

PART I – INTRODUCTION

Name: Jennifer Fricas, PhD, MPH, RN

Project Title: **Pandemic, Protests, and Perseverance: Learning from the Experiences of BIPOC Nursing Students through Participatory Photography**

Category: Faculty Research (with overlap to CON community focus)

Abstract: BIPOC nursing students are experiencing a triad of unprecedented stressors stemming from the pandemic, racial justice protests, and their continuing formation as nurse professionals. To honor their experiences and gain insights into potential antiracist improvements to our college/university policies and processes, I propose a participatory photography study, exhibit, and publication.

PART II – PROPOSAL

Background: This research stems from my three years as the inaugural Chair of the CON's Equity & Justice Committee (EJC) in which I worked alongside student leaders to ameliorate institutionalized disadvantages experienced by students of color, low-income students, and first-generation college students. The proposed research addresses this grant cycle's priorities of COVID-19 and racism and aligns with four of the five strategic priority work areas committed to by SU's Office of Diversity and Inclusion. This project will produce data about Black, Indigenous, and persons of color (BIPOC) student experiences that could (a) lead to their recruitment and retention, (b) improve campus climate, (c) create BIPOC-centered narrative through art, and (d) build SU's capacity to identify, center, and address issues of importance to BIPOC students.¹

Purposes: The purposes of the research are (1) **To provide an opportunity for CON BIPOC students to creatively share – through photography – their experiences of dealing simultaneously with unprecedented stressors stemming from** (a) the COVID-19 pandemic, (b) grassroots protests against police brutality/for racial justice, and (c) ongoing navigation of their development as nurse professionals, and; (2) **To share student-created photographs and their meanings through a campus exhibition to** (a)

increase understanding of our BIPOC students’ experiences at this critical time in history, and (b) influence inclusive changes in our college/university policies and processes to better support BIPOC student recruitment, retention, and a positive institutional climate.

Significance: Demographic trends showing tremendous growth in non-White racial/ethnic populations in the U.S. between now and 2060⁵ and evidence of the disparities in health care access and outcomes of these same populations are well-established in the health literature.^{2,3,4} These demographic shifts signal a potential worsening of health inequity, given that these groups suffer poorer outcomes in numerous areas of both mortality and morbidity⁴ due to structural violence stemming from racist and colonial legacies embedded in our health care systems. Despite these trends in population diversification and the urgency of growing health inequities, nursing students from non-White racial/ethnic backgrounds comprised only 34.2 percent of students in entry-level baccalaureate programs in the U.S. in 2018-19.⁶ A 2017 survey⁶ revealed the practicing registered nurse (RN) workforce was nearly 81 percent White, with less than 10 percent in each BIPOC identity category as depicted in [Table 1, found here](#). Developing and diversifying the nursing workforce begins with nursing education. Issues of recruitment are evident from the nursing workforce disparity data [presented above](#). Retention and graduation of BIPOC students is another concern, [as illustrated in Graph 1](#) from the American Academy of Colleges of Nursing (AACN),⁷ which shows the disparate enrollment and graduate rates of “minority” nursing students. Causes for disparities in the retention and graduation rates of BIPOC nursing students are multifaceted and a study such as the one proposed could help to reveal the layers and intersections of this complex issue.

We know that in the U.S. nearly 90% of low-income, first-generation college students do not graduate on time.^{8,A} A study from The Pell Institute found that, on average, low-income, first-generation college students have at least three risk factors that could contribute to their leaving university without having earned a degree. This problem is particularly acute among students studying

^ABIPOC students are more likely to be low-income and first-generation, given the racism within U.S. wealth-creation and education systems.

health disciplines.⁹ While in college, BIPOC students often encounter faculty and staff from dissimilar backgrounds, so they face difficulties learning to navigate the “hidden curriculum” that is part of being successful in U.S. universities.⁸ It is estimated that only 12.6 percent of full-time nursing faculty identify as BIPOC.¹⁰

Although issues of consistent data collection, documentation, and analysis exist, within the SU CON, unpublished [data shown in Table 2](#), indicates that BIPOC students pass the national RN licensure exam (NCLEX-RN) at lower rates than White students. National-level data about NCLEX-RN pass rates by race/ethnicity are sparse; some studies have attempted to incorporate this dimension, though one noted a “paucity of both quantitative and qualitative evidence concerning NCLEX-RN pass rates associated with racial/ethnic minority students.”¹¹ A better understanding of the experiences of BIPOC students in nursing school, during a stressful time globally, may help elucidate disparities in education-to-career transition and highlight challenges in gaining NCLEX-mediated entry into practice.

These are the conditions faced by BIPOC students under usual circumstances, and 2020-2021 has been anything but usual. Our BIPOC nursing students have continued their professional formation at a time of unprecedented intersecting stressors. The COVID-19 pandemic, like other health conditions in an inequitable system, has disproportionately affected communities of color, from prevalence and mortality rates, to testing access, to deaths of RNs of color while caring for COVID-19 patients.^{12,13,14,15} Add to the pandemic our nation’s largest and most sustained racial justice uprisings in recent years and our BIPOC students are navigating a tremendous amount of stress. This tempest is both unacceptable and our present reality. Now is a critical and unique time to amplify the voices of our BIPOC nursing students, to learn from their resiliency and about their needs, so that we can work together to build a more responsive and equitable institution of higher education.

Plans/Methods: Recruited students and I will collaboratively undertake qualitative, participatory research using the photovoice (PV) method.¹⁷ Co-researchers receive a brief training in basic

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photography (via Zoom) and will be loaned cameras (via mail) that exist within the CON for this research purpose. Photovoice allows for a first-person viewpoint, affirms local perspectives, generates a broad sample of images, illuminates complexity, and creates community discussion.¹⁷ It has been used successfully in health research with marginalized populations.¹⁸ (I have made preliminary inquiry among selected nursing students to determine their interest in this project and have discovered desire to participate among both undergraduate and graduate students.) Photovoice data will be analyzed following procedures in Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña¹⁹ and will include member checking and other co-researcher involvement, which has been shown to strengthen community capacity and increase the understanding of issues among all involved.²⁰ Finally, the study process will culminate in an on-campus exhibition of the co-researchers’ art and meanings, intended to influence the adoption of anti-racist college- and university-level policies and processes. A collaborative publication is also planned.

Expected Outcomes with Timeline:

Timeframe	Activity or Activities	Expected Outcome(s)
Early Mar ‘21	Submit IRB application	IRB review and permissions obtained
End Mar – Early Apr ‘21	Recruit co-researchers	Study co-researchers enrolled
Early Apr ‘21	Host PV Workshop via Zoom	Co-researchers prepared for data collection period, methods; co-researcher group introduced & rapport established; order of investigation of research themes established
Mid-Apr to Mid-Jun ‘21	Co-researchers collect/discuss PV data, hold scheduled individual & group Zoom meetings to title, describe & discuss photographs	Photographic, interview, & group discussion data collected
Mid-Jun ‘21	Co-researchers meet to plan PV exhibit in Fall 2021	Preliminary plan for on-campus PV exhibit
Late Jun to Late Aug ‘21	Lead researcher continues data analysis; prepares draft study summary for co-researcher member checking/feedback	Study data analyzed & initially summarized; draft of collaborative manuscript prepared

References: All references for this proposal can be accessed [at this site](#).

PART III – BUDGET – See attached. Budget has been reviewed by Toni Malaspino on March 8, 2021.