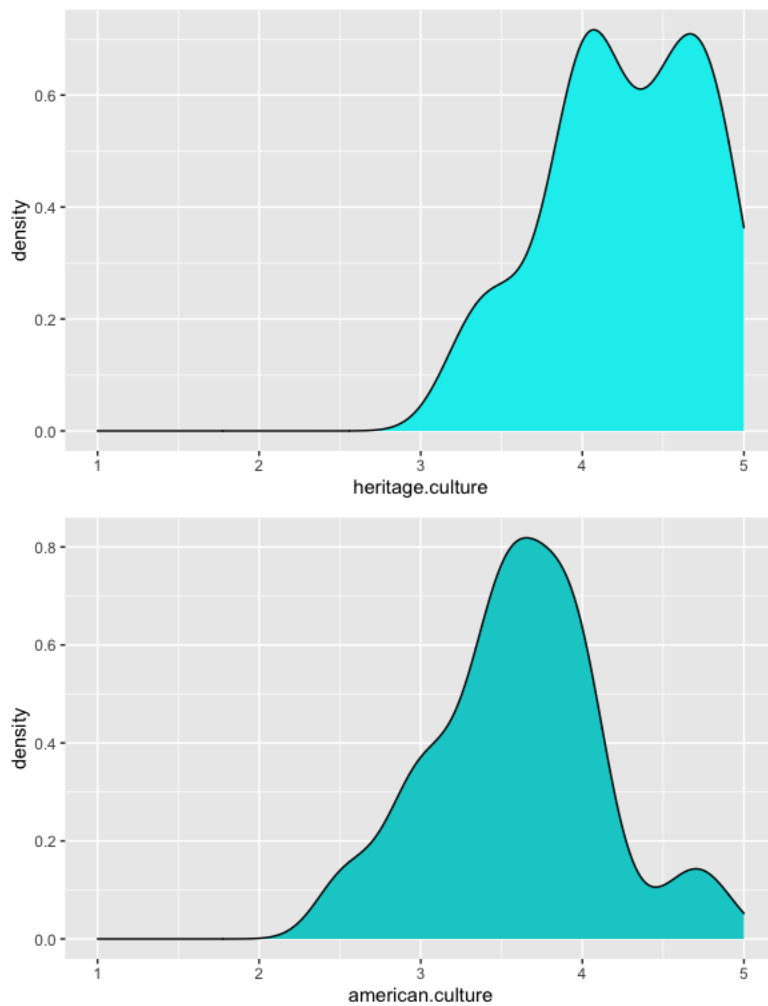
**Table 8**

Endorsement of Heritage Culture and Mainstream American Culture

	Measure	Mean	Standard deviation
a	Endorsement of Heritage Culture	4.26	0.48
b	Endorsement of Mainstream American Culture	3.60	0.52

**Figure 3**

Response Distribution of the Vancouver Index of Acculturation



### *Sense of Belonging*

As part of the social integration survey that measures sense of belonging within the college setting, students completed a revised version of the Sense of Belonging instrument developed for college students by Hoffman et al. (2002). Twenty-six items measure perceived peer support, perceived classroom comfort, empathetic faculty understanding, and perceived faculty support/comfort, and perceived isolation. For this research, six of the original items were removed because they did not appear to be applicable to the essence of this study. Two items (“It was difficult to meet other students in class” and “I talk to other students in my classes”) were removed from the analysis because these items did not correlate with the others in the scale. The resulting scale included 8 items measuring perceived peer support ( $\alpha = .92$ ), 3 items measuring perceived classroom comfort ( $\alpha = .90$ ), 3 items measuring empathetic faculty understanding ( $\alpha = .81$ ), and 4 items measuring perceived faculty support/comfort ( $\alpha = .81$ ).<sup>52</sup> The items included in each sub score are provided in Table 9. Items were completed on a 5-point scale (1 = Never, 5 = Always). The distributions for each sub score are depicted in Figure 4.

**Table 9** Student Perceptions on Sense of Belonging

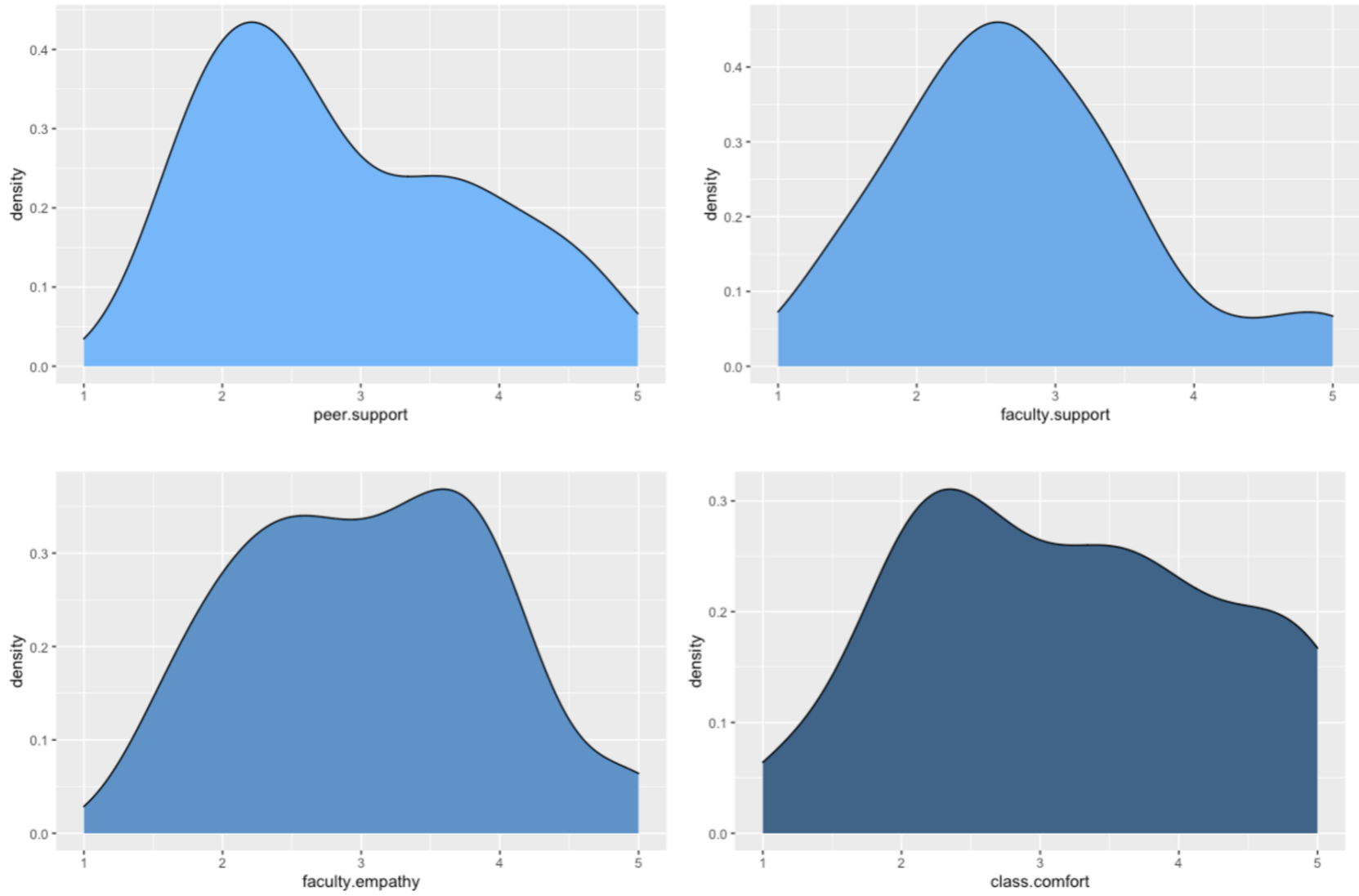
#### Student Perceptions on Sense of Belonging

	Factors	Mean	Standard deviation
a	Perceived Peer Support	2.86	0.95
b	Perceived Classroom Comfort	3.18	1.13
c	Empathetic Faculty Understanding	3.06	0.90
d	Perceived Faculty Support/Comfort	2.73	0.90

<sup>52</sup> This scale did not measure perceived isolation.

**Figure 4**

Response Distribution of Sense of Belonging Scale



### ***Perceptions of Equal Protection***

Perceptions on equal protection within the campus setting were captured through the social integration survey. The ten items developed to capture these experiences were influenced by Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) of California Muslim Youth at School Survey (2015a), and Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim, and South Asian (AMEMSA) Civil Rights Survey (Arab Film Festival, Council on American Muslim Islamic Relations, Islamic Center of Northern California, Islamic Network Group, 3<sup>rd</sup> I’s South Asian Film Festival, Asian American Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy, 2015). Eight items measured general experiences of microaggression, bias incidents, civil rights violations, and hate incidents. These items were completed by answering “Yes” or “No,” with an option to include explanations. Table 10 provides a summary of the responses and statements. The following two additional items were included: “I am treated fairly on campus by school employees” and “I feel safe on campus.” Both items were completed on a 5-point scale (1 = Always, 4 = Never). In general, a majority of students maintained a positive view of fair treatment (mean = 4.16, standard deviation = 0.75) and sense of safety (mean = 4.1, standard deviation = 0.66). The distribution of the responses is depicted in Figure 5.

**Table 10**

Student Experiences Relating to Equal Protection ( $N = 70$ )

	Statement	Yes	No	No response
a	<i>A school employee</i> (faculty, staff, administration) at my current school has treated me unfairly (discriminated against me) because of my religious identity.	14.3% ( $n = 10$ )	84.3 % ( $n = 59$ )	1.4% ( $n = 1$ )
b	<i>A student/peer</i> at my current school has treated me unfairly because of my religious identity.	17.2% ( $n = 12$ )	81.% ( $n = 57$ )	1.4% ( $n = 1$ )

	Statement	Yes	No	No response
c	A <i>school employee</i> (faculty, staff, administration) at my current school has offered me a religious accommodation	50.0% (n = 35)	48.6% (n = 34)	1.4% (n = 1)
d	A <i>school employee</i> (faculty, staff, administration) at my current school has denied me a religious accommodation.	5.7% (n = 4)	92.8% (n = 65)	1.4% (n = 1)
e	I have felt threatened or intimidated in school by another <i>student/peer</i> because of my religious identity (includes social medial experiences).	18.6% <sup>e</sup> (n = 13)	80.0% (n = 56)	1.4% (n = 1)
f	I have felt threatened or intimidated in school by a <i>school employee</i> because of my religious identity (includes social medial experiences).	8.7% (n = 6)	89.9% (n = 63)	1.4% (n = 1)
g	I have been physically harmed, bullied, or harassed in school by another <i>student/peer</i> because of my religious identity.	7.1% (n = 5)	91.5% (n = 64)	1.4% (n = 1)
h	I have been physically harmed, bullied, or harassed in school by a <i>school employee</i> because of my religious identity.	0.0% (n = 0)	98.6% (n = 69)	1.4% (n = 1)
i	If you have had any of these experiences described on the previous page—as a student on this campus—did you inform a school employee?	4.3% (n = 3)	22.9% (n = 16)	72.8% (n = 51)
j	If you have had any of these experiences as a student on this campus, what school resources or other types of resources would have helped you respond better to your experience?	Open-ended question		

*Note.* Optional comments to specific statements are included below and denoted by a superscript letter corresponding to the statements above.

<sup>a</sup>Optional comment: "In my freshman year, a professor was Muslim and converted to Christianity. He told me Christianity was better."

<sup>b</sup> Optional comments:

- “I have noticed resentment towards me from some of my fellow students who belong to a specific background that is not American due to political and religion differences.”
- “Someone I considered to be a close peer of mine and I were having a discussion one day, and he started to attack my Muslim faith by saying disparaging things about our Prophet Muhammad, and how we support a ‘war-mongering pedophile’. We talked for quite a while on this matter as I tried to explain the certain context of the time and how cherry-picking verses of the Quran and Hadith is not productive, but he was unwilling to accept my point of view because his ‘morals,’ rooted in Western ideology, told him otherwise. That was the last time I spoke with him because it really felt like an attack on my identity and the love that we carry for someone so near and dear to our hearts as Muslims.”

<sup>c</sup> Optional comments:

- “[M]y teacher let my pray Salah before an exam in the classroom.”
- “Extra day for exam submission due to religious holiday. I was also given break time to offer prayers.”
- “For Eid , exams were moved.”
- “My teacher allows me to leave class early on Fridays so I can make the Jummah Prayer.”
- “Excused absence for 1 or 2 days for religious holiday.”
- “Allowed me to skip class for Jummah. (My time was shifted due to daylight savings).”
- “Prayer room in the commons.”
- “At my job in the library, my boss gave me a place to pray.”

- “I pray in my professor’s office and I’m getting a meditation space built with help from her.”
- “Delay due dates to help.”
- “I was given the choice at the beginning of fall 2020 to notify the math department if I had a religious event in the semester so the test would not be the same day.”
- “I had a final exam during when I would be breaking my fast and praying so two of my teachers allowed me to move the time of the exam.”
- “My circuits professor let me break my fast during my final as iftar was in the middle of it.”
- “I was provided Ramadan accommodations a few years back for an exam in one of my classes.”
- “For an exam that was during Ramadan, my professor allowed Muslim students to take the exam in a separate room so we could eat at sundown.
- “My BIOL 540 professor let me take the exam after sundown for Ramadan.”

<sup>d</sup>Optional comment: “Misunderstanding of an email caused me to be a little late for the final exam held at noon in early Ramadan days. Two letter grades were deducted (several negotiations emails were in vain).”

<sup>e</sup>Optional comments:

- “Racism against Arabs and Islamophobia after Hookah Lounge shooting.”
- “[I]f it comes up that I am Muslim, it seems like my peers take a step back and distance themselves for [a] while before adjusting and that's only if I'm proactively enthusiastic, also praying or making wudu between classes is always met with confusion and a 'that's weird' look.”

<sup>f</sup> Optional comment: “From my undergraduate school, (not my current school) I felt clear discrimination towards me from a professor, after I had shared that I was from Pakistan. I got a terrible grade and the professor clearly refused to help me on multiple occasions.”

<sup>g</sup> Optional comment: “I’m not sure to be honest, he no longer works here so maybe?”

<sup>h</sup> Optional comments:

- “Ignored it.”
- “They happened not on this campus, but in my undergraduate school. I tried to remain confident and respond to the discrimination with my academic performance.”
- “I would just be normal and try to show that i am a normal person just like everyone else i just hold some different beliefs.”
- “It was a personal matter between my peer and I, and it didn't necessitate me over-inflating the issue. If people hold certain stereotypes, then there's nothing much any school employee can do to mitigate prejudices that someone might have against someone else.”

<sup>i</sup> Optional comments:

- “Talking to Muslim professors.”
- “An anonymous page where you could file complaints.”
- “It was resolved and I was able to talk to someone.”
- “I think if the faculty and staff show that it is normal to interact with Muslims and allow us to be more involved, then, the students will follow.”
- “Maybe a helpline that talks about these issues openly and makes it easy to report people.”
- “I haven’t had any negative experiences.”



- “Counseling, cultural centers.”
- “I honestly have not been told about specific resources I could use, being informed of them early on would have been helpful.”
- “I’d just want my teachers to know what they’re talking about before making comments/teaching about Muslims. and I would want my classmates to be generally more respectful of difference. But I don’t really know about specific resources.”
- “Counselor, administration, etc.”
- “Counseling, talking to Department head.”

<sup>j</sup>Optional comments:

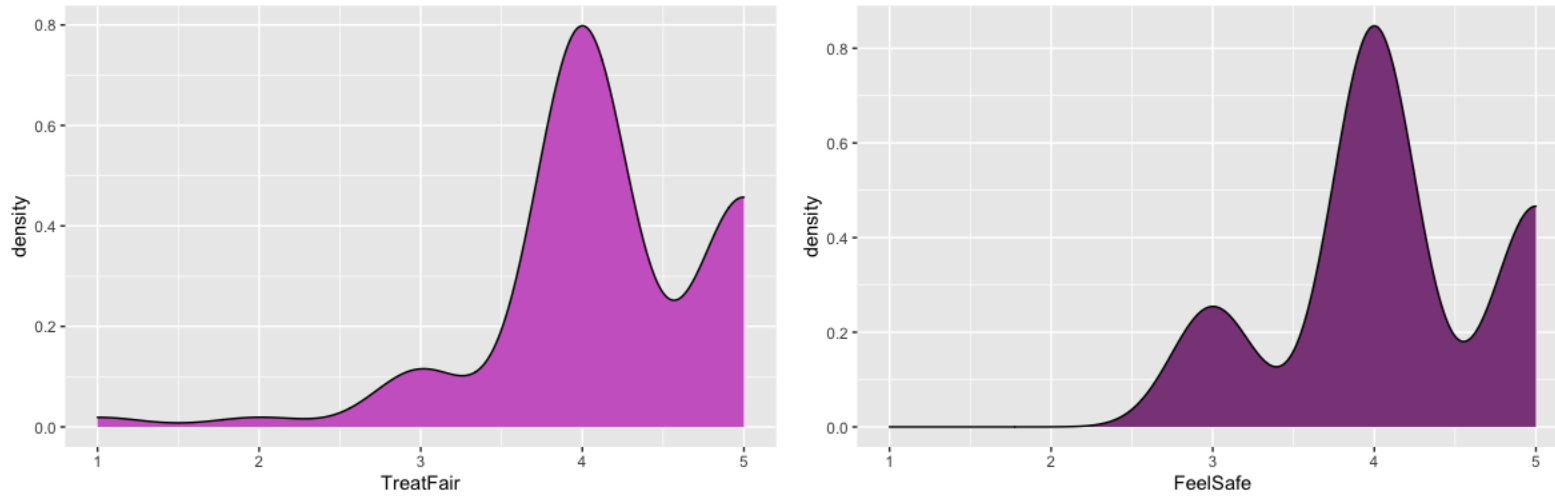
- “A close community, everyone's nice and friendly, we get happy when we see each other off campus.”
- “I go to a very diverse school, and I sincerely believe that has made my experience as a Muslim student on campus more positive than it would have been elsewhere.”
- “I have been lucky this semester to have 3/5 of my professors to be Muslim. It has definitely made me feel a lot more comfortable talking to them.”
- “I think prayer is one of the more difficult things. I know there is a prayer room, but I usually stop to pray where it is relatively empty. For example, in studio, if it is too crowded, I go to the corner with the vending machine. I feel self-conscious about praying near my non-Muslim roommate, even though he does not mind, or around anyone really.”
- “There isn’t really any outright discrimination. I feel like as a Muslim I have a confused identity that makes me feel out of place in both Muslim and non-Muslim communities, but ironically both are accepting of me. I sometimes feel like my views

on Islam are at odds with the MSA, and it feels difficult to commit to the Muslim community because my parents did not raise me in it. I feel like an outsider sometimes amidst my non-Muslim friends because I am a Muslim, explaining my dietary restrictions and fasting during Ramadan.”

- “It’s nice, but could be better.”
- “Muslims need to be connected to their religion and traditions.”
- “None, but hanging out with Muslim brothers playing sports is fun.”
- “There are many Muslims around campus so it was easy to settle.”
- “Universities should be more accommodating to us in general.”

**Figure 5**

Response Distribution of Items Measuring Perceptions of Equal Protection



On a final note, while it is impracticable to obtain the aggregate number of Muslim students enrolled in the three institutions of higher education that are part of this case study, Table 11 below illustrates the answer to the question, “How many Muslim students do you think are enrolled in this school?” The data indicates that Muslim student perceptions on the number of Muslim students on campus varies significantly.

**Table 11**

Student Perception of Muslim Students on Campus

Guess	Frequency ( <i>N</i> = 70)	% of respondents
<100	4	5.7%
100–500	15	21.4%
500–1000	10	14.3%
1000–5000	19	27.1%
>5000	10	14.3%
Less than 10%	2	2.9%
10–30%	4	5.7%
No response	6	8.6%

**Conclusion: Summary of Findings**

These descriptive statistics and general experiences of social integration as captured in the student survey provide some general insight into the first research question that explores the social integration experiences of Muslim students in the college setting. The survey data describes the range of various demographics of the target population of Muslim students sampled and summarizes their general experiences of social integration in the college setting.

The overwhelming majority of the students surveyed identified as first and second generation American, and of those, a majority are United States citizens. The survey strongly

suggests that Muslim students have favorable social integration experiences within American society in general and also within the context of their campus setting. A majority of students maintain a favorable view of their school's climate and diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, feel safe in their school setting, experience mostly fair treatment in the school setting, and feel sense of belonging with similarly situated peers who do not share their heritage culture. While the evidence demonstrated that most participants are significantly attached to their heritage culture, most survey students expressed a strong connection to both their heritage and cultural traditions and mainstream American culture inside and outside of the school setting.

Twenty-two of these survey participants volunteered to participate in the follow-up focus group discussions to engage in a more nuanced discussion relating to their social integration experiences. Accordingly, the next chapter, Chapter V, discusses, analyzes, and summarizes the patterns and themes that emerged from the analysis of coded data from focus group discussions with a small sample of these survey participants described in this chapter. These findings will provide a deepened understanding of the social integration experiences of Muslim students enrolled in the three institutions of higher education that are the subject of this case study.

## **CHAPTER V Findings from Student Focus Groups: “Talk to God and Move On”**

### **Introduction**

This chapter analyzes the themes that emerge from the findings of the student focus groups sessions conducted among American Muslim students that explored, in more depth than the student survey, student social integration experiences in the on-campus educational setting. Focus group discussion of a questionnaire is ideal for explaining or exploring survey results (Kitzinger, 1995). From the 70 students who completed the initial student survey assessing experiences of being Muslim in their institution of higher education, the data indicates that the overwhelming majority are first- or second-generation American citizens closely connected to their immigrant experience or heritage culture. From those students, a total of 22 students volunteered to participate in the follow-up focus group sessions to delve deeper into experiences of being Muslim in their institution of higher education. The researcher held a total of seven virtual focus group discussions during the months of March and April 2022. The number of participants in each focus group session ranged from three to four participants. While the ideal focus group size is four to eight participants (Kitzinger, 1995), the researcher kept her focus group size at the lower range, to elicit more in-depth conversation and account for the sensitive nature of the topic. The focus group interview questions are included as Appendix B.

All of the focus group students, except two students, were born in the United States to first-generation immigrant parents from the regions of South Asia and the Middle East. Two of the 22 participants were first-generation Americans, one from Pakistan and the other from Saudi Arabia. All student participants were students of color. Some of the focus group discussions were organized by sex to account for students who felt more comfortable engaging with students of their same sex. Other focus group sessions were organized by friend groups to elicit free flowing

and candid discussion. While the researcher acknowledges the difficulty in recruiting on-campus student participants given their diverse school schedules and developmental stages, the discussions that eventually occurred were robust and authentic. The researcher thinks that the fact that she is an in-group member accounts for the vulnerability and candid responses.

After transcribing the focus group sessions, the researcher coded the data using both a-priori codes developed prior to the data collection, in vivo codes that emerged from the participants' own language during the data collection, and secondary axial coding to search for meaning and patterns that identified themes, causal connections, and theoretical concepts. Student survey data supplemented the thematic assessment of the social integration experiences of Muslim students. The researcher relied on time-honored methods of using pen and paper, sticky notes, and highlighters to complete the iterative cycles of induction and deduction to power the analysis (Miles et al., 2020).

Described below is an analysis of the findings of the focus group sessions, along with excerpts from focus group participants that illustrate the patterns and themes that emerged. A complete list of student quotations is categorized with the corresponding themes and presented at the end of this chapter in Tables 12, 13, and 14.

### **Factors that Promote Social Integration**

The focus group data revealed the following primary factors that promote social integration (inclusion and cohesion) of first, second, and multi-generation American Muslim students in the three institutions of higher education examined in this study:

- Student in-group systems of support and friendship
- Diverse student body and student organizations
- Supportive faculty and advisors

- University diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives

### ***Student In-Group Systems of Support and Friendships***

The data indicates that primary systems of support for the majority of the focus group participants are other similarly situated students whose life experiences align with the students' life experiences relating to their religious identity and/or immigrant heritage. Most of these systems of support were discovered through engagement with student organizations, including Muslim organizations and cultural organizations. The data reveals that these extra-curricular systems of support (a) contribute to inculcating students' sense of belonging at their university, (b) provide validation and a positive tone to an aspect of their faith and/or immigrant identity that was, in many instances, marginalized during their high school or early college experience, and (c) brought many students closer to their faith and heritage culture. For most focus group participants, the college campus was their first time being exposed to a larger community of students who share their faith and immigrant heritage. This new experience was positive for most participants and thus, fully embraced. One student stated,

When I started freshman year and got involved with MSA, I met more Muslims my age than I have in my life because there weren't too many that I went to high school with... the most Muslims I was interacting with for the first time... we go to these things together [Friday prayer, etc.].

Another student recounted the positive support she received from the Muslim student organization since she started her college experience:

I really do appreciate some of the work [Muslim organizations] do ... like my freshman year, I didn't have a kitchen, and Ramadan... they would provide a meal which is really



helpful, because you know I was on a meal plan, and didn't have a kitchen, and couldn't really like navigate food sometimes.

These findings are consistent with scientific research on the fundamental human need to belong and feel connected to other people, especially adolescents and young adults (Allen et al., 2021; Baumeister & Leary (1995); Jeannotte, 2008; Maslow, 1943). This powerful human motivation appeared to draw these young Muslim students towards one another.

For several students, it appeared that this experience of engaging with a community of similarly situated increased their awareness of their inherent exclusion in their relationships with non-Muslim friend groups. In one example, a student who had primarily White friends most of her life, including during her entire first and second year in college, came to a disconcerting realization of how much she never really felt fully welcome and included in her non-Muslim friend groups. This internal consciousness led her to completely shift her friend group from primarily White friends to primarily Muslim students, and students who share a similar heritage culture, where she now feels a full sense of belonging. This student was born and raised in the United States. She states,

[In my junior year] I kind of had the realization that like okay like this isn't for me like I never really felt included, even though I had a lot of [non-Muslim] friends. I never really felt like I was fully included in like my friend groups, and it was never like an intentional thing. It was just always like inside me [since Freshman year], like I felt like I was unintentionally not a part of you know those circles; I'd never be like fully included so then junior year, I kind of like started being more involved in like religious and cultural organizations, and I just found, like more of a group of friends that I felt like, okay, I actually felt included, like all the time.

Another student had a similar experience. Prior to college, her entire friend group was non-Muslim, but then, “As soon as I got to college my whole like friend group kind of shifted [to Muslim].” A third-year student who shared a similar experience noted that her friendship circles have significantly transformed from her first year when her friends were primarily non-Muslim, stating, “I would say that most of like my close circle of friends like at this point are Muslim.”

For some students, this level of engagement with similarly situated students actually brought them closer to their faith. One student commented,

Coming to college has definitely been like a very positive experience for me as a Muslim. I definitely became a lot more practicing when I came to college, just because I was around the right type of people. I guess that motivated me to become more practicing and stuff like that.

Another student said,

I think my experiences with Islam have been very rocky, and so I think, like for me, it was just kind of like a like a learning curve, and I think I found out a lot of beautiful things of about Islam in college compared to what my parents had taught me.

These findings are consistent with Tatum’s (2017) research on racial identity development and the need for students to self-segregate from the daily microaggressions experienced as an inherent part of being a minority student. Being enveloped in positive racial identity by the support of in-group peers is way to affirm their identity and temporarily buffer from these negative daily occurrences.

### ***Diverse Student Body and Organizations***

Several focus group participants reported that the diversity in their university setting, particularly the university in the urban setting, was a key factor that actually drew them to that

university. One student stated, “That's one of the reasons that I was drawn towards [this particular university] because of its diversity and inclusion.” Another student at the same university stated, “There's a lot of diversity and you can meet people similar to you so that's why I've met so many Muslims in at [this university].” One student compared his experience at a university with a greater diversity in student population from his brother’s experience at a different university where he noted that most of the students are White students:

In my experience like my brother went to [a different university] and the feeling of like just stepping out of the car [there], and like, if there's like an event going on and literally everywhere, you look it's like mostly White people it's just a different feeling coming to [my university], and then doing that same thing, and then saying, people who look like Asian, Black, White, Brown, and Hispanic, like it's very different. You just feel like it's a more inclusive place.

The data also suggests that this diversity enabled these students an opportunity to engage with other Muslim students and students who share their immigrant and cultural heritage in a way that they never had before, because for the most part, their high-school setting was primarily White (and presumably non-Muslim) students. One student noted that,

I'll just be in the library and you know feel a little bit more like I don't stand out like as much as I do in high school, where you know I went to school with all White kids, and, like it was, I was like a sore thumb like so I just kind of noticed that about [this university] and it drew me towards it.

The data demonstrates that most participants were well integrated into a variety of diverse student organizations, including those organizations with which they identified on the basis of their immigrant heritage (cultural organizations) and faith (Muslim organizations), with

several of them holding leadership positions. One student shared that in her four years in college she participated in a multitude of cultural and religious organizations:

At [my university], I was in the [Asian Pacific student organization] and then I was in the [Muslim student organization]. I was also like on the board of it ... but like in terms of being a participant, I was in the [Sudani student organization, Pakistani student organization]. Sometimes I would go to the Bengali student events and Persian student events. Yeah, I think that was mainly the ones that I was in. [Now] I run this group spirituality series so that's kind of my main thing, the Muslim spirituality group.

Another very active student reported,

There's a couple organizations I'm a part of, it's a lot, but over the years I've cut down. I'm on the board for [Pakistani student organization] and [Afghan student organization]. I'm part of [student health and human rights organization.] I used to be part of student government. I'm also part of a ...pre-health fraternity. I'm also part of a couple of smaller organizations here and there, but I only have leadership roles in a few.

These findings suggest that a diverse campus climate, including opportunities for informal and formal participation with a variety of extra-curricular organizations encourages social integration of Muslim students, which is consistent with Tinto's (1987) positivist model of integration.

### ***Supportive Faculty and Advisors***

Several students reported that professors and other faculty played a significant role in helping them feel supported at the university. One student revealed,

People for the most part, are like very nice and like welcoming and like even like now ... I have [a] professor who's like really nice ... he's letting Muslim students take their test after [breaking fast] if they are online, so like he's providing accommodations and stuff.

Another student indicated,

I haven't honestly experienced anything negative at [my university]. I would say maybe back in high school it was more difficult but throughout my time at [this university] I've only really had positive experiences, and something that I was just thinking about was my professor ... He always made it such a point to be super inclusive of his Muslim students, so he will constantly, you know ... make known to the whole class that we're fasting. He made sure to have multiple different timings for people that were fasting in case they didn't want to take [the exam] during the class time. Like he's been super like accommodating to us so I it just like something that I never experienced in high school. So it's just very eye-opening to see kind of how the diversity has allowed for faculty to accommodate for us so much.

One fourth-year student stated that he was able to develop a supportive relationship with a handful of his professors throughout his four-year experience at the university:

There were professors that I felt like I could have gone to, you know, maybe three or four like during my time here, like I can probably point to like one professor every year that I've been here that, like I really you know, trusted. And you know, if I ever had something that I really needed to discuss with them, I would have been able to do that without an issue.

Another student highlighted that she felt more supported by faculty who were younger because their attitudes tend to be more inclusive. She stated,

One thing that I've noticed is that I feel a lot more ... comfortable, and feel like I can be more like myself, and more open with professors when they're younger and I think that the younger faculty population at [this university] is a lot more inclusive ... I feel like a

lot a lot of times the teachers that start issues tend to be older and have tenure, and the ones that I think that we feel a lot more comfortable around are younger...

These findings are consistent with Tinto (1987) and Baker & Velez's (1996) proposition that a meaningful way in which students can become socially integrated in educational institutions is through informal interactions with faculty and staff. These interactions may also be characterized by faculty efforts to build collective cohesion between students and the university (Durkheim, 1893).

### ***University Diversity, Equity, and Inclusive Excellence Initiatives***

The focus group data indicates that students are generally grateful for their universities' efforts to advance ideals of diversity, equity, and inclusion. This result is consistent with the student survey indicating that a majority of students maintain a positive view of their university's diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. Some of the ways in which students felt supported by their university's diversity, equity and inclusion efforts was through diversity statements and faculty support of their religious-based needs related to fasting schedules during Ramadan. For example, one student remarked,

I would say honestly [at my university] personally, and like my experience with other non-Muslim students and all the faculty from what I've seen has been like extremely welcoming. There's been like no discrimination or hate or feeling of like exclusion of any sort ...because it's such a widely diverse school. There's like all different types of cultures and backgrounds.

Some students suggested that the diversity statements on the syllabus provide them a sense of protection from discrimination and harassment in school that guarantees accountability on part of the university in case of such an experience. One student stated,

[Diversity statements are] like included at the end of all the syllabuses you get for every single class. I don't think anyone's ever read it though ... at the end of the day it makes you feel good, like okay, like the fact that it's on the syllabus so like in the case scenario. something happens like you know you can be like you literally put this in the syllabus like ...you can't really take your word back from that when you did make the syllabus yourself ... and you can like show it as evidence like this is in writing like you can't really discriminate or like have any bias toward me.

Another student emphasized that the professors who make a point to talk about the diversity statements on the syllabus on the first day of school are the professors they sense that they could rely on if they experience any discrimination or harassment. She stated,

I noticed when a lot of my professors make it a point, though, to talk about that [diversity statement] section [of the syllabus] like on the first day of school ...or they give like you know a 5 min speech about it, then I'll like actually recognize that you know maybe this professor really does care about that part. A lot of times like I've had professors where like when they send their welcome, email they put a whole section about justice equality and making sure that there is no discrimination, and I always just appreciate when professors take that extra effort to, you know talk about it in the first day. Well, it's kind of going up above and beyond ... and then, like, you know, you can really tell like, okay, like these are the professors that actually care and like you know, if something were to happen like they, they would be the ones to like definitely handle the situation.

These findings suggest that the institutions of higher education that are the subject of this case study are part of the national movement of institutions of higher education working to inculcate

the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion into their curriculum and school culture (Hilton et al., 2021; Office of Planning, Development, and Policy Implementation, 2016).

Table 12 below categorizes the following themes and patterns highlighted above:



**Table 12**

## Factors That Promote Social Integration

Theme	Dominant code	Interview quote sample
Student in-group systems of support and friendship	Inclusion	<p>“When I started Freshman year and got involved with MSA, I met more Muslims my age than I have in my life because there weren’t too many that I went to high school with ... the most Muslims I was interacting with for the first time ... we go to these things together [Friday prayer, etc.]” (Student 10)</p> <p>“As soon as I got to college my whole like friend group kind of shifted [from non-Muslim to Muslim students]” (Student 4)</p> <p>“I didn’t have much contact with other Muslims until I came to college ... [now] I kind of have 2 different circles of friends...one is like mainly Muslim and Desi people (Punjabi, Hindu, Sikh)<sup>53</sup> ... That's one kind of friend group. I have another friend group that is like just secular...50/50.” (Student 5)</p> <p>“I would say that most of like my close circle of friends like at this point are Muslim.” (Student 6)</p> <p>“[My friendships] evolved a lot because in freshman year it was definitely, predominantly White people that I was friends with, and I think that was more the [make up] of the school rather than who I was kind of gravitating towards ... now my like tight knit group of friends, they're all mostly Pakistani. But that's not to say that like I don't want to be friends with other people.” (Student 12)</p> <p>“I did have a few Muslim friends in high school, but it was definitely a little bit more diverse [in college], but I did find that I was able to relate more to my friends who were Muslim, which is why, when I first entered into college, I found myself kind of</p>

<sup>53</sup> The term “desi” or “deshi” is an Urdu language, Hindi language, and Bengali language slang that typically refers to an individual of South Asian origin.

Theme	Dominant code	Interview quote sample
		gravitating towards [Pakistan student organization] or [Muslim student organization].” (Student 13)
		“I don't think I've really made too many new friends recently. and I would also say that majority of my friends are either Pakistani or Muslim.” (Student 14)
		“Having kind of friend like a Muslim friend group is also just seeing that especially the fact that we all kind of gravitated towards each other and we just so happened to be kind of open-minded with each other about our own spiritual journey and our own religious journey.” (Student 15)
		“I went to parties and with people and kind of like mingled, and it became like a distressful situation for me, because I don't drink alcohol and you know I don't do stuff like that. So, being in these parties it became very evident to me that I didn't belong ... so that's where sophomore year I was like okay like, let me try to make friends that are like kind of like my own, like you know, in a group [Muslim].” (Student 21)
		“I think my experiences with Islam have been very rocky, and so I think, like for me, it was just kind of like a like a learning curve, and I think I found out a lot of beautiful things of about Islam in college compared to what my parents had taught me.” (Student 21)
		“I think one of the most positive experiences I have had with a Muslim organization and I think it was like really helpful with the betterment of my spirituality in Islam... and I think it really helped me to just enhance my like knowledge, and, you know, get to know my religion better. So I think it was very like positive.” (Student 22)
		“I really do appreciate some of the work [Muslim organizations] do like my freshman year, I didn't have a kitchen, and Ramadan ...they would provide a meal which is

Theme	Dominant code	Interview quote sample
Diverse student body and student organizations	Diversity	<p>really helpful, because you know I was on a meal plan, and didn't have a kitchen, and couldn't really like navigate food sometimes.” (Student 22)</p> <p>“At [my university], I was in the [Asian Pacific student organization] and then I was in the [Muslim student organization]. I was also like on the board of it ... but like in terms of being a participant, I was in the [Sudani student organization, Pakistani student organization]. Sometimes I would go to the Bengali student and Persian student event. Yeah, I think that was mainly the ones that I was in.” [Now] I run this group spirituality series so that's kind of my main thing, the Muslim spirituality group.” (Student 11)</p> <p>“There’s a couple organizations I’m a part of, it’s a lot, but over the years I’ve cut down. I’m on the board for [Pakistani student organization], [Afghan student organization]. I’m part of a [student health and human rights organization]. I used to be part of student government. I’m also part of a ...pre-health fraternity. I’m also part of a couple of smaller organizations here and there, but I only have leadership roles in a few.” (Student 13)</p> <p>“In four years, I was in a [women in business organization]. I was a mentee at first, and then I became a mentor, and then I was also a I was also in [university business organization], I was a peer advisor on campus. ... I was an executive secretary for another [environmental organization], I was in a [university] volunteer club and helped out our community. I am also part of the business school’s [multicultural diversity council]. I work ... at a theater at patron services ... and I’m also a resident advisor and that’s why I lived on campus all four years... I go to [Muslim student organization] events sometimes ... I used to go a little more like my freshman year.” (Student 17)</p> <p>“I feel like [participation in student organizations] has been an important part of my undergraduate experience, and it kind of allowed me to like meet new people, get new experiences and kind of, you know. make friends and be exposed to different</p>

Theme	Dominant code	Interview quote sample
Supportive faculty advisors	Valued identity	<p>perspectives which has been really helpful throughout my time ... I'm not sure how like different my experience would have been had I not joined these organizations.” (Student 20)</p> <p>“There were professors that I felt like I could have gone to, you know, maybe three or four like during my time here, like I can probably point to like one professor every year that I've been here that, like I really you know, trusted. And you know, if I ever had something that I really needed to discuss with them, I would have been able to do that without an issue.” (Student 7)</p> <p>“One thing that I've noticed is that I feel a lot more ... comfortable, and feel like I can be more like myself, and more open with professors when they're younger and I think that the younger faculty population at [this university] is a lot more inclusive ... I feel like a lot a lot of times the teachers that start issues tend to be older and have tenure, and the ones that I think that we feel a lot more comfortable around are younger...” (Student 8)</p> <p>“My [academic advisor] ... I go to with everything like literally everything I can talk to him about, and I can tell him about and he's very sympathetic. He's always trying to help me find ways to be Okay, in every way that he can like any way that he can use his power to help me, he will So that's one person that's been a real like ally person who's been on my side.” (Student 11)</p> <p>“I would say honestly [at my university] personally, and like my experience with other non-Muslim students and all the faculty from what I've seen has been like extremely welcoming. There's been like no discrimination or hate or feeling of like exclusion of any sort ...because it's such a widely diverse school. There's like all different types of cultures and backgrounds.” (Student 15)</p> <p>“I haven't honestly experienced anything negative at [my university]. I would say maybe back in high school it was more difficult but throughout my time at [this university] I've only really had positive experiences, and something that I was just</p>

Theme	Dominant code	Interview quote sample
University diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives	Cohesion	<p>thinking about was my professor ... He always made it such a point to be super inclusive of his Muslim students, so he will constantly, you know ... make known to the whole class that we're fasting. He made sure to have multiple different timings for people that were fasting in case they didn't want to take [the exam] during the class time. Like he's been super like accommodating to us so I it just like something that I never experienced in high school in high school. So it's just very eye-opening to see kind of how the diversity has allowed for faculty to accommodate for us so much." (Student 16)</p>
		<p>“[Diversity statements are] like included at the end of all the syllabuses you get for every single class. I don't think anyone's ever read it though ... at the end of the day it makes you feel good, like okay, like the fact that it's on the syllabus so like in the case scenario. something happens like you know you can be like you literally put this in the syllabus like ...you can't really take your word back from that when you did make the syllabus yourself ... and you can like show it as evidence like this is in writing like you can't really discriminate or like have any bias toward me.” (Student 19)</p> <p>“I noticed when a lot of my professors make it a point, though, to talk about that [diversity statement] section [of the syllabus] like on the first day of school ...or they give like you know a 5 min speech about it, then I'll like actually recognize that you know maybe this professor really does care about that part. A lot of times like I've had professors where like when they send their welcome, email they put a whole section about justice equality and making sure that there is no discrimination, and I always just appreciate when professors take that extra effort to, you know talk about it in the first day. Well, it's kind of going up above and beyond ... and then, like, you know, you can really tell like, okay, like these are the professors that actually care and like you know, if something were to happen like they, they would be the ones to like definitely handle the situation.” (Student 16)</p> <p>“[T]his year [my university] finally started like Halal to-go packages I think at the dining halls [for Ramadan]. But I do wish there was like some more</p>

Theme	Dominant code	Interview quote sample
		<p>accommodations like I've seen some other universities ... we have a small Muslim population here, but like, for example, I saw like in Michigan, like they have like, or like NYU, like they have like a lot ... so I definitely wish, like they would be more accommodating." (Student 18)</p>
		<p>"The university does a decent job ... many professors I've noticed started having diversity statements which wasn't a thing." (Student 2)</p>

## **Factors that Impede Social Integration**

The focus group data suggests that a variety of external and internal factors impede social integration (inclusion and cohesion) of first, second, and multi-generation American Muslim students in the three institutions of higher education examined in this study. External factors include the following:

- Student experiences of discrimination, harassment, microaggressions, and bias incidents
- Student lack of knowledge of institutional supports addressing these experiences, including the reporting and complaint resolution process
- Student lack of faith or trust that their institution will adequately support them in addressing these experiences, and related to this, discomfort in reporting
- Lack of diverse faculty
- Limited university funding to support diverse identities

The focus group data suggest that internal factors that impede social integration experiences include the following:

- Insularity and cliquishness; and
- In-group racism and hierarchies

### ***Student Experiences of Discrimination, Harassment, Microaggression, and Bias Incidents***

While several experiences of discrimination (disparate treatment) and harassment (unwelcome conduct) were reported during focus group discussions, every single focus group participant reported regular, if not daily, experiences of microaggressions or bias incidents on the intersecting categories of religion, national origin, race, and gender. Reports of daily occurrences of microaggression or bias incidents include racial slurs and name-calling, exclusion,

uncomfortable staring, asking insensitive questions, and stereotyping students as perpetual foreigners or terrorists. The researcher also noted that for the focus group participants who had a strong Arab accent or outwardly exhibited Islamic clothing (such as hijab), the microaggressions were particularly hostile. These reported experiences and perceptions are consistent with the researcher's literature review relating to experiences of Muslim high school students from sociological and mental health perspectives. The following simple statement from one student captures the general sentiment of the overwhelming majority of students who participated in the focus group: "Microaggressions ...very prevalent in the day-to-day basis where I live."

These findings are consistent with Tierney's (1992) construct of social integration for minority students in schools, in that minorities are likely to have disruptive cultural experiences in college given that the dominant culture in the United States is White. There is extensive literature highlighting this significant societal problem which is the basis of this study (Bonet, 2011; Joshi, 2020; Nadal et al., 2012; Office of Civil Rights, 2015). Tierney (1992) and LaCroix (2010) caution that schools, as an arm of government services, have an affirmative role to play in mitigating these harmful and erosive impacts by considering culturally responsive ways to integrate minority students in which diversity is highlighted and celebrated (LaCroix, 2010). The OCR provides extensive resources for schools to address this serious problem, and foster a school climate in which students feel safe from these inequities.

### ***Lack of Awareness***

While the initial survey found that most Muslim students attending the three institutions of higher education maintain a positive view of their university's diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, including school diversity statements and efforts to make religious accommodations, a more nuanced examination of this issue through the focus group data revealed that the majority



of participants are not aware of their universities' reporting process, complaint resolution process, or platforms to address these challenges described above. One comment represents a general consensus among many of the participants: "I don't think [my university] does a great job at providing or at least advertising what they can do to support students." Another student remarked, "I think we go over [the diversity, equity, and inclusion policies] during like the beginning of each class, and then it's never talked about like ever."

While the quantitative data painted a picture of general satisfaction in regard to perceptions of equal protection and diversity, equity, and inclusion school practices, a deeper dive into deconstructing how those abstract concepts could be applied in practice, the picture proved to be much more multifaceted. In other words, this theme suggests that while students may be aware of the public persona of diversity, equity, and inclusion in campus environment through the website and their class syllabus, they may not be so sure how these notions apply to help them when they are in need of support.

### ***Lack of Trust***

More troubling was the data that revealed that most students reported that they did not have faith in their institutional leadership in addressing these experiences or providing meaningful support. Most telling was a statement highlighted below:

In the beginning, like I would face microaggressions, I would talk to people that I thought could help, and they were just kind of like "Oh, we're sorry you went through that," but like literally nothing changed at all, and like, even with professors like there have been instances where like really problematic stuff has happened and ... because like there have been like many instances not just with me, but other students as well, but I've told them about it, and they were just like "we're so sorry you went through that like we we'll look

into it” but like nothing came out of it...now, whenever I go through something like I just think to myself all I'm doing is like giving away like my mental energy and like it's a lot to go and tell someone this and like if nothing comes out of it like what's the point so I just think it's like better to just preserve my energy, and like put it somewhere else.

Another student pointed out her experience in attempting to seek relief from her professor when she experienced disparate treatment and exclusion from her project partners in a project that was to impact her final grade:

I don't think I would ever personally like go to someone cause from previous experience, it's been like not a good outcome like they don't really do anything ... even when you do try to go to someone they give like the you know, I'm sorry ... maybe we can work on this, and then, like nothing comes out of it in the end. It has happened a lot of times like I would come to my professor, and especially with group work. But it's like the grade matters more to them than the reality of the situation which kind of sucks they're just like, okay, well, it's a group project you can finish it within the week, and you'll never like have to meet these people again.

Yet another student recounted her experience in seeking help from a university employee at a higher level of authority:

There was actually a situation ... where people were being kind of racist towards another group of people, and we took that to a [higher level] like the dean ...and we went up that high...but what was disappointing was that they didn't really do anything about it and so that was kind of discouraging, like is it worth it to reach out to someone about something like that, I don't know?

Another student expressed her perception of her university's counseling services, "If, like, I experienced something, and it was like almost traumatic in a way I would reach out to the counseling services but even they aren't that effective in my experience ... and I know in other people's experiences, too." In regard to experiences with campus police, one student reported,

I know, like a lot of times people would report things to [campus] police which you get like sent a little message and then that's pretty much it, like there's nothing that's being done. I feel like there's a lot that [my university] could do based off our community..."

Another student stated, "I don't think [my university] makes students feel safe to be honest like minorities, and especially women..." One student recounted her unsuccessful experience in trying to use the complaint resolution process.

"[In a discrimination matter] ... gone up the ladder from an instructor to basically the dean and program coordinators and have been met with like terrible responses so I don't know how inclined I would be to talk to the school. It might just [be better to rely] on your support system. Recognize the fact that you're Brown and Muslim, and, you know, talk to God and move on."

One student expressed that he felt that if he reported his experiences as an individual, he wouldn't truly be heard by the institutional authority, unless he had larger number of Muslims reporting along with him:

Honestly, if I was able to find the resources, I would [report] because at least I could get like the ball rolling like more students would hopefully like, speak out against it, and then maybe some actions could be done if they have like enough students talking about it. But I think just me alone going to somebody; I don't think they would like truly understand.

You would have to have numbers for them to actually like, investigate the situation and stuff like that.

Similar to the student above, another student from a different focus group shared that she had more faith in feeling supported by students through social media than in her institution in regard to reporting an allegation of discrimination or harassment. She stated:

I feel like students would be able to bring awareness or attention to that through social media like reposting about something like that happening. We've seen it happen over and over in the past months, especially with like Title IX complaints or just discrimination in general, I've seen social media posts blow up more than I've seen action being taken by administration at schools.

The scientific research indicating that students are more likely to take “extralegal” action than formal legal action in response to perceived civil rights violations is also consistent with the findings above (Morrill et al., 2010, p. 651).

Here again, the results from the survey appear to diverge greatly from the findings in the focus group. While survey respondents indicated positive experiences in regard to equal protection at their university, the focus group discussions were saturated with experiences of negative bias incidents, microaggressions, and allegations of civil rights violations. The researcher posits that this discrepancy may be due to the fact that the survey participants who had greater concern about the issues that were the subject of the survey volunteered to participate in the focus group, while students who perceived general satisfaction in their school's equal protection system may have felt there was not much more to contribute to the topic. Thus, there may have been a self-selection of focus group participants who experienced unfair treatment, exclusion, and fear on campus based on their Muslim and/or immigrant identity.

### ***Lack of Diverse Faculty***

A theme that came up during two focus group discussions was concern by several students that their universities lack a diverse faculty, and the faculty is not representative of the students they serve. One student stated,

Having been here four years, I've met and you know I've switched my major halfway through college, so like I've had professors from like all types of different electives and I've only ever had one Muslim professor and I think, that you know that's not really representative of [the university] student body, because we have a ton of Muslim students.

Another student remarked, "I've also never had a Muslim professor in my three and a half years here."

### ***Limited University Funding of Faith and Cultural Organizations***

A couple of students who held leadership positions in their universities' religious or cultural organizations, acknowledged and appreciated the university's financial support of the missions of their organization. They commented on how greater funding support by their university would strengthen the ways in which they could support students' diverse identities.

### ***Insularity and Clickiness***

Most students in each of the focus groups reported on the challenges of "clickiness" of Muslim and cultural organizations. While some students acknowledged that clicks are a part of life, and even admitted that those clicks at times help them feel more safe, protected and supported in their identity, others reported that this clickiness has led to insularity and racism among Muslims based on race and national origin. One student reported,

[Some Muslim students] are afraid to be open to different aspect of faith ... that causes people to kind of come within themselves and stay safe in what they know than to open their minds towards knowledge they hadn't had before or open their minds to people who may disagree with them. Bottom line of being Muslim is missed.

While this tendency may be seen as self-protection or survival, some students reported that it has created divisiveness in Muslim student communities.

I do think Muslims like we are very diverse, we come from all races ... all backgrounds and ... people like very attached to their cultural identity to the point where, like they might like, you know, unintentionally like, they don't like try to like get more diverse friends or see other people's perspectives.

While Tatum (2017) observes that it is affirming to self-segregate among those with whom one feels supported in their identity, she asserts that institutions have a critical role to play in being racially conscious of these dynamics and take affirmative steps to build trust, understanding, and cohesion (Jeannotte, 2008).

### ***In-Group Racism***

The data reveals that a key factor to this divisiveness is racism—disparate treatment—among certain Muslims on the basis of race and national origin, and in particular the marginalization of Black Muslims. One student expressed that certain cultures of Muslims feel superior to other cultures of Muslims. In at least one of the three universities, because of this oppressive dynamic, Black Muslims established their own Muslim organization. One student reported,

I do see a lot of clicks around here, especially dealing with [Muslim organizations], so much so that ... African American students here created their own [Muslim organization]

... because they felt that they were they weren't being treated properly ... there has been a sort of division.

The data revealed that this clickiness for some students was also a reason to not get involved in the leadership of these organizations. One student states,

Personally, I'm not an active, involved member of the [Muslim organization], or like [Pakistani organization]. I attend events occasionally, but I'm not an active member ... I try to avoid...I was active my sophomore year here, but after that I kind of took my space from it, and I am not involved.

Another student reported that, "... a clicky culture .... so it just felt like I was being judged all around ... so it kind of just made me feel like I ... didn't belong there like very quickly."

Table 13 below categorizes the themes and patterns highlighted above:

**Table 13**

## Factors That Impede Social Integration

Theme	Dominant code	Interview quote sample
Student experiences of discrimination, harassment, microaggression, and bias incidents	Discrimination and harassment	<p>“I am like a hijabi ... I do get like looks... in a group project where I was with predominantly White people and it was kind of weird, because they all like would kind of like talk on the side, and I was just like sitting on the corner ... I'm not really sure but I guess they kind of like have this idea that we might not speak English ... I don't know what they think but like they're kind of like secluded in their own area like, and I've kind of felt that with a couple of groups that I've been in but that's ... something I've felt like that's common or they kind of think you're different from them, and they like try to talk with people that they're more similar with even though it's a group project.” (Student 4)</p> <p>“.. because I'm in engineering major, I've definitely faced discrimination from people in group projects ... [and] male professors. One instance that I could think of and like, I guess it isn't just the fact that I'm a woman, but the fact that I'm a woman of color ... in a group of like all White men, and I was only woman of color in that group and we had [female] mentor helping us, and he [male professor] would grade us at the end. And I did literally like, most work out of everyone objectively speaking [because I talked to the female mentor who wasn't in charge of grades] and she was really upset to see this ... But, like literally, everyone, all the guys in the group got an A and I got B+. Why did everyone else in the group get an A and I got a B+?” (Student 6)</p> <p>“The days following the [University shooting], a lot of people [on social media and campus] were being racist towards Arabs and discriminating against Muslims that they are responsible for the shooting, although that wasn't the case... I don't feel [my university] has done anything specific for [that].” (Student 1)</p>



Theme	Dominant code	Interview quote sample
Lack of knowledge of institutional support for bias incidents, microaggression, discrimination or harassment	Awareness	<p>“There’s slurs here and there during basketball if you’re playing against people you don’t know ... towelhead, why are you playing basketball, go blow something up; go back to where you came from, Paki<sup>54</sup>.” (Student 2)</p>
		<p>“I can name like thousands of microaggressions you get like, for instance, even though I don't wear hijab I do dress very modestly, and especially in the summer ... I get a lot of comments like people are like aren't you hot and why do you do that and ... they'll ask me questions that are like really insensitive.” (Student 6)</p>
		<p>“Microaggressions ...very prevalent in the day-to-day basis that I live.” (Student 5)</p>
		<p>“I don’t really know of any outlets that they [the university] provide for us like it's not advertised well enough even if they have it.” (Student 8)</p>
		<p>“I think honestly like I don't think there are that many outlets for students like get like help with that.” (Student 9)</p>
<p>“I don't think [my university] does a great job at providing or at least advertising what they can do to support students.” (Student 6)</p>		
<p>“There are like some resources, but like they’re not advertised enough and I don't think there's enough maybe there isn't enough funding or to like make those [resources] ... more accessible to students and like advertise. So yeah, I think definitely, there's like a lot that can be improved upon.” (Student 13)</p>		
<p>“I think we go over [the diversity, equity, and inclusion policies] during like the beginning of each class, and then it's never talked about like ever.” (Student 18)</p>		

<sup>54</sup> “Paki” is a generally considered an offensive racial slur towards people of South Asian heritage, originating as British slang.

Theme	Dominant code	Interview quote sample
Lack of faith in institutional support for safety incidents, discrimination, bias incidents, microaggression	Trust	<p>“I don't think [my university] makes students feel safe to be honest like minorities, and especially women ... like sexual assault, it's a huge problem at [university], where there have been a lot of women who reporting sexual assault and the university has not given justice or like done enough and so I don't think the university really creates a space for students, especially women, and people of color to feel safe.” (Student 6)</p> <p>“I will say that the [University] as an institution doesn't really help as much as I think they could ...” (Student 12)</p> <p>“I know, like a lot of times people would report things to [campus] police which you get like sent a little message and then that's pretty much it, like there's nothing that's being done. I feel like there's a lot that [my university] could do based off our community, and a population.” (Student 4)</p> <p>“Honestly, if I was able to find the resources, I would [report] because at least I could get like the ball rolling like more students would hopefully like, speak out against it, and then maybe some actions could be done if they have like enough students talking about it. But I think just me alone going to somebody I don't think they would like truly understand. You would have to have numbers for them to actually like, investigate the situation and stuff like that.” (Student 5)</p> <p>“In the beginning, like I would face microaggressions, I would talk to people that I thought could help, and they were just kind of like Oh, we're sorry you went through that, but like literally nothing changed at all, and like, even with professors like there have been instances where like really problematic stuff has happened and ... because like there have been like many instances not just with me, but other students as well, but I've told them about it, and they were just like we're so sorry you went through that like we we'll look into it like nothing came out of it...now, whenever I go through something like I just think to myself all I'm doing is like giving away like my mental energy and like it's a lot to go and tell someone this and like if nothing comes</p>

Theme	Dominant code	Interview quote sample
		out of it like what's the point so I just think it's like better to just preserve my energy, and like put it somewhere else.” (Student 11)
		“I don't think I would ever personally like go to someone cause from previous experience, it's been like not a good outcome like they don't really do anything ... even when you do try to go to someone they give like the you know, I'm sorry ... maybe we can work on this, and then, like nothing comes out of it in the end. It has happened a lot of times like I would come to my professor, and especially with group work. But it's like the grade matters more to them than the reality of the situation which kind of sucks they're just like, okay, well, it's a group project you can finish it within the week, and you'll never like have to meet these people again.” (Student 4)
		“Unless it was something really bad like ... violence, I wouldn't report it; besides, I wouldn't feel right .... on the inside I would feel like I am tattle tailing, snitching... so it's not something I want to do.” (Student 1)
		“There was actually a situation ... where people were being kind of racist towards another group of people, and we took that to a [higher level] like the dean ...and we went up that high...but what was disappointing was that they didn't really do anything about it and so that was kind of discouraging, like is it worth it to reach out to someone about something like that, I don't know?” (Student 9)
		“If, like, I experienced something, and it was like almost traumatic in a way I would reach out to the counseling services but even they aren't that effective in my experience. and I know in other people's experiences, too.” (Student 9)
		“I feel like students would be able to bring awareness or attention to that through social media like reposting about something like that happening. We've seen it happen over and over in the past months, especially with like Title IX complaints or just discrimination in general, I've seen social media posts blow up more than I've seen action being taken by administration at schools.” (Student 8)

Theme	Dominant code	Interview quote sample
		<p>“[Y]ou'd be surprised how much posting can actually do...” (Student 13)</p>
		<p>“[If discrimination] was a professor, and let's say you didn't get relief higher up, then you feel that you would take it to like a maybe a student organization and raise a profile to get that attention... yeah, student organizations would probably be lot more helpful in that situation, I guess... I feel like oftentimes it kind of feels like professors are almost untouchable, especially like if they're tenured, or you know they've been there for a long time.” (Student 17)</p>
		<p>“There has been an experience where I was treated unfairly by a professor. It wasn't necessarily, because I was Muslim but it's just so surprising how hard I had to work to kind of just be heard by someone I had to like reach out to my counselor who reached out to someone else who reached out to someone else, and I was like, why is it taking so long like this is obviously a problem. So ever since then ... it's so discouraging like I just wish the faculty could match you know what the students show.” (Student 14)</p>
		<p>“So the thing is that to report discrimination it's a lot. It takes a big toll on you and it's very slow ... so this the stuff that was happening with that teacher ... so we were already taking that discrimination stuff to a higher level and because you ended up not doing anything about it and knowing the way [this university] is with discrimination stuff. They'd rather not, because they just don't want to ... and if it's something that they can ignore and get away with ignoring, they will you know ... so I was also just like exhausted but also like, I think ... it's just like a lot of effort for something that often doesn't end up going in the person being discriminated against favor and it creates a lot of drama, and it just makes everything hard. So I'm usually pretty like careful about when continue a contention, and if I see it as something that is feasible for me, but also worth it for the community that would benefit from it.” (Student 11)</p>

Theme	Dominant code	Interview quote sample
		<p>“So I have expressed my needs being Muslim and ... [bias] experiences being Muslim, and it's been a very negative experience for me with the school ... they're very praised for being diverse and inclusive, but it's just a facade honestly it's fake from my experiences and other people of color, like students of color in terms of being Muslim ...” (Student 21)</p>
		<p>“[In requesting a religious accommodation]. I've told them like I was having issues with getting placed earlier in the semester, and there was like a little bit of back and forth, and I expressed like I don't we want to drag this out until graduation like I want to finish in a timely manner ... I'm gonna be fasting and no other student is in my shoes and kind of expressing that to program directors and stuff just to be told like, ‘Oh, you'll be fine people get it done like you know, like it's definitely doable,’ and like very like cold, dismissive answers. And you know it's just not right for a school that claims to be as inclusive as they are.” (Student 21)</p>
		<p>“[In a discrimination matter] ... gone up the ladder from an instructor to basically the dean and program coordinators and have been met with like terrible responses so I don't know how inclined I would be to talk to the school. It might just ... on your support system. Recognize the fact that you're Brown and Muslim, and, you know, Talk to God and move on.” (Student 22)</p>
		<p>“My parents are immigrants from Pakistan, like, you know, work hard, and you know, keep your head down. Do what you got to do, I don't complain. So it took a lot out of me, and I had so many lists of experiences I finally brought to someone, and then that was shut down so it like various occurrences and various you know pieces of evidence you know when I reached out, and then it was all kind of crumbled ... So I don't think the institutional level is somewhere I would go to seek, you know, help, or you know, inform them of anything.” (Student 22)</p>
		<p>“So I live on campus [resident advisor] and work on campus so I'm very familiar with the policies. However, it it's not a benefit to me again, and I say this all the time. It</p>

Theme	Dominant code	Interview quote sample
Lack of diversity in faculty that does not reflect the student body they serve	Homogenous faculty	looks great on paper. Policies are great on paper they seem so supportive on paper. But it isn't until you actually go to them with something that you know you'll be shut down or brushed off." (Student 22)
		"I will say they do profit off of my identity a lot like, for example ... they'll like put my face everywhere they can any chance they can on their Facebook and here and there, it all goes back to like they like the look of me token [Brown]. But any concern I bring to them isn't validated or you know, given the attention it requires." (Student 22)
Limited university funding to support diverse identities	Funding	"Having been here four years, I've met and you know I've switched my major halfway through college, so like I've had professors from like all types of different electives and I've only ever had one Muslim professor and I think, that you know that's not really representative of [the university] student body, because we have a ton of Muslim students." (Student 7)
		"I've also never had a Muslim professor in my three and a half years here." (Student 10)  "I think if universities focused more on introducing people and less like words on paper [policy] like that would make more of a difference like if they hired faculty of color, race, queer, disabled, women professors it makes it massive difference like huge I'm literally in the global studies department and I can't even think of a professor of color. The race thing, you know, terms of culture, and so but I think faculty diversity is huge." (Student 11)
"[University] funding isn't there for some of these religious and cultural organizations." (Student 3)  "The University funding maximum that [MSA] has gotten ... you really run though that very fast ... we have to put up our sleeves and [fundraise] ourselves... there is no backing..." (Student 2)		

Theme	Dominant code	Interview quote sample
Insularity and clickiness that results in limited frequency in contact between in-group and majority student population and activities	Insularity	<p>“[Muslim organizations] tend to be clicky.” (Student 9)</p> <p>“MSA does have that problem [clickiness], but it doesn’t affect me...almost all my friends here are Muslim, and that’s maybe because I’m hanging out with other [Arabs]... I don’t try to go out and meet others.” (Student 1)</p> <p>“[Some Muslim students] are afraid to be open to different aspect of faith ... that causes people to kind of come within themselves and stay safe in what they know than to open their minds towards knowledge they hadn’t had before or open their minds to people who may disagree with them. Bottom line of being Muslim is missed.” (Student 2)</p>
In-group hierarchies and racism	Racism	<p>“[Muslim organizations] become more clicky or less clicky depending on how open they are and how effectively they are able to take into consideration the diversity of the Muslim population.” Student 2</p> <p>“I think there can be some racism and like discrimination, even within the Muslim community I've definitely felt, especially with certain cultural organizations are also Muslim, I've definitely felt like, okay, I'm not welcome because I'm not fully Arab, or like sometimes [Muslim organizations] can be dominated South Asians, and like I've heard from a lot of my friends who are Black Muslims that like they don't feel super included in [Muslim organizations]... if you're someone who's like not of that [dominant] culture but you are Muslim, you might not fully feel, and included all the time. That's just something that I've heard from a lot of my peers who were like Black Muslims.” (Student 22)</p> <p>“I do see a lot of clicks around here, especially dealing with [Muslim organizations], so much so that ... African American students here created their own [Muslim organization] ... because they felt that they were they weren't being treated properly ... there has been a sort of division.” (Student 13)</p>

Theme	Dominant code	Interview quote sample
		<p>“There was something going on in the [Muslim organization] about how the Black community Black Muslim community didn't feel represented ... but now there's a Black Muslim [organization] because of that.” (Student 14)</p>
		<p>“I do think Muslims like we are very diverse, we come from all races ... all backgrounds and ... people like very attached to their cultural identity to the point where, like they might like, you know, unintentionally like, they don't like try to like get more diverse friends or see other people's perspectives.”</p>
		<p>“[Being of a different sect], I've noticed sometimes people will be like, oh, so you're not actually Muslim and I've also kind of experienced like that type of judgment from other Muslims.” (Student 20)</p>
		<p>“Sometimes you feel like judged and then you see, other people that are like, you know, more religious, more spiritual, And I kind of like can bring you down like you know. Why am I not at that level yet? Why am I like, you know, still like figuring myself out?” (Student 19)</p>
		<p>“There's kind of like a bias or like an underhanded like judgment that comes off, which is why I feel like I kind of like separated from [Muslim organization] and was like okay, like, I'll just you know have my own Muslim friends like I can figure it out on my own, like I don't really like need to be a part of an organization for that.” (Student 18)</p>
		<p>“I don't even know the word for it. but I guess you could put it as like discriminatory because they weren't very open. We're kind of like have like this [Muslim] forum, I don't want to say superiority complex, but in a sense, kind of like talking down on like another person's [religious] sect, or like teachings or practices...” (Student 16)</p>
		<p>“Personally, I'm not an active, involved member of the [Muslim organization], or like [Pakistani organization]. I attend events occasionally, but I'm not an active member</p>



Theme	Dominant code	Interview quote sample
		<p>... I try to avoid...I was active my sophomore year here, but after that I kind of took my space from it, and I am not involved.” (Student 22)</p>
		<p>“... a clicky culture .... so it just felt like I was being judged all around ... so it kind of just made me feel like I wasn't I didn't belong there like very quickly.” (Student 12)</p>
		<p>“It was very clicky, very dramatic, very just not a positive situation for people who aren't part of that in group ... if that makes sense of these organizations so I kind of wasn't very interested in immersing myself in these organizations to begin with ... so that's why I kind of never took the step to become an active member ... we'll go to the prayers maybe some talks, join some classes, or whatever ... but not be in a like functioning part of the organization.” (Student 8)</p>
		<p>“On campus, I think a lot of Black Muslims didn't feel welcome. So they want to create your own organization ... how much pushback and struggle they faced ... people were calling them, you know, like not selfish, but like you know, saying, Oh, Muslim should be united, and ... kind of just missing their experiences and struggles as being one, Black Americans and two, Black Muslims in a predominantly Arab and South Asian organization ... it's unfortunate to hear that they were dismissed and like belittled for trying to create their own safe space and environment ... racism and anti-Blackness definitely exists in the Muslim community and the South Asian community especially. I've seen it back home and you know aunties, and you know all of it, and like the rhetoric and stuff.” (Student 22)</p>

## **Factors that Mitigate Anti-Muslim and Anti-Immigrant Sentiment**

The focus group data suggests that factors that mitigate anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant sentiment that first, second, and multi-generation American Muslim students have experienced in the three institutions of higher education examined in this study include the following:

- Reliance on student in-group students and organizations as primary systems of support
- Reliance on university systems of support
- Use of internal self-calming coping skills, including resignation or acceptance of the experiences as an inevitable part of life of being Muslim, minimizing, downplaying, or covering (Yoshino, 2007) of their Muslim or immigrant identity

### ***Reliance on In-Group Communities and Organization***

Most focus group participants indicated that they rely primarily on other Muslims, particularly the student communities of Muslims and cultural organizations of their immigrant heritage, for safety and support from anti-Muslim or anti-immigrant sentiments or incidents. One student remarked, “I will say that the [University] as an institution doesn't really help as much as I think they could ... So it's normally just talking to [Muslim] peers because they go through similar situations and stuff like that.” Another fourth-year student reported that,

I would say that the inclusion is a lot more of a culture of the student body and not necessarily the school that itself ... you know they're they have somewhat of a reputation, as far as you know, like the people that I know and the people that I've talked to during my time here like that they don't always follow up with you, don't know things the way that they should you know like I've heard a lot of instances of [this university's like Title IX policies, not following all the way through when they should in specific

circumstances, and stuff like that I think that the students do a really good job of making it feel like a diverse fun, safe, inclusive space. But I don't really attribute much of it to like faculty or administration.

A student in the same focus group, in agreement with this experience stated, "I think, that we all want to think that administration or faculty would do something about complaint like that of discrimination or prejudice, but I don't think they would if I'm being completely honest."

Similarly, a student in a different focus group expressed feeling pretty safe at their university, but rather than citing the institutional safety mechanisms, the student stated the reason she felt safe as quoted below:

I feel pretty safe at [this university] being around a big community of Muslims. There's like a lot of people that like, understand and I feel like would stand up for their brothers and sisters. I feel like [my university] doesn't like do a great job of like having those kind of like protective services.

### ***Reliance on University Systems of Support***

Two students from the total of twenty-two students who participated in the focus group indicated that they would reach out to university leadership to resolve a complaint of bias, discrimination, or harassment. One of these students stated,

[If I experienced discrimination], I would definitely go to the professor and like, I said most professors are very accommodating and very understanding. And most professors wouldn't really tolerate any kind of like racial or religious discrimination at all. But if it was a professor, then the good thing about college is there's levels to it. So if it's not like the professor ...then you have like the dean, and then like there's people above them, and you always have someone to turn to complain.

The other of these students commented,

[If I experienced discrimination, I would go to my [resident advisor] and I personally have like a really good relationship with her ... So I feel I'm gonna be really comfortable speaking up her ... she's very like open to like diversity like she always wants to do like diversity initiatives.

The researcher would be remiss to not mention the data in the section above that demonstrates that the overwhelming majority of students did not perceive institutional efforts as a mitigating factor to experiences of anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant sentiments. The reason for this appears to be a lack of faith and trust in institutional systems of complaint resolution and authentic support on campus based on institutional response *after* requesting help and obtaining no relief. In the two excerpts cited above, the students spoke hypothetically.

### ***Internal Coping Mechanisms***

Some focus group participants relied on internal coping mechanisms to deal with negative sentiments about their identity. Coping mechanisms included de-escalation, resigning themselves from these experiences, or accepting it as a part of life as a Muslim. A few students internalized, covered (Yoshino, 2007), or minimized their Muslim and immigrant identity. Yoshino (2007) explains “covering” as downplaying aspects of our identity that make us different from mainstream society. Internal coping mechanisms referenced during the discussion include the following:

- “I don’t let it get to me... you just hope that people realize things on their own...there’s no benefit to escalate the situation...I just ignore it...go get some water...walk away from the situation...”

- “I have kind of like built up a wall of like you know when someone is kind of discriminating against me...”
- “You kind of don't want to let it consume you, so you just try to like move it or like push it off to the side.”
- “Keep my head down.”
- “No matter what the university does for diversity, equity, and inclusion, it’s never gonna change. I don’t think the problem is going to be solved. There’s no point in getting worked up about it. It’s just a fact of life.”
- “For me it’s a personal struggle. I try too hard to fit in. I have trouble accepting my culture, religious identify, the mixing of both worlds.”

Table 14 below categorizes the themes and patterns highlighted above.

**Table 14**

## Mitigating Anti-Muslim and Anti-Immigrant Sentiment

Theme	Dominant code	Interview quote sample
Reliance on student in-group students and organizations as primary systems of support	Safety	<p>“I would say that the inclusion is a lot more of a culture of the student body and not necessarily the school that itself ... you know they're they have somewhat of a reputation, as far as you know, like the people that I know and the people that I've talked to during my time here like that they don't always follow up with you, don't know things the way that they should you know like I've heard a lot of instances of [this university's like Title IX policies, not following all the way through when they should in specific circumstances, and stuff like that I think that the students do a really good job of making it feel like a diverse fun, safe, inclusive space. But I don't really attribute much of it to like faculty or administration.” (Student 8)</p> <p>“I think that we all want to think that administration or faculty would do something about complaint like that of discrimination or prejudice, but I don't think they would if I'm being completely honest.” (Student 10)</p> <p>“Because I have a lot more people that are like me here [at the university]. So I feel like I have a community here that if I do feel attacked that they have my back and stuff like that.” (Student 6)</p> <p>“I feel pretty safe at [my university] being around a big community of Muslims. There's like a lot of people that like, understand and I feel like would stand up for their brothers and sisters. I feel like [my university] doesn't like do a great job of like having those kind of like protective services.” (Student 4)</p> <p>“I will say that the [University] as an institution doesn't really help as much as I think they could ... So it's normally just talking to [Muslim] peers because they go through similar situations and stuff like that.” (Student 19)</p>

Theme	Dominant code	Interview quote sample
		<p>“Any time that I have an issue like I usually go to my friends.” (Student 12)</p>
		<p>“When I face discrimination ... I was lucky I could kind of turn to a [mentor] ... But I just think like for the general person ... I don't think the systems are set up in a way where students can like easily report that, or like have someone to talk to.” (Student 7)</p>
		<p>“[MSA students] are more comfortable staying with people who they know” (Student 1)</p>
		<p>“...having the right guys around you is very big...can help you pull away from the situation [racial slurs] ...” (Student 2)</p>
		<p>“[bullying incident] ... I ended up just kind of like leaving that entire group and that's when I joined the [Muslim student organization]... actually because I was like, I want to be around other Muslims because these people don't understand me, and they don't like they would like, you know, the typical like pressuring you to drink pressure ... smoke ... and then being disrespectful when you like, don't want to do those things.” (Student 11)</p>
		<p>“I tend to hang around Muslims ... because it's like ... I'm a hijabi so like usually other hijabis like me easily get along because we have similar like interests, and similar ideals, and like the world and stuff.” (Student 4)</p>
<p>Reliance on university systems of support</p>	<p>Institutional support</p>	<p>“[If I experienced discrimination], I would definitely go to the Professor and like, I said most professors are very accommodating and very understanding. And most professors wouldn't really tolerate any kind of like racial or religious discrimination at all. But if it was a professor, then the good thing about college is there's levels to it. So if it's not like the professor ...then you have like the dean, and then like there's people above them, and you always have someone to turn to complain.” (Student 15)</p>

Theme	Dominant code	Interview quote sample
Use of internal self-calming coping skills	Internalizing, minimizing, covering	<p>“[If I experienced discrimination-, I would go to my [Resident Advisor] and I personally have like a really good relationship with her ... So I feel I'm gonna be really comfortable speaking up her ... she's very like open to like diversity like she always wants to do like diversity initiatives.” (Student 18)</p> <p>“There’s slurs here and there during basketball if you’re playing against people you don’t know and things go intense, but that’s people getting caught up in emotion in games or competition...I don’t let it get to me... you just hope that people realize things on their own...there’s no benefit to escalate the situation...I just ignore it...go get some water...walk away from the situation...” (Student 2)</p> <p>“I have kind of like built up a wall of like you know when someone is kind of discriminating against me, because like the way I look and stuff like that, so I just don't really take it under too much consideration, because it just happens on like a daily basis and stuff like that.” (Student 5)</p> <p>“Some of the stuff that happened that I went through was actually really messed up. But like, I think, just in the moment you kind of don't want to let it consume you. So you just try to like move it or like push it off to the side.” (Student 6)</p> <p>“[My parents] were just like, you know we look different we practice different we're a target. We're always going to be a target, [so] don't provoke, even though a lot of things happen unprovoked, don't provoke, cooperate, and do what you got to do to you know get out of the situation...if anything was to happen, part of me thinks I would regress into that mindset and not do anything about it.” (Student 22)</p>



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Theme	Dominant code	Interview quote sample
		“No matter what the university does for diversity, equity, and inclusion, it’s never gonna change. I don’t think the problem is going to be solved. There’s no point in getting worked up about it. It’s just a fact of life.” (Student 1)
		“For me it’s a personal struggle. I try too hard to fit in. I have trouble accepting my culture, religious identify, the mixing of both worlds...I’m trying to embrace my religious and cultural identity more.” (Student 3)

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## **Conclusion: Summary of Findings**

This final section summarizes the patterns and themes that emerged from the analysis of coded data from the focus groups. These findings provide insight into the first research question that explores the relationship between American Muslim students and their social integration experiences. Indicators of social integration from the perspective of Muslim include inclusion (i.e., measured by sense of belonging; perception of safety; sense of identity and esteem; cultural citizenship; and freedom from microaggression, bias, civil rights violations (discrimination), and hate-motivated incidents. Based on the findings of the focus groups, the data suggest the following:

1. Factors that promote the social integration of Muslim students in the college setting include being part of a diverse student population; engaging in diverse student organizations; having an in-group system of support with those who share similar religious and immigrant experiences; living in an environment where students may develop and cultivate friendships with other Muslims students and student who share similar immigrant experiences; faculty and administration that is supportive of diverse student identities and needs; and institutional diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, including diversity statements and religious accommodations.
2. Factors that impede upon meaningful social integration include experiences of discrimination, harassment, microaggression, and bias incidents; lack of knowledge of institutional support mechanisms; lack of trust and faith in institutional structures to address discrimination, harassment, microaggression, and bias incidents; a homogenous faculty that is not representative of the student body population it serves; limited student funding to support diverse student identities; insularity from

university activities and experiences outside of students' comfort zone resulting in clickiness with members of organizations closely connected to their Muslim and/or immigrant identity; and in-group hierarchies and racism on the basis of race, culture, national origin, religious sect, and religiosity.

3. Factors that mitigate students' experiences of anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant sentiment include reliance on student in-group systems of support related to inculcating a sense of safety from bias incidents, microaggression, discrimination, and harassment; reliance on university systems of support; and use of internal coping skills such as walking away and not reacting, resignation or acceptance that anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant systems are inherent and will always exist, and minimizing, downplaying, or covering aspects of their identity in order to fit into mainstream university culture.

The next chapter, Chapter VI, discusses, analyzes, and summarizes the patterns and themes that emerged from the analysis of coded data from the administrative interviews. These findings will provide insight into the second research question that explores the relationship between educational institutions' administrative civil rights policies and practices and the social integration of American Muslim students.

## **CHAPTER VI Findings from Administrator Interviews: “Have to maintain neutrality”**

### **Introduction**

This chapter analyzes the patterns and themes that emerge from the findings of the in-depth one-on-one interviews with university administrators engaged in addressing student experiences related to bias, microaggressions, allegations of civil rights violations, and hate incidents to better understand the role of institutions of higher education in the administration of civil rights policies and practices as they impact Muslim students. Interviews play a central role in the data collection in a grounded theory study (Creswell, 2009). In order to obtain information regarding the role of institutions of higher education in the administration of civil rights policies and practices as they impact Muslim students, the researcher utilized a cross-case interpretive analysis of three selected exemplar institutions of higher education located in the southeast region of the United States. A fundamental reason for cross-case analysis is to deepen understanding and explanation and to enhance transferability to other contexts (Miles et al., 2020).

One administrator from each of the three selected institutions of higher education participated in the in-depth one-on-one interview. The interviews lasted approximately between one to one and a half hours in length. Each participant was well-prepared and appeared vested in providing thorough and candid responses to the researcher’s questions. The participants were asked a series of questions relating to the role of their office; their job responsibilities; the role of federal guidance in their processes; the complaint resolution process for responding to alleged incidents of bias, microaggression, civil rights violations, and hate incidents; proactive efforts at preventing incidents of bias, microaggression, civil rights violations, and hate incidents; religious-based accommodations; and their experiences with Muslim students. They were also

asked to provide published information about their school's civil rights and diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives, including policies and procedures. The interview questions are included as Appendix C. The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Once the interviews were transcribed, the researcher coded the data using a-priori codes developed prior to the data collection, in vivo codes that emerged from the administrators' own language during the interview, and secondary axial coding to identify relationships and patterns, and group them into categories and themes. Policies and procedures referenced by the participants supplemented the thematic assessment of the role of institutions of higher education in the administration of civil rights policies and practices.

Described below is a summary of each university's civil rights and diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, and an analysis of the findings of the interviews, along with excerpts from interview participants that illustrate the patterns and themes that emerged. A summary of the descriptions of the three institutions of higher education is presented in Table 15, and a complete list of administrator quotations is categorized with the corresponding themes and codes and presented at the end of this chapter in Table 16 and Table 17.

### **A Description of the Institutions of Higher Education<sup>55</sup>**

The three institutions of higher education selected for the case study are similarly situated in regard to their status as large public universities receiving federal funding. The student populations for each of these universities is on the larger size, ranging from approximately 20,000 to 30,000. Diverse campus settings were selected to capture a wide range of campus experiences in a suburban setting, urban setting, and rural setting. Each institution's civil rights arm is located within a larger diversity, equity, and inclusion structure. Each institution's current

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<sup>55</sup> The extent of data disclosure considers confidentiality concerns; all efforts have been made to ensure anonymity.

version of their civil rights policy is fairly new, revised in 2020 or 2021. Information about each institution’s civil rights and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives is illustrated in Table 15 below.

**Table 15**

Summary of the Institutions of Higher Education

University-wide DEI strategic plan incorporates civil rights administration with the DEI framework			
Approach to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)	University A (suburban)	University B (urban)	University C (rural)
Adoption of most recent university DEI strategic plan	2018 (first DEI director position created in 2016)	2018	2019 (first university strategic plan that directly integrated diversity)
Civil rights/non-discrimination policy	Revised in 2021	Revised in 2020	Revised in 2021
Civil rights capacity: number of employees in the civil rights office (administering Title VI complaints)	4	4	4
DEI capacity: number of leadership positions in the DEI office	15	13	28

**The Day-to-Day Street-Level Bureaucracy of Civil Rights**

The interview data provided the researcher a solid understanding of the general structure of the civil rights arm at these three institutions of higher education examined in this case study, the administration of civil rights policies and practices at each of institutions, and insight into

ways in which each of the administrators interviewed, along with their team, administer civil rights on a day-to-day basis at their respective universities. The interview data revealed the following primary themes relating to the administration of civil rights in the three institutions of higher education examined in this study:

- Sexual harassment has been a catalyst for strengthening institutional civil rights processes;
- Civil rights administrators are marrying civil rights values with diversity, equity, and inclusive excellence initiatives in addressing complaints of bias and civil rights violations;
- New administrative leadership leads and supports new institutional civil rights structures;
- Federal civil rights guidance informs implementation and enforcement of institutional practices;
- Institutional civil rights policies are more expansive than federal civil rights laws and regulations, particularly in the case of religious-based discrimination;
- Civil rights administrators are engaging in prevention of bias and civil rights violations through civil rights training;
- There are institutional constraints in the civil rights complaint reporting and resolution process;
- Muslim students are not reporting allegations of bias or civil rights violations; and
- Civil rights administrative leaders promote institutional awareness to support diverse student identities and needs.

Described below is the summary of those results.

### ***Sexual Harassment as a Catalyst to Strengthen Institutional Civil Rights Processes***

While processing civil rights complaints is a legal mandate historically embedded in university systems since the passage of civil rights laws, most significantly the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the data revealed that the structure and processes of this university mandate has recently evolved through the lens of the universities' strategic diversity, equity, and inclusion goals. This evolution has taken place within the last few years. The interview data indicated that the evolution of the civil rights structure commenced during the time that high profile and well publicized campus related sexual assault allegations arose as a significant societal problem throughout the nation's college campuses. In fact, the data suggests that strengthening Title IX policies on sexual harassment was the shoo-in for strengthening Title VI policies for discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, (and religion). One university administrator who leads the civil rights team on enforcing their anti-discrimination policy related to race, color, religion, and national origin revealed,

So my office at [university], it's new as of last year ... It was carved out specifically from Title IX ... there was a perception, and perhaps a reality, that a lot of the non-Title IX cases like non-sexual assault ... cases, were being neglected, and so they carved out this function in this office to help kind of fill that void.

It is not clear from the findings the role that other forms of social unrest, including the Black Lives Matter movement, and heightened hate targeting of Asian populations subsequent to the COVID-19 crisis, have had in the development and implementation of Title VI policies.

### ***New Administrative Leadership Leads and Supports New Institutional Civil Rights Structures***

Regardless of the history of this evolution of civil rights practice in educational institutions, the data indicates that this evolving office structure through the lens of diversity,



equity, and inclusion appears to be shifting the status quo on how universities administer civil rights values. One administrator stated,

[Our civil rights office] is housed within [diversity, equity, and inclusion] and the notion of inclusive excellence ... and in a diverse, equitable, inclusive, and belonging environment [has] grown and embedded into the way that the university talks and speaks ... it's refreshing that we're marrying [legal compliance] work with work that's more interactive, skills building, civility building, and then we can get into some of these hard issues of bias and microaggression ...

The data reveals that each administrator interviewed is designated in a leadership position in connection to their respective university's diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in the area of civil rights complaints. Within this framework, each administrator provides lead management, oversight, and implementation of the institutions' civil rights complaint resolution processes for students and employees; responds to reports and complaints of prohibited discrimination and harassment; ensures institutional compliance and enforcement of federal and state civil rights laws and regulations and corresponding institutional anti-discrimination policies; and administers civil rights related training to institutional employees and key student leaders.

It is significant to note that along with the new office structures, the roles of each of the administrators interviewed is fairly new within the last ten months to two years. One administrator remarked,

So my office at [university], it's new as of last year. I came in in June of last year, June 2021, and so that that was kind of the inaugural version of my office ... [policy development] were relatively new...they're kind of officially stamped just before I came in.

The second administrator reported, “I'm here a year here which sounds long, but it's actually been very short to know kind of the historical context I think sometimes.” The third administrator shared, “So I arrived at [university] in in 2019 ... so the extent of my knowledge about the development of these policies ... is a little bit outside ... “

In sum, the findings indicate that these civil rights administrators' roles fall within Lipsky's (2010) characterization of their function as street-level bureaucrats. These administrators are expected to address allegations of bias and/or civil rights violations on a case-by-case holistic basis through an imperfect systemic process that requires them to use administrative discretion within institutional constraints in solving human problems that have a significant impact on the quality of life experiences of students. The findings below underscore the constraints and challenges posed by this evolving institutional structure.

### ***Federal Civil Rights Guidance Informs Local Institutional Practices***

The data demonstrated that each administrator is well versed in, and relies on, guidance issued by the OCR, DOJ, and Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to interpret and implement civil rights laws and regulations. Each administrator also plays a role, albeit a more limited one, in addressing bias incidents. All of the administrators are attorneys, having been involved in civil rights or equity initiatives in their prior role before taking on this inaugural role at their respective university. While in some cases, the civil rights policies were developed prior to their arrival into this role, each are currently involved in establishing and revising processes, practices, and procedures for their office. This is where administrative discretion comes into play. The theme of administrative discretion is explored in the next section.

While the data indicates that federal and state civil rights laws and regulations shape the civil rights policies of each of these institutions, the institutions rely heavily on federal guidance

documents to administer those policies in practice, including implementing and enforcing federal and state civil rights laws and regulations, as well as training their employees on these civil rights laws and regulations. One administrator stated,

... So when we're developing a policy, the easy part is to say that we prohibit discrimination based on all these categories. But it's really the enforcement and interpretation of those policies in kind of the prospective way where a lot of those guidances become really important. right? So looking at OCR guidance, looking at DOJ guidance, looking at EEOC guidance ... that's where the federal guidance and the more kind of informal guidance from those agencies becomes really critical because you're looking at how the agency is interpreting the law, or how is the agency going to be enforcing the law.

### ***Institutional Civil Rights Policies Are More Expansive Than Federal Civil Rights Laws***

The data shows that the institutional policies are structured in a way that authorizes the civil rights administrators to interpret federal and state civil rights laws and regulations in an *expansive* way to ensure fairness, equity, and just outcomes. One administrator remarked, “The non-discrimination policies that we have go above and beyond in terms of providing protections to employees and students...Our policies are a step beyond ... legal bounds...” This is particularly significant in the area of religious discrimination. While Title VI of the Civil Rights Act does not expressly prohibit religious-based discrimination, and the examination of religious-based discrimination is more nuanced in OCR analysis, each of the institutions’ policies include express prohibition of discrimination on the basis of religion or perceived religion. One administrator indicated,

There are other federal rules governing discrimination based on religion, we don't as a university ... have to parse out whether ... behavior amounts to harassment based on religion [while OCR would have to consider other factors to determine their subject matter jurisdiction over the matter because of the way Title VI is structured].

In addition, student conduct that may be deemed legal, or protected by free speech laws, in federal civil rights laws or regulations, may nonetheless be considered a violation of the institution's anti-discrimination policy or student code of conduct. At least one administrator reported that direct racial slurs aimed at a specific student or a community of students may likely fit into this category of policy violation, depending on the facts of the situation, while it may not rise to the level of an illegal act or violation of federal civil rights laws. A significant challenge in regard to this distinction between federal law and institutional policy is the issue of speech protections which is explored in the next section.

### ***Civil Rights Administrators Are Engaging in Prevention of Bias and Civil Rights Violations Through Civil Rights Training***

While the data demonstrates that a large component of the administration of civil rights laws is *responding* to allegations of bias incidents and civil rights violations (harassment and discrimination) as described above, the data also shows that each institution also plays a key role in *preventing* bias incidents and civil rights violations. Prevention through these civil rights offices has been primarily in the form of training on civil rights laws, policies, and practices, particularly mandatory reporting requirements. It is important to note that each administrator indicated that the primary responsibility of prevention is addressed through other facets of diversity, equity, and inclusion work, but for their civil rights arm—the offices that address allegations of civil rights violations on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin—training

on civil rights laws and policies is typically their primary tool for addressing this issue from a proactive angle. Each administrator described their roles in the training aspect:

- “Part of my role and what I oversee is mandatory training for all employees ... The mandatory reporting piece is part of the anti-discrimination policy ... main focus of the training is basically like, the main message is that we have to absolutely report; When you see something, and then is what we expected to report.”
- “We issue trainings. A fundamental part of that prevention piece is training...not just necessarily compliance training ... we can tailor a specific program for that population. [Training has] evolved... it focuses a lot on Title IX, but as much as I can help it, we try to also cover everything else that our anti-discrimination policy and that includes a focus on discrimination, based on based on race, color, religion, national origin.”
- “Our office preventive wise [does] training for all employees ... on preventing and addressing discrimination and harassment.”

### ***Institutional Constraints in the Civil Rights Reporting and Resolution Process***

Each administrator shared the written policies and procedures related to reporting mechanisms at their institution. The data suggests that the administrators are aware that many students are not as familiar with their offices and their role in administering civil rights complaints as they may be with other offices. One administrator remarked, “I think that when students have an issue, they Google it ... a lot of times...the reports come in through [a different office] because students are ... less familiar with our office.” There was also a general acknowledgment on the limitations of institutional systems of reporting, including the complex language of legalese, communication gaps and silos among offices within the same institution,

and varied ways of reporting allegations different types of civil rights violations and bias incidents that created confusion in navigating the procedures. One administrator stated,

If it is a complaint that comes in about stuff that might be a civil rights issue and it's about a student and it's not [related to sexual harassment], then that typically falls under ... [a different office]. While I am in a position to provide guidance to students affairs, and to anyone who might need it related to how the civil rights laws might apply to a situation that comes up, my team doesn't actually process those complaints or report ... depending on what happened, we may not even know about it because they might be processed entirely through [a different office].

An administrator at one of these three universities is leading efforts at strengthening the system of reporting by streamlining reporting and simplifying instructions on reporting.

We have a reporting mechanism where ... we try and make it easy for people to bring concerns, reports in many different ways...[including online] ... you can report bias, discrimination... [including mandatory reporting requirements] ...to the extent they identify potential discrimination or harassment of protected classes, our office automatically gets those ... If [a student] talks to something [like a resident advisor, student advisory group, etc.], they're going to get that information because the community's trained to get that into centrally.

The administrator also stated,

One of the weaknesses is that we don't necessarily speak the language because we are so good at the legalese, so we made that a priority [working on making reporting system more accessible] and everybody was right on board... we are revamping some of our materials because they're very text heavy, legalese heavy...

Here, the findings suggest that the bureaucratic limitations of access to this complaint system are a constraint that is impeding the ability of civil rights administrators to serve students equitably. This finding is consistent with Lipsky's notion that bureaucratic structures make street-level bureaucrats' job impossible. In this case, it appears that the institution expects the administrators to solve individual problems of civil rights on a daily basis, but has not developed a system that is equitable for students to access this system of justice. This problem now falls on the bureaucrats who are scrambling to find solutions in the face of inadequate systems and/or resources. The ultimate impact is on the life chances of the student experiencing disparate treatment or harassment on campus on the basis of their race, religion, color, or national origin.

### ***Muslim Students Are Not Reporting Allegations of Bias or Civil Rights Violations***

The interview data demonstrates that in general Muslim students have scantily reported incidents of bias or allegations of civil rights violations in any of the three institutions of higher education in recent years. One administrator noted,

I would have to go back to say five years; that's the last religious or ethnicity based [complaint] brought by a Muslim student ... I've had other religious discrimination claims since then but not from Muslim students... I would have to go back even farther than five years for a [bias] type of complaint.

Another administrator indicated that, "If [a Muslim student] had a complaint of discrimination [or harassment], then it would necessarily have to come through my team. I have not seen that."

The third administrator reported that, "There are not many I'd say there was one in the past year ... we did an inquiry ... and it was a [miscommunication] this doesn't mean that things aren't happening."

Each of the administrators underscored the fact that their offices typically do not track the specific religious identity of the complainant in responding to allegations of religious based discrimination or harassment. One commented, “So when those comes in, we're not tracking the religious identity, or the even the perceived identity of the person ... so I have no idea what religious backgrounds ... that's not something we track.” Nonetheless, each administrator reported that they consulted with their staff to anecdotally report numbers of complaints or reports submitted by Muslims for purposes of the interview. The primary concerns that these civil rights administrators noted from Muslim students centers around requests for accommodating students’ needs during Ramadan. In one case, there was some acknowledgement that lack of reporting does not necessarily correlate the number of civil rights incidents that occur in reality.

Based on this data, a conclusion can be drawn that that the administrative civil rights policies and practices promulgated by the three institutions of higher education examined did not significantly mitigate Muslim student experiences of bias incidents, microaggression, civil rights violations, safety fears, or hate incidents from the student population examined. While the constraint of challenges of student access to the complaint process helps to explain this finding, research by Morrill (2010) also explains that under-reporting is actually a common phenomenon. Morrill describes under-reporting as paradox between legal rights as a sought-after guarantee of social justice, but little used as a means to redress in the face of social injustices. According to the literature, the numbers of civil rights complaints filed by students is typically not reflective of the number of civil rights violations that occur.



*Civil Rights Administrators Promote Institutional Awareness to Support Diverse Student Identities and Needs*

The data clearly demonstrated that the administrators played some type of proactive role in increasing institutional awareness of diverse student needs, including providing resources and consult to different department on cultural competence of Muslims and unique cultural identities, arbitration services in different department on bias-related matters, and education on Muslim student needs related to fasting schedules during the month of Ramadan.<sup>56</sup> One administrator pointed out,

Ramadan falls around exam time ... so for the most part students who need an accommodation related to taking an exam can request one ... following the policy and [office] will work as, an advocate in a way, and working with the faculty to see if there's a way to accommodate whatever the student needs are relating to that.

Another administrator reported that, "Last year, we ... sent out the communication because Ramadan was overlapping with finals ... So you know, we work different offices to get some messaging up to instructors to figure out how to accommodate students with that scheduling." A third administrator indicated that, "I think with Ramadan, they do particular work around meals for some students ..." In one case, an administrator indicated that their office has a role to play in case a student and professor cannot agree on a religious accommodation. He stated, "Sometimes it requires a little bit more, and so sometimes our office will get brought into that process as an arbitrator, but it's not a primary function of our office." In this administrator's experience, this situation has not occurred with any Muslim students, but this administrator has been involved in

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<sup>56</sup> The month of Ramadan according to the Islamic (lunar) calendar is an especially holy month for practicing Muslims who observe this month by abstaining from food and drink, among other worldly pleasures, from sunrise to sunset each day of the month as an expression of devotion to God. The Islamic calendar is a lunar one, so the month of Ramadan changes from year to year.

arbitrating accommodation requests for Jewish and Christian students. The student focus groups yielded similar results that Muslim students generally felt supported in their identities by their university in regard to their unique needs for religious-based accommodations during the month of Ramadan.

Table 16 below categorizes the themes and patterns highlighted above:

**Table 16**

## Day-To-Day Administration of Civil Rights

Theme	Dominant code	Interview quote sample
Sexual harassment has been a catalyst for strengthening institutional civil rights processes	Title IX influence	<p>“So my office at [university], it’s new as of last year ... It was carved out specifically from Title IX ... there was a perception, and perhaps a reality, that a lot of the non-Title IX cases like non-sexual assault ...cases, were being neglected, and so they carved out this function in this office to help kind of fill that void.”</p> <p>“OCR been so more active in the Title IX realm that we apply that too much of the work, and it informs kind of way to do other work ... like the way they borrow from areas in terms of thinking about due process ... or fairness ... or the rights of the complainant; so we use all that very much ...kind of embedded ... because there's been so much movement in that area, [it] makes sense over here.”</p>
Civil rights administrators are marrying civil rights values with diversity, equity, and inclusive excellence initiatives in addressing complaints of bias and civil rights violations	Marriage	<p>“[Our office] is housed within the [strategic diversity, equity, and inclusion plan] and the notion of inclusive excellence is, and in a diverse, equitable, inclusive, and belonging environment is kind of and it's grown and embedded into the way that the university talks and speaks ... we are far from perfect, but I think in prevention you're creating, your norming, your social norming these things...”</p> <p>“It’s refreshing that we’re marrying [legal compliance] work with work that’s more interactive, skills building, civility building, and then we can get into some of these hard issues of bias and microaggression ...”</p> <p>“The [diversity, equity, and inclusion office is the kind of the arm of the University that that tries to foster as inclusive environment. We try to do that as well, but we also have to have a compliance lens. So we're really looking at discrimination and harassment and making sure that everyone in the university is following the Federal rights laws and regulations.”</p>

Theme	Dominant code	Interview quote sample
New administrative leadership leads and supports new institutional civil rights structures	New leadership	<p>“So my office at [university], it’s new as of last year. I came in in June of last year, June 2021, and so that that was kind of the inaugural version of my office ... [policy development] were relatively new...they’re kind of officially stamped just before I came in.”</p> <p>“I’m here a year here which sounds long, but it's actually been very short to know kind of the historical context I think sometimes.”</p> <p>“So I arrived at [university] in in 2019 ... so the extent of my knowledge about the development of these policies ... is a little bit outside ...”</p>
Federal civil rights guidance informs implementation and enforcement of institutional practices	Federal guidance	<p>“[OCR guidance letters] absolutely shapes both our procedures and the way that we process cases which I put into place ... and they also shape our practice ... when I’m training our civil rights investigators ... it’s from a lens of guidance letters ... and the thought process that OCR would apply ...”</p> <p>“The legal and regulatory guidance is the foundation... OCR guidance is critical not just in the development but also the interpretation of the policy. So when we’re developing a policy, the easy part is to say that we prohibit discrimination based on all these categories. But it's really the enforcement and interpretation of those policies in kind of the prospective way where a lot of those guidances become really important. right? So looking at looking at OCR guidance, looking at DOJ guidance, looking at EEOC guidance ... that's where the federal guidance and the more kind of informal guidance from those agencies becomes really critical because you're looking at how the agency is interpreting the law, or how is the agency going to be enforcing the law.”</p> <p>“We watch closely what particularly OCR and DOE are saying and doing as well as EEOC.”</p>

Theme	Dominant code	Interview quote sample
<p>Institutional civil rights policies are more expansive than federal civil rights laws and regulations, particularly in the case of religious-based discrimination</p>	<p>Expansive interpretation</p>	<p>“Our [university’s] non-discrimination policy ... includes religion as well as, and that draws from, but is broader than federal state civil rights laws.”</p> <p>“There are other federal rules governing discrimination based on religion, we don't as a university ... have to parse out whether ... behavior amounts to harassment based on religion [while OCR would have to consider other factors to determine their subject matter jurisdiction over the matter because of the way Title VI is structured].”</p> <p>“The non-discrimination policies that we have go above and beyond in terms of providing protections to employees and students...Our policies are a step beyond... legal bounds...”</p> <p>“[In the situation of a racial slur], I think policy does have room to sept in to say ... we’re gonna regulate conduct among our community to t standard that’s maybe above a legal protection ... so you might not be found to have violated law for calling someone a slur, but that conduct could constitute harassment under our policies, especially if it’s something that is repeated ... policy could potentially step up in to say, this might not be illegal conduct but it’s not okay in this community.”</p>
<p>Civil rights administrators are engaging in prevention of bias and civil rights violations through civil rights training</p>	<p>Training</p>	<p>“Part of my role and what I oversee is mandatory training for all employees ...”</p> <p>“[Training has] evolved ... it focuses a lot on Title IX, but as much as I can help it, we try to also cover everything else that our anti-discrimination policy and that includes a focus on discrimination, based on based on race, color, religion, national origin. So that's part of what we do, and a formal way.”</p> <p>“All employees are required to take compliance training which is required within 90 days of employment, and then every 2 years thereafter. to satisfy that requirement, they can either take an on-demand module that is available through a contractor, or they can sign up to take a training that is offered and coordinating by the assistant director.”</p>

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“We issue trainings. A fundamental part of that prevention piece is training...not just necessarily compliance training ... we can tailor a specific program for that population.”

“The mandatory reporting piece is part of the anti-discrimination policy ... main focus of the training is basically like, the main message is that we have to absolutely report; When you see something, and then is what we expected to report.”

“All employees are required to take Title IX training, as well as the nondiscrimination training... everyone was required to take the non-discrimination training this past years... regardless of their amount of tenure...so that was a new thing this year...I’m thinking every two years ... that’s the goal.”

“Our office preventive wise [does] training for all employees ... on preventing and addressing discrimination and harassment.”

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There are institutional constraints in the civil rights complaint reporting and resolution process

Systems constraints

“I think that when students have an issue, they Google it ... a lot of times...the reports come in through [a different office] because students are ... less familiar with our office.”

“We have a reporting mechanism where ... we try and make it easy for people to bring concerns, reports in many different ways... [including online] ... you can report bias, discrimination... [including mandatory reporting requirements] ...to the extent they identify potential discrimination or harassment of protected classes, our office automatically gets those ...”

“We are revamping some of our materials because they’re very text heavy, legalese heady...”

“If [a student] talks to something [like a resident advisor, student advisory group, etc.] they’re going to get that information because the community’s trained to get that into centrally.”

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“One of the weaknesses is that we don’t necessarily speak the language because we are so good at the legalese, so we made that a priority [working on making reporting system more accessible] and everybody was right on board.”

“If it is a complaint that comes in about stuff that might be a civil rights issue and it's about a student and it's not [related to sexual harassment], then that typically falls under ... [a different office]. While I am in a position to provide guidance to students affairs, and to anyone who might need it related to how the civil rights laws might apply to a situation that comes up, my team doesn't actually process those complaints or report ... depending on what happened, we may not even know about it Because they might be processed entirely through [a different office].”

“It's natural that the more people you have in a process... we have a lot of different offices that are potentially involved in deciding how to respond to a situation ... And which office is the correct one ... we also are more likely to have communications, issues ...you also have the potential for miscommunication or understanding about who will reach out and people can drop fault.”

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Muslim students  
are not reporting  
allegations of  
bias or civil  
rights violations

Reporting

“If [a Muslim student] had a complaint of discrimination [or harassment], then it would necessarily have to come through my team. I have not seen that.”

“I would have to go back to say five years; that’s the last religious or ethnicity based [complaint] brought by a Muslim student... that was an allegation that the student was... pushed into a conduct process for cheating on an exam ... I’ve had other religious discrimination claims since then but not from Muslim students... I would have to go back even farther than five years for a [bias] type of complaint.”

“A really small, very small number of complaints that kind of stem in the area of religion, race, national origin, color... [complaints by Muslim students ...there are not many I’d say there was one in the past year ... we did an inquiry ... and it was a [miscommunication] this doesn’t mean that things aren’t happening. I’m trying to think of any other and complaints in ... this area, so that we did not have many to count ...

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I'm guessing five or under...we've worked... to get messaging up to instructors to figure out how to accommodate students [during Ramadan.]”

“So when those comes in, we're not tracking the religious identity, or the even the perceived identity of the person ... so I have no idea what religious backgrounds ... that's not something we track.”

“If we were to pull the raw data, it would just pull religion, it wouldn't draw which religion.”

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Civil rights  
administrative  
leaders promote  
institutional  
awareness to  
support diverse  
student identities  
and needs

Accommodations

“Students may seek academic accommodation ... for religious reasons [in a different office] ...one thing that has come up and was something that resulted in a report to our office ... is that Ramadan falls around exam time... for the most part, students who need an accommodation related to taking an exam.”

“Ramadan falls around exam time ... so for the most part students who need an accommodation related to taking an exam can request one ... following the policy and [office] will work as, an advocate in a way, and working with the faculty to see if there's a way to accommodate whatever the student needs are relating to that.”

“I think with Ramadan, they do particular work around meals for some students ...”

“Last year, we ... sent out the communication because Ramadan was overlapping with finals ... So you know, we work different offices to get some messaging up to instructors to figure out how to accommodate students with that scheduling.”

“[Different office] has primary authority over the religious accommodations...often times they'll just ask students and professors to come to an agreement ...sometimes it requires a little bit more, and ... our office will get brought into that process as an arbitrator....I haven't encountered [requests for accommodation by Muslims] ... what I've encountered more often ...were accommodations for Jewish students ... and Christian students.”

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“Muslim students becoming radicalized, that to me would potentially create a civil rights issue that would need to be addressed proactively, and I would try to facilitate conversations with whoever I needed to make sure that we aren't stereotyping people based on a particular class and try to provide a little bit of education and coaching around that.”

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## **Administrative Discretion and Addressing Bias**

The interview data provided the researcher insight into the role that administrative discretion plays in the implementation and enforcement of civil rights policies and practices, including ways in which these bureaucrats address incidents of bias and microaggression that may not meet the threshold for actionable anti-discrimination policy violation.

- Unifying a fragmented system of civil rights compliance with diversity, equity, and inclusive excellence initiatives
- Holistic administrative discretion in civil rights implementation and enforcement
- Addressing microaggression and bias incidents that do not fall within the institution's civil rights policy and practices
- Tension between seeking relief from bias incidents and free speech laws
- Managing expectations of students and institutional players
- Civil rights administrators perceive themselves as neutral arbitrators

Described below is the summary of those results.

### ***Unifying A Fragmented System of Civil Rights Compliance with Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion***

While the section above explores the budding marriage between civil rights compliance and university diversity, equity, and inclusive excellence initiatives as a vision and construct, the data shows that it is actually the administrators, who through their discretionary authority, navigate the various parts of unifying this fragmented system into practice. The administrators' perceptions of putting this construct into practice was described in the following way by one administrator:

...there are different offices across campuses that have different roles to play, and the proactive part of creating an environment that is inclusive and, to the extent that we can, free from discrimination and harassment based on race, color, and national origin ... But we also have a ... responsibility to provide technical assistance about what the policy means, what discrimination and harassment, what those terms mean, to the extent that we can ...

Another administrator stated,

[A different office] ... works with the various student organizations ... that tries to foster as inclusive environment.... We try to do that as well, but we also have to have a compliance lens ... So we're really looking at discrimination and harassment and making sure that everyone in the university is following the federal rights laws and regulations.

The third administrator characterized this dynamic in the following way:

When they come from the land of legal compliance, thinking not necessarily from the land of those who research and study how to affect behavioral change, that's where you want to lean on experts in those fields to help us really get to some of the issues that are doing on human behavior or changing mindsets first. We do our best with the structure that we have.

### ***Holistic Administrative Discretion in Civil Rights Implementation and Enforcement***

Administrative discretion plays a significant role in embedding the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion into civil rights administration beyond legal compliance (Lipsky, 2010). Because legal compliance can be perceived as very black and white, humanizing these legal constructs into achieving practical justice or meaningful resolution in a holistic way is a critical

aspect of this work, as the data illustrates. One administrator described the discretion applied to achieving justice and fairness in the following way:

Which of these guidance[s] and regs ... really is it time to apply those, or if not, what about those do we think ... will actually create changes that we want some discretion in the analysis going on because not everything in the Title IX realm works.

Another administrator thoughtfully remarked,

I think the primary challenge is whether the parties ... can get some sense of justice ... we try to help folks ...navigate those consideration ... kind of talk through any concerns ... So we kind of lean on each other, to inform like what would be the best practice ... what's fair for our population ...

Each of the three street-level bureaucrats, perhaps because the essence of their work is civil rights, are fully cognizant of the impact that their administrative discretion has on the life chances of the vulnerable populations they serve. Because policy implementation comes down to these street-level bureaucrats, they bear the greatest responsibility to interpret equal protection principles, laws, and policies in moral, ethical, and socially equitable manner (Alexander, 1997; Frederickson, 1990; Lipsky, 2010).

### ***Addressing Microaggression and Bias Incidents That Do Not Fall Within the Institutions'***

#### ***Civil Rights Policies and Practices***

With this administrative discretion comes the challenge of not overextending their authority. The greatest challenge that administrators expressed that they faced was in addressing bias incidents on the basis of a protected category that fall short of actionable civil rights policy violations. The administrators shared the following about carefully managing reports or

complaints that do not meet the threshold of a legal or policy violation, but are nonetheless inequitable or unjust:

...when a bias report comes in, and we talk about it, and we've made it decision that hey, this probably isn't something that we can refer to an office to deal with formally, we still often engage with ... [a dean's office] or some other office, whatever the most appropriate office is ... to meet with the person who reported... to see if there's anything we can do to support them ... in a voluntary way to offer to facilitate a conversation, so that if there is any opportunity for an educational solution to the issue that we can explore.

Another administrator indicated,

There isn't really a formal process for handling bias incidents at [university]...our office does end up with a lot of them, just because they are often tied to these protected categories of race, religion national origin, so when those issues come into our office, we'll offer resolution options for them ... we also offer an informal resolution function ... that's more focused on kind of restorative justice [for bias issues]... more oriented towards educational outcomes ... even if we're not finding policy violations, we're providing that education ... resolution for the parties...trying to get some sort of shared understanding. I think it does kind of help to shape the culture ...a little bit more ... impactful than the investigations.

This theme was brought up over and over again during the interviews, in the following statements:

- “There are a lot of times where something will come in and just you know on its face won’t be a policy violation, but you know there are times when schools ... handle those incidents on their own.”
- “There are so many kinds of individual concerns, most of them not going to be policy type violations, but just people who have concerns about things ... resources are limited, people are limited, so it’s a challenge.”
- “The vast majority of claims that come into our office could potentially be resolved with an informal resolution if the parties agree to it.”
- “We’re doing outreach ... having coaching conversations with the individual who has done the behavior [that is objectively offensive yet falls outside of actionable policy action].”
- “Discrimination and harassment—those are terms of art. They are conclusions that we have to arrive at after a full and fair evaluation of evidence ... they are also ever evolving sociological and political contexts ... and they’re sometimes used interchangeably with terms like microaggressions and bias, and for example, we may hear about a hostile climate in an area, but the specific area may fall very much short of discrimination of discrimination or harassment, short of a policy violation. In other words, ... it’s not uncommon to see a gap between the perception of what the policy prohibits, and what the policy actually prohibits ... so a lot of the times we have the issue of making sure that someone doesn’t do too much in response to a concern that isn’t a policy violation.”

The findings suggest this constraint is the result of a fragmented system of civil rights in which some hurtful actions on the basis of race, color, religion, and national origin have legal

consequences and others do not. These street-level bureaucrats have been placed in the uncomfortable position of navigating these differences with the public they serve. On one hand, they want to bring justice and a fair outcome; on the other hand, they are constrained by the limitations of legal precedent and rigid processes for conciliation and resolution. This dynamic has created the nervousness that Gooden (2014) contends has stifled street-level bureaucrats, leading to an inability to seriously advance the reduction of inequities this civil rights system is meant to reduce.

### ***Tension Between Seeking Relief from Bias Incidents and Free Speech Laws***

A significant factor that exacerbates the challenge of addressing bias incidents for these civil rights bureaucrats is making sense of high-profile pending university-related litigation pitting the notions of offensive conduct and chilling protected speech. The administrators reported that all universities across the nation are carefully following the development of these key cases. The subject of this controversy is an objection to university initiatives that establish a formal system to resolve bias complaints, like bias response teams, on the basis that it violates or chills free speech. Each administrator expressed treading this challenge very carefully:

- “[Addressing] bias is a work in progress...we’re in a holding pattern right now... there’s a lot of litigation in that area right now, so schools are all looking at, how do we do this, how do we talk about it, *how do we not get undue attention or litigation in order to do something that feels right.*” [Emphasis added.]
- “[In regard to bias incidents], universities all over the country have been the subject of free speech lawsuits...” [In a bias incident report] ... “we have to be very careful, because if we say anything that makes it seem like that conversation is mandatory or

disciplinary in nature, then we potentially run afoul of some free speech concerns...that is one way that we work on being proactive.”

- “Someone finds a statement offensive; it’s not targeted at anyone. A statement or a viewpoint that they have, that that some people find offensive, and then, our office is put in the unenviable position of pushing back against something that is perceived as discrimination or harassment, even though it’s not, ... and it’s like, wait, you guys, are the office of [civil rights]. Why are you telling us that we shouldn’t punish or kick the student out of our program? That is one of the harder things that that we have to.”

These findings illustrate that the nervousness (Gooden, 2014) of how civil rights administrators address the issue of bias—which may or may not include microaggression—has a lot to do with pending nationwide litigation on this issue. Courts all over the nation are grappling with the inherent tension between offensive conduct and freedom of expression on college campuses. The civil rights bureaucrats are the ones caught in the middle responding to students with yet another bureaucratic constraint limiting their ability to bring about holistic justice for the students meant to be protected by bias policies.

### ***Managing Expectations of Students and Institutional Players***

Another considerable challenge civil rights administrators face is managing student expectations and expectations of certain institutional players. As the data seems to suggest, unfavorable outcomes to students occur a majority of the time reports or complaints are made, in particular relief for bias incidents that fall short of the legal threshold. The data shows that these administrators spend a significant amount of time educating students on their role in the office, the policies and procedures, and the importance of securing objective evidence to support their allegations. Two administrators made the following observations:



- “Some folks come to us thinking that we’re gonna kind of advocate for them ...and you know our role is really to be that neutral investigative body.”
- “They might be presenting something with scant evidence ... there’s definitely a function of managing those expectations and saying...we’re gonna do what we can but we are limited by the evidence...so that can be a huge challenge for us.

The data indicates that in managing expectations of students, administrators feel frustrated when they are put in the unpopular position of passing along the concern to a different office if it does not meet the reporting requirements, and the student’s presumption that the civil rights office does nothing. Two administrators reflected on this:

- “A constant struggle for this work ... is the feeling that this office doesn’t do anything, because there is a sense that if somebody acts poorly they should automatically get into trouble ...particularly if we have to pass it to another office because we’ll say ‘this doesn’t implicate our policy’ and that language sounds very at odds with someone who said, yeah, but they used a derogatory racial term...yes, it does implicate our policy because we’re in the realm of behavior based on race but we’re not going to get to the place of finding of responsibility because we won’t meet the standards that we required in order to sanction someone...so let’s talk about what we can do outside of a specific finding of harassments as a label...”
- “There’s constant frustrating ...trying to educate and help people see what we do, all the work that happens that they don’t know about and some people with forever not be satisfied with that ... because part of our goal is to change behavior.”

A final unique challenge that was raised during one of the interviews, but important to highlight, is the role of the civil rights administrator in managing complex university political power

dynamics like the “good ole boy system” in bringing about equitable outcomes regardless of the power one of the parties may hold in the complaint or report. One administrator remarked about a hypothetical situation:

Complaints ... about people who either had very close relationships to their supervisors or the people being complained about were in a lot of ways more powerful than the people that they reported to, or at least there was a perception that they had more power than the people that they reported... That creates a dynamic that's problematic when you have a complaint, when the person who's supposed to be involved in that decision making has less authority or less power than the person being complained about, or has a very close relationship with that person right ... so the line of supervision doesn't always reflect the practical reality of power dynamics, and that can create a problem.

As a result, bias incidents is an area for these administrators, that requires a careful balance of legal compliance, being careful not to overextend their authority, and managing student expectations for achieving a just outcome in response to a disturbing inequity that happened to them. In the end, the students suffer, because often they feel that they don't get heard or feel supported—even though administrators are doing all they can within the constraints of their position.

### ***Civil Rights Administrators Perceive Themselves as Neutral Arbitrators***

On a final note, the researcher would be remiss to disregard the consideration of implicit bias in the administration of civil rights policies and practices. It is certainly an uncomfortable topic of conversation to address with anyone, much less than with interview participants who see themselves as neutral arbitrators. In the same spirit that Lipsky (2010) holds that street-level bureaucrats primarily perceive their own responses to bureaucratic necessities as neutral, fair,

and rational, the data suggests that these administrators held the same views about themselves. One administrator stated, “My team specifically is limited in those proactive steps in some ways because we have a formal role to play in responding to complaints, and we have to maintain neutrality throughout that.” Another indicated that, “Some folks come to us thinking that we’re gonna kind of advocate for the ...and you know our role is really to be that neutral investigative body.” Notwithstanding this intuitively held perception, the literature review tells us otherwise, in that each of us carry implicit bias, including this researcher, and even those bureaucrats who are in the explicit business of addressing overt and implicit acts of bias in the form of discrimination and harassment (Lipsky, 2010). In fact, implicit bias research has found that even those who embrace nondiscrimination norms, like the administrators who are the subject of this study, hold implicit biases that might lead them to treat minority groups in discriminatory ways (Kang & Banaji, 2006). In her interviews, the researcher was unable to find any data that uncovered glimpses of implicit biases. The researcher does, however, conclude, that each of the administrators interviewed was deeply committed to the equal protection values espoused in this research study, including the ideas of restorative justice, but felt constrained by the legal system and their institutional hierarchies.

Table 17 below categorizes the themes and patterns highlighted above:

**Table 17**

## Administrative Discretion and Addressing Bias

Theme	Dominant code	Interview quote sample
Unifying a fragmented system of civil rights compliance with diversity, equity, and inclusive excellence initiatives	Unifier	<p>“...There are different offices across campuses that have different roles to play, and the proactive part of creating an environment that is inclusive and, to the extent that we can, free from discrimination and harassment based on race, color, and national origin ... But we also have a ... responsibility to provide technical assistance about what the policy means, what discrimination and harassment, what those terms mean, to the extent that we can ...”</p> <p>“[A different office] ... works with the various student organizations ... that tries to foster as inclusive environment.... We try to do that as well, but we also have to have a compliance lens ... So we’re really looking at discrimination and harassment and making sure that everyone in the university is following the federal rights laws and regulations.”</p> <p>“When they come from the land o legal compliance, thinking not necessarily from the land of those who research and study how to affect behavioral change, that’s where you want to lean on experts in those fields to help us really get to some of the issues that are doing on human behavior or changing mindsets first ...”</p>
Holistic administrative discretion in civil rights implementation and enforcement	Whole-of-person approach	<p>“So we kind of lean on each other, to inform like what would be the best practice ... what’s fair for our population ...”</p> <p>“ Which of these guidance and regs ... really is it time to apply those, or if not, what about those do we think ... will actually create changes that we want some discretion in the analysis going on because not everything in the Title IX realm works.”</p> <p>“If they only said that they were complaining about discrimination or harassment based on religion, we would not limit the way that we look at it to just religion ... we would</p>

Theme	Dominant code	Interview quote sample
Addressing microaggression and bias incidents that do not fall within the institution's civil rights policy and practices	Bias incidents	also say... national origin specifically so I guess like it's kind of a meaningless distinction in a way...
		"I think the primary challenge is whether the parties ... can get some sense of justice ... we try to help folks ...navigate those consideration ... kind of talk through any concerns."
		"We do our best with the structure that we have."
		"... When a bias report comes in, and we talk about it, and we've made it decision that hey, this probably isn't something that we can refer to an office to deal with formally, we still often engage with ... [a dean's office] or some other office, whatever the most appropriate office is ... to meet with the person who reported... to see if there's anything we can do to support them ... in a voluntary way to offer to facilitate a conversation, so that if there is any opportunity for an educational solution to the issue that we can explore."
		"There isn't really a formal process for handling bias incidents at [university]...our office does end up with a lot of them, just because they are often tied to these protected categories of race, religion national origin, so when those issues come into our office, we'll offer resolution options for them ... we also offer an informal resolution function ... that's more focused on kind of restorative justice [for bias issues] .. more oriented towards educational outcomes... even if we're not finding policy violations, we're providing that education ... resolution for the parties...trying to get some sort of shared understanding. I think it does kind of help to shape the culture ... a little bit more ... impactful than the investigations."
		"There are a lot of times where something will come in and just you know on its face won't be a policy violation, but you know there are times when schools ... handle those incidents on their own."

Theme	Dominant code	Interview quote sample
Tension between seeking relief from bias incidents and free speech laws	Balancing constitutional laws	<p>“There are so many kinds of individual concerns, most of them not going to be policy type violations, but just people who have concerns about things. How we work on this issue. Resources are limited, people are limited, so it’s a challenge.”</p>
		<p>“The vast majority of claims that come into our office could potentially be resolved with an informal resolution if the parties agree to it.”</p>
		<p>“We’re doing outreach ... having coaching conversations with the individual who has done the behavior.”</p>
		<p>“[In regard to bias incidents], universities all over the country have been the subject of free speech lawsuits...”</p>
<p>“[In a bias incident report] ... “we have to be very careful, because if we say anything that makes it seem like that conversation is mandatory or disciplinary in nature, then we potentially run afoul of some free speech concerns...that is one way that we work on being proactive.”</p>		
<p>“Someone finds a statement offensive; it’s not targeted at anyone. A statement or a viewpoint that they have, that that some people find offensive, and then, our office is put in the unenviable position of pushing back against something that is perceived as discrimination or harassment, even though it’s not, ... and it’s like, wait, you guys, are the office of [civil rights]. Why are you telling us that we shouldn’t punish or kick the student out of our program? That is one of the harder things that that we have to.”</p>		
<p>“[Addressing] bias is a work in progress...we’re in a holding pattern right now... there’s a lot of litigation in that areas right now, so schools are all looking at, how do we do this, how do we talk about it, how do we not get undue attention or litigation in order to do something that feels right.”</p>		

Theme	Dominant code	Interview quote sample
Managing expectations of students and institutional players	Customer service	<p>“Discrimination and harassment—those are terms of art. They are conclusions that we have to arrive at after a full and fair evaluation of evidence ... they are also ever evolving sociological and political contexts ... and they’re sometimes used interchangeably with terms like microaggressions and bias, and for example, we may hear about a hostile climate in an area, but the specific area may fall very much short of discrimination of discrimination or harassment, short of a policy violation. In other words, ... it’s not uncommon to see a gap between the perception of what the policy prohibits, and what the policy actually prohibits ... so a lot of the times we have the issue of making sure that someone doesn’t do too much in response to a concern that isn’t a policy violation.”</p> <p>“They might be presenting something with scant evidence ... there’s definitely a function of managing those expectations and saying...we’re gonna do what we can but we are limited by the evidence...so that can be a huge challenge for us.”</p> <p>“A constant struggle for this work ... is the feeling that this office doesn’t do anything, because there is a sense that if somebody acts poorly they should automatically get into trouble ...particularly if we have to pass it to another office because we’ll say ‘this doesn’t implicate our policy’ and that language sounds very at odds with someone who said, yeah, but they used a derogatory racial term...yes, it does implicate our policy because we’re in the realm of behavior based on race but we’re not going to get to the place of finding of responsibility because we won’t meet the standards that we required in order to sanction someone...so let’s talk about what we can do outside of a specific finding of harassments as a label...”</p> <p>“There’s constant frustrating ...trying to educate and help people see what we do, all the work that happens that they don’t know about and some people with forever not be satisfied with that ... because part of our goal is to change behavior.”</p> <p>“Complaints ... about people who either had very close relationships to their supervisors or the people being complained about were in a lot of ways more</p>

Theme	Dominant code	Interview quote sample
Civil rights administrators perceive themselves as neutral arbitrators	Implicit bias	<p>powerful than the people that they reported to, or at least there was a perception that they had more power than the people that they reported... that creates a dynamic that's problematic when you have a complaint, when the person who's supposed to be involved in that decision making has less authority or less power than the person being complained about, or has a very close relationship with that person right ... so the line of supervision doesn't always reflect the practical reality of power dynamics and that can create a problem.”</p> <p>“My team specifically is limited in those proactive steps in some ways because we have a formal role to play in responding to complaints, and we have to maintain neutrality throughout that.”</p> <p>“Some folks come to us thinking that we’re gonna kind of advocate for the ...and you know our role is really to be that neutral investigative body.”</p>



## **Conclusion: Summary of Findings**

This final section summarizes the patterns and themes that emerged from the analysis of coded data from the interviews. These findings provide insight into the second set of research questions that explore the relationship between educational institutions' administrative civil rights policies and practices and the social integration of American Muslim students. Indicators of social integration from the perspective of institutions of higher education include ways in the university builds cohesion between the majority culture and minority population (i.e., measured by acculturation; frequency of contact between Muslims and non-Muslims; student engagement in campus life and activities; efforts to address microaggression, bias incidents, civil rights violations, and hate motivated incidents (responsive); and efforts to support diverse identities, including providing reasonable accommodations for religious practices (proactive).

It is significant to note the findings outlined below reflect an alignment in the experiences of civil rights administrators in all three institutions of higher education located in the southeast region of the United States that were the subject in this case study. In other words, the interview data led the researcher to triangulate analogous patterns that reverberated throughout each of the three case studies. Based on the findings of the interview, the data suggest the following:

1. The day-to-day administration of civil rights policies and practices at each of institutions of higher education examined has significantly changed subsequent to the nation-wide student social movement raising awareness of the severity of unaddressed allegations of sexual assault, and led to a system of civil rights administration that has embedded the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion. The data indicates that this societal climate has been the catalyst in transforming the traditional compliance-oriented civil rights administration into a more holistic way of

- proactively working to prevent and address not only legal compliance in civil rights violations, but also bring about justice and fairness to resolving the human aspects of the experiences.
2. This change in structural status quo has brought new administrative leadership into the civil rights arm of the three institutions of higher education to implement and enforce the policies that have married the values of civil rights with diversity, equity, and inclusion. In doing this work, civil rights administrators are charged with the difficult task of unifying an institutional system that has traditionally been fragmented in siloed in different departments that may or may not communicate with each other. This charge must be fulfilled while maintaining neutrality in resolving complaints.
  3. The new administrative leaderships' brand of street-level bureaucracy includes a significant reliance on federal guidance documents that assist in the way that they interpret and apply civil rights policies to arbitrate just and fair results. These administrators also implement a more expansive interpretation of federal civil rights laws that promote a whole-of-person holistic approach to allegations of civil rights violations. This authority has been delegated to them through the promulgation of the university policies that are more expansive than federal civil rights laws in protecting students from unlawful discrimination and harassment. The implementation of policies relating to bias incidents are blurrier.
  4. Civil rights administrators are constrained in addressing bias incidents that do not fall within the institution's civil rights policy and practices. Bias incidents are an area that requires a careful balance of ensuring legal compliance, not overextending authority, and managing student expectations of validation of the experiences that may not fall

- in the realm of actionable civil rights violation. Some universities are awaiting the see the outcome of the litigation that is examining the competing values of managing offensive conduct (that exudes bias) and protecting free speech.
5. The day-to-day administration of civil rights includes training of university employees as an integral and critical component of prevention, including training on mandatory reporting policies at all three of the universities.
  6. Civil rights administrators are carving out a role in improving equitable access to university reporting systems. Currently, while universities may collect aggregate data on the number of reports and complaints filed on the basis of religious discrimination, none of the three universities track data on the type of religion. Albeit, the anecdotal data indicates that a scant number of Muslim students have reported any allegations of bias incidents, discrimination, or harassment at any of the three universities in the last few years.
  7. The most significant Muslim student concerns that the universities have administered or facilitated center around providing religious accommodations during Ramadan. These efforts support diverse student identities and unique needs.
  8. While these street-level bureaucrats perceive themselves as neutral arbitrators, it is significant to note that the researcher opines that each are conscientiously committed to the mission of advocating for the equal protection values of bringing about fairness and justice within the constraints of the legal system.

The next chapter, Chapter VII, synthesizes the findings from Chapters IV, V, and VI; draws preliminary conclusions, and utilizes grounded theory to advocate for ways in which public policy and administration can play a meaningful role in eliminating social inequities

experienced by American Muslim students and advance meaningful social integration. A deepened understanding of this public policy issue then forms the basis for considering implications and recommendations for public policy and administration.

## CHAPTER VII Discussion and Implications

### Introduction

This chapter triangulates the findings from the data to develop conclusions, assertions and generalized theoretical propositions about the role civil rights public policy and administrative practice can play in fostering meaningful social integration of Muslim students with diverse immigrant experiences in their educational institutions. The first part of this chapter begins with a review of the purpose of the dissertation. The second part of this chapter synthesizes the findings from the student survey, student focus groups, and administrator interviews at the three institutions of higher education that are the subject of this collective case study. Within this framework, the researcher draws preliminary conclusions about this policy issue and generates grounded theory on *the civil right to belong*. Next, the researcher denotes limitations of her research. This chapter concludes with a discussion on implications for public policy and administration, and implications for future research on social integration.

### Review of the Purpose of the Dissertation

This study begins with the proposition that the equal protection values embodied in the United States Constitution serve as social integration policies for new Americans who have made their home in the United States through migration. Migrants throughout American history have had diverse and complicated experiences of integration, in part, depending on *where* their migration story originated; for example, migration from Europe centered on immigrants *choosing* greater economic opportunities while migration from Africa centered on *forcible* participation in the United States economy. This disparity makes apparent that the way in which United States' equal protection values have historically been interpreted by the three branches of government has been complicated. This history has shaped the social and human consequences

of those migration experiences for the generations that follow, in particular, sense of belonging, identity, cultural citizenship, and sense of safety. The evolution of the interpretation of the Equal Protection Clause has come a long way since the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, in part due to the lessons learned from the disparate and unfair migratory experiences of new Americans on the basis of race, color, religion and national origin. This researcher explored this policy issue from the perspective of the generations of Muslim migrants who made their home in the United States as beneficiaries of the Civil Rights movement during which time racially restrictive immigration policies were abolished. Until the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, immigration to the United States was restricted to individuals primarily from Europe and South and Central America (Bernard, 1998). This policy shift led to a floodgate of new migration trends of Muslims making their permanent home in the United States predominantly emigrating from regions of Asia, Middle East and North Africa. Muslim migrants and generations following have had their own unique integration experiences, which have been explored in the literature and form the basis of this study.

Through the literature review, the researcher first explored the data relating to immigrant integration experiences of Muslims in a post 9/11 world and learned that an increase in anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiment, or *Islamophobia*, has a particularly detrimental effect on American Muslims, including Muslim youth with diverse immigrant experiences. There is extensive research underscoring how experiences of discrimination, microaggression, bias, hate incidents, exclusion, and bullying in educational settings on the basis of the intersecting categories of immigration status, religion, race, ethnicity, color, natural origin, ancestry, and cultural practices have a significant effect on Muslim youths' psycho-social well-being, including identity, self-esteem, sense of safety, sense of belonging, and cultural citizenship.

Moreover, social integration research finds that educational institutions are important social contexts that influence the integration experiences of adolescents and young adults (Anderman, 2002; Benner & Wang, 2014; McNeely et al., 2002; Wolfer et al., 2012). While there is a robust contribution in sociological and psychological literature on the detrimental impact of Islamophobia on Muslim youth, there is little research on the role of public policy and administration in mitigating these experiences. The researcher learned that federal government civil rights agencies, including the OCR and the DOJ, have developed policy guidance to assist educational institutions in protecting Muslim and immigrant students, and those perceived to be Muslim and immigrant, to address these significant problems occurring in public schools and institutions of higher learning across the nation, particularly since the events of 9/11. The impact of these civil rights federal public policy initiatives at the administrative local level in educational institutions has received little attention. Because of her background as a civil rights attorney, this researcher was particularly interested in exploring the role that public policies related to equal protection can play in mitigating this policy problem in the educational setting. Thus, the researcher selected public educational institutions as an arm of the executive branch of government to be the case study to explore this policy problem.

The purpose in exploring this policy problem is to think of ways to move the needle towards meaningful and just social integration of Muslim students in school. Accordingly, the researcher examined the theoretical literature on the construct of social integration as it relates to students and migration experiences; and the construct of “street-level bureaucracy” (Lipsky, 2010) as it relates to administrative interpretation of equal protection values in educational institutions by the bureaucrats that administer civil rights policies. The researcher then developed a model through which to deconstruct the indicators of social integration. See Figure 6 below. In

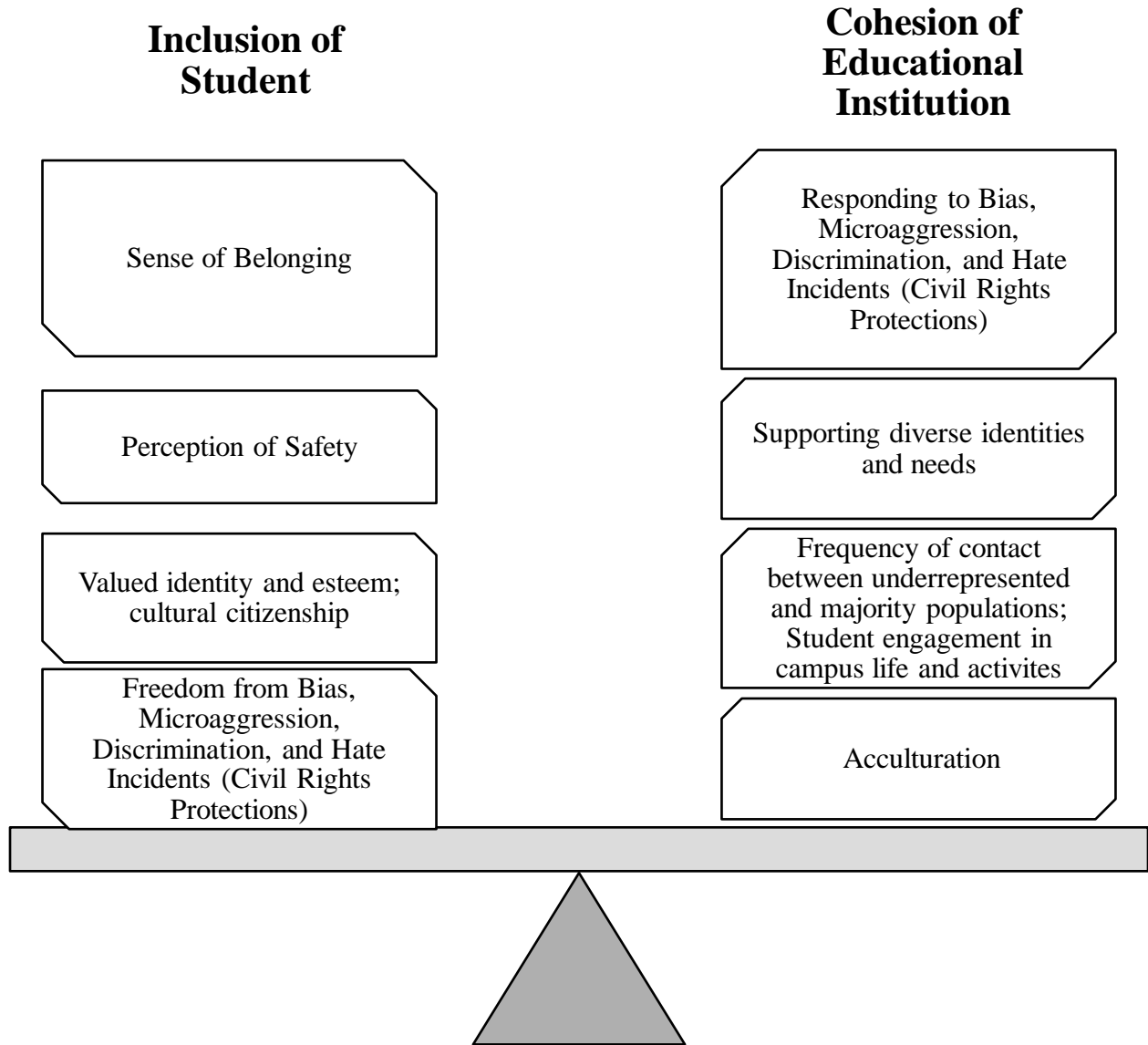
this model, both the student and educational institution have a role to play in the two-way process of inclusion of Muslim students with varied immigrant experiences and the internal cohesion of the educational institutions that are affected by the entry of these students (Jimenez, 2011; LaCroix, 2010; Tubergen, 2006). Accordingly, social integration of Muslim students with varied immigrant experiences within the context of equal protection values may be best understood in the following ways:

1. A process where all members move toward a safe, stable and just society by mending conditions of social disintegration and social exclusion, fragmentation, and polarization, and by expanding and strengthening peaceful social relations and coexistence, collaboration, and cohesion (Jeannotte, 2008);
2. A process through which the entire institution acquires civil, social, legal, political, human, and cultural rights, which creates the conditions for greater equality; and
3. A process that grants new members a role as equal partners in the educational community in which minority groups are supported in maintaining their cultural and social identities, since the right to cultural choice is intrinsic to democracy (Castles et al., 2002, p. 113; LaCroix, 2010; Kymlicka, 1995).



**Figure 6**

Model of Student Social Integration for Underrepresented Populations



Moreover, the balance of this two-way process depends on the administrative discretion of the street-level bureaucrats in embedding values of equal protection into practice (implementation) in educational setting. The literature on street-level bureaucracy posits that government officials who maintain day-to-day, face-to-face contact with the public in the regular

course of their work have the greatest impact on the life chances of public citizens through the use of their administrative discretion, or flexible exercising of judgement and decision making delegated to them (Lipsky, 2010).

A review of the literature and theoretical constructs then formed the basis for the research inquiry in this dissertation. First, the researcher explored the social integration experiences of Muslim students enrolled in public institutions of higher education. Here, these indicators of social integration were measured primarily through subjective perceptions of students. It is well documented that subjective perceptions carry with them considerable weight in the integration of immigrants, over and above the traditional objective integration parameters (Amit & Bar-Lev, 2015). In particular, how do students' religious identities and diverse immigrant backgrounds shape their social integration experiences on campus? How do societal and political anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant sentiment shape the social integration experiences of Muslim students on campus? In exploring these questions, the researcher considered factors that promoted social integration of Muslim students, factors that deterred the social integration of Muslim students, and factors that mitigated Muslim students' experiences of bias, microaggression, discrimination and hate incidents. Second, the researcher examined the impact of administrative civil rights policies and practices on the social integration of Muslim students enrolled in institutions of higher education. In particular, do institutional civil rights policies and procedures contribute to mitigating American Muslim experiences of civil rights violations, microaggressions, fears of violence, and experiences of marginalization in their educational setting? The sub-questions to this second research area include:

- Have civil rights policies and procedures contributed to promoting social integration of American Muslims in their educational institutions?

- Do educational institutions proactively consider culturally responsive ways to engage, or integrate, minority students?
- Do institutions expect the minority student to assimilate into the majority school culture, or do they foster a climate that values diverse social identities?
- How do administrators manage bureaucratic challenges in administering civil rights policies and procedures that impact Muslim students?
- Does bias in administrative discretion play a role in the administration of civil rights complaints?
- Does bias in administrative discretion influence social integration of undergraduate Muslim students enrolled in their institutions?

After operationalizing this research inquiry into tangible questions, the researcher designed a mixed-methods methodology to explore these research questions through a collective case study approach with three institutions of higher education located in the southeast region of the United States. Through the use of a student survey, student focus groups, and administrator interviews, the researcher collected and analyzed data. The themes that emerged from the findings are synthesized below.

### **Synthesis of Findings**

The data was analyzed through a postmodern critique to (a) deepen understanding of the social integration experiences of Muslim students within the nuanced understanding of current anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant sentiment, (b) examine the role that administrative discretion plays in the development, interpretation, and implementation of federal policies, procedures and initiatives that protect Muslim students from experiences of civil rights violations and microaggression, (c) analyze the administrative role that educational institutions are in fact

playing in the social integration of Muslim students in the educational setting on a day-to-day basis, (d) deconstruct the multiple perspectives between students and administrators that may reveal complex realities across the three case studies, (e) make sense of the complexity of global conflicts and national politics that have marginalized this minority group, and (f) develop a grounded theory that contributes to the knowledge of this policy issue.

A summary of highlighted demographics of the 70 survey participants is as follows: The majority of the Muslim students who participated in the student survey are first-generation and second-generation American undergraduate students, of whom a sizeable majority are American citizens. They were fairly evenly distributed on the basis of gender. While a sizeable majority identified as being of Asian heritage, the remainder identified as Middle Eastern descent, and African descent (in descending order). Almost 40% of the students indicated that they dressed in a way that outwardly displayed their religious identity, i.e., modest clothing and hijab for women, religious beard for men.

The survey strongly suggests that Muslim students have favorable social integration experiences. A majority of students maintain a favorable view of their school's climate and diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, feel safe in their school setting, experience mostly fair treatment in the school setting, and feel sense of belonging with similarly situated peers who do not share their faith or heritage culture. While the evidence demonstrated that most participants are significantly attached to their faith and heritage culture, most survey students expressed a strong connection to both their heritage and cultural traditions and mainstream American culture.

Almost one-third of the survey participants who completed the entire survey participated in 7 focus group sessions, which was a total of 22 focus group participants. The focus group participants were primarily second-generation Americans. The findings reveal that most of the

students who participated in the focus group share very similar lived experiences of integrating into their college campus settings. These collective lived experiences are directly related to the dynamics of growing up in a culture where most people around them do not share or relate to their religious and cultural experiences. Focus group participants expressed feelings of exclusion and marginalization from the majority culture (not fully feeling a sense of belonging), microaggression, insensitive comments, bias incidents, discrimination, and harassment on the basis of intersecting categories of race, national origin, religion, and gender. These findings are consistent with the vast sociological and psychological literature on this issue highlighting the experiences of discrimination, perceptions of microaggression, and fears of violence among American Muslims in a post 9/11 society, especially immigrants and youth in public elementary and secondary schools and its impact on well-being and sense of belonging (Abdelkader, 2015; American Civil Liberties Union, 2016; Bonet, 2011; Council on American-Islamic Relations, 2015a; Duncan, 2015; George, 2016; Hodge et al., 2016; Joshi, 2020; Mir & Sarroub, 2019; Mogahed & Chouhoud, 2017; Nadal et al., 2012; Ochieng, 2017; PBS Newshour, 2016; Riddy & Newman, 2006, 2008; Samari, 2016; Shammass, 2009, 2015; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2016; Svokos, 2015; Talbot, 2015; Woodrow, 2016).

Most students looked for a variety of ways to find a sense of belonging, valued identity, and cultural citizenship on campus, and ways to mitigate perceptions and experiences related to anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiment. These findings are consistent with the notion that human beings are social beings, driven by an interpersonal desire to be connected with other people, and motivated by a fundamental need to belong, especially in adolescence and young adulthood (Allen et al., 2021; Baumeister & Leary (1995); Jeannotte, 2008; Maslow, 1943). Most of the students relied on external in-group support systems, including cultivating

friendships with similarly situated students who share analogous experiences of growing up in a majority White Christian culture, and active participation in student Muslim or cultural organizations and extra-curricular campus activities. These findings are consistent with Tatum's (2017) research on racial identity development and the need for students to search for positive racial identity through support of in-group peers to affirm their identity and temporarily buffer from these negative daily occurrences. Many students also relied on internal coping mechanisms, such as de-escalating the situation, walking away, downplaying, internalizing, or minimizing aspects of their identity with non-Muslim peers. Some students reported advocating for themselves while other students reported seeking counseling services. These findings are consistent with critical sociologist Tierney's (1992) research that advances the notion that that minorities are likely to have disruptive cultural experiences in college given that the dominant culture in the United States is White. He asserts that merely inserting minorities into a dominant cultural frame of reference that is transmitted within dominant cultural forms leaves invisible cultural hierarchies intact (Tierney, 1992).

While the data suggests that the factors stated above are the primary mechanisms that Muslim students with diverse immigrant backgrounds achieve a sense of belonging, valued identity, cultural citizenship, and a sense of safety, many students also experienced a sense of support from select faculty members who exemplified diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives at their universities. This finding is consistent with Tinto (1987) and Baker & Velez's (1996) proposition that informal interactions with faculty and staff foster social integration. There was a distinction between support received from key faculty and advisors (generally very positive) compared to support perceived from administrators or bureaucrats (generally more negative).

There was some incongruity in student responses on whether they maintain a positive view of their school climate and formal diversity, equity, and inclusive excellence initiatives espoused by their university, such as equity statements. The survey responses indicated that a majority of the students maintain a positive view of their school climate and their university's diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. However, in probing this question further in focus group discussions, a more nuanced theme emerged. While there were some students who expressed a sense of safety they felt when their professors included diversity statements on the syllabus ("You put this in the syllabus...you can't really take your word back..."), and especially increased respect for professors who took the time to actually talk about this part of the syllabus in class, there was a sense that the policies on paper did not accurately reflect the climate of administration ("Policies are great on paper ... but it isn't until you actually go to them with something that you know you'll be shut down or brushed off"). There was also some concern expressed that when there is a complaint alleging discrimination by a professor, the administration automatically defers to take the side of the professor. Sociologist Olneck (1990) observed that the dominant language of integration is the voice of White middle-class education professionals speaking about "problem"<sup>57</sup> groups and about the solutions to the problems posed by diversity; it appeared to be the perception here by many of the students. Sociologist Tierney (1992) underscores that this positivist approach to social integration has potentially harmful consequences for minority students, and advocates that institutions consider culturally responsive ways to engage, or integrate, minority students in which diversity is highlighted and celebrated.

An overwhelming majority of students reported through the survey and focus groups that they are not aware of their university's systems of civil rights administration. The findings on

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<sup>57</sup> i.e., problem of acculturation, problem of having one foot in two separate cultures. Tierney (1992) ponders whether a student's "problem" of acculturation is really an institution's inability to function in a multicultural world.

lack of awareness, reported in student surveys and focus groups, appear to be consistent with the findings of scant complaints or reports filed by Muslim students in their respective universities' civil rights offices in the last several years, as reported in administrator interviews. This finding is troublesome considering the number of focus group participants who reported that they experience discrimination, bias, and microaggression on a regular, almost daily, basis. The civil rights administrators also acknowledged the challenges students may face in accessing the reporting system.

A significant number of students in the focus group discussions reported a lack of faith or trust in their institutions when it comes to reporting experiences of bias or discrimination related to anti-immigrant or anti-Muslim sentiment. This perception was primarily attributed to personal perceptions of marginalization by administrative authorities (including reports of being brushed off by administrative and faculty leaders, campus police, counseling, civil rights, and deans' offices) when they or their peers made complaints relating to bias, microaggression, discrimination, and safety concerns. It is significant that more half of the focus group participants raised these types of concerns to university employees, and felt unheard. Many students had more faith in being heard and validated through social media outlets and the student community coming together against their experiences of injustice. The findings also suggest that a lack of diversity in faculty may be a contributing factor that leads to institutional distrust.

In sum, while the findings in the survey generally suggest positive social integration experiences, the focus group findings do not. The numerical data suggests that a majority of students maintain a favorable view of their school's climate and diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, feel safe, experience mostly fair treatment in the school setting, and feel sense of belonging with similarly situated peers who do not share their heritage culture. However, most of



the focus group discussions underscored a lack of trust and faith in their institutions' capability to support their needs related to discrimination experiences and bias incidents. The researcher suggests two reasons for this incongruency. First, while students may be generally appreciative of the diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in the campus environment, a deeper dive into discussing personal experiences in an intimate focus group setting with other students also sharing personal stories may elicit more internalized experiences that students may not have necessarily connected with the more generic terms of "climate of support," "diversity, equity, and inclusion," and "treated fairly" as used in the survey. Second, the findings suggest that this discrepancy may be due to the fact that survey participants who had concerns about the issues that were the subject of the survey were more likely to volunteer to participate in the focus group discussions. For those students who reported general satisfaction in their social integration experiences may have felt that there was not much more to contribute on this topic. For this reason, there appears to have been a greater share of participants in the focus group who had concerns about civil rights. In that sense, the focus group findings may also be more honed into the challenges that a self-selected subset of more vulnerable students face, that are hard to glean from the survey. Thus, this qualitatively-driven mixed-methods allowed the researcher to gather a more comprehensive understanding of the range of social integration experiences, while playing close attention to the multifaceted perceptions of the barriers to social integration a smaller subset of Muslim students experience (Creswell, 2009).

The findings make evident that the institutional culture of diversity, equity, and inclusive excellence, in particular the administration of civil rights in the educational setting, is at a crossroads. Institutional civil rights as an administrative practice in education is in a process of massive cultural and societal transformation not just in the institutions of higher education

examined in this study, but analogous to the national trend that has been taking place in the last several years since universities all over the nation have been revamping civil rights policies relating to Title IX and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act and finding new and innovative ways to strengthen their support of diverse student cultural identities and needs.

And in this societal cultural shift happening now, the findings suggest that street-level bureaucrats—the administrators of the university civil rights systems—play a critical role in (a) shaping the development, interpretation, and implementation of federal civil rights policies, procedures and initiatives that protect underrepresented students, including Muslims students with diverse immigrant backgrounds, from experiences of civil rights violations, bias incidents, and microaggression, and (b) educating institutional leaders (through training) on how to better support diverse student identities and needs. To the public, the street-level bureaucrat is the face that represents government, the *real* policy maker, policy interpreter, and policy implementer (Lipsky, 2010). Lipsky posits that minority group members especially depend upon governmental bureaucratic structures for fair treatment. So, it is here, with civil rights administrators, where the researcher believes that the crux of shifting the status quo towards greater equality and justice for students can really occur.

The findings suggest that these street-level bureaucrats are already doing this challenging work of unifying fragmented and decentralized systems of traditional civil rights administration through a new lens of diversity, equity, and inclusive excellence as delegated to them by institutional leadership to apply at their discretion. Yet, the literature on street-level bureaucracy (Lipsky, 2010) suggests that street-level bureaucrats have inherent difficulties in fairly serving minority groups and other stigmatized individuals. Reasons for their difficulties include bureaucratic problems arising from unattainable or contradictory expectations about job

performance, enormous caseloads, ambiguous agency goals, inadequate resources, and threat and challenges to their authority.

Here, the data suggests that civil rights administrators are acutely aware that some of these institutional bureaucratic challenges, including fragmented systems and silos, and resistance to change of the status quo, are contributing to students' negative experiences in civil rights relief and perpetuating lack of trust in institutions. There is evidence to also suggest that these bureaucrats are finding innovative strategies through administrative discretion to address some of these inherent constraints. Civil rights bureaucrats are carefully balancing (a) their desire to facilitate relief and justice for students who experience unjust, unfair, and discriminatory situations that do not meet the threshold of a legal violation in discretionary ways, (b) their charge to remain within the realm of their authority and not overextend themselves in ways that can get them into institutional trouble ("stay in their lane"), or worse get their institution into legal trouble, (c) student expectations when students do not get equitable relief or justice, or perceive that the university "is doing nothing."

One key example that demonstrates institutional resistance to this cultural shift is the nationwide litigation challenging university efforts to address bias incidents that may not rise to the level of civil rights violations, but nevertheless significantly diminish the social integration experiences of underrepresented students. This issue is a serious institutional constraint that each of these administrators must currently grapple with in determining their discretionary authority to give relief to students seeking inclusion and belonging.

These complex dynamics perpetuate diminished trust by students, for which administrators expressed significant challenges. Lipsky finds that therein lies a paradox in which the public primarily perceives bias (i.e., prejudice, dehumanization, discrimination) while the

street-level bureaucrat primarily perceives his or her own response to bureaucratic necessities as neutral, fair, and rational. The data suggests that some universities have made more progress in innovative initiatives more than others, while others are cautiously observing national trends that impact this civil rights work in fear of litigation in this polarized political climate.

### **Preliminary Conclusions**

As a preliminary conclusion, the researcher finds that current institutional civil rights policies and procedures at the three institutions of higher education that are the subject of this case study have not contributed to promoting the social integration of Muslims students with diverse immigrant backgrounds in the same way that in-group student support systems have. While students seem generally successful in navigating their own paths to foster a sense of *inclusion* within the general student body and among in-group students who share similar religious and immigrant identities, because of the strong inherent motivation to find a sense of belonging (Maslow, 1943), the lack of *trust* between students and the educational institutions legally responsible for ensuring equal opportunities for these students seems to be impeding on collective authentic cohesion. The researcher concludes that educational institutions must take intentional and targeted culturally competent steps to advance both inclusion and cohesion.

The researcher also concludes that strengthening and embedding the notions of diversity, equity, and inclusion into traditional civil rights administrative day-to-day practice with specific targeted benchmarks and goals may positively influence the social integration of Muslim students and students with diverse immigrant experiences over time and consistent efforts by civil rights administrators. In doing so, this researcher proposes that civil rights administrators, or street-level bureaucrats, are the *bridge builders* for influencing social integration through a whole-of-person holistic approach that can meaningfully foster students' sense of belonging,

acculturation, cultural citizenship, valued identity, and sense of safety and support from experiences of bias, microaggression, civil rights violations, and hate incidents.

### **Developing a Grounded Theory: The Civil Right to Belong**

Grounded theory is a general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systemically gathered and analyzed (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). It evolves during actual research and does this through continuous interplay between analysis and data collection. Along with patterns, themes and preliminary conclusions, grounded theory in this study may be ultimately used to advocate for ways in which public policy and administrative practice can play a meaningful role in eliminating societal inequities experienced by American Muslim youth and foster their meaningful social integration (Denzin, 1978; Farmer, 2010; Merriam, 2009).

Here, the researcher began with the proposition that social aspects of immigrant integration are the heart of what American Constitutional values of equal protection, including justice, fairness, equality, and equity espouse. The researcher set out to explore how these civil rights values are being practiced in day-to-day administrative practice through data collection from a small sample population of first and second generation American Muslim students and civil rights administrators. The researcher triangulated the data from a student survey, student focus groups, and administrator interviews to develop a comprehensive understanding of this policy issue.

The use of grounded theory in this study was successful in highlighting the social integration experiences of first and second generation American Muslim students and ways in which civil rights administrators can serve as *bridge builders* to advance the inclusion and cohesion of these students into the social structure of educational institutions. For example, a critical theme that emerged from this research was the problem of insularity and in-group racism

and hierarchies on the basis of religiosity, race, ethnicity, and immigrant status within the diverse Muslim student population at the institutions of higher education examined. Through bridge building, civil rights bureaucrats can play a significant role in deconstructing factors that lead to insularity and in-group oppressive hierarchies with the collective goal of strengthening cohesion and fostering a sense of belonging and greater cultural citizenship among students. Addressing these nuanced civil rights challenges—that do not meet the threshold of legal violations—get to the heart of inculcating equal protection values in practice.

Theoretical insights gleaned from this study include the need to consider civil rights as an integral component in the theoretical construct of social integration. Much of the theoretical literature in the field of social integration emphasizes the notion that governments' role in advancing social integration is in specified policy areas of education (early childhood, elementary, secondary, postsecondary, adult), including linguistic proficiency, health care, welfare, and civic participation (voting). What appears to be missing from the theoretical literature is the recognition that government civil rights laws and policies as operationalized throughout local government structures, like public educational institutions, also play a critical role in advancing social integration, particularly for new Americans. In fact, embedding civil rights values in the practice of governmental services including education, health care delivery, social welfare, housing, and workforce development, among others will also strengthen economic integration. While LaCroix (2010) posits that the failure to develop an inclusive and tolerant society inevitably leads to discrimination, social exclusion, and the rise of racism and xenophobia, *the opposite is also true*. Freedom from discrimination, harassment, microaggression, and bias incidents is critical in fostering a sense of belonging, sense of safety, valued identity, and cultural citizenship throughout the different facets of immigrant and youth

integration. Thus, this researcher proposes that robust civil rights policies and procedures that are practically effective at building inclusion and cohesion between students and their institutions should be considered an indicator of social integration.

Another theoretical contribution of this study is highlighting the emergence of a paradox between sense of belonging and insularity. Insularity in this study was operationalized as a factor that impedes social integration while sense of belonging, cultural citizenship, and valued identity was operationalized as a factor that promotes social integration. By seeking to find a community in which students feel a sense of belonging, it appears that a sizeable number of Muslim students may be inadvertently becoming more insular. The researcher hypothesizes that this paradox may be related to the apparent weakness in cohesion and disconnect between institutional civil rights practices and the students, and exacerbated by the growing political polarization in civil rights policies and legal issues. This paradox has direct implications for social integration into the fabric of the larger American society.

While there is acknowledgment that the results of this study are not statistically generalizable, the researcher nonetheless proposes that these preliminary conclusions may be applied to other categories of underrepresented populations. Because, in the end, all Americans have a civil right to belong to a nation that they call home; and it is incumbent upon government entities to effectuate this Constitutional ideal in practice not only when we experience injustices, but also in proactive ways that support and nurture our diverse identities.

### **Limitations of the Research**

Because qualitative research places the role of the researcher as the central means of data collection, identification of personal values, assumptions, and biases are required at the initial onset of the study (Fassinger, 2005). Accordingly, the researcher acknowledges that her religious

background and immigrant heritage and other biases has shaped the way data were collected, viewed, and interpreted. Moreover, she believes that bias incidents, microaggression, civil rights violations, and hate incidents exist and occur against Muslim immigrants in the United States every day. Notwithstanding these factors, every effort was made to ensure objectivity (Sue et al., 2007).

This mixed-methods research was exploratory in nature and limited to a case study of students and civil rights administrators at three institutions of higher education in the southeast region of the United States. For these reasons, the conclusions are generalizable only to the extent of the population studied.

The sample size for the survey, focus group, and interviews were modest, due in part to the subset of the population studied—American Muslims—who have become suspicious of researchers after this nation has escalated its state-sanctioned surveillance in the lives and activities of Muslims in the United States since 9/11, including college students, which has led to diminished intercommunity trust among Muslim youth (Ali, 2016). There may have been a selection bias where students who experienced unfair treatment on campus based on their Muslim and/or immigrant identity were more likely to volunteer to participate in focus group discussions. Despite this limitation, the researcher thinks that each participant was exceptionally candid and highly enthusiastic about participating in this study, which many participants indicated has received too little attention in academic research. The researcher thinks that this variable contributed positively to the robustness of the data collection.

### **Implication for Public Policy and Administration**

The researcher posits that public policy and administration play a key role in solving this problem. It is clear that while educational institutions have taken strong steps to transform the



status quo of civil rights compliance into a more robust holistic approach through the lens of diversity, equity, and inclusion, there is a lot of work that needs to be done to get there. The administrative civil rights administrators leading the new civil rights structures at their respective educational institutions through the framework of diversity, equity, and inclusive excellence, are the key *bridge builders* to strengthening the cohesion aspect of student integration experiences. These street-level bureaucrats are best positioned to be leading this transformation because they are most closely connected to the students. Cohesion begins with them and builds up. Because policy implementation comes down street-level bureaucrats, they bear the greatest responsibility to interpret Constitutional principles, laws, and policies in moral, ethical, and socially equitable manner (Alexander, 1997; Frederickson, 1990; Lipsky, 2010). They have the skillset to influence social integration through a whole of person approach because the nature of civil rights itself is equity-centered; however, the steps they need to take need to be more intentional and targeted to face the inherent constraints of transforming the status quo.

First and foremost, this requires that civil rights administrators build trust with students through regular engagement, outreach, and transparency about the bureaucratic constraints and challenges. It includes inviting student to have a seat at the table to contribute not just to discussions about these problems, but also be a vested partner in finding and implementing workable solutions to the constraints that have emerged in the themes. This recommendation is also consistent with the 2015 OCR guidance that encourages college campus leaders to allow students to serve as experts on their lived experiences, thereby helping colleges and universities to take ownership of making safe spaces on campus. Olneck (1990) observes that the dominant language of integration is the voice of the White middle-class education professional speaking about problems posed by diversity and their need to fix it; excluding students who are directly

impacted by these problems from being part of the solution is potentially harmful (Tierney,1992). Tierney suggests that institutions need to integrate students into this process for better outcomes, and this is exactly what this researcher advocates here. The data suggests that the trust is severely lacking.

Second, while the notion of neutrality is central to street-level bureaucracy, particularly in the case of civil rights administrators as arbitrators, taking on the role as advocate of the Constitutional values of equal protection *within* their institutional hierarchies may be a robust strategy to move the needle towards strengthening just and equitable outcomes for students in a systemic way. During this research, it became clear that the civil rights administrative leaders involved in diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts at all three institutions of higher education are committed to ensuring the spirit of the civil rights doctrine of equal protection beyond mere compliance to include proactive initiatives that the researcher posits are at the heart of the concept of social integration as operationalized in this study. Yet, the administrators' keen awareness of, and constraints in addressing microaggression and bias incidents highlight the tension that these street-level bureaucrats experience between doing the right thing (fairness, equity, justice) and staying in their bureaucratic lane. While educational institutions are treading very carefully in balancing the evolving societal and political climate to avoid legal challenges by maintaining an air of neutrality ("Let's wait and see what happens"), civil rights administrators within the institution are uniquely situated to lead advocacy efforts *internally* within their institutional leadership. They have the skillset to educate leadership about the impartial integrity of civil right values, detangle institutional fixation on political or litigious environments and refocus priority on a student-centered approach, and lead this transformation of day-to-day civil rights administration into a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive approach.

In doing so, administrators must also reconcile their own air of neutrality by acknowledging inherent implicit biases that can fester in attempting to administer and arbitrate these human issues through colorblindness. Raising consciousness of students' diverse experiences are critical to break through the rigid legalese and move towards a whole-of-person and holistic approach to implementing university policies and procedures on curbing microaggression and bias incidents and supporting student identities and needs. This action will start to build trust between students and administration, and in the process, lead towards greater cohesion.

None of this challenging work can happen without the vested partnership of university leadership. University leadership must empower civil rights administrators to take on this role by providing clear goals, adequate resources, and lift the social justice work that these administrators do. In doing so, university leadership needs to build a culture in which all parts of the hierarchy inherently understand that students are the clients in the work of civil rights. The nervousness of lawsuits, hierarchical bureaucratic power dynamics, succumbing to public opinion politics, or having a wait and see attitude only hurts the students meant to be protected by these civil rights structures.

In addition, diversity in faculty is a critical aspect of building a sense of community and belonging in educational institutions. The findings strongly suggest key faculty members who espouse—in practice—the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion to their students (beyond diversity statements published at the end of the syllabus) are the primary glue that currently binds the cohesion between students and the institution. If the goal of public policy and administration in the education arena is to build cohesion between students and the institution, then diversifying the faculty on the basis of diverse lived experiences, including experiences on

the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, and religion, will strengthen this possibility. Not only will a diverse faculty that is truly representative of the population it serves cultivate social integration through trust and belonging, it will ultimately contribute to enhancing and strengthening educational outcomes at the institutions of higher education.

### **Implications for Future Research on Social Integration**

The social integration experiences of African American or Black Muslims merits further examination. The uniquely American experiences of Black Muslims, dating back to forced migration and including the generational impact of slavery, segregation, Jim Crow laws, mass incarceration, disparities in school discipline based on race, disparate use of police force based on race, and other inequities diverge greatly from the experiences of the recent generations of Muslims who migrated to the United States from the regions of South Asia, Middle East, and Africa. While this study on social integration centered on the migrant experience of Muslims, an area of study that merits a deep dive is on social integration experiences of African American or Black Muslims. A critical theme that emerged from this research was the significant problem of in-group racism and hierarchies on the basis of religiosity, race, ethnicity and immigrant status within the diverse Muslim student population at the institutions of higher education examined. The reported hierarchies within Muslim student organizations in which (minority) African American or Black Muslims experienced marginalization by the predominant (majority) of Muslim students that made up university Muslim organizations, i.e., those of South Asian or Middle Eastern heritage, was troubling. The research hypothesizes that that the low response rate from Black and African-American Muslim students to the survey and focus groups was related to the theme of in-group racism and hierarchies among first- and second-generation American Muslims and Black and African-American Muslims. The researcher also hypothesizes that this

dynamic occurs in universities across the nation and is a microcosm of the complexities of racism outside of university settings. For this reason, thinking about ways in which public policy and administration may address this problem is a ripe area for future research.

The paradox between (a) the role of Muslim and cultural organizations inculcating a sense of belonging, cultural citizenship, and valued identity by in-group student support and (b) insularity of Muslim students (i.e., diminished frequency of contact with non-Muslims or engagement in activities with non-Muslim students) deserves more attention. Insularity in this study is operationalized as a factor that impedes social integration while sense of belonging, cultural citizenship, and valued identity is operationalized as a factor that promotes social integration. How are these competing factors reconciled when the data suggests that they are happening concurrently among the same students?

## **Conclusion**

Cultivating the successful integration of American Muslim communities, particularly the youth who will shape the future of the United States, is a crucial component to promote social justice for a marginalized community in American society, and this nation's education system plays an important role in facilitating fundamental fairness, providing equal opportunities, fostering social justice and equity, supporting diverse cultural and social identities of American Muslim students and fostering an authentic sense of belonging. Not doing so could potentially have very detrimental effects for the internal cohesion of this nation. This study suggests that it already has. As highlighted in the literature review, immigrant integration theorist LaCroix (2010) posits that it is the failure to develop an inclusive and tolerant society, which enables different ethnic minorities to live side-by-side and in relative harmony with the local population of which they form a part, that inevitably leads to discrimination, social exclusion, and the rise of

racism and xenophobia. How well American Muslim youth in the United States integrate socially depends on how well our institutional stakeholders, including the civil rights bureaucrats, faculty, institutional leadership, Boards of Visitors, and policy makers engage in a two-way holistic process alongside students to take visible and effective steps to (1) develop policies and procedures in such a way that address individual experiences of bias, microaggression, civil rights violations, and hate incidents, and (2) foster a sense of social belonging for a group of individuals who are grappling with experiences of othering based on their religious or perceived religious ideology and cultural immigrant experiences.

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**APPENDIX A Social Integration and Civil Rights Survey for American Muslim Students in Higher Education<sup>58</sup>**

**Student Survey**

Please answer questions below and send back to [siddiquimh@vcu.edu](mailto:siddiquimh@vcu.edu).  
 In the alternative, please complete survey electronically at  
<https://vcuportal.questionpro.com/t/AUw5IZ>.

**Part A**

**1. How would you rate the climate of support for Muslims in your school community?**

Excellent	Very Good	Only Fair	Poor	Does not apply/Don't know

**2. How would you rate the quality of your school's diversity, equity, inclusion program?**

Excellent	Very Good	Only Fair	Poor	Does not apply/Don't know

**Part B**

Many of these questions will refer to your *heritage culture*, meaning the original culture of your family/ancestors. It may be the culture of your birth, the culture in which you have been raised (i.e., Muslim practice), or any culture in your family background (e.g., South Asian, Arab, African, African American, European American). If there are several, pick the one that has influenced you most.

**My heritage culture is:** \_\_\_\_\_.

Please circle one of the numbers after each question to indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement.

Question		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
a	I often participate in my heritage/cultural traditions.	1	2	3	4	5

<sup>58</sup> Adapted from the following measures: Vancouver Index of Acculturation (VIA) (Ryder et al., 2000; Paulhus, 2013); Sense of Belonging Scale (Hoffman et al., 2002); Council on American Islamic Relations-California Survey on Muslim Youth at School (2015), Arab Middle Eastern Muslim and South Asian Civil Rights Survey (2015), and Ozyurt's (2013) Acculturation Scale.

b	I often participate in mainstream U.S. cultural traditions.	1	2	3	4	5
c	I would be willing to marry a person from my heritage/culture.	1	2	3	4	5
d	I would be willing to marry a person not from my heritage/culture.	1	2	3	4	5
e	I enjoy social activities with people from the same heritage/culture as myself.	1	2	3	4	5
f	I enjoy social activities with people not from the same heritage/culture as myself.	1	2	3	4	5
g	I am comfortable interacting with people of the same heritage/culture as myself.	1	2	3	4	5
h	I am comfortable interacting with people not of the same heritage/culture as myself.	1	2	3	4	5
i	I often behave in ways that are typical of my heritage/culture.	1	2	3	4	5
j	I often behave in ways that are typically considered U.S. culture.	1	2	3	4	5
k	It is important for me to maintain or develop practices of my heritage/culture.	1	2	3	4	5
l	It is important for me to maintain or develop mainstream U.S. cultural practices.	1	2	3	4	5
m	I believe in the values of my heritage culture.	1	2	3	4	5
n	I believe in mainstream U.S. values.	1	2	3	4	5
o	I am interested in having friends from my heritage/culture.	1	2	3	4	5
p	I am interested in having American friends not from my heritage/culture.	1	2	3	4	5



q	It is important for me to maintain the language of my heritage/culture.	1	2	3	4	5
r	Most of the people I live with when I attend school are of the same or similar heritage/culture as me.	1	2	3	4	5

**Part C**

Please select the answer that best describes your experience.

Question		Never	Once in a while	About half the time	Most of the time	Always
a	I have met with classmates outside of class to study for an exam.	1	2	3	4	5
b	I discuss events which happened outside of class with my classmates.	1	2	3	4	5
c	I have discussed personal matters with students who I met in class.	1	2	3	4	5
d	I could contact another student from class if I had a question.	1	2	3	4	5
e	Other students are helpful in reminding me when assignments are due or when tests are approaching.	1	2	3	4	5
f	I have developed personal relationships with other students in class.	1	2	3	4	5
g	I invite people I know from class to do things socially.	1	2	3	4	5
h	I feel comfortable contributing to class discussions.	1	2	3	4	5
i	I feel comfortable asking questions in class.	1	2	3	4	5
j	I feel comfortable volunteering ideas of opinions in class.	1	2	3	4	5
k	It is difficult to meet other students in class.	1	2	3	4	5
l	I share personal details about my life with non-Muslim classmates.	1	2	3	4	5
m	I talk to other students in my classes.	1	2	3	4	5
n	I feel comfortable talking about a problem with a school faculty member, staff, or administrator.	1	2	3	4	5
o	I feel that a school faculty member, staff, or administrator would be sensitive to my difficulties if I shared them.	1	2	3	4	5

p	I feel comfortable socializing with a school faculty member, staff, or administrator outside of class.	1	2	3	4	5
q	I feel that a school faculty member, staff, or administrator would be sympathetic if I was upset.	1	2	3	4	5
r	I feel that a school faculty member, staff, or administrator would take the time to talk to me if I needed help.	1	2	3	4	5
s	If I had a reason, I would feel comfortable seeking help from a school faculty member, staff, or administrator outside of class time (office hours, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
t	I feel comfortable asking a school faculty member, staff, or administrator for help with a personal problem.	1	2	3	4	5

**Part D**

Please circle one of the numbers after each question to indicate the degree to which you have had these experiences.

	Question	Always	Mostly	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
a	I am treated fairly on campus by school employees (faculty, staff, administration).	1	2	3	4	5

	Question	Yes	No	Optional: Explain in your own words below
b	A school employee (faculty, staff, administration) at my current school has treated me unfairly (discriminated against me) because of my religious identity.	1	2	

	Question	Yes	No	Optional: Explain in your own words below
c	A student/peer at my current school has treated me unfairly because of my religious identity.	1	2	

	Question	Yes	No	Optional: Explain in your own words below
d	A school employee (faculty, staff, administration) at my current school has offered me a religious accommodation.	1	2	

Question		Yes	No	Optional: Explain in your own words below
e	A school employee (faculty, staff, administration) at my current school has denied me a religious accommodation.	1	2	

Question		Always	Mostly	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
f	I feel safe on campus as a Muslim.	1	2	3	4	5

Question		Yes	No	Optional: Explain in your own words below
g	I have felt threatened or intimidated in school by another <u>student/peer</u> because of my religious identity (includes social medial experiences).	1	2	

Question		Yes	No	Optional: Explain in your own words below
h	I have felt threatened or intimidated in school by a <u>school employee</u> because of my religious identity (includes social medial experiences).	1	2	

Question		Yes	No	Optional: Explain in your own words below
i	I have been physically harmed, bullied, or harassed in school by another <u>student/peer</u> because of my religious identity.	1	2	

Question		Yes	No	Optional: Explain in your own words below
j	I have been physically harmed, bullied, or harassed in school by a <u>school employee</u> because of my religious identity.	1	2	

**Part E**

Please answer the questions below.

3. **If you have had any of these experiences described on the previous page - as a student on this campus – did you inform a school employee? Please circle *one*.**

Yes	No
Optional: Explain. Did it help solve the problem?	Optional: Explain. How did you respond to the experience?

4. **If you have had any of these experiences described on the previous page – as a student on this campus – what school resources or other types of resources would have helped you respond better to your experience?**

5. **What year were you born?** \_\_\_\_\_
6. **What is your gender?** \_\_\_\_\_
7. **How would you describe your ethnicity/race?** \_\_\_\_\_
8. **Were you born in the U.S.? Please circle *one*: Yes / No**
- a. If you were not born in the U.S., in what country were you born? \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. If you were not born in the U.S., how long have you lived in the US? \_\_\_\_\_
9. **Which of the following best describes your U.S. status? Please circle *one*:**
- a. U.S. Citizen
  - b. Dual Citizenship (citizen of the U.S. and another country)
  - c. Refugee/Asylee
  - d. Student Visa
  - e. Permanent Resident (Green Card holder)
  - f. Other: Please specify \_\_\_\_\_

11. **Is your mother a first-generation immigrant to this country?**

**Please circle *one*:** Yes / No

If your mother is a first-generation immigrant, from what country did she emigrate?

\_\_\_\_\_

If your mother is not a first-generation immigrant, please explain:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

12. **Is your father a first-generation immigrant to this country?**

**Please circle *one*:** Yes / No

If your father is a first-generation immigrant, from what country did he emigrate?

\_\_\_\_\_

If your father is not a first-generation immigrant, please explain:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

***Part F***

Please answer the questions below.

13. **Which of the following best describes your student status? Please circle *one*:**

- a. Freshman/First year
- b. Sophomore/Second year
- c. Junior/Third year
- d. Senior/Fourth year
- e. Graduate student

14. **Which of the following best describes your living situation? Please circle *one*:**

- a. On campus (dorms)
- b. Off campus – with friends/roommates
- c. Off campus – with family/relatives

15. **Do you dress or groom in a way that may outwardly exhibit your religious beliefs or customs (e.g., headscarf/hijab, beard, other)? Please circle *one*:** Yes / No

Optional: Explain

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16. In which institution of higher learning are you enrolled? \_\_\_\_\_

17. How many Muslim students do you think are enrolled in this school? Take your best guess: \_\_\_\_\_

18. Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience as a Muslim student on campus?

19. Would you be willing to participate in a focus group to discuss you experiences in more detail? If so, please complete the attached request form at the end of this survey.

**END OF SURVEY**

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**Request to Participate in Focus Group**

I am interested in participating in a focus group discussion exploring some of the questions asked in the survey I have completed.

**First name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Best contact information** (phone and/or email): \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B Student Focus Group Questions

Focus Group Question	
1	<p>Tell me which <b>school activities</b> you are involved in this semester.</p> <p>a. Do you feel comfortable in your school community? In class? Outside of class?</p>
2	<p>Tell me about your <b>circle of friends</b>.</p> <p>a. Are they mostly Muslim?</p> <p>b. Have your friendship circles changed over the years you have been a student? Explain.</p>
3	<p>How would you describe your <b>Muslim identity</b> as a student here?</p> <p>a. Please share experiences here in school that relate to your Muslim identity.</p> <p>b. What are some <i>positive</i> experiences?</p> <p>c. What are some <i>negative</i> experiences?</p>
4	<p>Have you ever felt that you were <b>treated differently, or experienced discrimination</b> based on your religious identity by anyone in the school community – including other students, faculty, administrators, employees? If yes, explain. Did you report to school officials?</p> <p>a. If no: Why not? How did you address this issue?</p> <p>b. If yes: To whom? What was the result/disposition?</p>
5	<p>Have you ever <b>felt intimidated or threatened or feared your safety or experienced assault/violence</b> on campus based on your religious identity? If yes, explain. Did you report to school officials? Did you report to campus police?</p> <p>a. If no: Why not? How did you address this issue?</p> <p>b. If yes: To whom? What was the result/disposition?</p>
6	<p>Do you feel comfortable <b>approaching school authority</b> if you experience unfair treatment, discrimination, or threats on the basis of your religious identity that made you afraid?</p> <p>a. If no, why?</p> <p>b. If yes, who would you approach? Do you know your school policies and procedures for filing a complaint? Explain.</p>
7	<p>Are you familiar with <b>your school diversity, equity, and inclusion polices</b> at school? If yes, how have you learned about them? What do you think about them? Have they affected your experiences as a Muslim student in any way?</p>

## APPENDIX C Administrator Interview Questions

<b>Interview Question</b>	
1	Tell me about the role of your office.
2	Tell me about your job responsibilities.
3	I am interested in learning more about your role in regard to discrimination and harassment based on religion, national origin, race, and color. The Office of Civil Rights at the USDOE has provided colleges and universities guidance about protecting students from discrimination and harassment on the basis of religion, national origin, race, and color. <b>Has federal guidance</b> been used to develop the policies and practices of this office? a. If yes, explain. Which guidance specifically? b. If no, how was policy/practice developed?
4	What role does this office play in fostering a <b>school climate</b> free from discrimination and harassment based on religion, race, color, and national origin? a. Do you think it is effective? Explain. b. What are some of the challenges?
5	Tell me about the <b>discrimination/harassment complaint process</b> based on religion, national origin, race, or color. a. What is the difference between a discrimination complaint and a harassment complaint? b. How are complaints investigated? c. Do you think it is effective? Explain. d. What are some of the challenges?
6	Have you had complaints related to <b>religious-based discrimination</b> in the last couple of years? a. If no, why do you think that is? b. If yes, what issues do you encounter? Do you have complaints by Muslim students? a. If no, why do you think that is? b. If yes, do you have data that captures the number of such complaints in the last two (2) years? If not, would you be willing to make an informed guess? i. What issues do you encounter? ii. How are they addressed? iii. Please share specific examples. iv. Do you have data that captures these experiences? If not, would you be able to make an informed guess? v. What are some of the challenges?
7	How do you differentiate between behavior that is actionable discrimination from <b>behavior that may be offensive or perceived as offensive</b> , but does not rise to the level of discrimination that is actionable or violates policy?



	<p>a. How often has this office come across a discrimination complaint by a Muslim student that does NOT meet the level of actionable discrimination, but is offensive nonetheless? Explain.</p> <p>b. How do you balance the issue of protecting students from being exposed to offensive behavior while honoring the offending person’s First Amendment right to offend?</p>
8	<p>Have you had complaints related to <b>religious-based harassment, imminent threat of violence, or intimidation</b> towards Muslim students?</p> <p>a. If no, why do you think that is?</p> <p>b. If yes, what issues do you encounter?</p> <p>i. How are they addressed?</p> <p>ii. Please share specific examples.</p> <p>iii. Do you have data that captures these experiences? If not, would you be able to make an informed guess?</p> <p>iv. Does law enforcement get involved? If so, explain.</p> <p>v. What are some of the challenges?</p>
9	<p>Do you address requests for <b>religious accommodations</b> for Muslims?</p> <p>a. If no, who addresses these issues? How do students know where to ask for a request for religious accommodation?</p> <p>b. If yes, what issues do you see? Would you share specific examples? Do you have data that captures the experiences? What are some of the challenges?</p>
10	<p>What are your experiences with <b>Muslim students</b> in general?</p> <p>a. Would you be able to estimate the number of Muslim students attending this school? Take your best guess.</p> <p>b. Are you worried about students becoming radicalized?</p> <p>c. Do you have any thoughts on Islam’s compatibility in this secular school setting that you would share?</p> <p>d. What are some of your challenges?</p>
11	<p>Please share with me any written materials, policies, procedures, web-links, etc. that address the issues we have discussed today. Do you have any additional thoughts?</p>

## APPENDIX D IRB Approval



TO: Saltanat Liebert  
CC: Mamoona Siddiqui

RE: Saltanat Liebert; IRB HM20011985\_Ame1 The Role of 21st Century International Security Politics and U.S. Constitutional Values In the Social Integration of Muslim Youth in Higher Educational Institutions

On 3/17/2022, the **change(s) to the** referenced research study **qualified for exemption** and was **approved by limited IRB review** according to 45 CFR 46 by VCU IRB Panel A under exempt category

Category 2(iii) Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests, survey or interview procedures, or observation of public behavior when Identifiable information is recorded by the investigator, and the IRB conducted a limited IRB review

The information found in the electronic version of this study's smart form and uploaded documents now represents the currently approved study, documents, and HIPAA pathway (if applicable). You may access this information by clicking the Amendment Number above.

### **COVID-19 Notice**

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the IRB expects the research will proceed in accordance with other institutional policies and as outlined in this submission and if applicable, in the study's COVID-19 Contingency Protocol. IRB approval does not necessarily mean that your research may proceed. For more information on investigator responsibilities and institutional requirements, please see <https://together.vcu.edu/>.

The Principal Investigator is also reminded of their responsibility to ensure that there are adequate resources to carry out the research safely. This includes, but is not limited to, sufficient investigator time, appropriately qualified research team members, equipment, and space. See WPP #: IX-1 Principal Investigator Eligibility and Statement of Responsibilities

If you have any questions, please contact the Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) or the IRB reviewer(s) assigned to this study.

Thank you for your continued collaboration in maintaining VCU's commitment to protecting human participants in research.

## **Vita**

Mamoona Hafeez Siddiqui was born in Lahore, Pakistan and made her home in Richmond, Virginia at the age of four. She attended Chesterfield County Public Schools and learned how to speak English with the help of her kindergarten teacher at Falling Creek Elementary School. After graduating from Meadowbrook High School, she completed her Bachelor of Arts at the University of Virginia majoring in Foreign Affairs and Middle Eastern Studies. She earned her law degree from the University of Maryland School of Law. She has served in the Virginia Office of the Attorney General from 2015–2022 as Assistant Attorney General in the Education Division, Assistant Attorney General in the Division of Human Rights and Fair Housing, and Senior Assistant Attorney General and Section Chief of the Office of Civil Rights. In 2021–2022, she served as Deputy Chief Diversity Officer in the Virginia Governor’s Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and senior policy advisor to Virginia’s Office of New Americans at the Department of Social Services. She is licensed to practice law in the Commonwealth of Virginia since 2001 and was admitted to the United States District Court, Eastern District of Virginia in 2015. Awards and honors include Outstanding Doctoral Student Award for the Public Policy & Administration at the L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs at Virginia Commonwealth University (2022), Young Scholars Award Recipient, American Society for Public Administration (2015), Founder’s Fellow Award Recipient, American Society for Public Administration (2014), and Excellence in Virginia Government Award Scholarship (2014).

