

FACTORS THAT MOTIVATE  
HIGH-ACHIEVING UNDERSERVED STUDENTS OF COLOR  
TO SUCCEED IN COLLEGE

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**ABSTRACT**

America dropped from 2nd to 13th place in undergraduate graduation rates in the world, which may be due to its low percentage of people of color who attain a bachelor's degree. Despite challenges students of color face, some still succeed. Presently, a paucity of literature on underserved high-achievers of color exists. This study's purpose is to better understand the motivational factors of underserved students of color. The Culturally Engaging Campus Environments Model was the theoretical framework of this study. Data from interviews with 22 underserved high-achieving undergraduates at a large public university demonstrated consistency with three model factors. Two additional elements manifested, which further describe these students' motivation. Implications and recommendations for postsecondary educational institutions are provided.

**CHAPTER 1:****BACKGROUND, PURPOSE, AND OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY**

*I was born in Honolulu and raised in Kailua. I am full Japanese and consider myself local, as I am sansei, or in other words, the third generation of my family that was born in Hawai'i. Growing up through the public schools of Keolu Elementary, Kailua Intermediate, and Kailua High, I was always surrounded by a racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse student population. However, this all changed when I started attending the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (UHM). I noticed that the student body was not nearly as diverse as the schools that I had attended in the past. For a while, I felt that I did not fit in. I cannot remember how I found out that I could concurrently enroll in UH community colleges (UHCCs) and UHM simultaneously, but I did. When I began to attend UHCCs, I felt much more comfortable in the smaller class settings with students of diverse backgrounds. As I reflect on my experiences at UHCCs and UHM, I note that I probably felt more at ease because of the similarities between my elementary and secondary institutions and the UHCCs. I completed my B.A. and M.A. in Speech, now called Communicology, at UHM with more confidence and self-assurance.*

*While earning my B.A. and M.A., I worked in the Mānoa Advising Center, Colleges of Arts and Sciences Student Academic Services, and the Graduate Division of UHM. These offices served the general UHM student population with which I was comfortable. I subsequently assumed a position as an academic advisor for the Honors and Regents and Presidential Scholars (RAPS) Program at UHM.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, there is a distinct*

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<sup>1</sup> The Regents and Presidential Scholarships were established by the UH Board of Regents to support students at any UH campus, with a record of outstanding academic achievement. Regents Scholars are awarded a full tuition waiver

*difference between the students with whom I worked in the past and those whom I currently advise for the Honors and RAPS Programs. In the Honors and RAPS Programs, my advisees consist mostly of White and Japanese students who graduated from private schools and/or came from upper-class backgrounds.*

*Recognizing that the Honors and RAPS student compositions were not reflective of the broader demographic population of Hawai'i, I started recruiting at UHCCs, as well as public high schools to increase underserved students' awareness of these programs. The ultimate goal was to possibly get them to join at least one of the programs.*

*Unfortunately, I ran into another issue. Even though enrollment of diverse students in the Honors and RAPS Programs is increasing, the retention and graduation rates of this group is still not comparable to those of White and Japanese students in these programs.*

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Although the preceding narrative describes my own perspective, my experiences and observations are not unique to me. Colleges and universities all across the United States are admitting, retaining, and graduating underserved students of color at a lower rate than that of White students (Ntiri, 2001; Rudenstine, 2001). However, some underserved students of color, despite the many unique barriers in higher education (Lewis, Chesler, & Forman, 2000), succeed and graduate.

This dissertation focuses on understanding what factors motivate high-achieving underserved students of color to succeed. More specifically, the current examination is intended

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for four years of undergraduate study. They must maintain a minimum cumulative or semester grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 for the first and second years and a 3.5 for the third and fourth years. Presidential Scholars receive a full tuition waiver for two years of undergraduate study and must maintain a minimum cumulative or semester GPA of 3.7. All scholars receive a stipend of \$4,000 per year and a one-time travel grant of \$2,000.



to understand how the campus culture of postsecondary institutions shapes students' motivation to succeed. This chapter includes a statement of the problem that is addressed, the purpose and significance of the study, and the definition of key concepts central to the investigation. I conclude the chapter with an overview of the organization of the dissertation.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problem that provides the foundation for the proposed inquiry is the persisting racial and ethnic disparities in college degree attainment. The United States has dropped from 2nd to 13th place in higher education graduation rates among Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) member countries (OECD, 2012). The fact that the U.S. lags behind other countries in graduation rates could partially be due to the low percentage of the attainment of a bachelor's degree of people of color. For example, 2010 statistics indicate that, nationally, approximately 12% of Blacks, 11% of Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders, 9% of Hispanics, and 9% of Native Americans have attained a bachelor's degree, compared to 30% of Asian Americans and 19% of Whites. Groups within the larger Asian American population also face disparities. For example, around 12% of Hmong Americans, compared to 40% of Filipinos and 35% of Koreans (U. S. Census Bureau, 2012a). These disparities illustrate the challenges that postsecondary institutions face in retaining and graduating students of color.

These statistics do not bode well for the future of the United States, as the 2010 U.S. Census projected that the nation's ethnic minority population will increase from 37% of the nation to 57% by the year 2060, becoming the *majority* of the population. This means that the population will increase from 116.2 million to 241.3 million over this 50-year period (Hixson, Helper, & Kim, 2012). In his address to the joint session of Congress in 2009, President Barack Obama vowed "by 2020, the U.S. will once again have the highest proportion of college

graduates in the world.” To fulfill his promise, educators in the United States need to acknowledge the statement of Dr. Kevin Kruger (2013), the president of the National Association of Student Personnel Administration:

Future classes of traditional-age college students will look very different than past classes. They will increasingly include more students of color... with academic support needs that will challenge every college and university. ... To continue to develop as a nation and to satisfy the needs for an educated workforce, ... we must begin developing an infrastructure to handle a more diverse student body and to develop academic and social support structures that will move these students through to graduation. (p. 4)

In the remainder of this section, I discuss the representation of people of color in the United States and higher education in more detail. Given that the proposed investigation will take place in Hawai‘i, which exhibits a distinct racial and ethnic demographic composition, I also provide an overview of the representation of various racial and ethnic groups in the state of Hawai‘i and the state system of higher education within Hawai‘i.

Despite the fact that many people of color are citizens of the United States who have made and continue to make significant contributions to the history of this country, they are often ignored in educational research. This shortcoming is partly due to difficulties associated with data collection on these populations (Hagedorn, Lester, Moon, & Tibbetts, 2006). Often times, smaller ethnic groups are classified within larger homogeneous classifications, such as the title, AAPI. This larger category misrepresents the unique experiences of smaller diverse racial and ethnic groups.

However, in 2000, national agencies, such as in the U.S. Census Bureau, began to separate the general AAPI racial group into ethnic categories. With this change, the demographic

information being collected paints a stark picture for some AAPI ethnic subgroups. For example, due to this separation, data demonstrates that many more Native Hawaiians are living in poverty, lacking health insurance, experiencing cultural and linguistic obstructions to health and social services, and having higher rates of infant mortality than Caucasians in the United States (White House Initiative, 2003). This specified data also indicates that Pacific Islanders are only around half as likely as non-Hispanic Whites to have attained at least a bachelor's degree with 15% versus 30% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). In addition, disaggregated analyses of national data show that more Southeast Asian Americans (SEAA) (e.g., Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, and Vietnamese) live in poverty and drop out of high school than the national average in the U.S. (White House Initiative, 2003).

### **Context of the Study**

To comprehend the educational attainment of underserved students of color, it is important to first understand the representation of various racial and ethnic groups in the United States. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, as of 2010, the nation's population was 72% White, 16% Hispanic, 13% Black, 5% Asian American, 1% American Indian and Alaskan Native, and 0.2% Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander (Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011). As mentioned earlier, in 2010, there were about 37 million or 18% of the U.S. population attained a bachelor's degree. This population consisted of 72% White, 10% Black, 8% Hispanic, 7% Asian or Pacific Islander, and 1% % American Indian and Alaskan Native (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012a). And, as mentioned above, populations of color are drastically underrepresented among those who attained a bachelor's degree, which indicates that there are systematic obstacles people of color still face in higher education.

As for Hawai'i, the state had around 1.36 million residents in 2010 (Hixson et al., 2012; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b). With regard to race, this state's population consisted of 39% Asian American, 25% White, 10% Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander, 9% Hispanic, 2% Black, and 0.3% Native American. When disaggregating by AAPI ethnicities, the state included 15% Filipino, 14% Japanese, 4% Chinese, 2% Korean, and 1% Samoan (U. S. Census Bureau, 2010). In 2010, there were 177,727 individuals (20% of the population) who attained a bachelor's degree, which consisted of 24% White, 22% Asian American, 17% Black, 12% Hispanic, 11% Native American, and 8% Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander (U. S. Census Bureau, 2012a). Like the U.S., these percentages are vastly different from the ethnic and racial make up of the state in that Whites, Hispanics, Blacks, and Native Americans were overrepresented regarding bachelor's degree attainment, while other populations – including Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and other Pacific Islanders – were underrepresented.

The University of Hawai'i at Mānoa had 20,429 students in 2010, including 14,402 undergraduates. Approximately 73% of the undergraduates are state residents (UHM, 2011). The undergraduate population is one of the most diverse in the nation, but was less diverse than the state's population, which consisted of 40% Asian, 21% White, 17% of Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, 2% Black, 2% Hispanic, and 0.3% Native American (UHM, 2011). The average UHM graduation rate is 55%. The average graduation rates are as follows: 57% Asian, 42% Native Hawaiian, 41% White, and 35% other Pacific Islander. Unfortunately, due to the small numbers of Black, Hispanic, and Native American students, graduation rates were not calculated for UHM (UHM, 2009). With this data, it is evident that there are differences among racial and ethnic groups in regard to graduation rates as well as Asians have a higher graduation rate than the UHM average, while Native Hawaiians, Whites, and other Pacific Islanders graduate at a

lower rate than the average of UHM. The racial and ethnic composition of students who graduated from the Honors Program at UHM in 2010 also differs from that of Hawai'i's and UHM's population but in a more drastic way. The most underserved populations are Native Hawaiians with 7% and Filipinos with 4%, whereas the UHM population consisted of 16% Native Hawaiians and 8% Filipinos in 2010 (UHM, 2010b). UHM is the ideal site for this inquiry with its high percentage of underserved students of color with a at least 39%. For percentage comparison, please see Table 1.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Despite the challenges that underserved students of color face in higher education, some individuals overcome these obstacles and graduate with a bachelor's degree. What makes these graduates unique? What motivates them to excel educationally? While investigation of the underachievement of underserved students of color is imperative, examinations of those who are high-achieving must also be studied. Learning more about the motivational influences of high-achieving students of color will help educational institutions make more informed decisions about allocation of resources to foster academic success for this particular population.

However, a paucity of literature on the undergraduate experiences of high-achieving underserved students of color exists. Due to the lack of research on this particular group, there is a clear need to understand what forces motivate high-achieving underserved students of color to succeed academically. The proposed analysis aims to generate knowledge in this area by utilizing qualitative methods to learn about the sources of academic motivation for high-achieving underserved college students of color.

This study focuses on addressing one overarching question: What motivates high-achieving college students of color to succeed academically? Several sub-questions also guide

this inquiry: (1) How, if at all, do external influences, as defined by the CECE Model, affect the motivation of high-achieving college students of color? (2) How, if at all, do pre-college inputs, as defined by the CECE Model, affect the motivation of high-achieving college students of color? (3) How, if at all, do college campus environments, as defined by the CECE Model, affect the motivation of high-achieving college students of color?

### **Significance of the Study**

The results of this inquiry will inform research, policy, and practice. In regard to research, this dissertation will help further define what factors motivate high-achieving underserved students of color, as past examinations have been found to conflict with each other. Generating more knowledge about the specific sources that foster motivation of underserved undergraduates of color will help institutions of postsecondary education make better and more informed decisions regarding the establishment and support of institutional organizations, resource allocations, and policies to ensure success of underserved undergraduates of color. People who work with underserved students of color could use the results of this investigation to determine what strategies and approaches to utilize when working with this population. With the United States' ethnic minority population being projected to increase from 37% to 57% by 2060, understanding how underserved students of color succeed in higher education is critical to informing postsecondary institutions about how they can ensure academic success for the more diverse students entering their campuses.

### **Key Concepts and Definitions**

In this section, definitions of key concepts utilized in this analysis are provided:

- *Campus culture* –Kuh and Hall (1993) illustrates campus culture as “the collective, mutual shaping patterns of institutional history, mission, physical settings, norms, traditions, values, practices, beliefs, and assumptions that guide behavior of individuals

and groups in an institution of higher education which provide a frame of reference for interpreting the meanings of events and actions on and off campus” (p. 2).

- *High-achieving* – For this investigation, high-achieving students is defined as those who earning a Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) composite score higher than the average of students’ fellow classmates, having a grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 or higher, being enrolled in an honors program, and engaging in co-curricular activities (Albaili, 1997; Fries-Britt, 2002; Griffin, 2006; Harper, 2005; Light, 2001; Ruban & Reis, 2006; Vanzile-Tamsen & Livingston, 1999) (see Chapter 2 for discussion).
- *Motivation* – This study builds off of Ryan and Deci’s (2000) definition, “To be motivated means *to be moved* to do something. A person who feels no impetus or inspiration to act is thus characterized as unmotivated, whereas someone who is energized or activated toward an end is considered motivated. [M]otivation is hardly a unitary phenomenon. People have not only different amounts, but also different kinds of motivation” (p. 54).
- *Motivation to persist* – For this investigation, the term motivation focuses specifically on students’ motivation to persist in college.
- *Persistence* – The definition of persistence for this inquiry is based off of Leppel’s (2001) description, which is a student’s continuation of enrollment at a given university.
- *Student of Color* – For this examination, students of color are individuals who are underserved in higher education within the state of Hawai‘i. More specifically, students who do not self-identify as Caucasian, Chinese, Japanese, or Korean will be considered members of underserved students of color in this research.
- *Subculture* – With Bolton and Kammeyer’s work (1972), Jayakumar and Museus (2012) defines *campus subculture* as “the distinct culture that is created and perpetuated by a group on campus that (1) is in persisting interaction with each other, (2) has developed distinct values, assumptions, and perspectives that guide behavior of its group members, (3) transmits those values, assumptions, and perspectives to newcomers to facilitate conformity to them, and (4) differs from the dominant culture of the campus” (p. 7).
- *Underserved* – The ethnic and racial groups of students in the Honors Program that are lower in percentage than that of the larger UHM undergraduate body in 2010 are considered underserved. In the Honors Program, White, Japanese, and Chinese students are overrepresented. Samoan and Tongan students are equally represented. The underrepresented student populations are Filipinos, Hawaiians, Hispanics, Blacks, and Koreans. There are not sufficient numbers of students in the Honors Program and UHM to calculate representation of individuals other ethnic and racial groups.

For the purposes of this study, I define “success” as degree completion. I acknowledge that success can be described in a variety of other ways. However, the main focus of this study is centered on the motivation of students of color, as being motivated to persist in college.

### **Organization of the Dissertation**

Chapter Two of this dissertation contains a review of literature relevant to the current study. First, literature examining high-achieving college students is reviewed. Next, traditional frameworks of college success and related research are discussed. Theories regarding motivation and college success are then examined. The motivation literature is followed by discussion of postsecondary campus environments and its relation to motivation. Last, the motivation patterns of students of color and high-achieving students of color are summarized. Chapter Three includes the methodological approach, site and sample selection, and data collection and analysis procedures that were utilized throughout this investigation. Chapter Four provides the findings of this inquiry. Lastly, Chapter Five discusses the summary, discussion, conclusions, and implications of the current investigation.



## **CHAPTER 2:**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

#### **Chapter Overview**

Much of the empirical literature on factors that motivate high-achieving college students has focused on the examination of samples disproportionately composed of White undergraduates. As I will highlight in my review of this research, although there is a growing amount of research that focuses on high-achieving undergraduates of color, the findings of these studies often contradict each other. Thus, the need to further examine the factors that motivate high-achieving college students of color becomes increasingly imperative as the population of the United States becomes increasingly diversified.

Realization of the need for greater comprehension of the factors that influence the persistence of students of color have led higher education researchers to propose new perspectives regarding underserved racial and ethnic minority student retention (Museus, 2014; Museus, Ravello, & Vega, 2012; Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000; Yosso, 2005). Consequently, recent efforts to disentangle the complexities of the persistence of students of color have involved underscoring and documenting the potential power of campus cultures in hindering or facilitating the engagement and persistence of underserved students of color (Baird, 2000; Museus, 2007a; Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000). While this body of literature is growing rapidly, empirical studies that explore how institutional culture can specifically hinder or foster the motivation of underserved undergraduates of color are difficult to find.

This chapter includes an overview of the published literature related to the current analysis of the factors that influence the motivation of high-achieving students of color. First, I use existing literature to delineate the characteristics of high-achieving college students of color.

Next, I discuss traditional theories regarding college student success. After that, frameworks and research on college student motivation are examined. Then, I review research conducted on campus environments and the possible influences it can have on the motivation of students of color. After that, I review literature on factors that motivate students of color and more specifically, high-achieving students of color. Lastly, this chapter concludes with the conceptual framework that guides the present investigation.

### **High-Achieving College Students**

Past studies delineated the traits used to classify students as high-achieving (Albaili, 1997; Fries-Britt, 2002; Griffin, 2006; Harper, 2005; Light, 2001; Ruban & Reis, 2006; Vanzile-Tamsen & Livingston, 1999). These criteria will be used to establish the definition of high-achieving in this investigation. The four main characteristics that have been found to identify high-achievers of color across existing empirical inquiries are (1) earning a Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) composite score higher than the average of students' fellow classmates, (2) having a grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 or higher, (3) being enrolled in an honors program, and (4) engaging in co-curricular activities (Albaili, 1997; Fries-Britt, 2002; Griffin, 2006; Harper, 2005; Light, 2001; Ruban & Reis, 2006; Vanzile-Tamsen & Livingston, 1999).

### **Scholastic Aptitude Test Scores**

With regard to high-achieving students' composite SAT scores, researchers vary somewhat in whether they compare high-achievers' scores to the national average or the university's incoming class average. For example, one criterion for Fries-Britt's (2002) definition of high-achieving college students is to place in the top 5% of SAT scores in the nation. On the other hand, Griffin (2006) defined high-achieving college students partly based on their SAT scores being higher than the average of their peers' scores. However, both authors

used higher than average composite SAT scores as one criterion of defining high-achieving college students, whether by national or institutional standards.

### **Grade Point Average**

The second common criterion used by researchers who have studied high-achieving students was earning a GPA of 3.0 or higher. Again, there was some variation in the application of this criterion. For example, Vanzile-Tamsen and Livingston (1999) defined high-achieving college students as those earning a GPA that was one standard deviation above the mean of students at their institutions, which was 3.51 in their examination. Meanwhile, Albaili's (1997) defining characteristic of high-achieving students was earning a GPA of at least 3.0. Similarly, another criterion for defining high-achieving students utilized by Fries-Britt (2002) was maintaining a GPA of 3.0 or better. To summarize, all of the aforementioned authors used the trait of earning a GPA of 3.0 or higher to define high-achieving students.

### **Honors Program or College Participation**

Another consistent criterion used to define high-achieving college students was that high-achievers were enrolled in an honors program or college at their institution. The rigorous academic standards to be admitted into universities' honors programs and colleges, as well as the demanding academic requirements to graduate with honors, distinguishes these students from their average- and low-achieving peers. For example, a third element of Fries-Britt's (2002) definition of high-achieving college students was that they must be enrolled in an honors program. Likewise, Ruban and Reis (2006) defined high-achieving college students as being members of their university's program for honors students. Thus, honors program or honors college participation has been employed as another criterion used to determine whether undergraduates are classified as high-achieving college students.

**Co-curricular Involvement**

The last characteristic that researchers have used to define high-achieving undergraduates is participation in multiple student organizations. Research on high-achieving undergraduates has predominantly used in-class achievement to define this population. However, the most memorable and valuable learning experiences, acceptance into the best graduate and professional schools, employment by the most sought after companies, and resumes of the most basic transferable skills rarely go to students who only succeed in the classroom. Rather, those who are resourceful and engage in and outside of the classroom are able to competently achieve a wide range of tasks and work with people from diverse backgrounds tend to be most successful. High-achieving students recognize these opportunities and make the most of them (Harper, 2005). And, past research on student success in general echoes the positive correlation between co-curricular engagement and achievement in the classroom (Kuh, 1995; Light, 2001). The next section discusses the most well known theories regarding academic success.

**Traditional Frameworks of College Success**

The study of student success is not a new topic within the field of postsecondary education. The two most established frameworks on college student success are Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) student integration theory and Astin's (1984, 1999) student involvement theory. An overview of these theories and their contributions are provided. The limitations in advancing discourse around and understanding the success of students of color are also examined.

The most widely cited and examined theory of college success is Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) integration theory. This framework posits that students enter college with initial commitment levels to their goals and colleges or universities. These commitments determine the degrees to which students become integrated into the academic and social subsystems within

their campuses. These integration levels, in turn, contribute to students' subsequent commitments to their objectives and institutions. Lastly, these resulting commitments determine their likelihood of succeeding in college.

The second most widely cited and studied theory regarding postsecondary educational success is Astin's (1984, 1999) theory of student involvement, which suggests that college students' involvement is linked to greater levels of satisfaction and likelihood of persistence to graduate from college. Astin (1984, 1999) defines student involvement as the amount of physical and psychological energy students invest in various activities and opportunities in college. Additionally, this framework states that both the quality and quantity of energy invested by students in postsecondary educational activities and opportunities determine the likelihood that they will achieve greater learning results and achieve. The theory of student involvement suggests that when college educators facilitate student involvement in certain activities and opportunities, they can facilitate positive learning and persistence outcomes.

Although both theories provide useful frameworks for understanding success among students of color, these frameworks have three limitations in describing the success of students. First, both theories have been critiqued for being inherently culturally biased and disadvantage students of color (Museus, 2013a; Tierney, 1999). Most postsecondary institutions have Eurocentric beginnings and can therefore be viewed as establishing a "White culture" (Manning & Coleman-Boatwright, 1991, p. 368). This type of culture that is pervasive at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) validates and cultivates the values and assumptions of the White population and marginalizes those of underserved racial and ethnic populations (Manning & Coleman-Boatwright, 1991; Museus, 2008a). Thus, the failure of these traditional perspectives to intentionally account for cultural diversity ignores the reality that students of color must often

sever ties with their cultural heritage, or commit *cultural suicide* as Tierney (1992) called it, in order to assimilate or integrate into the dominant cultures of their campuses.

Some researchers believe that the difficulties students of color face at PWIs can be viewed as a function of cultural distance and the resulting high levels of cultural dissonance that they may feel because of that distance (Kuh & Love, 2000; Museus & Quaye, 2009). *Cultural dissonance* can be defined as the tension that occurs when students encounter new cultural information that is incongruent with their cultural meaning-making systems (Museus, 2008a). Given that most postsecondary institutions are founded on White middle-class communities' values, norms, assumptions, and beliefs, it is understandable that students of color are more likely to feel greater distance between their home and campus cultures than their peers who are White (Kuh & Love, 2000; Museus & Quaye, 2009) and that cultural distance is connected to higher levels of cultural dissonance (Museus, 2008a), which in turn, decreases students' likelihood of achieving success in college (Museus & Quaye, 2009).

When experiencing cultural dissonance, students may feel that they need to engage in culture suicide. As mentioned, cultural suicide is the act of divorcing or killing off their former selves and cultures and forging new selves and relationships in order to effectively integrate themselves into collegiate life (Tierney, 1992, 1999). With this model, Tierney implicitly suggests that students must not only leave their youth behind them, but also their cultures (Museus, 2013a).

Another limitation of these theories is that both of them are self-deterministic (e.g. Bensimon, 2007). More specifically, this means that both frameworks disproportionately center on student behaviors, while not adequately emphasizing the responsibility of postsecondary educational institutions to establish campus cultures that foster success among their students

(Museus, 2013a, 2014). This limitation is crucial, as the ways in which colleges and universities create their campus environments and educators' actions actually influence the success of their students (Jayakumar & Museus, 2012).

Last, these theories do not incorporate motivation into their frameworks. Students need to be motivated in order to succeed. Neither perspective describes how motivation influences success. Nor do they discuss the types of motivational factors students have to excel in college. In the following section, theories regarding motivation and relevant empirical studies are discussed to shed light on the connection between motivation and success in college.

### **Psychological Theories and College Success**

Scholars have identified both external and internal factors that affect students' levels of academic motivation. Postsecondary educational institutions need to know the motivational factors of students and how these relate to academic success to be able to create a supportive campus culture. Although there are various motivation theories that have been established throughout the years, this section describes three psychological theories that have attracted the most attention within higher education: attribution theory (Weiner, 1974, 1986), self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1982), and self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The research focusing on the connection between each theory and the educational achievement of students are also discussed. For the purposes of this review, educational achievement is defined as students' academic performance, which includes the grade earned in an exam or course or the GPA they earned for a semester or longer, depending on the inquiry. Each theoretical framework is further detailed below.

One theory that has attracted much research within the field of postsecondary education is Weiner's (1974, 1986) attribution theory, which examines how individuals explain success or

failure and how their interpretation affects their future thoughts and behaviors. Within higher education, this supposition is used to examine how students establish causal attributions for phenomena and how their academic motivation is influenced by these connections (Graham, 1994). For example, Griffin (2006) utilized this framework to explain the academic motivation of Black high-achieving college students.

The theory of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982) is another framework that is common in educational literature. Self-efficacy is defined as one's judgment of his or her own ability to carry out a task in a specific context. This theoretical framework has been applied to education to understand what phenomena affect individuals' self-efficacy in the classroom. However, having a high degree of self-efficacy in one area does not necessarily translate into other domains. Self-efficacy and performance mutually affect each other, as high self-efficacy positively affects performance and as a result, this good performance will positively affect self-efficacy.

### **Self-Determination Theory**

The third perspective that has also generated a considerable amount of research within postsecondary educational literature is Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory. This theoretical framework examines academic motivation types and how they predict the outcomes of student performance, which makes itself the most relevant to this examination. According to Deci and Ryan, the first step for understanding students' motivation in an educational context is to distinguish between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation.

**Extrinsic Motivation.** Extrinsic motivation refers to outside motivators for individuals to achieve academically. According to Deci and Ryan's (1985, 2000) self-determination theory, extrinsic motivation exists along a continuum from high to low levels of self-determination. Four types of extrinsic motivation with different degrees of self-determination have been



proposed and range from a high to low degree of self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 2000). First, there is *integrated regulation*, which is similar to intrinsic motivation. However, behaviors characterized by integrated motivation can still be considered caused by extrinsic motivation because they are carried out to achieve separable results instead of for inherent enjoyment (e.g., students who complete extra work because of its instrumentality to succeeding in the future). Next is *identification*, in which behaviors are viewed as personally important to achieving an external goal (e.g., students who go to a class to eventually reach the career they desire); *introjected regulation*, which represents a partial internalization without completely accepting it as one's own (e.g., students who go to a class to avoid feeling guilty); and *external regulation*, which takes place when a behavior is performed for external rewards or constraints (e.g., students who take courses because their parents told them to do so).

**Intrinsic Motivation.** The dimension of intrinsic motivation refers to that which is internally felt as a motivator to achieve in the academic arena. As described by Deci (1975), students are intrinsically motivated when they engage in an action for the pleasure experienced in the process. Intrinsic motivation has been characterized to be the most self-determined style of motivation. To explicate the concept of intrinsic motivation, Vallerand, Blais, Briere, and Pelletier (1989) categorized intrinsic motivation into a tripartite taxonomy: a motivation to know, to accomplish things, and to experience stimulation.

Intrinsic motivation *to know* refers to constructs such as students' exploration, curiosity, learning goals, intellectuality, and the intrinsic motivation to learn (Vallerand, Pelletier, Blais, Brière, Senècal, & Vallières, 1992). In addition, the intrinsic motivation to know can also be described as a need to know, understand, or search for meaning. Students are intrinsically motivated to know when they accomplish tasks for the pleasure that they experience while

learning something new or different. Simply put, an intrinsic motivation to know consists of an individual performing an activity for the pleasure and the satisfaction experienced while in the process of learning.

Intrinsic motivation *toward accomplishment* involves engaging in an activity for the pleasure and satisfaction experienced when one attempts to accomplish or create something (Vallerand et al., 1992). In educational research and developmental psychology, intrinsic motivation toward accomplishment has also been labeled as the concept of ‘mastery motivation,’ which occurs when students who go beyond the requirements of an assignment to experience the pleasure and satisfaction of exceeding their own goals display an intrinsic motivation toward accomplishment (Harter, 1981).

The intrinsic motivation *to experience stimulation* operates when students engage in activities for sensations such as sensory pleasure, aesthetic experiences, and fun and excitement. This concept has also been studied across disciplines under different labels, such as dynamic and holistic sensation of flow, aesthetic experiences, and peak experiences (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). Students who attend class because they are excited and look forward to class discussion, or students who read books for the pleasure derived from engaging passages are intrinsically motivated to experience stimulation. The main assumption of the self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000) is that the more intrinsically motivated students are, the more likely they will achieve academically.

**Literature Review.** Like the attribution (Weiner, 1974) and self-efficacy theories (Bandura, 1994, 1997) mentioned earlier, the self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000) has also been examined in relation to academic success within higher education. Much research based on self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000) has shown that intrinsic

motivation is related to important behavioral outcomes in education (Deci, 1975; Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). However, further investigations demonstrate conflicting findings. These examinations are described in further detail within the remainder of this subsection.

As stated earlier, the main assumption of the self-determination theory is that the more intrinsically motivated students are, the more likely they will achieve academically (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). Several experimental studies support this assertion and link intrinsic motivation to outcomes such as learning and knowledge integration, academic performance, and persistence (for overviews, see Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999; Deci & Ryan, 2000, 2002; Vallerand, 1997). For example, Vallerand and Bissonnette (1992) examined 1,042 first-semester students enrolled in a compulsory French course at a French-Canadian junior college, who completed a scale measuring motivation toward academic activities at the beginning of the semester. Results of a multivariate analysis of variance revealed that students who completed the course reported being more intrinsically motivated than those who dropped out. In addition, Vansteenkiste, Simons, Lens, Sheldon, and Deci (2004) conducted three field experiments with 801 high school and college students in Belgium to test the self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). Analyses of variance confirmed that intrinsic factors positively affected not only course test performance, but also depth of processing and persistence as well.

Despite the findings of the aforementioned studies on the application self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000) to the educational success of students, other investigations demonstrate results that contradict this theory and its supporting literature. More specifically, an increasing number of investigations regarding self-determination theory on students of color are indicating that external factors may have a stronger influence on the motivation and success of this population. For example, in studies examining multiple Native American tribes, tradition

seems to play a dominant role in the academic success of college students from these groups (Huffman, Sill, & Brokenleg, 1986; Rindone, 1988). In a quantitative examination of Navajo students, Rindone (1988) analyzed data from questionnaires completed by college graduates in Arizona found that stability of traditional values as instilled by the family was the only factor that contributed to the success of those individuals who had attained a bachelor's degree. Similarly, in another ethnographic analysis that utilized questionnaires, researchers focusing on Sioux college students in South Dakota noticed that retention of native cultural traditions was shown to foster higher education success (Huffman, Sill, & Brokenleg, 1986).

Studies on Native Hawaiian college students also demonstrated that factors external to the individual may also play a significant role in their academic success (Hagedorn et al., 2006; Makuakane-Drechsel & Hagedorn, 2000). Using logistic regression, Hagedorn et al. (2006) traced the life paths of some Native Hawaiian students who began their postsecondary education at a community college. They found that socioeconomic status and receiving college financial aid and family support were significant influences in attaining a bachelor's degree for these students. Another study on a group of Native Hawaiian community college attendees indicate that being a full-time student and a recipient of financial aid were significant predictors of Native Hawaiian student persistence (Makuakane-Drechsel & Hagedorn, 2000).

In regard to Black students, Guiffrida (2005a) also found that having connections with other Black people who were successful in higher education positively affected some students' academic achievement. Guiffrida (2005a) further defines this source by adding that engaging in a tradition of education within the Black community called othermothering – the ways in which student-centered faculty went above and beyond their roles as professors to assist students with their academic, career, and personal issues” (Guiffrida, 2005a, p. 708) – by Black faculty fosters

student success for high-achieving students who were also African American. 19 Black undergraduates at a predominantly White postsecondary educational institution participated in focus groups of two or four students.

Contradictory findings were also revealed in an investigation using a racially and ethnically diverse non-traditional student sample. In Kaufman, Agars, and Lopez-Wagner's (2008) examination using regression analyses, both extrinsic and intrinsic factors were found to contribute to the academic success of these students. At a four-year university in the southwestern U.S., 315 participants were asked to complete an online questionnaire using Likert-type items about their motivation, personality, high school GPA, and parental education levels. Students' first-quarter GPA was provided by the institution's research office. The sample consisted of 46% White, 27% Latino, 10% Black, and 9% Asian, with the remaining 8% indicating "other." In this analysis, both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, along with conscientiousness, were all significant predictors of first-quarter academic success. Examples of extrinsic motivation are individual preferences for tasks that foster achievement, rewards, and recognition, and the belief that intelligence is fixed. Instances of intrinsic motivation are individual preferences for activities worthwhile, provide opportunities for growth, and suggest that intelligence is malleable.

In another study comparing first-generation and non-first-generation undergraduates from a racially and ethnically diverse student population, the effect of extrinsic and intrinsic factors had different results on the academic achievement of these two groups (Próspero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007). A questionnaire of Likert-type items was administered to 277 students attending a community college in the southern region of U.S. Using multiple regression analyses, the researchers found that external and internal motivation factors significantly influenced the GPA

of these first-generation students, while neither external nor internal factors affected the GPA of the non-first-generation students included in this study.

Even with the participant pool consisting mostly of Whites of Turner, Chandler, and Heffer's (2009) study, they found that both extrinsic and intrinsic factors affect their participants' GPA. In this inquiry, 264 undergraduate students enrolled in psychology courses at a major university in the southwestern U.S. completed an online survey. The sample consisted of 68% Whites, 18% Latino, 5% Asian, 5% Black, 3% biracial, and 1% other. The results of regression analyses indicated that authoritative parenting and both intrinsic and self-efficacy predicted the influences the academic success of these undergraduates.

**Strengths and Limitations.** Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000) and the research about this framework have demonstrated some strengths and weaknesses of this perspective. Three of these strengths are discussed. First, self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000) is a broad-based theory of motivation that has been in effect for more than 37 years. Second, the purpose of the theory is to identify the main causes, processes, and outcomes of human success, in particular by conceptualizing the nature of optimal motivation and the general conditions that support or undermine this motivation. Third, different types of research supporting the self-determination theory have been conducted (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000), including experimental and field studies, which strengthens the theory overall (Vansteenkiste & Sheldon, 2006).

On the other hand, there are also some limitations of the self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). One disadvantage is that the investigations detailed earlier were the only ones that could be found which applied this framework to students of color. Thus, self-determination theory may not accurately reflect the motivation and achievement patterns of these

students. The results of aforementioned studies focusing on specific groups of students of color demonstrate that external factors can have an equal or even stronger influence on the academic success of these students compared to intrinsic motivational forces. This contrast indicates that students of color may be motivated differently than their White counterparts. Given the conflicting research results, further investigation needs to be conducted to better determine how the self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000) applies to students of color. The other limitation of self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000) is mixed evidence supporting the perspective's assumption that higher levels of intrinsic motivation are correlated to higher levels of academic achievement. As demonstrated in the aforementioned research, this presumption does not hold true for student populations of color within higher education. Additional exploration is needed to further determine the influence of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation factors on the educational success of students.

In conclusion, research focusing specifically on the connection between self-determination theory and the educational achievement of students in higher education was described. The strengths and weaknesses of the framework were also discussed. One drawback of this perspective is similar to one of the disadvantages of the traditional success theories that was discussed earlier, which is that self-determination theory focuses disproportionately on students' thoughts and behaviors. As stated earlier, this distracts from the need for colleges and universities to take responsibility in creating a culture that fosters success among their students. The next section discusses campus environments and its connection to academic motivation.

### **Campus Environments and Motivation**

Campus climate and campus culture within higher educational institutions have received considerable attention in postsecondary literature. While campus culture and climate are

sometimes used interchangeably, it is important to understand the differences between them.

Moreover, researchers have discussed and examined how these aspects of postsecondary institutions are shaped by race, thereby generating discourse around the campus racial climate and campus racial culture. In this section, I review literature on the campus racial climate and campus racial culture of college and university campuses.

### **Campus Racial Climate**

Campus climate can be described as “the current perceptions, attitudes, and expectations that define the institution and its members” (Bauer, 1990, p. 2). Much of the research on institutional environments and racially diverse student populations has studied campus climates as they relate to race (for review, see Harper & Hurtado, 2007). Overall, examinations of campus racial climates are concentrated on investigating students’ attitudes, views, observations, or interactions within the racial environment of their postsecondary institution at a certain point in time (e.g., Cabrera, Nora, Pascarella, Terenzini, & Hagedorn, 1999; Museus, Nichols, & Lambert, 2008; Nora & Cabrera, 1996). This field of research has highlighted significant realities in that it has established a substantial amount of evidence that different racial groups view campus environments in disparate ways, students of color experience prejudice (including racial stereotyping) and discrimination at predominantly White institutions (PWIs), and benefits result from cross-racial interactions in college (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Chang, 1999, 2001; Chang, Astin, & Kim, 2004; Chang, Denson, Sáenz, & Misa, 2006; Fries-Britt, 1998; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Jayakumar, 2008; Museus et al., 2008; Museus & Truong, 2009; Rankin & Reason, 2008; Sáenz, Ngai, & Hurtado, 2007; Smeadly, Myers, & Harrell, 1993). Across the U.S., postsecondary educators continue to engage in efforts to address “chilly” climates to improve the experience for racially diverse college student populations. Even



though focusing on the betterment of campus climates and students' postsecondary experiences and outcomes, this concentration on campus racial climates have two important limitations.

First, with few exceptions (e.g. Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, & Allen, 1998), the concentration on campus climates does not explicitly establish holistic views about how higher education institutions can and should transform to better serve increasingly racially diverse student populations. Therefore, attempts to positively affect the experiences of students of color often result in the formation of isolated programs and activities created to help students feel more welcomed or feel as though they have a voice on campus. Unfortunately, the impact of these efforts is often short-lived and does not succeed in stimulating profound, pervasive, and lasting systemic institutional change. Contrary to research on campus climate, studies on campus culture seek to comprehend institutions from a more holistic view (Bauer, 1998). Campus culture research takes into consideration the historical context, rituals and traditions, institutional values and norms, beliefs and assumptions that drive policymaking and programming, and other symbolic aspects of a campus's identity, as well as the observed and unobserved values and assumptions that shape views, actions, and the way education is approached and delivered. By doing so, campus culture examinations and conversations can help move toward a more holistic comprehension of the intersection between the deeply embedded and complex components of postsecondary institutions and their diverse student bodies (Jayakumar & Museus, 2012).

Second, research regarding campus racial climate has not created a sufficient empirical basis for comprehending how those deeply embedded aspects of higher education institutions create obstacles to institutional change for better supporting racially diverse student populations. This is a pivotal point because, even when postsecondary educators strongly advocate for institutional transformation to address the needs of racially diverse student populations, they face

systemic cultural and structural obstacles. Unlike examinations of campus climate, comprehending campus cultures can help educators better understand how values and assumptions that shape action and the delivery of education can inhibit positive institutional transformation. Understanding campus cultures can also provide educators greater flexibility in facilitating institutional change (Tierney, 1992, 1993). Such comprehension can help educators in overcoming cultural issues and leveraging various components of their campus cultures to facilitate change. In conclusion, comprehending and acknowledging institutional campus culture is crucial for changing institutions to maximize success among increasingly racially and ethnically diverse student populations.

### **Campus Racial Culture**

*Campus culture* is an area that has been studied for many years (e.g. Bauer, 1990; Kuh & Hall, 1993; Peterson & Spencer, 1990; Tierney, 1988, 1992). Campus culture can be defined as: the collective, mutual shaping patterns of institutional history, mission, physical settings, norms, traditions, values, practices, beliefs, and assumptions that guide behavior of individuals and groups in an institution of higher education, which provide a frame of reference for interpreting the meanings of events and actions on and off campus. (Kuh & Hall, 1993, p. 2)

This definition is especially valuable because it highlights both the complexity of university cultures and value of cultural views in comprehending the experiences of individuals and groups on college campuses (Museus, 2007b). It is also important to note, however, that this definition does not delve into how different groups may view, establish meaning of, and experience various aspects of a campus culture in different ways. In addition, the deracialized nature of this definition is congruent with much of the work on culture, which has improved current levels of

understanding regarding college students' experiences in the campus context overall, but is limited in its clarification of how specific groups, such as various racial and ethnic groups, experience certain parts of a campus culture in varied ways (e.g. Kuh & Hall, 1993; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005; Strange & Banning, 2001).

Campus culture is powerful in that it shapes everything that occurs within a postsecondary institution (Kuh, 2001/2002). Even though individual traits of students affect their college experiences, past research demonstrates that the cultures of colleges and universities also have a significant impact on the experiences and outcomes of their students (Guiffrida, 2006; Kuh, 2001/2002; Museus, 2007b; Museus & Maramba, 2010; Museus & Quaye, 2009; Tierney, 1999). In addition, a growing number of studies is showing that postsecondary institutions have some control over the extent to which they hinder or foster cultures that support success among the student body in general (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006; Kuh et al., 2005) and specifically, students of color (Museus, 2007b; Tierney, 1999).

The vast majority of existing literature regarding campus cultures has been mainly associated with negative experiences and outcomes for undergraduates of color (Museus, Lãm, Huang, Kem, & Tan, 2012). Actually, existing evidence highlights the issues students of color face when entering, adjusting to, and finding membership in the dominant cultures of PWIs (e.g. González, 2002; Kuh et al., 2006; Kuh & Love, 2000; Museus & Quayle, 2009). More specifically, research has shown that students of color often experience pressure to conform to cultural stereotypes and feelings of alienation, isolation, and marginalization from their campus cultures (González, 2002; Lewis et al., 2000; Museus, 2007b; Rendón et al., 2000). This body of literature, however, is relatively small and more research in this area would greatly benefit institutional policymakers and practitioners as they consider ways to establish environments that

positively affect the experiences of all students. It is my hope that the findings of this dissertation will help contribute to this area of scholarship.

The challenges that students of color face are understandable considering that they are within PWI cultures that are founded on the ideas of White culture and cultural dissonance (Katz, 1989; Manning & Coleman-Boatwright, 1991; Museus, 2008a). Manning and Coleman-Boatwright (1991) pointed out that the question of whose histories, traditions, and experiences are represented and fostered within higher education is rarely considered. They highlight the fact that most postsecondary institutions have Eurocentric beginnings and can therefore be viewed as “White culture” (Manning & Coleman-Boatwright, 1991, p. 368). This type of culture that is pervasive at PWIs validates and cultivates the values and assumptions of the White population and marginalizes those of underserved racial and ethnic populations (Manning & Coleman-Boatwright, 1991; Museus, 2008a).

As mentioned previously, some researchers believe that the difficulties students of color face at PWIs can be viewed as a function of cultural distance and the resulting high levels of cultural dissonance that they may feel because of that distance (Kuh & Love, 2000; Museus & Quaye, 2009). *Cultural dissonance* can be defined as the tension that occurs when students encounter cultural information that opposes their cultural meaning-making systems (Museus, 2008a). Given that most postsecondary institutions are founded on White values, beliefs, and norms, it is understandable that some students of color might feel greater distance between their home and campus cultures than their White peers (Kuh & Love, 2000; Museus & Quaye, 2009) and that cultural distance is connected to cultural dissonance (Museus, 2008a), which in turn, decreases these students’ likelihood of achieving success in college (Museus & Quaye, 2009).

As with any higher educational institution, the culture of a campus is complex. With colleges and universities growing and becoming increasingly diversified, they have also become progressively complicated. This expanding size and intricacy has led to the emergence of subcultures within the larger campus. Using the framework of Bolton and Kammeyer (1972), Jayakumar and Museus (2012) describe *campus subculture* as:

the distinct culture that is created and perpetuated by a group on campus that (1) is in persisting interaction with each other, (2) has developed distinct values, assumptions, and perspectives that guide behavior of its group members, (3) transmits those values, assumptions, and perspectives to newcomers to facilitate conformity to them, and (4) differs from the dominant culture of the campus. (p. 7)

Often times, college students of color have been found to unknowingly gravitate or intentionally look for ethnic subcultures on campus. This pull may possibly be due to experienced cultural distance, cultural dissonance, and issues navigating the larger dominant cultures of PWIs (Murguía, Padilla, & Pavel, 1991). Ethnic campus subcultures like ethnic studies programs, targeted support programs, cultural and multicultural centers, and ethnic student organizations, can significantly impact the experiences and outcomes of students of color in various positive ways (see González, 2002; Guiffreda, 2006; Museus, 2010, 2011a). These subcultures provide safe spaces for students of color, in which they can embrace and demonstrate their cultural identities and create more meaningful connections with the academic and social subsystems of their college or university. Establishment of these meaningful relationships has been shown to foster the success of students of color (Jayakumar & Museus, 2012).

The potential for campuses to create the conditions for students of color to thrive might depend on the extent to which they foster *cultural integration*, which is the integration of the

academic, social, and cultural components of the experiences of students of color (Museus, 2011b). Campus subcultures can help students achieve integration by creating spaces, academic courses, workshops, projects, and activities. Such integration is pivotal for undergraduates of color who have to navigate their larger postsecondary institution's environment that do not usually facilitate such integration. There is some evidence that cultural integration has a positive impact on the outcomes of students of color, including validation of their cultural backgrounds and identities and academic success (Museus et al., 2012; Tierney, 1999).

Therefore, review of the aforementioned research on campus culture and undergraduates of color indicates that the dominant cultures of PWIs pose challenges for these students, and campus subcultures can provide safe spaces that promote their success. However, research suggests that educators can also promote *dominant* organizational values, beliefs, and assumptions that advance the success of students of color (Museus, 2011a; Museus & Harris, 2010). While Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, and associates (1991) and Kuh et al. (2005) examined the positive effects of espoused and enacted values and a steady focus on student learning on the engagement and success of college students, students of color were not specifically studied. Building on these studies, Museus (2011a) investigated three PWIs that had high and equitable persistence and graduation rates among underserved students of color and found that strong networking values, a commitment to focused support, a belief in humanizing the learning experience, and an assumed institutional responsibility for the success of students of color were the main cultural components that fostered success among racially and ethnically diverse student populations at these institutions. Thus, there is some evidence that PWIs can cultivate campus-wide values, commitments, beliefs, and assumptions that positively affect the success of students of color. Postsecondary educators need to understand how their campus cultures have different

effects on various student groups and what cultural aspects facilitate student achievement so that their institutions have cultures that successfully integrate and foster academic success of all members of their student population.

Building on the work of scholars who have written about culture, campus culture, race, and the role of race in postsecondary education (e.g. Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999; Kuh & Hall, 1993; Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Museus, 2007b, 2011a; Museus & Harris, 2010; Museus & Quaye, 2009; Peterson & Spencer, 1990; Rendón et al., 2000), Museus et al. (2012), define the *campus racial culture* as,

the collective patterns of tacit values, beliefs, assumptions, and norms that evolve from an institution's history and are manifest in its mission, traditions, language, interactions, artifacts, physical structures, and other symbols, which differentially shape the experiences of various racial and ethnic groups and can function to oppress racial minority populations within a particular institution. (p. 32)

With this definition, different racial and ethnic groups experience and create meaning of aspects of the campus culture in disparate ways. An institution's campus racial culture is disproportionately influenced as time progresses by the racial majority and as a result, is congruent with, engages, mirrors, and validates the values of the culture from which the people from the racial majority come. Simultaneously, that culture is often less congruent with, engaging of, reflective of, and validating of the cultural backgrounds of people of color.

Comprehending the concept of the campus racial culture is imperative, as administrators, faculty, and staff at institutions across the United States are disproportionately White. Thus, they must acknowledge the fact that students of color may view the same aspects of their campus's culture in ways that differ from themselves (Museus et al., 2012). Presently, there is a paucity of

research examining the linkage between campus racial culture and its effects on student motivation. This dissertation will help address this gap by providing more knowledge about the key factors postsecondary institutions must incorporate into their campuses in order to motivate students of color to succeed.

### **Culturally Engaging Campus Environments Model of Success**

After reviewing theories and extant research on college student success and motivation, Museus (2014) developed a Culturally Engaging Campus Environments (CECE) Model of Success that explains the impact of campus environments, acknowledges the role of motivation and success, addresses the limitations of traditional perspectives, and focuses specifically on students of color. In this section, I provide an overview of the CECE Model. This framework, which is shown in Figure 1, is an explanatory model for understanding the impact of campus environments on the academic motivation and success of college students of color. This model was mainly created based from the concepts and views of theories and research on students of color, including the perspectives and empirical evidence discussed in the previous section.

The CECE Model states that various *external influences* (i.e., finances, employment, and family guidance) affect *individual influences* (i.e., sense of belonging, academic attitudes, and academic performance and *success* among students of color. This theoretical framework also posits that students enter college with *pre-college inputs* (i.e., demographic traits, initial academic attitudes, academic preparation) that affect individual influences and achievement. The model emphasizes the *environmental* (i.e. CECEs) and individual effects on educational achievement. The focal point of this perspective is that the degree to which the environment of a postsecondary educational institution is culturally engaging is positively correlated with increasingly positive individual factors and ultimately greater academic achievement. The CECE



model suggests that individual influences are positively linked with greater likelihood of college persistence and graduation (Museus, 2013a, 2014). This framework posits that there are nine CECE aspects of culturally engaging environments that function to engage students' diverse cultural identities and create conditions for them to thrive. These nine indicators can be separated into two groups: indicators of cultural relevance and cultural responsiveness.

**Culturally Relevant Environments.** The first five critical aspects of campus environments that within the CECE Model gauge the degree to which campus environments are relevant to the cultural identities of diverse students.

- ***Cultural familiarity.*** First, the CECE model states that the extent to which students are able to establish connections with faculty, staff, and peers with whom they share similar backgrounds is positively related to their success in college. This premise coincides with existing literature indicating that students who are able to identify with institutional members who come from backgrounds like theirs or have common experiences with them are more motivated to excel in college (Guiffrida, 2005a; Hassinger & Plourde, 2005).
- ***Culturally relevant knowledge.*** Next, the CECE Model proposes that campuses that provide opportunities for students to establish, maintain, and deepen epistemological cultural connections to their home communities can positively affect their experiences and success. Particularly, opportunities for the establishment and maintenance of epistemological relationships refer to the ways in which institutions provide space for students to learn and share knowledge about their communities of origin. The inclusion of this construct is consistent with existing scholarship that demonstrates that students' capabilities to learn and share knowledge about the needs of their home communities are

linked to creating greater bonds with having higher levels of motivation (Guiffrida, 2005a; Museus, Shiroma, & Dizon, 2013).

- ***Cultural community service.*** Third, the CECE Model suggests that transformational cultural connections can positively affect the experiences and outcomes of student populations. Transformational connections are established when institutions provide students with ways to give back to and positively influence their home communities through various means, like activities created to spread awareness about community issues, engage in community activism, engage in service-learning opportunities, or be involved in problem-based research opportunities that help address challenges in their home communities. Existing research is consistent with the inclusion of transformational connections in the CECE Model demonstrating that activities allowing students to positively influence their communities of origin are positively connected to being more motivated to succeed (Museus et al., 2013).
- ***Meaningful cross-cultural engagement.*** Fourth, the CECE Model implies that opportunities for meaningful cross-cultural engagement positively affects success among student populations. Particularly, the framework suggests that opportunities to engage in positive purposeful interactions with peers of different cultural backgrounds can positively affect college experiences and success. With the connection between such cross-cultural engagement, persistence, and degree completion already being researched and analyzed, postsecondary scholars have documented that environments that foster meaningful cross-cultural engagement are linked with many positive outcomes that are related to motivation (Antonio, 2004).

- ***Culturally validating environments.*** Fifth, the CECE Model proposes that culturally validating environments are positively related to success. When college educators validate the cultural backgrounds and identities of students, they are more likely to experience college positively and succeed (Barnett, 2011a, 2011b; Museus & Quaye, 2009; Nora, Urick, & Cerecer, 2011; Rendón, 1994; Rendón & Muñoz, 2011). Cultural validation refers to the degree to which colleges and universities value their students' cultural backgrounds and identities. This construct is consistent with past literature that suggests that such validation can positively affect students' level of motivation (Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, & Rosales, 2005; Museus & Quaye, 2009).

**Culturally Responsive Environments.** The last four indicators of the CECE Model gauge the degree to which campus environments respond to the cultural norms and needs of racially and ethnically diverse student populations.

- ***Collective cultural orientations.*** First, the CECE Model posits that environments with more collective cultural orientations, as opposed to more individualistic ones, are more conducive to positive college experiences and success for students. Past research also connotes students who originate from more collectivistic cultural orientations may face unique issues while navigating colleges and universities with individualistic cultural orientations (Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005; Thompson & Fretz, 1991). Furthermore, existing literature supports the possible impact of collective approaches to motivate students to succeed (Guiffrida, 2006).
- ***Humanized educational environments.*** The second aspect of the culturally responsive environment suggests that the degree to which students encounter humanized educational environments is positively related to postsecondary experiences and success. Humanized

educational environments refer to campus environments that are distinguished by caring, commitment, and meaningful connections. Extant literature demonstrates that such humanization supports the motivation of college students (Guiffrida, 2003; Museus, 2011a; Nora et al., 2011; Rendón, 1994; Rendón & Muñoz, 2011).

- ***Proactive philosophies.*** Third, the CECE Model implies that the degree to which proactive philosophies exist on postsecondary campuses can partially influence the likelihood of success among students on those campuses. In other words, the model suggests that, when faculty and staff go beyond making information and support available to making extra efforts to provide that information and support to students and maximize their likelihood of success, they can increase the rates of attainment of students. This construct is consistent with past research that emphasizes the positive effects of such proactive philosophies and practices on college student motivation (Guiffrida, 2005a; Jenkins et al., 2006).
- ***Holistic support.*** The fourth component of the culturally responsive environment is the availability of holistic support. This construct refers to the degree to which students have access to a faculty or staff member that they believe will provide the information that they require, offer the assistance they seek, or connect them with the information or support that they need. While the research regarding the significance of holistic support is limited, the studies in this area demonstrate that such holistic approaches foster motivation among students (e.g. Guiffrida, 2005a; Jenkins et al., 2006).

The CECE Model challenges important deficient views and stereotypes regarding college student success. Additionally, this theoretical framework also helps establish a better understanding of the various factors that can affect student success and motivation. The CECE

Model and its supporting literature demonstrate that higher educational institutions have the ability to establish an environment that is conducive for the motivation and success of their student populations. Therefore, further research that determines how the CECE Model applies to students is needed to better understand how colleges and universities can foster academic motivation and success for these students (Museus, 2013a, 2014).

The CECE Model challenges important deficient views and stereotypes regarding students of color. In addition, this theoretical framework also helps establish a better understanding of the various factors that can affect student motivation and success, which also complicates our comprehension of these students. Therefore, further research that determines how the CECE Model applies to students of color is needed to better understand how colleges and universities can foster academic motivation and success for these students (Museus, 2013a, 2014). In the next section, I examine research regarding the factors that affect the motivation of underserved students of color.

### **Factors Influencing the Motivation of Underserved Students of Color**

Most of the research focused on motivation has included mostly White college students. Thus, these perspectives and studies may not accurately reflect the motivation patterns of specific populations of students of color. Realizing this paucity of research on the motivation of students of color, scholars have recently increased the amount of knowledge regarding what factors motivate students of color to achieve academically. Much of the existing research based on self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000) has shown that intrinsic motivation has a stronger influence on important behavioral outcomes in education than extrinsic motivation (Deci, 1975; Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). As mentioned, this general concept has received considerable empirical confirmation, first in experimental studies (see Deci, Koestner, & Ryan,

1999, for a review of this work from the 1980s), and later, in the 1990s, in education, focusing on many different positive outcomes, such as learning and knowledge integration, academic performance, and persistence (for overviews, see Deci & Ryan, 2000, 2002; Vallerand, 1997).

However, research focusing on specific types of students of color is more consistent with theories regarding externally driven motivation in that they demonstrate that external factors, particularly environmental factors, can have an equal or even stronger influence on the academic success of these students compared to intrinsic motivational forces (Amodeo & Martin, 1982; Fuligni, 2002; Harper, 2005; Hwang, Echols, & Vrongistinos, 2002). This contrast indicates that students of color may be motivated differently than their White counterparts. The rest of this section will discuss these studies in further detail.

With regard to sources of academic motivation for Hispanic college students, family has been found to have the most significant impact on students' motivation in studies conducted by Amodeo and Martin (1982) and Fuligni (2002). Amodeo and Martin (1982) found that encouragement from family members was the most motivating influence for Hispanic participants who attained high educational achievement. Similarly, Fuligni (2002) found that having a sense of obligation to one's family was a strong force that pressured some Latin American students to achieve academic success.

Three studies also found that family was the strongest influence for academic motivation of some Southeast Asian Americans (SEAAs). Two of these examinations were conducted on teenagers. One inquiry used quantitative research methods to survey 39 Southeast Asian (17 Cambodian and 22 Vietnamese) adolescent refugees who were enrolled in a bilingual vocational education program at a high school (Lese & Robbins, 1994). When asked what motivated them to succeed academically, family was the most common response of these individuals.

Teranishi and Nguyen (2009) conducted the second inquiry on teenagers by using mixed research methods. They gathered descriptive statistics and interviewed SEAA high school students in California. Their findings also emphasized the significant positive impact of the encouragement from their families and communities on these teenagers' academic motivation. Additionally, many interviewees felt that it was their responsibility to succeed given all of the sacrifices their parents made for them.

On the other hand, some SEAA students said that they also felt that their cultural expectations and familial responsibilities negatively affected their motivation to attend college. The effect of traditional culture seemed to be particularly significant to some Hmong participants, especially women. Female interviewees spoke about cultural expectations regarding living at home until getting married, which limited considerations and opportunities for college.

The third inquiry on SEAA students was qualitative and was performed on 34 college students from five public four-year colleges and universities across the United States (Museus, 2013b). The findings of this investigation also demonstrated that parents had the strongest effect on their children's academic motivation in various ways. The first three techniques positively influenced some SEAA students; they involve parental expectations, parental values, and parental sacrifice and responsibility. The fourth method was internationalization of parental pressures and intrinsic motivation that fueled students to achieve academically. Some interviewees cited three ways in which parental pressures were complicated for students: (1) excessive parental pressures, (2) lower expectations for women than men in some communities, and (3) students pressured by their parents to major in an academic area that was unsuitable for them. This examination shows how complex parental influence can be on the academic motivation of SEAA students.

Knowing what factors motivate students of color to stay in college can help institutions better understand this growing undergraduate population. However, due to the high attrition rates of students of color, more literature needs to be generated regarding high-achieving students of color so that postsecondary institutions can learn from them and be better able at fostering retention and graduation within their campus cultures. The next section reviews past studies regarding high-achieving students of color.

### **Factors Influencing the Motivation of High-Achieving Underserved Students of Color**

High-achieving underserved students of color are like typical college students in many ways. However, the issues of being a student of color and a gifted student can merge together to shape students' experiences in unique ways (Fries-Britt, 1997; Lindstrom & Van Sant, 1986; Noldon & Sedlacek, 1996). Existing research on high-achievers of color illustrate the difficulties these individuals face, including racism, reconciling their racial, ethnic, cultural, and gifted identities, and social isolation. These experiences can restrain these students' success and decrease their motivation levels.

As mentioned earlier, colleges and universities' establishment of a positive and supportive campus culture plays a crucial role in fostering academic success of all of its student populations (Fries-Britt, 1997; Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006; Kuh et al., 2005; Museus, 2007b; Noldon & Sedlacek, 1996; Tierney, 1999). However, although the literature examines challenges that Black high-achievers of color face and the role that social support has in mitigating the influence of these factors, there is less understanding and knowledge regarding what factors motivate these students to continue to strive for educational excellence despite these barriers. The remainder of this section discusses what research has been conducted on high-



achievers of color and how this particular dissertation hopes to address the paucity of research in this area.

One investigation was found regarding high-achieving Hispanic students, which was an ethnographic examination conducted by Hassinger and Plourde (2005). It involved four middle school participants from Washington who were achieving above grade-level expectations. Data was collected through observations, interviews, and document reviews. They found that both internal and external factors motivated these students to succeed. The internal factors included high levels of self-esteem, internal locus of control, and positive disposition. The external factors included having at least one family member or caregiver that is supportive of the student's academic success and a teacher who has high expectations of the student and knows that the teacher believes in them.

Presently, the group of high-achieving students of color that has garnered the most research is Blacks. Research regarding motivational factors of Black students has pointed to external sources as having the most impact (Guiffrida, 2005a; Harper, 2005; Hwang et al., 2002). In some studies, social responsibility has been shown to play a significant influence in academic motivation (Harper, 2005; Hwang et al., 2002). In one investigation, for example, Harper (2005) interviewed 32 Black male students and found that "commitments to assuming responsibility for the advancement of the African American community and ensuring that minority voices were heard" were strong motivational influences for these individuals. Similarly, research that focused on Black college students demonstrates that, in addition to intrinsic motivational influences to learn and succeed, social responsibility and concern for community growth also contributed to the academic motivation of these participants (Hwang et al., 2002).

In addition, Guiffrida's (2005a) qualitative analysis found that having connections with Blacks who were successful in higher education positively affected some Black students' academic achievement. Guiffrida further defines this source by adding that engaging in a tradition of education within the Black community called othermothering by Black faculty fosters student success for high-achieving students who were also African American. 19 Black undergraduates at a PWI participated in focus groups of two or four students. 18 out of the 19 were then interviewed individually. For this study, othermothering is defined as "the ways in which student-centered faculty went above and beyond their roles as professors to assist students with their academic, career, and personal issues" (p. 708).

The findings of these studies warrant the need for further research to be conducted on underserved college students of color, particularly those individuals who are high-achieving. Gaining more knowledge about the motivational influences of high-achieving college students of color will help educators know how to allocate resources in order to foster success for this particular group. In addition, this inquiry may also be helpful and instrumental for other colleges that support underserved students of color in succeeding educationally.

### **Conceptual Framework**

To better understand the factors of motivation of high-achievers of color, the CECE Model (Museus, 2013a, 2014) were utilized for this dissertation. I examined the motivation of high-achieving underserved students of color using Museus's (2013a, 2014) CECE Model. This construct posits that *external influences* (i.e., finances, employment, and family guidance) influence *individual influences* (i.e., sense of belonging, academic attitudes, and academic performance) and *success* among students of color. This framework also suggests that students begin their postsecondary education with *pre-college inputs* (i.e., demographic traits, initial

academic attitudes, academic preparation) that affect individual influences and success. The theory highlights the *environmental* (i.e. CECEs) and individual effects on educational achievement. The focal point of this perspective is that the extent to which the environment of a postsecondary institution is culturally engaging is positively correlated with increasingly positive individual factors and ultimately greater academic success. (Museus, 2013a, 2014). Scarce and inconsistent research demonstrates the need to further examine the impact of CECEs on the motivation of diverse student populations. Furthermore, gaining more information in this area is key to learning how to foster academic success of underserved undergraduates of color.

The CECE Model provide a holistic lens to analyze the ways in which larger environmental or institutional forces shape the motivation of high-achieving students of color. The most relevant aspect of the model for this inquiry is the positive relationship that this framework hypothesizes between CECEs and motivation to achieve in college. In addition, currently, there is a paucity of literature regarding the relationship between campus culture and the motivation of high-achievers of color. Thus, the purposes of this dissertation are to gain a better understanding of the experiences of high-achievers of color and to establish more knowledge about the linkage between campus culture and the motivational influences of this student population.

### **CHAPTER 3:**

#### **RESEARCH METHODS**

In this chapter, the research methods that were utilized to examine the factors of motivation of high-achieving students of color are discussed. First, I provide a brief description of qualitative inquiry and a justification for the selection of the qualitative research methods for this inquiry. Next, I examine the specific phenomenological method used for this study. Then, I define the methods utilized to collect and analyze the data. To conclude the chapter, the measures taken to ensure trustworthiness of the findings, the researcher's role, and limitations are discussed. Before delving into the message, I reiterate the research questions that guided the methodological choice made in the design of this study.

#### **Research Questions**

As mentioned, this study focuses on addressing one overarching question: What motivates high-achieving college students of color to succeed academically? Several sub-questions also guide this inquiry: (1) How, if at all, do external influences, as defined by the Culturally Engaging Campus Environments (CECE) Model, affect the motivation of high-achieving college students of color? (2) How, if at all, do pre-college inputs, as defined by the CECE Model, affect the motivation of high-achieving college students of color? (3) How, if at all, do college campus environments, as defined by the CECE Model, affect the motivation of high-achieving college students of color?

#### **A Qualitative Inquiry into Factors of Motivation**

This section discusses my methodological approach. First, characteristics of qualitative research are described. Next, I discuss the reasons that I chose qualitative inquiry methods to drive the current investigation.

### **Traits of Qualitative Inquiry**

Quantitative research differs from qualitative approaches to scientific inquiry in a few significant ways (Patton, 2002). First, participants are chosen for their rich perspectives into the phenomena that is being examined, rather than for the goals of generalizing conclusions to a larger group of people. For this inquiry, high-achieving students of color were selected for their insights into what factors motivate them to succeed in college. Next, qualitative research emphasizes on the essences of experience rather than measurement. Accordingly, qualitative research techniques can be utilized to comprehend the *wholeness* of an experience instead of objects or parts of that experience (Moustakas, 1994). I am sought to comprehend the experiences of students of color in regard to what motivates them to excel educationally. In addition, personal engagement of researchers in conducting qualitative research is common and the researchers' personal experiences and perspectives can play an important role in data interpretation (Patton, 2002). Moreover, perspective and reflexivity are significant considerations, as qualitative researchers have an obligation to be aware of the biases they may have and how they shape research (Creswell, 1997). Last, instead of numerical reports of statistical significance created in quantitative research, findings of qualitative research are reported with syntheses, storytelling, narration, and quotations of participants.

### **Rationale for the Utilization of Qualitative Methods**

In the current examination, qualitative research methods were used to comprehend the influences that motivate high-achieving underserved undergraduates of color. Multiple reasons guided the choice to utilize qualitative inquiry to examine and comprehend the experiences of high-achieving underserved students of color. First, the research questions that guided the design of this inquiry were answered most effectively using qualitative techniques. Qualitative methods

were selected as they are appropriate ways to answer *what* questions (Creswell, 1997), and therefore most suitable for this investigation. The research questions that guided the proposed examination focused on *what* factors motivate high-achieving underserved students of color. Second, qualitative methods were utilized to examine students within UHM. Creswell (1997) noted that qualitative methods are useful to help comprehend the experiences of individuals within their natural environment. For this examination, I interviewed undergraduates at UHM.

### **Philosophical Underpinnings**

Like Yin (2003), my philosophical approach to the phenomenological method is constructivist. Constructivists believe that truth is relevant and it is dependent on one's perspective. This view "recognizes the importance of the subjective human creation of meaning, but doesn't reject outright the notion of objectivity. Pluralism, not relativism, is stressed with focus on the circular dynamic tension of subject and object" (Crabtree & Miller, 1999, p. 10). Constructivism is founded on the premise of a social collaboration between the researcher and participant, while allowing participants to share their stories (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). With these stories, participants are able to share their perspectives of reality, which allows the researcher to gain a better understanding of participants' behaviors (Lather, 1992).

### **Methodological Approach: A Phenomenological Study**

For this qualitative examination, I sought to gain an in-depth comprehension of the life experiences and interactions of underserved high-achievers of color. The life experiences and reflections of these students are examined to understand the factors that motivate these individuals to succeed academically. In addition, from this inquiry, I sought to gain insight into how these undergraduates were motivated by the resources they cited in the interviews.

To fulfill the purposes of this analysis, the phenomenological qualitative approach was utilized (Creswell, 2006). This technique is the examination of individuals' lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon. This perspective is most fitting, as phenomenology is aimed at understanding the lived experience of groups or individuals (Moustakas, 1994). Accordingly, this investigation focuses on the meaning that students of color make of their lived experiences being high-achieving during their undergraduate years.

### **Selection of Participants**

Purposeful sampling procedures were used to recruit a group of participants who can provide the most insight into the research questions that guide this inquiry. Specifically, I utilized extreme and criteria-based sampling techniques (Patton, 2002). Extreme sampling is also known as deviant or outlier sampling. It refers to "[l]earning from unusual manifestations of the phenomenon of interest, for example, outstanding successes" (p. 243). Regarding extreme sampling, I chose to focus on notably successful students, or notably high-achievers, within underserved populations of color within Hawai'i. More specifically, students who self-identify as Chinese, Japanese, Korean and White have relatively high degree attainment rates in Hawai'i and are not considered underserved students of color for the purposes of this research. Alternatively, those who self-identify as Black, Filipino, Native American, Native Hawaiian, other Pacific Islander, or any other type besides Chinese, Japanese, Korean, or White are considered members of underserved populations. Knowing more about the experiences of these individuals may help us better understand how to support the success of underserved undergraduates of color.

Criterion sampling is defined as choosing participants that meet some criterion, in this instance being high-achieving. For this investigation, I used the work of previous research to

identify criteria upon which sampling is based (Albaili, 1997; Fries-Britt, 2002; Griffin, 2006; Harper, 2005; Ruban & Reis, 2006; Vanzile-Tamsen & Livingston, 1999). Thus, individuals who earned a composite Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) score higher than the national or institutional average, have a cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 or better, are participating in the university's honors program or college as an undergraduate, and are engaging in co-curricular programs are considered high-achieving for this dissertation.

The sample is extreme in the sense that only the high-achieving students from this particular group were examined. The sample was chosen using criteria that are drawn from past studies that examined high-achieving students. Additionally, potential participants were current high-achieving undergraduates in their last semester to ensure that they are near complete with the Honors Program and degree requirements and so that they are still aware of what motivates them to achieve academically. Data from the institutional research office and Honors Program at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (UHM) (2010b, 2012) were used to find individuals who fit the criteria as described above, which resulted in 61 potential participants.

The final sample consisted of 22 high-achieving undergraduates of color from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups from UHM. Participants came from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds. 14 interviewees identified with two to six different ethnicities. Participants identified with the following ethnicities: (3) Caucasian, (7) Chinese, (1) Dutch, (3) English, (7) Filipino, (2) French, (3) German, (6) Hispanic, (1) Indian, (3) Irish, (1) Italian, (5) Japanese, (1) Korean, (1) Native American, (11) Native Hawaiian, (1) Mapuche, (2) Okinawan, (2) Polish, (6) Portuguese, (2) Puerto Rican, and (1) Scottish. This sample included 14 females and 8 males. The average age of participants was 25 years, while the median age of the interviewees was 21 years. 20 participants were U.S. citizens, 1 was a permanent resident, and one did not respond to



the prompt. In regard to generational status in the U.S., 4 students were first generation. Of the 22 participants, 8 indicated that at least one parent earned a high school diploma, 2 reported having a parent that earned an associate's degree, 7 had at least one parent who earned a bachelor's degree, 4 indicated that at least one parent earned a master's degree, and 1 participant reported that he had a parent that held a doctoral degree. 7 students were receiving full financial support from their parents, 11 were receiving partial financial support from their parents, and 4 did not respond to the question. 4 interviewees were their family's first generation to be born in the U.S. 6 students were the first in their family to attend college.

As for class standing, 1 sophomore, 2 juniors, and 19 seniors were interviewed. The participants were all full-time undergraduate students. The interviewees majored in a diverse range of majors, four of which double majored. Participants majored in the following areas: (1) American studies, (1) biological engineering, (3) biology, (1) Chinese language, (1) economics, (1) English, (1) food science and human nutrition, (2) Hawaiian language, (1) Hawaiian studies, (1) history, (1) interdisciplinary studies, (1) journalism, (2) kinesiology and rehabilitation science, (1) mathematics, (1) microbiology, (1) molecular cell biology, (1) plant and environmental protection sciences, (1) political science, (2) psychology, (1) sociology, (1) spanish, (1) travel industry management, and (1) zoology. The mean GPA was 3.59 and the median GPA was 3.6 at UHM for these individuals. All participants engaged in at least one co-curricular activity or club. The next section describes the chosen site for this dissertation.

### **Selection of Site**

UHM served as the research site for this examination. UHM is located in Honolulu on the island of O'ahu. It is the flagship campus of the UH System, which includes 10 campuses on four islands. UHM is presently accredited by the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges

and Universities of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. UHM offers a wide range of undergraduate, graduate, and professional degrees to more than 20,000 students, of which 69 percent are undergraduates and 56 percent are female and 44 percent are male (UHM, 2011, 2012). For a more detailed description of the racial and ethnic percentages of the undergraduate population at UHM, refer to Table 1.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Participants were recruited from Spring 2013 to Spring 2014. I met with the director and office manager of the Honors Program to obtain permission to interview former students of the program and to obtain an initial list of potential participants for this analysis. With consideration of my relationship with the interviewees as Maxwell (2013) suggests, I established a short-term, comfortable, open, and honest connection with them. In general, my connection with the interviewees was short because I just interviewed them once individually. I initiated contact with them through email (See Appendix A). Since I connected with students of the Honors Program at UHM who are near completion of their Honors and degree requirements.

As indicated in the recruitment email, I ensured participants confidentiality. Their names will not be shared with anyone, and pseudonyms are used. This assurance was also provided to encourage feelings of being comfortable, honest, and open with me.

Individuals who agreed to be a participant in this inquiry signed a consent form (see Appendix B) and completed a short demographic form (see Appendix C) prior to the interview. Then, they met with me for a one-on-one semi-structured interview. With semi-structured interviews, I was able to react to new ideas or emerging perspectives provided by interviewees throughout the interview (Merriam, 1998). Interviews were audio taped and about an hour in length. The recordings of these interviews were transcribed verbatim.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

Data were collected using two methods. First, a five-minute form requesting information about participants' undergraduate, post-graduation, demographic, and family background was administered before the interview. In addition, the main source of data came from interview transcriptions. The interview protocol was formulated based on a review of previous research on the experiences of high-achieving undergraduates from minority groups (Griffin, 2006; Harper, 2005; Hwang et al., 2002). Questions focus on participants' views regarding the internal and external sources of motivation in college. Questions about how participants' multiple social identities affect their motivation to succeed academically were also included in the interview (see Appendix D). The demographic form and interview protocol were pilot tested with five high-achievers of color during the spring semester of 2013.

Data analyses were conducted throughout the investigation using methods prescribed by Moustakas (1994) for phenomenological inquiry. The NVivo ® Qualitative Research Software package was used to organize and code the data. Invariant constituents were identified and used to construct thematic categories. Textural-structural descriptions of each participant's experience were created to highlight key phenomenon and how these individuals experienced the phenomenon. The textural-structural descriptions and invariant constituents were then utilized to group those constituents into thematic categories. Next, these themes were compared to the CECE Model and new emerging factors were sought.

### **Trustworthiness and Quality Assurance**

Three methods described by Lincoln and Guba (1986) were used to ensure trustworthiness and quality. First, I analyzed negative cases by consciously examining inconsistent data during the analysis of this investigation. If data that were discrepant with

developing themes arises, these themes were reviewed and adapted accordingly. Second, data from interview transcripts, participant questionnaires, and researcher notes were triangulated. Lastly, member-checks were conducted. Specifically, participants were sent a summary of the interpretation of their experiences and were asked for feedback and clarification to maximize accuracy of my interpretation of their experiences and the findings of this examination.

### **Role of Researcher**

Even though positivists and quantitative researchers have sought to remove their influence when conducting empirical inquiry, it has been said that all research is inherently subjective (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Acknowledgement of the researcher's role in one's studies is imperative in all types of research, put particularly significant when conducting qualitative examinations. The researcher is the main research instrument in qualitative inquiry. In this dissertation, my background knowledge of high-achievers of color, higher education in general, and qualitative methods were central to designing this analysis and creating the interview protocol and is crucial to conducting interviews, analyzing and interpreting the data, identifying connections within the data, and writing case descriptions.

On one hand, some qualitative researchers have tried to minimize their subjectivity (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Other scholars espouse a constructivist perspective and advocate the significance of researcher reflexivity, which is the identification and comprehension of biases and assumptions that can influence researchers' choices and views. This perspective allows me to embrace my subjectivity and incorporate it into the discourse of research (Charmaz, 2005).

My role as the researcher in this study is to provide insight into understanding what influences motivate high-achievers of color and how these factors are related to the campus culture of postsecondary institutions. Moreover, my role as the researcher includes providing

recommendations about how higher education policymakers, administrators, faculty, and staff may be able to use the findings to foster success among students of color at their institutions.

Given my role as a researcher, it is useful to consider my background and how it may influence my interpretation of the data collected for this dissertation. As mentioned in the introduction, I was born and raised in O‘ahu and am currently an employee of UHM, more specifically, the academic advisor of the Honors Program. Because of these experiences and the ways in which they have influenced my views of the experiences of high-achievers of color, my interpretation of the data acquired in this inquiry is most likely be affected. In addition, there is the possibility of participants feeling uncomfortable with sharing their true thoughts, feelings, and experiences of their undergraduate years, especially if they are negative, in fear of being judged, penalized, and/or evaluated negatively by the Honors Program and the larger institution.

To address my subjectivity and the possible perceived power I have over the participants, a few measures were taken. First, the potential participants were pulled from a list of individuals who are in their last semester of courses. With this way, I had less perceived influence on the participants, as I mainly advise Honors students in their freshman and sophomore years. Second, participants were reassured that their responses are completely confidential and do not have any influence on their academic progress. They were told that I am solely interested in both the positive and negative aspects of their experiences, so that future students’ experiences can be improved. Last, participants were provided a survey after the interview, in which they were able to provide any other information anonymously, in case they felt uncomfortable sharing any negative responses with me during the interview.

### **Limitations**

Although measures were taken to ensure trustworthiness and quality, the current investigation has limitations. The first limitation of this inquiry is that the findings are context-bound and cannot be generalized beyond the participants. All participants were recruited from UHM. Moreover, all of the possible participants of this examination reside on the island of O‘ahu, which provides a different racial and cultural setting than other areas of the nation that may not have undergraduate student populations as racially and culturally diverse as Hawai‘i. Therefore, the findings of this analysis are not necessarily transferable to high-achieving underserved students of color who attend other institutional contexts or geographic regions

Second, due to the recruitment methods employed in this study, selection bias constitutes a second limitation. The students who were invited to participate in the interviews were only from the Honors Program at UHM and participated on a voluntary basis. Therefore, they may provide different perspectives than students who attend other postsecondary institutions and/or who are disinclined to participate in this investigation.

Third, the findings acquired from this inquiry are limited to common experiences and do not provide insight into how the experiences of high-achieving undergraduates of color may vary across subgroups or individuals within the high-achieving underserved student population of color. In other words, the purposes of this examination are to unearth themes across the influences that affect academic motivation of high-achieving undergraduates of color. However, the variations across gender, racial composition, and other characteristics were not studied.

Fourth, not all students from all the underserved racial and ethnic groups within the Honors Program at UHM were interviewed. Given that these groups are underrepresented in this particular organization, there were already a small number of potential interviewees to contact.

Since participants were recruited on a voluntary basis, there was no way to ensure that all underserved racial and ethnic groups were represented in this analysis.

Finally, researcher bias may constitute a final limitation of the study. As discussed above, my experiences shape my perspectives, which can influence the analysis and interpretation of data. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that other researchers, with different life experiences and perspectives, would draw the same conclusions or generate the same findings.

## CHAPTER 4:

### FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present the findings that emerged from the 22 individual interviews with the underserved high-achieving students of color at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (UHM). Each participant had a unique experience as an undergraduate. However, they also shared some commonalities. The data demonstrated consistency with three Culturally Engaging Campus Environments (CECE) Model factors. First, students asserted that *external influences* played a significant role in influencing their motivation. Second, a fundamental factor of interviewees’ motivation was their *initial academic dispositions* coming into college. Third, being in a *culturally engaging campus environment* was also found to significantly influence the motivation of these high-achievers of color. In addition, there were two elements that manifested in addition to the CECE Model, which further describes the motivation of these high-achievers of color: *cultivation of self-improvement* and having a desire to *positively represent and give back to their community of origin*.

Before discussing the aforementioned themes in further detail, it is important to note that these themes are not mutually exclusive, but are sometimes interconnected. For example, interviewees were sometimes motivated by one specific source that simultaneously allowed them to experience a humanized educational environment and establish cultural familiarity. These facets are further reviewed in the following sections.

#### External Influences

As previously mentioned, interviewees emphasized the significance of external influences regarding their academic motivation. The external influences element of the CECE Model consists of three aspects. One of these factors did not emerge as a common influence,



which was employment. However, there were two CECE Model aspects that were mentioned as having an effect on students' motivation. First, financial aid had a huge influence on the motivation of the high-achievers of color who were interviewed. Second, participants also underscored the importance of their family regarding their academic motivation.

### **Institutional Financial Aid**

Several participants highlighted the significance of receiving financial aid from UHM as a huge source of motivation. As awardees of these financial opportunities, the high-achievers of color who were interviewed were in turn, motivated to succeed in at least three ways. These effects are described in further detail in this section. First, opportunities that provided financial support in the form of scholarships and research awards were more appealing for students, as these programs helped ease students' financial burden. For example, Nani, a female of Chinese, German, Irish, Native Hawaiian, Polish, and Portuguese ancestry, said, "I was first intrigued by the financial aid support" of the Minority Access to Research Careers Program (MARC) at UHM, which includes a monthly stipend, tuition assistance, a research supply budget, conference travel allowance, and funding to conduct research in the continental U.S. Similarly, the merit-based scholarships offered by the Honors Program at UHM appealed to students who were interviewed, particularly those who did not qualify for federal financial aid.

Second, some students knew that they were being offered more than just financial support. In addition, they were also given opportunities to develop professionally, by being chosen to represent their academic programs by participating in national competitions and presenting at national conferences. Ranson, a Hispanic male, said:

Since you're just an undergraduate, you're usually just required to do work in the lab, but then if the PI [primary investigator] sees that you're more capable than that, then they're like, "Oh you should go give this presentation or you should come with me to this conference that's over in California."

Here, Ranson describes how knowing that there were potential opportunities to hone his professional skills motivated him to demonstrate his capabilities. Although this particular factor is not directly related to receiving financial aid, the opportunities to develop professionally were created as an immediate result of these financial aid options.

Nani discussed similar benefits of being part of MARC:

[Being part of] the MARC program will definitely look good no matter what I go into. I'm interested in the medical field and am also interested in PhD programs now. I know the MARC program is geared toward PhD, but the experience helps me for med school. I was talking to someone at the Honors Symposium. She's a professor. She said that having the chance to present at the symposium, that's huge for students, for undergrads. That helps us with speaking, communication skills, and presenting skills. That'll help prepare us in any field you go into no matter what it is.

In this statement, Nani talked about how MARC expanded her career interests and regardless of what path she chooses to follow, the experiences she has had as a MARC student has helped prepare her. Nani knew that she was given the opportunity to develop in skills that are valuable for both graduate and professional schools.

Third, a few students indicated that being the recipient of a scholarship motivated them to maintain their high-achieving student status by being involved with academic and co-curricular activities. Cadance, a Japanese and Native Hawaiian female, illustrated the effect of receiving a scholarship on her motivation:

I got a scholarship, so I just try to show that I am still trying to be involved. I do love school. Scholarships are a big part of why I go to school because if I didn't receive any, I don't think I'd be at UH Mānoa.

In this quotation, Cadance described a cycle of being high-achieving because she knew that engaging in curricular and co-curricular activities were behaviors that scholarship selection committees valued and wanting to maintain her high-achieving status because she is a scholarship recipient.

Michael, a male of English, German, Irish, Native Hawaiian, Okinawan, and Portuguese descent, also mentioned similar sources of motivation during his interview:

I'm a really competitive person and I also really like attention. So between winning things and getting attention for winning things, these create a lot of cycles. Basically, the more I win, the more attention I get. I definitely like it.

For Michael, there are other factors that influence his desire to maintain his high-achieving status than just being a scholarship recipient. In addition, he is naturally competitive and enjoys getting attention for winning. With these additional aspects, he realized that a cycle occurs that motivates him to be high-achieving.

### **Family Influences**

In general, many students' families influenced their academic motivation in four overarching ways. While three exhibited more positive influences on participants' motivation, one technique was found to have negative effects. These behaviors are discussed below.

**Family-Based Aspirations.** In general, having family-based educational aspirations had a positive influence on the motivation levels of a majority of participants. Three types of family-based academic hopes seemed to have a favorable effect on these undergraduates' motivation levels. These aspirations are further described below.

One hope of family members was for several of the interviewees to achieve the educational goals that they were not able to attain themselves. One category of educational goal was to just go to school like for Keoki, a male of Chinese, Hispanic, Italian, Native Hawaiian, Okinawan, and Puerto Rican descent. He said, "My mother took 36 years before she got her GED. She dropped out of high school, got pregnant, and dropped out of high school [again] and so she would always push us to go to school."

Another educational goal that was placed on some students by their family members was to earn a degree at a higher level than they were able to attain. Kealoha, a male with a Chinese, Japanese, Native Hawaiian, and Portuguese ethnic background for instance, explained this in the following comment:

My mom says she wishes she could've gone to grad school but she didn't have the money and she didn't have a lot of financial aid. That's why she stopped at her bachelor's. But she says if she could've gone on to get her MBA she would've if she had the funds. So she's very supportive of me going.

In this example, Kealoha shared that with him earning a master's degree, he would also be fulfilling his mother's dream of attaining one.

The second family-based aspiration that surfaced during many interviews with underserved high-achieving undergraduates of color was that these students wanted to make their families proud. Brandon says, "During my entire life, I've always wanted to make them proud." Davelyn, a Filipino female, went into further detail about how wanting to make her family proud affected her motivation to succeed in college:

My family, my parents and my grandparents just wanted more for me, so then I wanted to make them proud too. My grandpa said it doesn't matter where you go as long as it's what you do there. So I decided to make the most of being here [at UHM] too.

As demonstrated above, many students who were interviewed for this inquiry mentioned that they just did not want to make their parents proud, but earlier generations as well, which further increased their motivation levels.

Even though Cadance's father passed away while she was a senior in high school, she emotionally talked about why he still influences her motivation to be high-achieving:

I'm the last child of five and one of my other sisters went to UNLV. Since I was the last one, he wanted me to go to college too because it was only my sister that went to college besides me, so he really pushed me. He just wanted me to keep doing well in school. Because when I went to the school of St. Anthony I was like an honor roll student there so he would always remind me to keep doing well in school. When I went to Maui High

and I was also honor roll there, so he just always wanted me to keep on getting good grades.

For Cadance, being high-achieving was also a way of helping her fulfill the wishes of her father who had passed on and perpetuate the values and goals he had for her, which also significantly affected her motivation to succeed in college.

The last type of family-based aspiration was that several students wanted to have occupations unlike that of their parents. For some students, it is because of the struggles that they see their parents face on a daily basis. Brandon, a Hispanic and Mapuche male, spoke about how he is motivated to be a physical therapist partly because of what he witnesses of his parents:

I see them working really hard, so that makes me want to make hard. Both my parents work long hours. They work [in] some really stressful conditions. But then they come home and they really make it worthwhile. I see how if you're really dedicated to what you want to do, you can do some great things and really elevate yourself.

During our interview, Tiffany, a female of Chinese, French, Irish, Japanese, Native Hawaiian, and Portuguese descent, commented on making similar observations of her parents and being motivated because of them:

I see how hard my parents have to work because they both have like entry level jobs so they both have to work really hard like I see how hard they work, they have to work overtime and sometimes on the holidays so I don't want to have to do that, that's kind of motivating me to keep going with school because I don't want to have to work that hard or at least like once I'm done I won't have to do that.

Yeah, they're the ones who want me to keep – they want me and my siblings to go to school and graduate and everything so like they're the big reason. They even tell us like they don't want us to have to do what they have to do.

These quotations from Brandon and Tiffany illustrate how seeing their parents struggle firsthand inspired them to progress in their undergraduate education.

**Family Members as Role Models.** Another way that family members were an encouraging motivational factor for many students was by being role models for the interviewees. Family members were viewed as role models for at least three reasons.

One basis for a family member being viewed as inspirational was the personal characteristics some interviewees would like to exude themselves. For example, Pi'ilani, a Chinese, Native Hawaiian, and Portuguese female, related the traits that made her older brother a role model in her eyes:

My brother's so good at what he does. He teaches me via his work ethics. He's on top of what he's trying to do. He's motivated. He knows what he's doing. He's always trying to get better. He's always reading something. He's always making this and things he needs to do. He's really organized. He can make big things happen.

The description Pi'ilani provided about her brother was also a portrait of the traits that she wanted to possess for herself.

In addition to exemplifying inspirational characteristics, some mothers were seen as role models due to their academic achievements, which can be seen in how Nani portrays her mother:

My mom is a good example of a motivator because she got her bachelor's here. And then I think she had my older brother and my older sister. While she was pregnant with my older sister, she was getting her master's [degree] in Maui. And now, she had my older brother, my older sister, and me in college and she was trying to get her PhD. So she, academically, she's always striving for the next thing. So it's easy to kind of model myself after her. She's kind of crazy.

Pi'ilani depicted her mother similarly:

My mom's strong. My mom's real strong. She raised six kids. She gave birth to six kids all naturally. She breastfed six kids. She put up with six kids. She's strong. She put up with an abusive husband. She got kicked down. She's a master's graduate in the English department. She's strong. She never gives up. Even if people aren't supporting her, she never gives up. And on top of that, the people that don't treat her the best, she always helps them.

For Nani and Pi'ilani, it was extremely powerful for them to see their mothers not only be able to raise multiple children, but to also be able to balance these duties and responsibilities with those

that come with earning a graduate-level degree as well. Having their mothers as strong role models contributed to these students' academic motivation, as they were able to witness the successes of their mothers.

Parents were also role models in regard to several students' career choices. Ashley, a Chinese, German, Japanese, and Native Hawaiian female, illustrates how her parents inspires her by demonstrating personal characteristics she would like to have and showing her the impact their work in the medical field can have on people:

My parents [are] always like hard workers when it came to work. Like their patients always ask for them to help them like when it came to the hospital like, "Oh where's Cathy or Lloyd, they will help me." And they just work so hard. They worked their way up. My dad just wanted to stay a nurse forever but my mom became like this clinical coordinator for her floor but like a lot of people respect them. And they're really good at educating other people so they're kind of my inspiration like they don't just give a patient their pills and move on.

Like, my friend was in the hospital he said that he run into my mom and he asked her for ice cream once and then after that somehow ice cream kept appearing with every meal at the hospital.

And she's like "I know you wanted [ice cream], so you probably want it all the time." He's like, "I'm going to get so fat." And she said, "No, you're in the hospital, relax. Eat your ice cream." You know, little stuff like that. Like they did to like kind of show that they really cared about their patients. I think I want to do that, really show people that I care about them. And taking that extra step, you know it's like little stuff that makes the big impact.

In the quotation above, Ashley explains that being able to observe and hear about the powerful influence her parents have in their jobs to help others has motivated her to choose the same career path with hopes that she too, can have that type of impact on the world.

**Unconditional Encouragement.** A third way that family positively influences the motivation of the majority of interviewees was by providing unconditional encouragement. There were two types of fortification that family member provided. Being supportive of the students' current educational pursuits was one specific type of encouragement that was found to

increase many individuals' motivation levels. Three specific behaviors of family members conveyed this type of support to these undergraduates. First, parents checked in daily with these high-achievers of color to make sure that they were doing all right. Ashley provided a summary of the conversations she has with her parents on a daily basis:

They think I'm kind of crazy. Like, I tell them about the stuff I'm doing, like I started a new job on a bakery and I'm finishing my like senior Honors part and they're like and do you still get to go to the beach? Like do you, you're hardly sleeping, are you eating okay? Like maybe you should slow it down, I'm like "No, this is what I want to do." So, I mean, they support me but I guess they're just concerned sometimes. But they always support me like whenever I said I wanted to try something, they never said like no.

Numerous interviewees in this investigation often cited these daily check-ins as being a huge source of motivation for themselves similar to the quote above from Ashley.

Second, multiple parents directly told their children that they were proud of what they are achieving in college. Pi'ilani said that her mother tells her that, "She thinks whatever I'm doing is profound. She always says, 'I'm proud of you' and 'Just go for it!'" Cadance related that her mother also provides this type of encouragement: "She's always excited whenever I tell her what's the new thing that I'm doing." Likewise, Chelsea, a Hispanic and Filipino female undergraduate, commented that her parents tells her that, "They're really proud of me. No matter what happens they'll still be glad for me. It's like an expectation but it's still not like pushing me towards anything so it's not as stressful." Knowing that their parents were proud of them no matter what motivated these underserved students of color to push themselves to see what they were able to achieve in college without having to worry about what their parents would think.

Third, various students often mentioned that just having their parents always there to listen to them has helped them stay motivated in college. Tiffany talked about this regarding her mother, "My mom's really supportive of me and she's the person I always call if I feel like crying because of how stressed I am, so yeah mostly my family motivates me." Michelle, a



Hispanic, Native American, and Polish female student, also said that her parents were helpful in that they were “encouraging whenever I need to talk [to someone].” These quotations provided by Tiffany and Michelle illustrate that having family members to fall back on if they needed support was another type of motivation for some students.

A second kind of encouragement that some family members provided were by making sure that these high-achievers of color were progressing toward their academic, career, and personal goals. They ensured advancement in these areas by engaging in three types of actions. First, a few family members would discuss the progression of these students in straightforward manner. For instance, during the interview, Pi’ilani illustrated the “pep talks” her older brother has with her about where she was going in life:

When my dad got kicked out, my brother stepped up and was my dad. Every second he could, he would have pep talks with me. [He would ask,] “What are you doing with your life? What is the bigger picture? What is the meaning of your life? Why are you specializing in what you want to do? What do you like to do?”

In this quotation, Pi’ilani explains that having her brother make sure that she was progressing in her life and why motivated her to make sure that she was active and purposeful in her life.

Another technique several family members used when ensuring that these high-achieving students of color progressed was by actively helping these individuals. For example, Pi’ilani said that her mother also “does all the little things I don’t even think about doing. She just makes sure that it’s all taken care of so she can do whatever I want.” Moreover, the mother and sister of Kate, a Chinese, Filipino, Native Hawaiian, Puerto Rican, and White female, would help her with her classes and research:

[My mom would] offer to help me with things like making things for class or something or give me a ride somewhere. My sister [helped] too, especially with my research. I needed to get a lot of materials for running participants and then she’ll help me with that.

The quotation above demonstrates that students also appreciated physical acts of support and felt that these displays of encouragement fueled their motivation to be high-achieving.

**Overwhelming Expectations.** There were at least three expectations some parents had of their children that negatively affected students' academic motivation. One set of overwhelming expectations had to do with a few parents expecting their children to be fully independent. Interviewees felt that this expectation was prematurely established. For instance, Lisa, a Hispanic female, described her parents' perspective and how this affected her motivation:

For your parents, the mindset is, "Well, don't forget that you also have to work and support yourself." I think that makes a difference, when you have a family that is willing to support you 100% to go through school. I wish I would have come from a family that was able to be more supportive of higher education versus "You're a teen. You have to go support yourself. You have to figure it out for yourself." You have to worry about making the paycheck versus worrying about getting good grades. [At my] community college, my average was a B to an A because I had to work full-time and study full-time. It was very, very difficult.

Lisa's description exemplified the difficulties underserved students of color have to face when they are prematurely forced to be completely independent.

A second set of overwhelming assumptions that several parents had was that their children would carry on their family businesses, so earning a bachelor's degree derailed these two high-achievers of color in doing so. Ranson, an only child of parents who own a farm, explained the significance of his return to his home in Puerto Rico:

The way Hispanic side works is that it's very patrilineal. It's very similar to the Japanese. The eldest son is typically where everything goes. If you're the only child, then that's it. If I don't go back, then it's the end of the family line.

Thus, for Ranson's parents, Ranson not returning home means that there would be no one in the family to take over the farm when the time comes. Because of this expectation, Ranson has not told his parents yet that he plans on never returning home. Instead, he told them that he is going to go to graduate school because he does not know what he wants to do with his life yet.

A third set of overwhelming assumptions that some parents had for their children was that these students would help their family's financial situation. For example, the parents of Chasity, a Korean female, foreclosed on their house when her father lost his job. They expected her to assist them with the legal processes and procedures, especially since her older sister moved out due to her volatile relationship with their parents and her parents did not understand English. Chasity discussed this situation and its effect on her motivation to succeed educationally and career aspirations below:

When our house went into foreclosure I was pretty much the only one there. So I had to look at lost mitigation, write hardship letters, and look up federally funded apartments. Then, I had to go to court a couple of times. I was like whoa. And then also just mentally and emotionally, I was just not doing well in school at all. I just couldn't deal with this. So I was just crying all the time. I did nothing. That was really hard that I didn't do well and I was really sad about it. That's actually when I started debating on whether I want to go to medical school just because I didn't know if I can make it with my grades.

In the quote above, Chasity talked about how having to help her parents with their financial difficulties put a strain on her academic motivation physically, emotionally, and temporally. Unfortunately, because she did not perform well academically this semester, she doubted her ability to be able to be accepted into medical school after graduating.

Similarly, Reid, a Filipino male, felt that he should go into a field that would help him get a higher paying job to help support his family financially as demonstrated in the quote below:

There's definitely a lot of pressure because I'm the first one [in college] and I'm not majoring in something that's what they would see as a traditional meaning of successful because I majored in Chinese and American Studies. To them it's "What are you going to do with that?" They ask me all the time. More of it comes from the pressure of asking me what I want to do and I feel that I don't want to upset them when I tell them I can't provide for them.

So the pressure based on salary and money-wise because I do want to provide for my family but it's just the things that I love to do probably won't help me give them that luxurious life that they think being a doctor or being good a trainer would give.

They are supportive on my schooling. They understand that it's good for me but it's just I think they want that security I guess because they didn't have that security and I think for me going to college and being the first one to graduate it's like a hope for them. Maybe we could get out of Kalihi or the situation that we're currently.

So I think that's severe pressure for me. I hate it thinking about that because I want to be a teacher but I want to provide for my family.

This quotation shows the intense pressure Reid experienced to support his family. So much in fact, that he is afraid of pursuing his dream of being a teacher.

Because of the similar type of pressure to support Keoki was experiencing, he made the conscious decision to separate himself from his family. During our interview, he talked about this choice and how it influences his academic motivation:

I chose to distance myself from everyone in my family and pretty much left them all. I haven't seen my mother since 2008. My oldest brother, I haven't seen for 13 years. I haven't seen my last two nieces that were born.

I haven't seen my family for a long time and that is a conscious decision that I make on my own because I know that if I see my family, what could happen? I can lose everything that I worked really hard for in an instant because then I'm going to try and rescue them from their life. I need to focus on mine. And so the motivation comes from the fact that I can't afford to fail. Failure is not an option.

This quotation is another example of how strong the pressure to support one's family is for six underserved students of color. It should be noted that these overwhelming expectations only emerged in a third of the interviews, and was not an overarching theme across participants.

### **Initial Academic Dispositions**

Within the CECE Model, one of the constructs affecting student motivation is titled, pre-college inputs. This construct within the model includes demographics, academic preparation, and initial academic dispositions. Students' initial academic dispositions were manifested in three specific characteristics, which in turn, motivated them to excel academically.

### Seeking Challenging Academic Experience

One of the most common themes found among the underserved high-achievers of color who were interviewed was the disposition of having a desire to be exposed to challenging educational experiences. Students tested themselves academically for three reasons. These explanations are examined below.

Some students joined the Honors Program to avoid getting bored. They explained that they wanted their college education to be challenging, and the Honors Program provided an opportunity to earn a more rigorous education. Ranson, for example, clarified this when he offered the following comment:

It's always been a challenge for me just for education purposes. I always had to take that two-hour boat ride [from the island that he lived on to the island on which his school was located to go to school]. So I'm used having to face challenges to pursue educational means and to just not have to deal with challenges would be really boring to me. So Honors gives me that chance to have all this other stuff I need to do. It's mostly that I'm putting up goals for myself so I don't get really bored.

In the quotation above, Ranson explained that prior to college, he was socialized into a demanding educational environment, and he sought a post-secondary educational experience that provided a similar level of difficulty.

On the other hand, other students pushed themselves academically because they knew that being high-achieving would help them get ahead in the future. These underserved students of color explained that they knew they had to be competitive for future educational and professional opportunities. Nani provides one example of this below:

I always felt like in school, I would be ok. I never really had problems in school, like completing homework and studying for exams. Because of that, I think I was able to take on more. So, in general, yep. I feel like it would be hard if I had a harder time in school to do all of that but it's all about time management and just if you want to get it done, then you'll just get it done. Like this semester, I enrolled in a lot of credits, so I had to cut back on other things and it's just a balance. I mean, it's been hard, but in the end, I know it'll help me a lot in the future.

In this quotation, Nani explained her practical view about her education in that it prepared her for life after college with preparation and time management skills. She also mentioned that she knows that these experiences will help her progress in her future endeavors.

Other students just wanted to test themselves and see how much they achieved.

Encouraged by what they were able to accomplish, these individuals continued to excel within and outside of the classroom. For example, Kate said:

At first it was because I just want to do better than I think I can and as I went on I could see that I could do better than I did so I wanted to try more and see what else I could do.

Similarly, Chelsea explained:

Most of it's just me pushing myself to do more because I know I can do it. I'd rather not be like "I could've done all this!" [Also,] I am not happy if I don't get an A and doing other things outside. I'm pushing myself more, be more sociable and stuff like that. If I'm not doing that then I'm not moving forward just staying the same. I want to keep moving forward.

These quotations offered by Kate and Chelsea illustrates how high-achievers of color stay motivated to keep excelling throughout their undergraduate career.

### **Genuine Interest in Academic Field**

Being genuinely interested in their academic field was a second disposition that many underserved high-achieving students of color had. For some students, they chose courses because they were truly fascinated with the course content. Kealoha is one such individual as he described why he is minoring in economics: "I do all those classes because I do really like the subject. I think it's interesting so it's not so difficult but it is very interesting stuff." Likewise, Fiona, a Filipino and White female interviewee discussed how she chooses what to participate in:

I'm not goal oriented at all and kind of just go with what i want to do and i end up getting into situations that i won't have expected to see myself in. Because even just you know i have just like, we have our coaches for paddling, maybe i want adventure. It really puts

me in good situations like who would have thought that i would ever mean like almost graduated with honors like vice president of ASUH.

As demonstrated by Kealoha and Fiona, some students in this examination were high-achieving because they chose to engage themselves in curricular and co-curricular opportunities that truly interested them. Thus, they really enjoyed the time they spent while engaged in these activities.

Other students learned to like their courses over time. Pre-medicine students are required to take science courses to fulfill medical school admissions requirements. In the following comment, Chasity described how she gradually increased her interest in the pre-medical school courses she needed to take:

The more I took science classes, the more I enjoyed it and the more I exposed myself to the healthcare field and medicine in general. I just enjoyed it more and more. So it solidified my interests. I'll be honest. Last semester, I had this quarter-life dilemma and I was like, "Do I really want to and am I really cut out for it?" But the more I sorted other options, the more I was super disappointed when thinking that my future would not be involved in medicine.

In the above quotation, Chasity illustrated how she not only started to enjoy her courses, but enrollment in these courses also helped her solidify her post-graduation plans of applying to medical school.

Similar to Chasity, Nani had to take science courses too but for her academic major. However, she learned to like her courses because of a key professor, Dr. Steven Robinow. She illustrated how he positively influenced her academic motivation:

I took [Dr. Robinow's] class 275 in summer 2011. I enjoyed his class a lot. He's a great teacher. He made the information exciting and useful and then I stayed on as a TI and I TI'ed for two semesters. Ok, so, I was a TI for him and he is a mentor. So he is part of my thesis committee. So as a professor, he motivated us to gain as much information as we could and to take it a step further than just memorizing so [we were] actually understanding it and making it relevant to our lives.

In this quote, Nani demonstrates how just one professor significantly changed the way she viewed and felt about her undergraduate courses in a positive way.

Another group of students like Pi'ilani, were motivated to achieve in college because they enrolls in courses knowing what information they need to help them be able to fulfill their academic and career goals. Pi'ilani recounted her educational choices:

Even though you live on a small island here, you don't really feel too much land or the natural environment because it's so cemented. It's so populated. And so it makes people sick, it makes people really sick and so that's why I switched my major from kinesiology into a major that it's about the Hawaiian plants and focusing on the medicinal portions of the plants and then classes that will help me to create a foundation of how to do research in Hawaiian and to understand the Hawaiian lifestyle.

As demonstrated in the quotation above, some students like Pi'ilani set their career goals first and then chose their academic major and courses accordingly.

### **Post-Graduation Goals**

Like Pi'ilani, many interviewees knew what they wanted to do after they graduated with their bachelor's degree(s). However, not all of them took classes specifically because of what they wanted to do after they graduated. Instead, these students were high-achieving in general because they knew how competitive admission into graduate or professional school is. The following statements explain how competition to be accepted into graduate or professional school has influenced their academic motivation:

Well, for my Math classes, I want to go to grad school in Math so I know that I have to perform really well in the undergraduate classes. [Also,] I join[ed] the upper division as well because I'm thinking about applying to grad school, so if you have undergraduate research experience, your adviser can write you a letter of recommendations claim that this student would be very suitable to attend your graduate school because they already have an idea about how research works. You don't have to explain most stuff to them. That'll make the application a lot stronger. – *Kealoha*

[Admission into medical school is] crazy competitive, so I need to get on my game and start actually doing things. But then the more I started doing things and like excelling at them, I was really enjoying it. So I just continued to [do them]. – *Chasity*

I wanted to do really well because my goal has always been to go to physical therapy school. I knew that before I even got here [that] I wanted to do that. So I knew what I needed to do and then that's when I kind of had the light bulb click saying that I needed to



really step up my game study-wise so that I can make sure my GPA is high enough to be admitted to a physical therapy program. – *Brandon*

These quotations above all convey three pieces of knowledge that many high-achievers of color in this analysis had, which was: (1) they knew what career path they wanted to pursue after graduating with their bachelor's degree(s), (2) to be able to work in their chosen profession, they needed to be accepted into their designated graduate or professional school, and (3) to be able to be admitted into a top graduate or professional school, they needed to be high-achieving in academic and co-curricular activities.

### **Culturally Engaging Campus Environments**

As stated earlier, culturally engaging campus environments are characterized by nine elements that function to engage students' racially diverse cultural identities and respond to their diverse norms and needs. These nine indicators can be separated into two groups: indicators of cultural relevance and cultural responsiveness.

#### **Culturally Relevant Environments**

The first five factors of the CECE Model define five aspects of campus environments that gauge the degree to which campus environments are relevant to the cultural backgrounds and communities from which diverse students come. Three of these indicators did not surface in this study. These were cultural familiarity, culturally relevant knowledge, and opportunities for meaningful cross-cultural engagement. The two components that emerged during the interviews with underserved high-achievers of color are discussed below.

**Cultural Community Service.** The first culturally relevant environmental element that manifested as a motivational influence was cultural community service. This term refers to the degree to which students can access opportunities to give back to their home communities. There was one particular way in which multiple underserved high-achievers of color were able to

engage in cultural community service at UHM, which was their off-campus community engagement. These high-achievers of color cited these experiences as ways that motivated them to excel academically, helped them choose and/or increased their confidence levels of their chosen future profession, and gain experience in this area. Pi'ilani, for instance, often mentioned how working at Holu 'Āina, an 100-acre forest reserve affected her college experience:

[The people at Holu 'Āina] start their days with chanting to put out the intention and then they just work hard at it. They see troubles within the world and the only way to heal it is through getting back to land, returning to the land.

The land is the life of the people, so it's that reciprocal relationships. If the land sick, your people are going to be sick. If you look at the land right now, it's invaded with invasive [plants]. You can't really eat from it. The water's not flowing. There's no harmony. People are very controlling, not letting others thrive. So all that's happening in the environment. All that's happening with the people.

So we're trying to fix that. You fix the land, you view yourself, find yourself, think, fix. It's a welcoming place of refuge for all people [from] all cultures to sustain and propagate the connection between the land and people. [It is such a] basic, basic foundation. That is so profound in itself. So that's where I got a lot of my inspirations. From working with people that think like that.

In the quotation above, Pi'ilani portrayed Holu 'Āina as a place where she can learn about and perpetuate the land and her culture of origin. Through these experiences, she discovered what she wants to do after graduating and consequently, her major for her bachelor's degree, which motivated her to excel in college.

On the other hand, other students like Brandon knew what occupation they wanted to get into prior to entering college. So these students purposely chose off-campus community engagement opportunities that were in the professional field that they desired to work in. Brandon, for example, elucidated what he gained from his off-campus community engagement in the following excerpt:

I've been interning and volunteering at this physical therapy clinic, total fitness physical therapy for the past four years and I built a really strong relationship with the physical

therapist over there. Working there not just solidified by my wanting to become a physical therapist and it also helped me developed key teaching skills in physical therapy because one of the things I've noticed amongst my peers and also other physical therapists is [that there is] often times a lack of attention to detail. In [a] rehabilitation [setting], if someone has an injury, probably the most important thing is [being] very detail-oriented with the movements that you're doing. So being able to teach those movements as precisely as you want them to be has been a key thing for me to develop.

Volunteering at the Queen's Medical Center gave me a new perspective of the different settings a physical therapist is working [in]. There's in-patient and outpatient. Outpatient is when the patient comes to you. The in-patient, you come to the patient because the patient can't come to you. So working the in-patient department really helped me. I thought it was a good experience like seeing how you're basically working with someone who is at the very bottom of how they could possibly feel. So these are people who have just been amputated and they suffered heart attacks and all that. So that was another good experience making me realize how much more there is than just the clinic.

In the aforementioned selection, Brandon specified how working at various locations has allowed him to learn about what it is like working on a daily basis as a physical therapist. This knowledge also helped him learn what skills are important for him to be an excellent physical therapist and broadened his understanding of what physical therapists do and where they work. Consequently, these experiences have assisted Brandon strengthen his commitment to becoming a physical therapist.

Chasity also shared with me how her own work experiences at St. Luke's Clinic, a walk-in clinic on O'ahu, has affected her motivation to succeed in a slightly different way:

So I started working as a medical claims assistant at St. Luke's Clinic. That kind of solidified my aspirations too just because I see what happens in the clinic and I'm not really fond of it. Okay, the staff is all Japanese speaking and so when English and Korean or whatever speaking Asians come in, they have a really hard time communicating. Even when I called the place to [tell them], "I'm sick, I can't come in to work today." They're like, "Who is this? Hello? Who is this?" And I'm just like, "It's [me]. I'm sick."

It's super hard. So when I'm there, I can translate for English with Korean-speaking Asians. When I'm not there, they don't even really make an effort.

Seeing that, it just makes me want to make it so that it's kind of mandatory to have somebody available, somebody that can do something to help the patients that don't speak the language that you're speaking. It's common apparently because when I took

Honors 495 with Dr. Chun, where you're learning about cultural competency and like the language barriers and stuff like that, apparently it's really common. Like the United States doesn't really have a mandated place like you have to have a translator in like every practice or you have to have something.

So I can see the [patients] getting super frustrated and I'd really like to be a part of it like some solution that happens here.

In the preceding passage, Chasity explained how witnessing the prevalent issues that are occurring in the medical field and learning about them in class helped her further define how exactly she could contribute to this occupation as a future doctor. This, consequently, further motivates her and solidifies her goal of going to medical school.

**Cultural Validating Environment.** The second culturally relevant environmental factor that arose as a motivational factor of the majority of interviewees was feeling like they were in a culturally validating environment. This indicator is defined as the degree to which students feel that their institutions value people from their respective cultural communities. While students often mentioned feeling culturally validated at UHM, there were two students who had different experiences. Both types of perceptions are illustrated below.

Regardless of whether they were local to Hawai'i or not, many students felt that they were culturally validated at UHM. This means that these underserved high-achieving undergraduates of color felt that UHM accepted them and their fellow students from various cultural communities. Lisa, a student from California, compared her undergraduate experiences in colleges in California and UHM:

In the mainland, your accent makes you a handicap. Here at UHM, they don't evaluate you by your accent. They evaluate you by your ability to do your work, turning in good work, basically, your intelligence. They don't treat you like, "Oh she has an accent, so she thinks with an accent." So that was very helpful, even when I make mistakes. You know, writing is not necessarily one of my strengths. It was never that sense of an issue. You were always shown so much respect and room to improve.

As stated in the aforesaid excerpt, Lisa shared with me that the people she interacted with in California colleges judged her the instant that she spoke due to her accent. Because of this action, she felt that her intelligence was judged prematurely and unfairly. However, at UHM, she did not encounter this issue at all. Instead, Lisa felt that she was evaluated by the quality of work she put forth and was even supported by representatives at UHM. This may be because many other students with accents surrounded her

Most of the local students interviewed for this inquiry were also comfortable with their racial and ethnic backgrounds at UHM. Most students who were Native Hawaiian had a unique experience at UHM that they may not have experienced elsewhere, as UHM stresses being a Hawaiian place of learning (UHM, 2010). For example, Nani talked about how this validation affected her experience in college:

I think it's pretty easy to feel comfortable at UH being Hawaiian. Being around other Hawaiian students, being around people who are interested in the culture or not even interested, but everyone has to take Hawaiian 107 or some sort of equivalent. So people are exposed to it on campus or in classes. Yah, I always feel comfortable here. And then again, in Hawaiian language classes and Hawaiian Studies classes, you tend to feel comfortable as a Hawaiian. I've never had a problem with it. I feel like I have a pretty diverse group of friends. Even though I identify with Hawaiian, there are other people in my group who are pure Japanese or something else. So I think it's a nice balance and Hawai'i's like that. There's some sort of thing that speaks to ethnicity and values but in general, you hang out with people not based on ethnicity because it's kind of past that. You look for other qualities.

In the above quotation, Nani felt that UHM created a culturally validating environment for herself as a Native Hawaiian by UHM encouraging students to take Hawaiian courses and infusing the overall campus with the Hawaiian culture, regardless of whether or not UHM members are interested in this.

Kate also shared, "With being Hawaiian, I think if anything, over here, [it] would make you more accepted. It's very stressed and I did my research on Native Hawaiians. So if anything,

I just got a lot of support from that.” This passage exemplifies how Native Hawaiian students felt that they were encouraged by UHM in regard to its environment.

***Unwelcoming Environment.*** Unfortunately, there were two local students to Hawai‘i who did not experience UHM as a culturally validating environment. This perspective negatively affected their motivation. Pi‘ilani is one of these students. She discussed her feelings in the following comment:

It’s kind of hectic [at UHM], especially because the only place that you feel like you’re in Hawai‘i is probably at the Hawaiian Studies department. [In] the other part, we are the minorities and a lot of people don’t care about Hawai‘i, Hawaiians and the fact that they’re not in their homeland but they’re occupying it.

Because [UHM’s] core values, they want to uplift or support the Hawaiian community but you don’t see many Hawaiian professors. You don’t see Hawaiian things. You don’t see Hawaiian food being served at all. I mean if it was Hawaiian-themed, instead of it being such a corporation and them trying to just take all your money instead of really helping you through it. It’s kind of difficult that way. It’s really expensive to go to school. You got to pay for parking. There’s just fees on top of fees.

How are you going to help the Hawaiian community if you’re not even Hawaiian? You don’t even take the time to understand what Hawaiians need and how Hawaiians learn. The best way for me to learn is not in a classroom. It’s really suffocating. It’s really hard to concentrate and a lot of the time you’re not even learning about Hawai‘i. You’re learning about other places. The only way you’re going to learn about Hawaiian stuff is if you’re in a class that’s directly about [it].

In the preceding selection, Pi‘ilani talked about not feeling culturally validated even though she was Native Hawaiian and UHM is in Hawai‘i. She also talked about how this negatively affected her motivation to succeed in college.

Fiona also brought up one particularly negative experience that made her feel that she was not culturally validated at UHM but in a different way than Pi‘ilani:

Last year in ASUH, we had a big situation happened with the Native Hawaiian group. Before, I took hula and I took Hawaiian and I was like, “I just love the culture.” I was so immersed in it. I was just like, “I wish I was part of these people but I’m not. I’m not... Native Hawaiian... I love being with them.” and I was kind of living in a fantasy just like,

“I am part of the culture, I am.” But then that whole situation happened, they called my name out and they did attack me personally.

They had me stand up. It was hard, yeah. Like they came into the meeting and they called me and three of these editors out and we had to stand up and they like attacked us. It was a hard experience and it was hard to see them act like that. They were mad at me because I had said “Aye” to the bill in the previous meeting because I wanted to come to another meeting, not because I supported it, which I don’t even know if I support it or not because I’m very unbiased. So they weren’t taking anything to heart of what I said and people who were in there, a lot of them were people I have classes with, and after that, I don’t speak to anybody from those groups. I was kind of like, I will see people from that group and I’ll keep my head down. But even though it was a bad experience and it really did hurt me, it really taught me who I am and where I belong. I am not part of the culture.

In the prior passage, Fiona described how one public attack dramatically changed the way she viewed the UHM environment. She went on further to describe how this incident negatively affected her college experience and caused her to reevaluate her own cultural identity.

### **Culturally Responsive Environments**

The last four indicators of the CECE Model gauge the degree to which campus environments respond to the cultural norms and needs of racially and ethnically diverse student populations. All four culturally responsive environment factors emerged during the interviews as motivational influences for these underserved high-achieving undergraduates of color. These facets are discussed in further detail below.

**Collectivistic Orientation.** The first trait of a culturally responsive environment that was stated as being a motivational influence for most of the students was their belief that UHM had a collectivistic orientation. This constituent is defined as the degree to which college campuses are driven by collectivistic rather than individualistic, values. Many students viewed UHM as having a collectivistic orientation as a result of four specific ways in which their peers provided support.

One area that peers helped each other in was academics. Fiona detailed the specific ways her roommate has motivated her to excel in her courses:

My roommate moves in and she's been a huge impact on me. I met her in NRS 101, day one of class. She's smart cookie. In Chem 161 lab, I saw her quiz and I was like "Oh my, [an] A?" and I was like C-. So the next step [was], "Oh my God! We have the same classes! Do you want to be lab partners?" Honest to God, I did that. She has helped me throughout the stuff and she has really helped me like in my classes so I can't thank her enough for everything she has done for me.

In freshmen year, my paddling coach passed really suddenly. He gone to moped accident on King street. That weekend was Halloween and then the next Monday, I had bio, Chem, and calculus exams back to back and Lucy stayed up with me all night and she helped me get all the chem done. I think I actually got a B on my bio class. I got an A in Chem. Things like that, she's always been there for me so i really appreciate everything she does and she has a huge influence on me.

In the former statement, Fiona clarified how her roommate, who was initially her classmate, helped Fiona improve her grades by helping her write great lab reports and prepare for classes and exams.

Another area that these students supported each other was by encouraging each other to take advantage of off-campus engagement opportunities, particularly those that made them more competitive for graduate or professional school. Chasity provides one example below:

Along the way, I've met a lot of people who were doing their own thing who can tell me, "Hey, I just got this internship at so and so where like I just started volunteering at clinics. You should apply." People who are on kind of in the same class as me, tell me things and then I tell them things and we kind of just share things like that.

In the preceding quote, Chasity depicted how her and her fellow pre-medicine peers shared information and opportunities with each other.

A third way that some students were supported was by being able empathize with fellow members of the institutional student organizations they were part of. Chelsea provides specific examples about this type of support in the following quote:

We end up actually becoming really good friends. We're all in Golden Key [Honour Society] together. We know so much about each other like "Oh you know you can do this!" or "Oh you're going to do bad day," or words of encouragement and just spending time with each other like relieve the stress.



One friend in particular is no longer continuing upper division honors. She's a valuable friend because she understands everything we go through and the stress and stuff. So, she doesn't add to the pressure I already feel by saying things like [Golden Key]. That's the great thing about being in honor societies. Because most of them are in the same boat as you are. They understand the stresses and everything like that so they can be a great asset, point you in the right direction, as well as just help keeping you sane by not being another person going, "Oh, you're smart. Therefore, this is easy for you and you'll get an A, etc."

Tiffany also mentioned receiving similar motivating peer empathy from being part of the Pre-Medical Association (PMA):

It's nice because [PMA is] student run mostly, so you interact with a bunch of people who are trying to do the same stuff as you. So it's motivating because you're not alone and when I talk to everyone else in PMA like the people that you think are super smart and breeze through everything are actually having difficulties too so it makes you feel better.

These selections from interviews with Chelsea and Tiffany epitomize the support and empathy undergraduates of color were able to receive from being part of student organizations. What was motivating about these types of communication was that they came from peers who truly understood what they were going through and genuinely meant what they said to one another.

Last, a few interviewees also found support by being able to connect with and look to peer role models for inspiration. These individuals were also able to build relationships with others on a one-on-one basis. Ashley details the effects of one particular connection in the following remark:

One of my friends has like the highest grade in every single class he's in. Like while everyone was getting a 50% in class, he was getting 98s and 99s. He's just like a huge inspiration for me and he had like a hard time at home. He has a hard family life, so if he can do it with all those problems, why can't I? All of my other friends have that same mindset. It's kind of good to be around people like that. It keeps you like motivated when you're not always motivated. We all help each other out so it's kind of nice that way.

As illustrated above, Ashley spoke about one particular friend who helped keep her motivated in college despite experiencing family issues by demonstrating how he still performed well academically with even more familial issues than she had.

Peers were also role models for several students in the sense of what they were being able to accomplish. Chelsea recounted how fellow honor society members motivates her in this way, “So when I talk to my friends in the honor societies, they always have all these plans or things they're working on. So it's motivating for me to that my peers are doing even more than I am.”

**Humanized Educational Environments.** The second culturally responsive environment characteristic that emerged in the interviews as being a motivational factor was humanized educational environments. This aspect refers to the degree to which students are provided opportunities to develop meaningful relationships with faculty and staff that care about the success of the student is associated with higher levels of motivation. In this inquiry, some students mentioned two specific characteristics of their relationships with academic advisors and faculty that motivated them to achieve in college.

***Personal Connection with Academic Advisors.*** First, a few students mentioned how being able to personally connect with their academic advisor has motivated them academically. Ashley described how my relationship with her has influenced her motivation to succeed:

The person that's helped me most is probably you. You're more than just an adviser. Well, to me, I think of you as a friend and a mentor. You always have my back. I know that you really care about your students and stuff. I always know I can come to you. And I know I ask you a lot of stuff all the time. I didn't think I would have such like so much support in such a huge school. Like I came in to UH Mānoa with the idea my freshman year like, “Oh this is a huge place. I'm not going to get those personal connections that I did back in Hilo.” But I definitely did with the Honors Program because everyone is so helpful. I think I get the most like mentoring and advice and all that kind of help from the Honors Program.

Fiona also sees the same effect not just for herself, but for her peers as well:

I think you're a major reason that people stay in the [Honors] Program, I really do. People are just like, "I love Kiana. Kiana is the best." I think you really keep people's heads up of their needs. And I don't think they would do [it] without you. You're doing such a good job if all the students have. You keep it so organized. You get all the emails and we see everything. That's nice that I can feel comfortable with you as an adviser. I think you resonate with a lot of students like that and that's why a lot of people stay in the program. I think you are a major coach in the program that's why it does so well.

In the prior accounts, Ashley and Fiona explicated how connecting with their academic advisor in the Honors Program on a personal level and knowing that she was there to support them motivated them to excel academically.

***Faculty Commitment to Student Success.*** Second, several students also described being motivated because of the concern faculty have demonstrated for students' success in college.

Lisa detailed the way faculty have influenced in her academic career:

I think the faculty are committed to help the students succeed. I mean you can see that the faculty are there because they love to teach and not because they're just trying to make ends meet. They're really passionate about teaching and helping the student and I think that is one of the reasons why I graduate.

Tiffany also mentions how supportive faculty have been for her:

They're always there to talk. I always get nervous and scared when I don't do too well on exams. So you just go talk to them. They calm me down. [They] say, "It's not that big of a deal. It's okay. You just study a little bit more. You'll be fine." They're like really reassuring.

Keoki even went so far as to say that his professor "has been probably the most instrumental person as an individual. [He is] always supportive of any academic goal that I have [and] always supportive of any endeavor that I have. [He is] willing to push me from that perspective." These accounts affirm that faculty have the potential to significantly influence their students' motivation levels by demonstrating the concern that they have for their undergraduates.

**Proactive Philosophies.** The third culturally responsive environmental trait that appeared as a motivational influence was proactive philosophies. This construct is defined as the extent to

which faculty, administrators, and staff proactively bring important information, opportunities, and support services to students, rather than expecting students to seek them out or find them on their own. In this investigation, academic advisors, academic programs, and student organizations have helped motivate some participants in three ways.

First, underserved high-achievers of color mentioned that they felt motivated when their academic advisors made sure that they were on track with their undergraduate courses and grades. Michael talked about the effects of this particular action below:

I think the advising especially when I was at the Selected Studies was really helpful. I haven't had as much advising after that but I think it's more important to have the first couple of years because definitely it keeps you on track. And if you start to slip, which I did in one semester, it definitely helps motivate you. To get good grades so you get off of probation. And that doesn't help you just with the Honors program because it helps your grades and journals. That's pretty good motivation.

In the earlier quotation, Michael translated how tracking performed by his academic advisor positively affected his academic motivation.

A second particular technique engaged by a few academic programs was making sure that their students had the necessary tools and knowledge to succeed professionally. Nani went into detail about this method in the following testimony about the Minority Access to Research Careers Program (MARC):

The thing that I like most that I've gotten out of MARC is all of the resources they give us access to. They try to introduce us to programs on campus or organizations or topics that are relevant to research and science in general. So, for example, this semester, we had guest speakers from IRB and the sexual harassment section of UH. We have lab safety, bio safety, [and] research ethics [presentations]. That's just a few and we all had guest speakers who would specifically come talk to us, which are 10 students, three directors, and a grad assistant. They tailor their presentations to us. They would give us their information [and] we would be able to talk to them one-on-one. It's definitely, like, we have a huge set of resources. The library lady at Hamilton, I forget her name but she's one of the head librarians. She made a specific website for MARC students that has a bunch of resources on that. You know, like all the databases that we would need and links. They set it up so we can be successful in whatever we do whenever we need it.

As revealed above, Nani disclosed how MARC make certain that their students were prepared academically, professionally, and personally for a career in scientific research.

Third, during the interviews, some students also shared how being part of student organizations at UHM have provided them critical information about applying for professional school and how receiving this information has influenced their academic motivation. Tiffany recounted her experience below:

Yeah that actually is like one of the big reasons that [I decided to apply to medical school] because last year, I was deciding if I still wanted to apply to med school. So my mentor was really helpful. She told me what I needed to do. She told me about her experiences and how she achieved everything, how she got into med school. All the mentors are super helpful. Like even one mentor, he gives hope to everyone just because he applied to 18 schools or something, didn't hear back to any of them, and then he reapplied three different times to a bunch of schools and he finally got into JABSOM. So kind of just like, "Oh, if you really want it, just keep going and eventually you'll get it."

In the previous comment, Tiffany expressed how her membership in the Medical Student Mentorship Program at UHM has helped increase her motivation to be a doctor.

**Holistic Support.** The third factor of the culturally responsive environment that came to light in this examination was holistic support. This component refers to whether students have access to at least one faculty or staff member or program that were able to provide the information they need, offer the assistance they seek, or connect them with information or support that is needed regardless of the issue they face. Several high-achieving students of color found that two specific actions were particularly influential on their educational motivation.

**Faculty Availability.** One of these behaviors was faculty always being available to answer any questions that these students had. A few students often spoke about faculty who were always available to discuss course content and how this convenience has helped them be motivated. Kealoha's relationships with his professors is one example:

I've been very fortunate to have very good professors this last two semesters and the fact that they come in class with enthusiasm for the subject and the ability to explain things very clearly has definitely helped me to want to succeed. I guess part of it is that they know the subject that they teach is hard so they always make themselves available for consultation. They're always willing to help you. They always insist you come in if you need help because they know that's not easy. I go on office hours and if it's a quick question I'll just send them an email, ask them what's going on with this problem.

In the above passage, Kealoha described his professors as being genuinely interested in their students' success. This was demonstrated in that the professors knew that the course content was challenging to comprehend but they offset the difficulty of the class with offering and providing timely and consistent support. Like Kealoha, other students often mentioned being motivated by the various types of holistic support they were able to obtain from faculty members at UHM.

Lisa also mentioned this type of conduct from faculty in general as motivating:

At the school, what has really helped me to succeed is faculty. [For] most of the classes I took, the faculty [were] really trying to help you be able to get those grades right, like give you the right advice and guidance.

This quote from the interview with Lisa highlight the importance of faculty providing holistic support by being open and available for their students to come to see them if they need assistance. Additionally, participants also commented on feeling supported and welcomed by faculty when they asked for help, which is another kind of holistic support faculty provided.

This same relationship between faculty availability and students' levels of motivation were also found when faculty were the mentors of students for their Senior Honors Projects.

Chelsea mentioned this in the remark below:

My mentor too right now has been a really big help too! A few months ago, [I had] so many questions and [I was] kind of stressing out. So he's been helping to keep me from getting too far off and answering all my questions. He's on medical leave so I feel really bad. He hasn't been acting like it's been affecting him or bothering him. He's been nice enough to take on my stress and help me from staying calm while dealing with his own condition.

In the quotation above, Chelsea outlines the specific types of holistic support her Senior Honors Project mentor provided, which included timely support and availability. She also detailed how her mentor has directly motivated her to achieve academically because of the various kinds of holistic support he provided.

***Holistic Academic Support.*** The second action that motivated many high-achieving students of color to succeed was when academic programs, and faculty within them, were able to provide students with holistic support. Indeed, participants often mentioned academic departments as being able to provide a variety of holistic support types. Pi'ilani described the kinds of assistance she received from the Honors Program:

Vernadette, after meeting her that one time, she was like, "If you are going to speak at a conference, you're going to get funding. I'm going to help you get funding." She had a really positive uplifting energy and I felt supported.

In the preceding sentences, Pi'ilani mentioned the effect of having the emotional and financial support from the Honors Program on her academic motivation.

In addition, Nani spoke often about how MARC connected them with people and programs pertinent to their students' success:

So, I got into the MARC program going into my junior year. That exposed me to research because that was not something that I grew up learning about. The directors of the MARC program have been great resources. Any questions and problems, I could go talk to them.

We even had a tax guy come in because all of us were having problems with their taxes because MARC stipend is weird because it doesn't really count as a scholarship. It's more like a fellowship. So he came to talk to us twice. So he said, like, don't take this to heart and do not quote me on it, but here's my recommendations. The MARC directors are very accommodating because we're having problems with the taxes, so they went and found someone who could help us with the taxes [since] there was no one on campus that we could talk to or any that were recommended.

As part of [MARC], I applied to the Honors Program. The Honors Program has been a good resource. Again, they're available whenever I needed help with anything. Specifically, during this semester, I turned in my graduation plan during Christmas break.

I found out when I returned to school that I was missing classes and the [MARC] directors and Honors Program definitely helped guide me in making sure that I could graduate in the way I wanted when I wanted.

As defined before, Nani received a variety of support types from MARC, including providing pertinent information and connecting her to other valuable academic programs, which in turn, motivated Nani to succeed academically.

### **Other Motivational Factors**

In addition to the CECE Model factors that were found to be consistent with themes that emerged during the interviews, there were other facets of students' lives that influenced the motivation of these underserved high-achievers of color. One of these constituents is a campus environment factor. The second element is a pre-college input.

### **Cultivation of Self-Improvement**

One additional campus environment factor that was often mentioned as being influential on the academic motivation of a majority of interviewees was the cultivation of self-improvement by faculty members and the Honors Program. Cultivation of self-improvement refers to the degree to which students felt that they were inspired to better themselves. Students were cultivated to improve themselves in two ways.

**Individual Faculty Championing.** Most of the individuals who were interviewed stated that the individual championing that they received from faculty members helped them become more motivated in college in three ways. One method was by having to meet high expectations set by their professors. Nani provides one example below of her being a teaching instructor (TI):

As a TI, he pushed us to learn even more. He pushed us to be active, to take an active role in being a TI. He would quiz us during TI meetings. It was very active. He didn't let us slack. He expected us to be knowledgeable about subjects so we could help the students.



In the aforementioned comment, Nani described how her supervisor professor has high expectations for her as a TI. She spoke about how this faculty member's expectations positively influenced her motivation to achieve educationally.

Another way many students were motivated by the encouragement of faculty to better themselves was by being assigned more responsibilities and duties like how Natasha, a Filipino and White female, spoke of one professor in the Psychology department:

She inspire me to be organized and proactive and getting my study together. She gave me a little bit of responsibility over the summer by helping with her research labs. So she gives me different opportunities to learn outside the classroom setting, hands on way.

In the quote above, Natasha spoke about how her professor's increased expectations of Natasha in her laboratories prompted Nani to be organized and take initiative in her studies.

Other students mentioned how even just the general support of faculty to better themselves was motivational. One example is the explanation that Ranson provided, "They always push me to do better because they know I can. Even when you switch labs, they're always willing to find you a new place to be in. You find out where you belong." The encouragement and support provided by faculty as described by Ranson fueled his motivation to do the best he could in the classroom and in their laboratories.

**Demanding Honors Program Requirements.** A second way that some students felt cultivated to improve themselves was by having to fulfill the Honors Program's requirements. They clarified that be able to maintain good standing in the Honors Program, they had to fulfill the Honors Program's curricular and co-curricular requirements. Knowing about these requirements and the consequences that followed if they did not fulfill them, motivated these students to engage themselves within and outside of the classroom. The statements below

describe the specific ways that the expectations of the Honors Program increased students' motivation levels:

In the lower level Honors classes, [they are] good because [they] give you more individual attention to help you more. They expect more from you, which is always a plus. – *Kealoha*

[The Upper Division Honors Program] has really pushed me to try a little bit harder with this research because I mean – I [want to] do something that I would be proud of and my children would be proud of and my community would be proud of. – *Pi'ilani*

It's being in the Honors Program and having the extra work and knowing that I can still do that with my other classes made me realize that I could do more. So it motivated me to do better and even just to do the best in every class in every way. – *Kate*

In the above quotes, these students elucidated how the Honors Program motivated them to reach their maximum potential in their curricular and co-curricular activities.

### **Positively Represent and Give Back to Home Community**

One pre-college input that was continuously stated in many of the interviews was students' desire to positively represent and give back to their community of origin. The underserved high-achievers of color who were interviewed often mentioned that they were high-achieving because of their inclination to be a positive representative of their racial and ethnic groups. For instance, Lisa said, "I really want to make a difference. I don't want to be a statistic. That really motivated me." Kate mentioned that this value was instilled in her from the high school she was attending, which was Kamehameha Schools, "They [would] stress doing well and representing the main Hawaiian community to the best of your ability. Just doing what you can to perpetuate the Hawaiian culture." Keoki explained that for him, "There's always this sense of kuleana where it's kind of I thought, I don't want to say obligated... maybe obligated is the word then, but I felt this sense of needing to finish what I started with Hawaiian language." The accounts from these students demonstrate these individuals' acknowledgement that they are

aware that they are representatives of their respective racial and ethnic groups and are proactively ensuring that they are personifying their communities in a positive way.

Some students also stated that they were motivated to perform well in college because they wanted to be able to positively impact on their communities of origin. Ashley talked about this type of inspiration below:

Every time I think of anything else I could do that's not being a doctor, I can't really think of anything else. I think it's the most appropriate thing for me to do. It matches me the best and what I want to see happen in my community. It's sad, especially at home. I went home to shadow my family physician this past summer. There are so many people coming in with diabetes. Nine out of the ten patients she saw a day were people with diabetes getting their checkups and stuff. It's just crazy. All these people with the kind of like a negative mindset when it comes to health like, "God, I don't want to exercise." I want to try to implement a program that really promotes the idea that, "Hey, healthy is good." I think that's just what Hilo's missing. There's so many people that are overweight [and have] heart disease. I can think of a lot of my family members who fit those stereotypes of people in Hilo.

For Ashley, witnessing the issues the people of her home community faced was one of the main reasons why she is pursuing a career in medicine.

Similarly, Reid discussed the way in which he would like to impact his home community:

I always wanted to be a teacher only because in high school I looked to my teachers as a resource because I didn't have that resource back home. So [I ask] the teachers there about college and what I can do to further myself. I just wanted to be that person to help students in high school. Until this day, I always tell people I might go to law school but I really want to be a teacher.

Kalihi is somewhere where I grew up. It's somewhere I hold dear in my heart and I hate when people talk about how bad it is because there are so many students there that are actually freaking smart. They're super smart but they don't have the resources to get to where they want to be. So that severely frustrates me and I hate it and so that's why I think it also influences me to become a teacher and to just move on beyond whatever is expected of people from low-income communities.

So I guess that's what pushed me to do great. I'm not great but I do things to better myself to better help my family, my community as a whole.

In Reid's case, he wanted to positively affect Kalihi, his home community, by being a high school teacher there and building individual relationships with students of the future generations of his community of origin.

Pi'ilani also talked about how giving back to her community motivates her in college:

I'm going to school for my great, great, great granddaughter. And I'm getting this knowledge so that my children will be able to play in the forest that are still left here and they'll still be able to swim in ponds and they'll be able to be aware of the natural spectacles that are always going on, be able to eat the food that is grown in Hawai'i and it'd be actually be good for you to eat and help your body.

In the above statement, Pi'ilani wants to help her community of origin by taking care of the land and all that it is able to procure to ensure that future generations will be able to enjoy these too.

## **CHAPTER 5:**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS**

In this analysis, I examined the motivational influences of underserved high-achieving students of color at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (UHM). Individual interviews with 22 students from underserved racial and ethnic groups in the Honors Program at UHM, as well as demographic information surveys were the data sources for this study. Purposeful sampling was used to recruit a group of participants who can provide the most insight into the research questions that guide this inquiry. Specifically, I utilized extreme and criteria-based sampling techniques (Patton, 2002). Extreme sampling is also known as deviant case or outlier sampling. It refers to “[l]earning from unusual manifestations of the phenomenon of interest, for example, outstanding successes” (p. 243). Criterion sampling is defined as choosing participants that meet some criterion, in this instance being high-achieving. The sample is extreme in the sense that only the high-achieving students from this particular group were examined. The sample was chosen using criteria that are drawn from past studies that examined high-achieving students. Additionally, participants were current high-achieving undergraduates in their last semester to ensure that they are near complete with the Honors Program and degree requirements and so that they are still aware of what motivates them to achieve academically. Data from UHM’s institutional research office and Honors Program (2010b) were used to find individuals who fit the criteria as described above, which resulted in 61 potential participants.

The summary section of this chapter includes a brief overview of the purpose of the investigation, research methods used in conducting this investigation, and the key findings that emerged from this inquiry. The summary is followed by the conclusions that arose from the findings. After that, a discussion is provided, in which the findings of this examination are

compared with those of published research on motivation factors of college students. Last, this chapter concludes with a series of implications for policy, practice, and future research on the motivational influences of underserved high-achieving students of color.

### **Summary of the Study**

The purpose of the present analysis was to understand the factors of motivation of underserved high-achieving students of color. Thus, the central research question that provided the foundation for the framework of this study was, what motivates high-achieving college students of color to succeed academically? Several sub-questions also guides this inquiry: (1) How, if at all, do external influences (e.g., family, financial, and employment influences) affect the motivation of high-achieving college students of color? (2) How, if at all, do pre-college inputs, as defined by the Culturally Engaging Campus Environments (CECE) Model, affect the motivation of high-achieving college students of color? (3) How, if at all, do college campus environments, as defined by the CECE Model, affect the motivation of high-achieving college students of color?

Scholars in higher education have contributed much to our comprehension of facets that contribute to and hinder the motivation of college students. However, there is a paucity of research regarding the factors that motivate underserved high-achieving students of color and what postsecondary educational institutions can do to establish a campus system in which students of color can succeed educationally. Therefore, this inquiry fills a critical gap in the literature by providing an in-depth understanding of what motivates underserved high-achievers of color to succeed and how the campus environment affects these students' motivation.

The theoretical framework that guided the design and execution of this investigation consisted of the conceptualization of the CECE Model (Museus, 2014). This construct posits that

*external influences* (i.e., finances, employment, and family guidance) influence *individual influences* (i.e., sense of belonging, academic attitudes, and academic performance) and *success* among students of color. This framework also suggests that students begin their postsecondary education with *pre-college inputs* (i.e., demographic traits, initial academic attitudes, academic preparation) that affect individual influences and success. The theory highlights the *environmental* (i.e. CECs) and individual effects on educational achievement. The focal point of this perspective is that the extent to which the environment of a postsecondary institution is culturally engaging is positively correlated with increasingly positive individual factors and ultimately greater academic success (Museus, 2014). Scarce and inconsistent research demonstrates the need to further examine the impact of CECs on the motivation of diverse student populations. Furthermore, gaining more information in this area is key to learning how to foster academic success of underserved undergraduates of color.

The CECE Model provided a holistic lens to analyze the ways in which larger environmental or institutional forces shape the motivation of high-achieving students of color. This perspective was imperative to the study, as it provided a framework through which the experiences and motivational influences of underserved high-achieving undergraduates of color was perceived. More specifically, it demonstrated that students are affected by various factors regarding their academic journey and that colleges and universities have the power to help shape these individuals' motivation and success.

In the current examination, qualitative research methods were used to comprehend the influences that motivate high-achieving underserved undergraduates of color (Creswell, 1997; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002; Yin, 2003). The phenomenological qualitative approach was utilized for this examination (Creswell, 2006). This technique is the examination of individuals'

lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon. This perspective is most fitting, as phenomenology is aimed at understanding the lived experience of groups or individuals (Moustakas, 1994). Accordingly, this investigation focuses on the meaning that students of color make of their lived experiences being high-achieving during their undergraduate years.

Data collection consisted of 22 individual interviews and demographic forms. Participants were recruited from Spring 2013 to Spring 2014. I met with the director and office manager of the Honors Program to obtain permission to interview former students of the program and to obtain an initial list of potential participants for this analysis. Individuals who agreed to be a participant in this study signed a consent form (see Appendix B) and completed a short demographic form (see Appendix C) prior to the interview. Then, they met with me for a one-on-one semi-structured interview. With semi-structured interviews, I was able to react to new ideas or emerging perspectives provided by interviewees throughout the interview (Merriam, 1998). Interviews were audio taped and about an hour in length. The recordings of these interviews were transcribed verbatim.

The main source of data came from interview transcriptions. A five-minute form requesting information about participants' undergraduate, post-graduation, demographic, and family background was administered before the interview. Data analyses were conducted throughout the inquiry using methods prescribed by Moustakas (1994) for phenomenological studies. The NVivo ® Qualitative Research Software package was used to organize and code the data. Invariant constituents were identified and used to construct thematic categories. Textural-structural descriptions of each participant's experience were created to highlight key phenomenon and how these individuals experienced the phenomenon. The textural-structural descriptions and invariant constituents were then utilized to group those constituents into



thematic categories. Next, these themes were compared to the CECE Model and new emerging factors were sought.

Three methods described by Lincoln and Guba (1986) were used to ensure trustworthiness and quality. The first way was to analyze negative cases by consciously examining inconsistent data during the analysis of this investigation. If data that were discrepant with developing themes arises, these themes were reviewed and adapted accordingly. Next, data from interview transcripts, participant questionnaires, and researcher notes were triangulated. Lastly, participants were sent a summary of the interpretation of their experiences and were asked for feedback and clarification to maximize accuracy of my interpretation of their experiences and the findings of this investigation.

Although measures were taken to ensure trustworthiness as discussed in the previous section, there are five limitations that cannot be avoided in the current examination. The first limitation of this inquiry is that the findings are context-bound and cannot be generalized beyond the participants. Second, due to the recruitment methods employed in this analysis, selection bias constitutes a second limitation. Third, the findings acquired from this inquiry are limited to common experiences and do not provide insight into how the experiences of high-achieving undergraduates of color may vary across subgroups or individuals within the high-achieving underserved student population of color. Fourth, not all students from all the underserved racial and ethnic groups within the Honors Program at UHM were interviewed. Finally, researcher bias may constitute a final limitation of the study.

As demonstrated earlier, three aspects of the CECE Model demonstrated consistency with the themes found across the student interviews. First, a majority of students asserted that *external influences* played a significant role in influencing their motivation. This manifested in two forms.

First, financial aid had a huge influence on the motivation of some high-achievers of color who were interviewed in that this provided students opportunities to ease their financial burden and develop professionally, as well as encouragement to maintain their high-achieving status.

Second, most of the participants also underscored the importance of their family regarding their academic motivation. Many students cited their family as affecting their motivation by family member providing their own aspirations, being role models, giving unconditional encouragement, and imposing their overwhelming expectations on these undergraduates.

The second fundamental factor of some interviewees' motivation was their *initial academic dispositions* coming into college. These students' initial academic dispositions were manifested in three specific ways. First, these high-achievers of color felt a need to seek challenging academic experiences. Second, these undergraduates were genuinely interested in their academic field. Lastly, the interviewees knew exactly what they wanted to do after they graduated with their bachelor's degree(s).

The third theme highlights that *culturally engaging campus environment* significantly influenced the motivation of these high-achievers of color. The first five factors of the CECE Model define five aspects of campus environments that gauge the degree to which campus environments are relevant to the cultural backgrounds and communities from which diverse students come. Three of these culturally relevant environmental indicators did not surface in this inquiry. These were cultural familiarity, culturally relevant knowledge, and opportunities for meaningful cross-cultural engagement. These particular aspects may not have emerged for many reasons, such as the nature of the interview questions that were asked or the institutional context of UHM. Regarding the latter, because the majority of UHM's undergraduates are students of color, students may not have consciously raised cultural familiarity or culturally relevant

knowledge as salient motivational factors because they are more natural take-for-granted elements of the larger dominant campus environment at UHM.

One of the components that emerged during many of the interviews with underserved high-achievers of color was cultural community service, which was demonstrated in students' off-campus community engagement. The other culturally relevant environmental factor that surfaced as a theme was being in a culturally validating environment, which included a lack of discrimination. The experiences of those who felt UHM was an unwelcoming environment were discussed as well.

The last four indicators of the CECE Model gauge the degree to which campus environments respond to the cultural norms and needs of racially and ethnically diverse student populations. All four culturally responsive environment factors emerged during the interviews as motivational influences for these underserved high-achieving undergraduates of color. First, most of the interviewees believed that UHM had a *collectivistic orientation* that was fostered by peer encouragement and connections with peers with similar interests. Second, many students experienced a *humanized educational environment* by being able to connect on a personal level with their academic advisors and the concern that faculty exhibited toward them. Third, some interviewees believed that UHM had a *proactive philosophy* due to the tracking done by academic advisors, the sharing of information within student organizations, and the preparation for success that academic programs provide. Last, various students strongly felt that they received *holistic support* by faculty always being available to answer questions and receiving consistent academic program assistance.

Lastly, there were two elements that manifested in addition to the CECE Model, which further describes the motivation of the majority of high-achievers of color who were interviewed.

One of these supplemental aspects was *cultivation of self-improvement*, which was fostered by individual faculty championing and demanding Honors Program requirements. The other factor was having a desire to *positively represent and give back to their community of origin*.

### **Conclusions**

Four major conclusions can be drawn from the findings of the current analysis. First, the majority of families of underserved high-achieving students of color in this study have a significant impact on their children's motivational levels in that family members can hinder or foster their children's motivation. The distinction between the negative and positive effects of family influences appears to be based on the students' perception as to whether their family's expectations and hopes become overwhelming.

Second, the current findings suggest that the initial academic motivation that underserved students of color bring with them to college could be an important factor that affects their motivation once they are enrolled at an institution of higher education. The aspects of this preliminary motivation are fostered by various influences on students, including family, community of origin, and high school administration. The findings of this study demonstrate that these pre-college sources are still influential even as these students near graduation.

Third, the findings indicate that higher education institutions can in fact create conditions that are conducive to the motivation of underserved students of color. The results of this examination demonstrate the exact ways that UHM's campus environment positively and negatively affects the motivation to succeed of underserved high-achievers of color. The fostering of the culturally relevant and responsive environmental factors that have proven to be influential for these students by institutions of higher education may lead to more students of color to become high-achieving and graduate from college.

Finally, the results of the current analysis indicate that a wide range of factors – from financial, to familial, to academic, to social – affect college student motivation. In this inquiry, there was not a single person or organization that was able to assist all students to address all of these factors. However, students were able to identify specific campus subcultures in which they were able to gain the information that they needed to succeed. Therefore, the establishment and maintenance of multifaceted support programs and services designed to provide a comprehensive educational experience and serve the whole student may be a crucial consideration in fostering the motivation to succeed of underserved students of color.

### **Discussion**

Scholars in higher education have contributed much to our comprehension of the salient external, pre-college, and institutional facets that influence the motivation of students (Bandura, 1982; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Weiner, 1974, 1986). More recently, higher education researchers have begun to examine the roles of these same factors on the motivation of students of color (Antonio, 2004; Barnett, 2011a, 2011b; Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005; Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, & Rosales, 2005; Guiffrida, 2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2006; Hassinger & Plourde, 2005; Jenkins et al., 2006; Museus, 2011a, 2013a; Museus & Quaye, 2009; Museus et al., 2013; Nora, Urick, & Cerecer, 2011; Rendón, 1994; Rendón & Muñoz, 2011; Thompson & Fretz, 1991). Lastly, a small and growing body of literature have examined the motivational influences of underserved high-achieving students of color (Guiffrida, 2005; Harper, 2005; Hassinger & Plourde, 2005; Hwang et al., 2002). The findings of this investigation support many results from these earlier empirical inquiries and provide new and supplemental perspectives into the factors that influence the motivation of college students of color. The findings of this analysis that do not support past literature are also discussed.

**External Influences**

As previously mentioned, most of the interviewees emphasized the significance of external influences regarding their academic motivation. The external influences element of the CECE Model consists of three aspects. One of these factors did not emerge as a common influence, which was employment. Employment may not have surfaced as having a significant effect on students' motivation because all of the participants worked part-time at the most. Employment may have been an important motivational factor if these students worked full-time while also attending college or held jobs on campus. In addition, this particular aspect may not have surfaced as a significant influence on students' motivation because it was not specifically addressed during the interviews. As mentioned earlier, the interview questions were based off of the original conceptual framework and did not focus specifically on the CECE Model.

**Institutional Financial Aid.** There were two external influences of the CECE Model that were mentioned as having an effect on students' motivation. First, financial aid had a huge influence on the motivation of many high-achievers of color who were interviewed. These participants highlighted the significance of receiving financial aid from UHM as a huge source of motivation. As awardees of these financial opportunities, these high-achievers of color who were interviewed were in turn, motivated to succeed in at least three ways. First, opportunities that provided financial support in the form of scholarships and research awards were more appealing, as they helped ease students' financial burden. Second, having a paid internship provided some students opportunities to develop professionally, as they were funded by their professors' research grants to participate in national competitions and present at national conferences. Third, a few students indicated that being the recipient of a scholarship motivated them to keep being high-achieving students by being involved with academic and co-curricular activities on-campus.

The findings of the current examination, therefore, support earlier conclusions that ability to pay for college is a major component in college student motivation (Cabrera, Nora, & Castañeda, 1993; Cabrera, Stampen, & Hansen, 1990; Stampen & Cabrera, 1988). More specifically, the results suggest that receiving college financial support can be a significant factor in the motivation of underserved students of color (Astin, 1993; Coltfelter, 1991; Hagedorn et al., 2006; Heller, 2003; Makuakane-Drechsel & Hagedorn, 2000; Maton, Hrabowski, & Schmitt, 2000; Museus, 2007a; St. John, 1990; St. John, Kirshstein, & Noell, 1991; Zalaquett, 2006).

In addition, these students were also aware that these options, more specifically, research internships were also helping them advance educationally and professionally. This particular finding is consistent with research conducted on the Meyerhoff Scholars Program at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, which is a program focusing on high-achieving Blacks in science, engineering, and mathematical fields (Maton et al., 2000).

The finding that some interviewees consciously maintained their high-achieving status because they knew that they were awarded these financial opportunities because of this facet is a new motivational influence that has arisen, as other empirical inquiries on the motivational influences of underserved high-achieving students of color have not found this factor. Because of the various ways receiving financial aid from UHM can positively affect the motivation of underserved students of color, educators need to be knowledgeable about the financial options available to students. In addition to knowing about financial opportunities, higher education representatives need to make every effort to ensure that their students are aware of and take advantage of these possibilities.

**Family Influences.** The second external influence of the CECE Model that was found to be consistent with this investigation was the importance of family. In general, the majority of

students' families influenced their academic motivation in four overarching ways. Three techniques positively affected participants' motivation, while one engendered negative effects.

In general, many students who were interviewed believed that their family was a significantly positive influence on their academic motivation. These findings are consistent with previous research examining the motivation of Hispanic, Native Hawaiian, and Southeast Asian American (SEAA) students (Amodeo & Martin, 1982; Fuligni, 2002; Gandara, 1982; Hassinger and Plourde, 2005; Rindone, 1988), as well as high-achieving Blacks and Hispanics (Griffin, 2006; Harper, 2012; Zalaquett, 2006). More specifically, some students stated that having family-based aspirations were extremely influential on these individuals' motivation levels in a positive way. Three types of family-based academic hopes seemed to have a favorable effect on these undergraduates' motivation levels: education, make family proud, and having a job different from their parents. These aspirations have been found to be motivational for underserved students of color in other studies as well (Zalaquett, 2006). The finding of knowing that these students were fulfilling their family's educational aspirations is similar that of Herndon and Hirt's (2004) and Guiffida's (2005b) studies of Black high-achievers and Museus's (2013b) examination of SEAAAs. Making one's family proud has also been found to positively motivate other high-achieving underserved students of color (Griffin, 2006; Herndon & Hirt, 2004; Urdan, Solek, & Schoenfelder, 2007). Having a job different from their parents was a significant motivator that was also found in empirical studies on high-achieving underserved students of color (Griffin, 2006; Urdan et al., 2007).

A second way that family influenced the motivation of some underserved high-achievers of color was having family members as role models in regard to their personal characteristics, academic accomplishments, and chosen career paths. Presently, there is a paucity of literature



regarding the motivational influence of having family members as role models. Therefore, this finding adds to the field of knowledge regarding how family influences the academic motivation of students of color.

Lastly, family was a positive motivational factor of the majority of interviewees by providing unconditional encouragement by being supportive and encouraging their children to progress. The results of this examination coincide with scholarship regarding the positive effect of family encouragement on the motivation of underserved students of color (Amodio & Martin, 1982; Rindone, 1988; Russell & Atwater, 2005) and more specifically, high-achieving Black students (Griffin, 2006; Guiffrida, 2005b; Harper, 2012; Herndon & Hirt, 2004). These findings that demonstrate the potential ways families can influence their children's motivation are informative for families from underserved racial and ethnic groups, as well as postsecondary institutions and how they involve families in their children's education.

Families were viewed as hindering several students' academic motivation when their families placed overwhelming expectations on them, which included having full independence, carrying on the family's business, and financially supporting their family. All of the students who mentioned their family affecting their motivation in these ways were first-generation college students. These findings add to the conflicting literature on underserved students of color. Some research indicates that families have a positive influence on the motivation of first-generation Hispanic females (Zalaquett, 2006) and students from underserved racial and ethnic groups (Fuligni, 2002; Phinney, Dennis, & Osorio, 2006; Tseng, 2004). On the other hand, the findings of Museus's (2013b) on SEAs concur with the findings of this inquiry in that both studies add to the literature on family influences by showing that the positive influence of family on students' motivation can become negative when it is excessive or unreasonable and that this only

happens in a minority of cases. Guiffrida (2005b) also found that some Black students also felt negatively pressured to support their family financially. Moreover, the findings of Dennis et al. (2005) suggest that family expectations do not have any significant effect on the motivation of first-generation underserved students of color. This analysis's findings demonstrate that the relationship between family expectations and the motivation of students from underserved racial and ethnic populations can vary, particularly for those who are first-generation.

### **Pre-College Inputs**

Within the CECE Model, one of the constructs affecting student motivation is titled, pre-college inputs. This section includes demographics, academic preparation, and initial academic dispositions. Presently, literature regarding the relationship between demographics and motivation to succeed is scarce. The lack of research supporting this connection is consistent with the finding of this particular study, which did not demonstrate demographics as being a contributing factor to the motivation of underserved high-achievers of color.

The finding that academic preparation was not cited as a motivational factor may be a result of the fact that the participant pool only included high-achievers. In general, many students are high-achievers prior to entering college. It is true that these individuals had to have thought about their educational preparation in order to apply for the Honors Program, but these students applied at least a year before the interview took place. Thus, since they were already academically prepared for college and may not have faced any significant challenges that result from being under-prepared, this aspect was not at the forefront of their minds during the interview. This finding adds to the conflicting past literature on this relationship. Nora and Cabrera (1996) found that academic preparation was a significant influence on underserved student motivation. However, Allen (1999) did not find this relation to be significantly

influential. The lack of research on demographics and conflicting empirical studies on academic preparation demonstrate the need for further research in these areas.

**Initial Academic Dispositions.** In this examination, only one initial academic disposition was connected to the motivation of the majority of underserved high-achievers of color who were interviewed, which was initial academic motivation. These students' initial academic dispositions motivated them to excel academically in five ways: need to challenge self, fully committing themselves, having a desire to stand out, genuine interest in their academic field, and knowing what they want to do after they graduate. Existing literature of high-achievers (Neumeister, 2004), students of color (Dennis et al., 2005) and high-achieving Black students (Griffin, 2006) is consistent with these findings. Therefore, the findings here suggest that postsecondary institutions may want to allocate more resources in fostering these aspects of initial educational motivation, which can include hosting events and programs that recognize students' academic achievements, fosters students' interest in their major, and helps students further define their post-graduation goals and how exactly to attain these objectives.

In addition, the CECE Model includes initial academic motivation as one potential pre-college input. However, it does not specify what types of factors lead to this initial disposition. Thus, the findings of this investigation help us better understand the kinds of characteristics that make up the educational motivation that underserved students of color enter college with.

### **Culturally Relevant Environments**

As stated earlier, there are nine CECE aspects that have the potential and functions to engage students' racially diverse cultural identities and fulfill their diverse needs. These nine indicators can be separated into two groups: indicators of cultural relevance and cultural responsiveness. The first five factors of the CECE Model define five aspects of campus

environments that gauge the degree to which campus environments are relevant to the cultural backgrounds and communities from which diverse students come. Three of these indicators did not surface in this inquiry: cultural familiarity, culturally relevant knowledge, and opportunities for meaningful cross-cultural engagement. These factors may not have been demonstrated to help motivate the underserved high-achievers of color in this particular inquiry for four reasons. First, many of the interviewees were pre-medicine and pre-law. Thus, their course transcripts comprised mostly of pre-requisite courses for professional schools, which do not require the inclusion of cultural content. Second, the ethnic studies department is relatively small at UHM, which does not provide many opportunities for students to experience UHM as a culturally relevant environment. Third, UHM does not directly require students to take a culture course to graduate with a bachelor's degree. Finally, with many of the interviewees being local to Hawai'i, perhaps being in an environment that is culturally familiar is not significant for them, as they are still within the environment of Hawai'i.

**Cultural community service.** The two components that emerged during many of the interviews with underserved high-achievers of color are engaging in cultural community service and experiencing a culturally validating environment. The first culturally relevant factor that was found to positively motivate these underserved high-achieving students of color was participation in cultural community service. The effects of this facet is congruent with extant empirical research, which suggests that activities allowing students of color to give back to their home communities are related to stronger connections to their institutional campuses, which are related to success in college (Astin & Sax, 1998; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Guifrida, 2003; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Museus, 2008b, 2011b; Museus et al., 2012; Museus & Quaye, 2009). The findings of this investigation helps further define the motivation of underserved high-achievers of color,

as no other literature could be found that specifically demonstrates how cultural community service affects the motivation of high-achieving students of color. Thus, the findings of this study suggest that UHM should broaden and strengthen its relationships with off-campus organizations to establish ways that its students could engage in cultural community service.

**Culturally validating environments.** The second culturally relevant aspect that was also found to positively influence the motivation of the majority of interviewees was their belief that UHM provided a culturally validating environment. This aspect is also consistent with previous scholarly studies on students of color (Barnett, 2011b; Museus & Quaye, 2009; Rendón, 1994).

Unfortunately, there were two students who felt that UHM was not culturally validating. As the quotations in the previous section illuminated, Pi'ilani felt that UHM was not welcoming to Native Hawaiians. In addition, she said that the campus environment was not supportive or validating for her. These feelings may be due to the lack of presence of Native Hawaiians, including faculty, staff, and students, in various spaces on-campus. For example, as of Fall 2012, only 9% of the faculty at UHM was Native Hawaiian (UHM, 2012). Without many faculty members to identify with racially and ethnically, perhaps Pi'ilani was not provided the opportunity to feel validated by UHM. Another reason may be the lack of Native Hawaiian knowledge exchanged on UHM's campus.

Pi'ilani's experience coincides with literature regarding cultural dissonance, which can be described as the stress that arises when students gain cultural knowledge that is not compatible with their own cultural meaning-making systems (Museus, 2008a). With most colleges and universities being based on White middle-class culture, it is reasonable that students of color are more likely to feel greater distance between their home and campus cultures than their White peers (Kuh & Love, 2000; Museus & Quaye, 2009) and that cultural distance is connected to

higher levels of cultural dissonance (Museus, 2008a), which in turn, decreases students' likelihood of achieving success in college (Museus & Quaye, 2009). Due to these possible reasons, perhaps Pi'ilani felt that she was pushed away from an environment that was not culturally validating, which was the general UHM campus in this case, and felt pulled to a place where she felt validated for her culture, which was the Hawaiian Studies department.

The second student who felt that that UHM had an unwelcoming environment was Fiona, who had a very different experience than Pi'ilani in that even though she felt that she was part of the Native Hawaiian culture on-campus, she was publically outcast by Native Hawaiians because she was not Native Hawaiian by blood. As a result of this open rejection, Fiona felt that she was pushed away from specific areas of the campus in which these individuals took classes or hung out socially. At the same time though, Fiona gravitated toward other places of UHM in which she felt validated for her cultural background. With UHM having one of the most diverse student populations in the nation, it is easy to assume that all students are able to easily feel that they are culturally validated. However, educators at even extremely diverse institutions must be aware that efforts should still be made to ensure that students feel culturally validated within the campus environment.

### **Culturally Responsive Environments**

The last four indicators of the CECE Model gauge the degree to which campus environments respond to the cultural norms and needs of racially and ethnically diverse student populations. All four culturally responsive environment factors emerged during the interviews as motivational influences for many of these underserved high-achieving undergraduates of color: collectivistic orientation, humanized educational environment, proactive philosophies, and holistic support.

**Collectivistic Orientation.** First, the majority of students stated that they were motivated by UHM's collectivistic orientation in the forms of peer encouragement and connecting with peers with similar interests. These findings are consistent with past research on underserved students of color (Jackson, Smith, & Hill, 2003; Museus, 2008b; Museus & Quaye, 2009; Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Zalaquett, 2006) and more specifically high-achieving Black students (Harper, 2012; Herndon & Hirt, 2004). What is important to note is that all of the peer interactions in this examination that were cited as motivational for underserved high-achievers of color occurred by chance or within student organizations. These findings strongly indicate that UHM needs to establish more opportunities for its students to connect with their peers at the institutional level.

**Humanized Educational Environment.** Second, many underserved high-achievers of color experienced a humanized educational environment by being able to establish a personal connection with their academic advisors and having concerned faculty. The finding of experiencing concern from faculty is consistent with scholarship on the motivation of underserved students of color (Cokley, 2000; Jackson et al., 2003; Museus & Quaye, 2009; Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Rendón, 1994; Young, 2006; Zalaquett, 2006). More specifically, this study's accounts mirrors those of which Guiffreda (2005) has defined as "othermothering," which is defined as "the ways in which student-centered faculty went above and beyond their roles as professors to assist students with their academic, career, and personal issues" (p. 708). The findings of this analysis highlight the importance of individualized relationships that academic advisors and faculty need to establish with their students.

**Proactive Philosophies.** Third, various underserved high-achievers of color who were interviewed also stated that the proactive philosophies of institutional representatives were also motivational for them by the tracking of students' progress by academic advisors, academic

program preparation for success, and the sharing of information by student organizations. These findings are consistent with Maton et al.'s (2000) examination on the Meyerhoff Scholars Program and Palmer and Gasman's (2008) examination of an Honors Program at a historically Black university in the Mid-Atlantic. The sharing of information by student organizations also support past research findings (Museus, 2008b). Presently, the colleges within UHM are only required to review students' academic progress at the end of every academic year. However, the findings of this inquiry suggest that this policy be reconsidered. Another aspect of UHM colleges that may need to be rethought is the student learning outcomes of undergraduate majors. Presently, not all major departments provide their students with the knowledge and skills to be able to succeed in their academic field. This developmental area should be considered as a student learning outcome for the major departments at UHM. Last, the findings of this investigation highlight the need for UHM to establish the sharing of relevant information for targeted groups, which is something that is not currently being done at the institutional level.

**Holistic Support.** The last aspect of the CECE Model that was found to be consistent with the findings of this inquiry was receiving holistic support from consistently available faculty and assistance from academic programs. This study's findings are congruent with past literature on student-faculty interactions (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Guiffreda, 2005; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2010) and academic program support (Jenkins et al., 2006; Maton et al., 2000; Palmer & Gasman, 2008). These findings also reinforce the need for faculty and academic to communicate with their students that they are open and available for consultation and to follow through with these messages.



**Cultivation of Self-Improvement**

The findings of this analysis add to the CECE Model in two ways. One of these constituents is a campus environment factor. One additional campus environment factor that was often mentioned as being influential on the academic motivation of underserved high-achieving undergraduates of color was the cultivation of self-improvement by faculty members and the Honors Program. This emphasis of educational achievement and attainment by faculty is congruent with previous empirical research (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Komarraju, Musulkin, & Bhattacharya, 2010; Kuh et al., 2010), particularly on students of color (Guiffrida, 2005; Rendón, 1994). The results of the current investigation provide support for some findings of these earlier investigations as well as additional insights into how institutions can cultivate the self-improvement of students with the help of faculty and academic programs.

**Positively Represent and Give Back to Home Community**

The second element that supplements to the CECE Model is a pre-college input. One pre-college input that was not discussed in the CECE Model as a motivation factor but was continuously stated in the interviews was students' desire to positively represent and give back to their community of origin. This particular finding has been found to be similar to that of other studies conducted on high-achieving Black students (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Griffin, 2006; Harper, 2012; Herndon & Hirt, 2004). Therefore, this finding should be given consideration about how this motivational influence can be included in the campus environment of UHM.

These studies demonstrate that the motivation of high-achievers of color is neither exclusively internal nor external. Instead, it is a multidimensional construct. The findings of this examination support this conception, demonstrating that 22 successful students of various ethnic and racial backgrounds often drew on multiple sources to drive their academic motivation.

The conceptual framework of the CECE Model proved to be significantly relevant and applicable in understanding the academic motivation of underserved high-achieving students of color, as it defined both intrinsic and extrinsic sources that influence these undergraduates' motivation. The present inquiry also adds to the CECE Model in some aspects. In addition, this analysis takes the theoretical framework of the CECE Model and directly applies it directly to a group of students that it was established for, which provides a richer and fuller portrayal of the influences on the motivation of underserved students of color who are high-achieving.

### **Implications**

The findings of this investigation have significant implications for educators and institutions that serve underserved students of color. Therefore, a number of recommendations for postsecondary educational policy, practice, and research are provided in this section.

#### **Implications for State and Federal Policy**

State and federal support can have a significant influence on the motivation of underserved students of color. The interviewees benefitted immensely from the support provided by the state government of Hawai'i. For example, students consistently cited the Honors Program at UHM as a source that provided various types of motivation for underserved high-achievers of color. This illustration demonstrates the potential of how just one support system of the state can have an impact on the motivation of underserved students of color.

In addition, federal aid for targeted support systems at many colleges and universities, including UHM, is provided by federal and institutional sources. The Minority Access to Research Careers Program (MARC), for instance, is funded by the National Institutes of Health and run by the UHM's Pacific Biosciences Research Center. This could be an attestation that, in light of institutions limited institutional resources, state and federal support are important factors

to increasing the motivation of underserved students of color. Thus, federal and state policymakers need to consider the significance of providing the resources to establish, sustain, and improve support and retention programs and services for underserved student populations.

The support systems that were cited as having the most influence on students' motivation to succeed at UHM provide academic, financial, and social support for their students. Therefore, administrators who work closely with underserved students of color at UHM are able to allocate financial support for these students. Consequently, federal and state policymakers should consider the significance of ensuring sufficient financial opportunities are provided for students with need-based financial aid and to ensure that these individuals are given ways to develop academically, professionally, and socially.

### **Implications for Institutional Policy**

Some previously mentioned programs like MARC, are institutional initiatives that were established and funded by the resource commitment from institutional administration. Particularly where the combined resources allocated by federal and state governments to these initiatives is inadequate, it is imperative for institutional leaders to think about the significance of providing resources in efforts to establish and maintain a wide range of programs and services dedicated to the success of underserved students of color to ensure that their colleges and universities maintain high retention and graduation rates, and more importantly, to make sure that they establish an environment supportive of students of various ethnic and racial backgrounds. This consideration is particularly important for postsecondary educational institutions given the increasingly diverse student populations of the future.

Given the value of meaningful relationships between students and the administration, faculty, and staff with whom they communicate, committees and individuals who make decisions

about hiring new college or university personnel should be aware of how their decisions may affect the underserved students of color at their institutions. Hiring committees and those who control the hiring decisions should consider two matters. First, the ratio of students to faculty and staff within a department should also be considered at postsecondary educational institutions. For example, while the National Academic Advising Association found that the median caseload for advisors at U.S. institutions is 260 (Robbins, 2013), many advisors at UHM have ratios far beyond this median. For example, the Pre-Health/Pre-Law Advising Center's one Director has a caseload of 2,200 students, the eight advisors in the Colleges of Arts and Sciences Student Academic Services each have a caseload of 645 students, and I have a caseload of 611 students (Council of Academic Advisors, 2012). The more students that advisors have, the less time that they are able to establish a meaningful relationship with each student. Second, the potential impact of hiring individuals who understand and are dedicated to meeting the needs of underserved students of color should be contemplated by colleges and universities.

### **Implications for Practice**

The findings of this study yield significant implications for practice in institutions of higher education. First and foremost, campus leaders should acknowledge and comprehend the power their institution's campus has in fostering the motivation to succeed of various student populations, including underserved racial and ethnic groups. The findings of this inquiry provide specific ways of how different cultural factors converge to establish a system that engages, supports, and motivates underserved students of color. Efforts of improving the academic motivation of students from underserved racial and ethnic groups that are siloed in a specific program or service may not be as effective as comprehending and working toward reshaping the campus-wide culture to promote the motivation to succeed among those students, as all of the

students who were interviewed for this investigation were motivated by multiple programs, services, and individuals on campus.

The significance of underserved students of color establishing and maintaining relationships with the administration, faculty, and staff at their institution is highlighted in this examination. The findings of this analysis is evidence that meaningful relationships with administrators and academic advisors could also be an important factor in promoting the motivation of underserved students of color. Thus, higher educational representatives should be aware of the salient impact that creating such relationships can have on the success of students from underserved racial and ethnic groups and make concerted efforts to establish this type of relationships within and outside of the classroom.

Postsecondary institutions should make a concerted effort in establishing and maintaining an environment in which students are not expected to find, identify, and pursue support on their own initiative. This need is emphasized for first-generation college students who may not be able to obtain this knowledge from their families or friends who are off-campus. Establishing a culture in which administrators, faculty, and staff espouse an institutional responsibility for connecting students with information and resources may be a crucial factor of the motivation of students of color.

The findings of this study demonstrate that comprehending the motivation of underserved students of color is extremely complex given that these students draw from various sources of motivation on- and off-campus. In addition, the multiple aspects of a campus culture, including the values, assumptions, beliefs, and norms are tacit and often assumed (Schein, 2005). Thus, the leaders of higher education institutions should take a systematic approach to comprehending their respective campus cultures and how they influence the perspectives and behaviors of

administrators, faculty, staff, and students. Cultural audits should be conducted to comprehend the nature of their campus culture and how the values, assumptions, beliefs, and norms affect the connections between institutions and their student population. Institutions also need to acknowledge the significance that students' families have on these individuals' lives and collaborate with them to ensure that students are in environments that foster their motivation and success on- and off-campus. Postsecondary institutions need to establish and strengthen connections with these constituents to ensure the success of underserved students of color.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Although this analysis provides valuable insight into how postsecondary institutions can foster the motivation of high-achieving students of color, it has many limitations. First, UHM, which is a large, public four-year university, was the only institution examined in this examination. The findings and conclusions, therefore, must be read with caution, especially since the student population of UHM is unique in that it is one of the most diverse in the country. Thus, to allow the conclusions made in this investigation to be applied to other colleges and universities, further inquiries should expand the sample to include a substantial number of both two-and four-year institutions.

Second, another limitation of the research design was the exclusion of low-achieving underserved students of color. The participant sample allows the conclusion that there are common factors that contribute to the motivation to succeed of students from underserved racial and ethnic groups. However, it does not provide the conclusion that these conditions are not experienced by low-achieving students the same institution. It is possible that any of the traits mentioned earlier could be experienced by students who are not as high-achieving as those who were interviewed for this inquiry. Knowing the differences between these particular student

populations may be informative. Therefore, further research comparing these groups should be conducted so that such assertions can be voiced.

Third, this study echoes previous calls to examine the ways in which culture shapes experiences in higher education (Kuh, 2001/2002, 2005; Museus, 2007). Further examinations should focus on cultural factors that shape other significant academic outcomes. The limited research that has been conducted on the impact of culture on students' experiences on-campus are mostly qualitative. Therefore, researchers in higher education should ponder the application of cultural frameworks to the design and conduction of quantitative studies.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, even though postsecondary educational institutions across the U.S. have focused on the recruitment of students of color, the rate at which they are retained and graduating remains dismally low. Even though examining the underachievement of students of color is imperative, it is equally important to look to those students of color who not only graduated with a bachelor's degree, but were also high-achieving as an undergraduate. This investigation examined what factors positively and negatively affected the motivation to excel academically of underrepresented high-achievers of color. The findings of this research provide valuable insight into how postsecondary education administration, faculty, staff, and parents can allocate the necessary resources to foster success among the increasingly diverse student populations arriving on their campuses. Moreover, this inquiry demonstrates the significant need for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to better understand how to shape higher education environments that contribute to the conditions for students to thrive and maximize their motivation to succeed in college.

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**APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT EMAIL**

Hi,

My name is Kiana Shiroma and I am a graduate student in the Department of Educational Administration at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (UHM). I am also the academic advisor of the Honors and Regents and Presidential Scholars Programs at UHM. I am contacting you to ask for your participation in a study for my dissertation. I am looking at the different types of academic motivation of college students.

In order to participate in this study, you must be at least 18 years of age.

The study will consist of meeting with me for an individual in-person interview that should take about one hour to complete. It will also include filling out a short questionnaire. This questionnaire should take you approximately five minutes.

If you choose to participate in this study, please read and keep the attached consent form for your records. The purpose of having a consent form is to provide contact information and to inform you of what you will be agreeing to do. Your responses will be kept completely confidential. The interview and questionnaire questions are also attached to this email.

If you are interested in participating, please complete the following:

- Sign and return the consent form to me
- Complete and return the questionnaire to me
- Respond to this email with the days and times of your availability for the current and following weeks

The decision to take part in this study is voluntary. If you do decide to take part in this study, you may terminate participation at any time without consequence. If you wish to terminate participation, please contact me immediately. Whatever you decide will carry no penalty.

You have the right to ask questions about this research before you sign this form and at any time during the study. You can reach me at 808-956-0756 or [kianak@hawaii.edu](mailto:kianak@hawaii.edu). If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact a representative of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, which oversees research involving human participants. The Institutional Review Board may be reached at: Human Studies Program, University of Hawai'i, 1960 East-West Road, Biomed B-104, Honolulu, HI 96822. You can also contact the Board by telephone or e-mail at 808-956-5007 or [uhirb@hawaii.edu](mailto:uhirb@hawaii.edu).

Thank you.

**APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

My name is Kiana Y. Shiroma. I work at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (UHM) as an academic advisor of the Honors and Regents and Presidential Scholars Programs. I am contacting you though, as I am pursuing research in partial fulfillment for the Doctorate in Educational Administration at UHM. The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of high-achieving underserved ethnic and racial minority college students. I am asking you to participate in this project because you are a high-achieving student of color who is graduating.

**Project Description – Activities and Time Commitment:** If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a demographic form that should take around five minutes to complete and participate in a digitally recorded, individual, face-to-face interview that will last approximately one hour long. I am recording the interview so I can later type a transcript – a written record of what we talked about during the interview - and analyze the information from the interview. If you participate, you will be one of at least 10 individuals who I will interview. One example of the type of question I will ask is, “What motivates you to succeed at UHM?”

**Benefits and Risks:** I believe there are no direct benefits to you in participating in my research project. However, the results of this project might help me and other researchers learn more about the experiences of high-achieving underserved ethnic and racial minority college students. I believe there is little or no risk to you in participating in this project. If, however, you are uncomfortable or stressed by answering any of the interview questions, we will skip the question, or take a break, or stop the interview, or withdraw from the project altogether.

**Confidentiality and Privacy:** During this research project, I will keep all interview data in a password-protected file on a password-protected computer. Only I will have access to the data, although legally authorized agencies, including the UH Human Studies Program, have the right to review research records.

When I report the results of my research project, and in my typed transcripts, I will not use your name or any other personally identifying information. Instead, I will use a pseudonym (fake name) for your name. If you would like a summary of the findings from my final report, please contact me at the number listed near the end of this consent form.

**Voluntary Participation:** Participation in this research project is voluntary. You can choose freely to participate or not to participate. In addition, at any point during this project, you can withdraw your permission without any penalty of loss of benefits.

**Questions:** If you have any questions about this project, please contact me at via phone (808) 956-0756 or e-mail ([kianak@hawaii.edu](mailto:kianak@hawaii.edu)). If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, in this project, you can contact the University of Hawai‘i, Human Studies Program, by phone at (808) 956-5007 or by e-mail at [uhirb@hawaii.edu](mailto:uhirb@hawaii.edu).

Please keep the prior portion of this consent form for your records. If you agree to participate in this project, please sign the following page and return it to me.

**Signature for Consent:**

I agree to participate in the research project entitled, *The Motivation Factors of Underserved Ethnic and Racial Minority College Students*. I understand that I can change my mind about participating in this project, at any time, by notifying the researcher.

**Your Name (Print):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Your Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT PROFILE FORM**

*\*\*\*All of this information will be kept confidential and will only be used for this study.*

Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Phone Number: (     ) \_\_\_\_\_ Primary E-Mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Home City or Town: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female

Ethnic Background (Include all ethnicities, such as Native Hawaiian, Chinese, Japanese):

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Residence status: ☐ U.S. Citizen ☐ Permanent Resident Alien ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

High School Attended: \_\_\_\_\_

Did you begin college at UHM?: ☐ Yes ☐ No, I attended: \_\_\_\_\_

Years you have taken college classes?: \_\_\_\_\_ Student status: ☐ Full-time ☐ Part-time

Credits completed: ☐ 0-24 ☐ 25-54 ☐ 55-88 ☐ 89+ Credits enrolled in this semester: \_\_\_\_\_

Approximate overall GPA: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you receiving financial aid?: ☐ Yes, I receive partial support. ☐ Yes, I receive full support. ☐ No

Major(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Type(s) of degree(s) you are earning: \_\_\_\_\_

Student Organizations and Clubs: List any organizations or clubs in which you have been involved during your college career – even if you are no longer affiliated with those organizations or clubs.

Club or Organization:

Leadership Positions Held (if any):

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____



Campus Programs: List any campus programs in which you have participated during your college career – even if you are no longer affiliated with those programs. (For example, Kōkua a Puni, Student Support Services):

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How many hours do you work per week?: \_\_\_\_\_ Do you work on-campus?: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Where are you living?:

☐ On-campus in a dorm

☐ Off-campus with partner and/or peers

☐ On-campus in an apartment

☐ Off-campus with family

☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Highest educational degree your mother earned:

☐ High School Diploma

☐ Master's Degree

☐ Associate's Degree

☐ Professional Degree (e.g., J.D., M.D.)

☐ Bachelor's Degree

☐ Doctoral Degree (e.g., Ph.D., Ed.D.)

Highest educational degree your father earned:

☐ High School Diploma

☐ Master's Degree

☐ Associate's Degree

☐ Professional Degree (e.g., J.D., M.D.)

☐ Bachelor's Degree

☐ Doctoral Degree (e.g., Ph.D., Ed.D.)

Are you the first in your family to be born in the United States?: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Are you the first in your family to attend college?: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Are you the first in your family to attend college in the United States?: ☐ Yes ☐ No

**APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of high-achieving underserved ethnic and racial minority college students. I am asking you to participate in this project because you are a high-achieving student of underserved ethnic and racial minority status who is near graduation.

1. Why did you decide to attend the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (UHM)?
2. What has your experience at UHM been like so far?
3. What motivates you to succeed at UHM? How has [each answer] motivated you?
4. When you think about your time here at UHM, are there other things that have helped you succeed in college?
5. Are there specific people who have helped you succeed at UHM? Can you tell me a little more about how [each person] has helped you succeed?
6. Are there people outside of campus that have helped you succeed at UHM? How so?
7. What challenges are you facing as a [enter ethnicity (e.g., Filipino) here] undergraduate? How have you overcome [each barrier]?
8. How did you find out about the Honors Program?
9. Why did you join the Honors Program?
10. In what ways has the Honors Program positively influenced your experience here?
11. What parts of the Honors Program have not been helpful? How has [each answer] impacted your experience?
12. Do you feel a sense of belonging in the Honors Program? Can you tell me a little more about that?

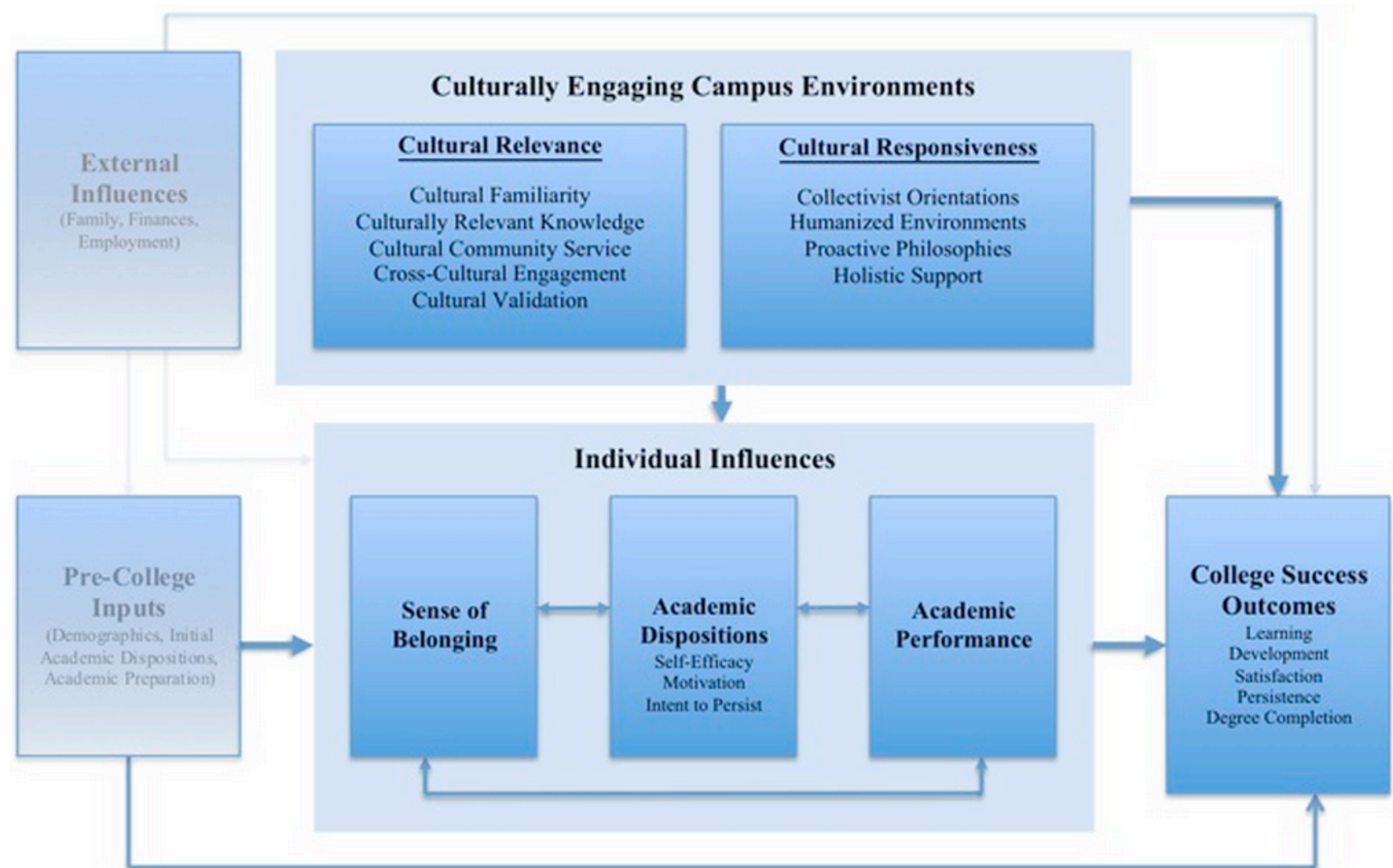
**TABLE 1: RACIAL PERCENTAGES IN 2010**

	People	White	Filipino	Japanese	Hawaiian	Hispanic	Chinese	Black	Korean	Samoan / Tongan	Other
Hawai'i	1.36 million	25	15	14	10	9	4	2	2	1	18
UHM	20,429	21	8	13	16	2	7	2	4	1	25
Honors Program	450	33	4*	16	7*	1*	9	1*	1*	1	27

Data Source: UHM, 2010b, 2011, 2012; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010)

**TABLE 2: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS**

Name	Ethnic Background	Age	Gender	Major(s)
Ashley	Native Hawaiian, Chinese, Japanese, German	20	Female	Microbiology
Brandon	Chilean (mixed: Mapuche, Spanish) Caucasian (German, French)	23	Male	Kinesiology & Rehabilitation Science
Cadance	Japanese, Portuguese, Hawaiian	20	Female	Travel Industry Management
Chasity	Korean	21	Female	Biology
Chelsea	Spanish, Filipino	21	Female	History
Davelyn	Filipino	20	Female	Food Science and Human Nutrition
Fiona	Filipino, Caucasian	21	Female	Zoology
John	Native Hawaiian, English, Scottish, Dutch	54	Male	Hawaiian Language, Hawaiian Studies
Kate	Filipino, Hawaiian, Puerto Rican, Chinese, Caucasian	21	Female	Psychology
Kealoha	Native Hawaiian, Japanese, Chinese, Portuguese	21	Male	Math, Economics
Keoki	Native Hawaiian, Chinese, Okinawan, Puerto Rican, Italian, Spanish	34	Male	Hawaiian Language/Molecular Cell Biology
Keoni	Indian, Native Hawaiian, and Japanese	21	Male	Biology
Lisa	Hispanic	32	Female	Political Science, Spanish
Michael	Native Hawaiian, Portuguese, English, Irish, German, Okinawan.	22	Male	Plant and Environmental Protection Sciences & Journalism
Michelle	Mexican, Polish, Native American	23	Female	English
Mona	Father - Filipino, Mother - Canadian, English and French descent	35	Female	Sociology
Nani	Native Hawaiian, Chinese, Portuguese, Irish, German, Polish	21	Female	Biology
Natasha	Caucasian and Filipina	24	Female	Psychology
Piilani	Portuguese, Chinese, Hawaiian	22	Female	Interdisciplinary Studies
Ranson	Hispanic	22	Male	Biological Engineering
Reid	Filipino	20	Male	Chinese Language and American Studies
Tiffany	Native Hawaiian, Chinese, Japanese, French, Irish, Portuguese	21	Female	Kinesiology Rehabilitation Science

**FIGURE 1: CULTURALLY ENGAGING CAMPUS ENVIRONMENTS MODEL OF COLLEGE SUCCESS**

Culturally Engaging Campus Environments Project, 2014.