

## Research Statement

Guided by both my personal and professional experiences, **my research agenda centers on transforming postsecondary institutions in order to better serve historically marginalized students and communities.** To this end, my research can be best understood through three strands of scholarship: (1) the cultivation of inclusive organizational policies, practices, and cultures in higher education; (2) the roles of place and space in higher education; and (3) critical and intersectional perspectives of social class. In addition to these lines of inquiry, much of my research has examined four particular social groups: (1) first-generation students, (2) low-income students, (3) Indigenous students, and (4) rural students. Below, I discuss in more detail my current work and contributions in each area, as well as my plans for future research.

### *The Cultivation of Inclusive Organizational Cultures and Practices in Higher Education*

**My primary line of inquiry seeks to understand how higher education may develop more inclusive policies, practices, and cultures.** The relatively low college completion rates of historically underserved groups like first-generation, low-income, and Indigenous students demonstrate the need for more inclusive organizational environments that serve the needs of these groups. Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) have been found to be places with such cultures. While most research on MSIs has focused on U.S.-based institutions, **I co-authored the first publications to examine international MSIs' roles in providing access to higher education for populations across the globe, including a peer-reviewed article (in the journal *Higher Education*) and book chapter (in the book *A Primer on Minority Serving Institutions*).** My studies found that, while MSIs in the U.S. focus on the social categories of race/ethnicity, MSIs in other parts of the world focused on a variety of historically marginalized populations, including linguistic and religious minority groups. This work sets the foundation for understanding variations in how international institutions serve students at the margins.

In addition, I have worked on multiple projects funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF) to examine how to create more inclusive policies and practices to recruit and retain diverse students in the geosciences, which is one of the least diverse STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) disciplines in terms of many metrics (particularly regarding the representation of women and students of color). I have co-presented work on how to create more equitable learning environments at national conferences across many disciplines, including STEM and educational research. This collaborative work has reached scientists and administrators beyond scholars of higher education, receiving positive attention among geoscientists and scholars of geoscience education. **One co-authored publication examining intersectionality in geoscience was published in the *Journal of Geoscience Education* and quickly became the most read article in that journal.** Another article focused on inclusive learning environments in geoscience was recently published in the *Journal of Women and Minorities in Science and Engineering*. In a third project also funded by NSF, I have been conducting research about the effectiveness of a specialized geoscience course – the findings of which I anticipate publishing in 2023.

### *The Roles of Place and Space in Higher Education*

**My second line of inquiry interrogates the roles that place and space play in shaping postsecondary opportunity structures,** wherein *place* regards sites of social relationships, community identities and cultures, and economic and political structures, and *space* accounts for the distance between one place and another. In recent years, place and space have gained considerable attention in the higher education sphere, as scholars (such as Nicholas Hillman and Ozan Jaquette) have examined the role of college deserts – that is, areas that have limited or no access to four-year institutions – and the recruiting practices of renowned institutions, which most typically recruit in urban, wealthy, and white neighborhoods and schools. My research expands upon this scholarship by considering how place/space interacts with various social identities to affect higher education outcomes. In particular, **I co-authored an article in the *Journal of Women and Gender in Higher Education*,** which demonstrated how various, gendered social narratives played out in different levels of interactions in a rural

community. Moreover, along with Sonja Ardoin and Darris Means, **I am organizing the first edited volume on college access and success for rural students of color** – a population that has some of the lowest educational attainment rates in the United States and remains overlooked in rural research and research on students of color alike. **The book is under contract with Stylus Publishing and will be released in either late 2023 or early 2024.**

Additionally, my dissertation explored whether individuals' high school living situations were associated with their likelihood to complete and their likelihood to remain at full-time status throughout their college duration, and whether these associations varied by gender or race/ethnicity. To answer these questions, I used geocoding to attain information pertaining the students' neighborhoods from their senior year of high school and a longitudinal research design to examine retention and status trends for a 2012 cohort of students. For the institution under examination, neighborhood-level socioeconomic variables were found to predict student retention and time-to-degree in college. As I expand this study to other institutions, including a city- or state-wide dataset, this research will have significant implications for future higher education policy – particularly those policies pertaining to performance-based funding.

Along with the forthcoming edited book and dissertation, I have also explored how distance to polling locations and voting resources may impact voting outcomes for students and communities of color. While prior scholarship has acknowledged how distance to polling locations affects voter turnout, my research has furthered this line of inquiry, examining how spatial distance intersects with race to disenfranchise communities surrounding MSIs. This research was published in two co-authored reports through the *Center for Minority Serving Institutions – MSI Vote: Ensuring Democracy and Promoting Voting through the Power of Minority Serving Institutions* and *Spotlight on MSIs: Turning Student Activism into Votes* – and has since informed the practices of organizations dedicated to increasing voter turnout, including aiding the mobilization of a MSI-focus with the *Students Learn Student Vote Coalition* and expanding the representation of voter advocacy organizations (such as the *Andrew Goodman Foundation*) on MSI campuses.

### ***Critical and Intersectional Perspectives of Social Class***

**My third line of inquiry critically examines how social class is commonly measured and understood in higher education.** Traditionally, in quantitative analyses, social class has most often been measured via Pell grant status, parental education, or family income. Yet, each of these measures has a different meaning and signals very different disadvantages in relation to social capital, cultural capital, or economic capital. One of my articles in progress, derived from work in my dissertation, employs a content analysis in order to conceptualize how higher education scholarship has attempted to measure social class over the last decade. This work will address how scholars can more accurately measure social class, avoid conflating various social class measures for meaning the same (dis)advantage, and provide better tailored recommendations for serving students based on their distinct social class (dis)advantages moving forward.

Further, higher education scholars (such as Anne-Marie Núñez, Samuel Museus, and Kimberly Griffin, to name a few) have called for more research that examines how the intersectionality of multiple social identities is associated with unique experiences in the interlocking, socially constructed systems of oppression ever present on college campuses – experiences that are too often overlooked in traditional scholarship. My research answers this call, exploring how various social identities may intersect with social class to simultaneously influence individuals' experiences in higher education. At present, I am collaborating with four other scholars across multiple social science disciplines to examine the experiences of students with disabilities from less-privileged social class backgrounds. Our study will identify barriers that may be overlooked by focusing on *only* disability or *only* social class and put forth recommendations for institutions to transform their practices and better serve similar students.

### *Future Directions*

Collectively, my research has advanced understanding of the experiences of historically marginalized groups and how higher education institutions can better serve them. I have published in both academic and editorial outlets, demonstrating my commitment to disseminating such research to relevant audiences, including researchers, policymakers, and practitioners alike. Future projects include: (1) examining how certain policies/procedures (such as application fees and student stipends) in graduate education may constrain student access and retention; (2) examining how rurality intersects with various social identities to shape students' college major choices; and (3) comparing the use of neighborhood-based socioeconomic variables with those more commonly employed in higher education.