DOMINICAN UNIVERSITY
of CALIFORNIA

Offices of Undergraduate and Graduate Admissions

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Recruitment at Dominican University of California: The Black/African American Student Experience & College Choice

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Recruitment at Dominican University of California: The Black/African American Student Experience & College Choice

Lexi Amrhein, Melany del Carpio, Cassie Garcia, Hermes Membreno

Executive Summary

This research study examines the enrollment decisions of Black/African American students at Dominican University of California in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the recruitment strategies of the Office of Admissions. The researchers worked with the leaders of the Black Student Union (BSU) to host two focus groups for Black/African American students currently enrolled at Dominican University. Our goal was to gain a nuanced understanding of why these students had enrolled and what resources provided by the Office of Admissions impacted these choices. This partnership with BSU created an opportunity for participants to structure the research, ensured that we host comfortable, safe conversations, and provided an avenue for thorough community outreach.

The conceptual framework of this study was informed by the college choice model (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Perna, 2016) and Acevedo-Gil's concept of college-conocimiento (2017) for Latinx students. We also utilized the concept of cultural community wealth (Yosso, 2005) and critical race theory (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001) to center race and racialization in our study, while also looking for ways students overcame adversity and grew from their admissions experiences. Critical Race Theory also motivated us to include BSU leaders in the co-creative process of designing and implementing the focus groups. This framework served to ensure that our research would share and honor the counter-narratives of the Black/African American student college choice at Dominican University.

Our study found that Black/African American student college choice was influenced by four key factors: price, the perception of place, interactions during recruitment, and the navigation of systems. The factors, although independent, were connected and influenced one another. The factors were experienced in varying ways by our student participants, but they all critically shaped their decision-making process. Using the data collected from the focus groups, we have developed the following recommendations for Dominican University:

1. Develop an assessment process of Financial Aid, Registrar, and Residential Life that allows staff to identify potential, and existing, gaps in services and communication that pertain to students with low socioeconomic status (SES), students of color, and foster youth.

2. Enact a policy of transparency to ensure that students are aware of "hidden" costs and barriers such as annual tuition increases and the FAFSA verification selection process.

3. Make an effort to support the growth of peer networks by working with the continuing Black/African American students in order to create more robust programs that will allow prospective students to connect with current students with shared identities in meaningful ways.

4. Actions to be taken directly by the Office of Admissions as a means to remove barriers and well as provide deeper support for Black/African American students throughout the recruitment and enrollment process.

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Introduction

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to examine the enrollment decisions of Black/African American students at Dominican University in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the Office of Admissions recruitment strategies. To do this, we hosted two focus groups for Black/African American students currently enrolled at Dominican University. The focus groups were semi-structured conversations, utilizing five to seven guiding questions. Our goal was to gain a nuanced understanding of why Black students enroll at Dominican, and what resources provided by the Office of Admissions impact these choices. In conducting this research, we worked closely with the student leaders of the Black Student Union in order to provide students with the opportunity to inform the research, ensure our outreach was thoroughly conducted, and to host comfortable, safe conversations. We then transcribed and coded the responses to identify themes and trends in the student experience. Finally, utilizing this data, and our literature review, to offer recommendations for the Office of Admissions as well as the university as a whole.

Research Questions

- ○ What recruitment strategies impact enrollment?

- ○ What factors influenced Black/African American students to enroll at Dominican University of California?

- ○ How do Black/African American students experience marginalization through these recruitment practices?

Site Description

Dominican University of California (DU) is a small, private, suburban college located in San Rafael, California. Originally founded by the Dominican Sisters of the Catholic Church in the 1800's, the university was a women only, Catholic college until the 1970's when they became fully coeducational and an independent university (History of the University, 2018). The student body is still largely female (75%) with only 25% of its students identifying as male (Common Data Set, 2016). The university prides itself on its diverse students body with 71% of its students being "from ethnically diverse backgrounds" and 23% of the students being the first generation in their family to attend college (At A Glance, 2018). Additionally, 29% of students receive the Federal Pell Grant (No Schools, 2018). As of the 2018 fall semester, Dominican has a total of 1,355 undergraduate students enrolled both full and part time, including non-degree seeking students. Of that number, 383 students are White while 355

students are Asian American and 302 students are Hispanic/Latino. Only 54 students identify as Black/African American while 13 are Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic and seven are classified as Native American. The remaining 241 students are comprised of international students, students who identify as two or more races, and students who did not disclose their race or ethnicity (Student Ethnicity Profile, 2018). Although these numbers do demonstrate racial diversity among White, Asian American, and Hispanic/Latino students, the university is enrolling students with other racial identities at a significantly lower rate. While recognizing the low enrollment of both Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander students as well as Native American students, for this research project we will be focusing specifically on the experience of the recruitment and enrollment process of Black/African American students.

The Office of Admissions at Dominican University is part of the Division of Enrollment and Marketing which is overseen by the Vice President of Enrollment and Marketing. The Office of Admissions is responsible for recruitment efforts, application review, and on-campus events. The office is staffed by four First Year Undergraduate Admissions Counselors and one Transfer Admissions Counselor. All Undergraduate Counselors report to the Director of Undergraduate Admissions who works under the supervision of the Associate Vice President of Enrollment. Recruitment efforts are loosely tied to enrollment goals which are set based on predictive analytics, data summaries, and other information provided by third-party organizations such as College Board and Ruffalo Noel Levitts. According to one of the Undergraduate Admissions Counselors, there are no official policies or recruitment strategies in place within the Office of Admissions, however, there are unwritten practices which guide the way Admissions Counselors plan their fall travel and recruitment efforts. For example, Admissions Counselors are encouraged to prioritize private high schools over public high schools when planning their fall travel recruitment schedules as well as focus recruitment efforts in suburban areas rather than urban or rural areas. The rationale behind these practices is to target 'feeder' high schools and areas where the university already receives a higher number of applications or interested students.

Listed on the Admissions Office Website, DU's resources for prospective students *seeking information include the following: a Digital Mailing List which includes once a week reminder* emails that are geared towards each students progress through the admissions process; College Fairs and High School Visits which are organized by an online map showing DU's presence at various college fairs and high schools; Online Informational Chats with an Undergraduate Admissions Counselor and Student Ambassadors; Individual Campus Tours and Counseling Appointments for prospective students and families; Campus Visit Day events where prospective students can meet current students and faculty, learn about paying for college with a financial aid representative, and attend breakout sessions for different areas of study; and Group Tours for schools or organizations (Undergraduate Events, 2018). Throughout the website, prospective students are encouraged to connect with the

Undergraduate Admissions Counselor assigned to them, determined by the location of their high school or home address. Student Ambassadors are also available as a source of support and regularly participate in call campaigns, coordinating information package requests, participating in online chats, and providing other outreach services.

Conceptual Framework

Through a review of literature on college choice, race, and higher education, we developed a conceptual framework to help us better investigate the experiences of Black prospective students at Dominican University. In this study, we employ the college choice model (Hossler & Gallagher 1987; Perna, 2006), drawing inspiration from Acevedo-Gil's concept of college-conocimiento (2017) for Latinx students. In regards to assessing recruitment practices at Dominican, we utilize critical race theory and concept of cultural community wealth (Yosso, 2001) in the hopes of better understanding how Black students may or may not experience marginalization through their recruitment practices.

Hossler & Gallagher's College Choice model consists of three phases: predisposition, search, and choice which students move through in a sequential, linear fashion. Predisposition is when initial opinions are formed about college and continuing education after high school. Factors that influence predisposition include socioeconomic status (SES), ability or achievement, attitudes of parents and peers, pre-college experiences, proximity to a college campus. Search is when individuals begin to seek out information about colleges and universities. During this phase both the student's investigative activities and the efforts of the college to connect give shape to the student's college choice set, or the group of institutions they will eventually choose from. Choice is determined by the preferences of the applicant, the attributes of the college and the courtship procedures that appear to determine the outcome. In thinking of College Choice, we include the work of Perna (2006) and Acevedo-Gil (2017). Perna's conceptual model adds four contextual layers from sociology: the individual's habitus (demographics and cultural capital); school and community context; the higher education context; and the broader social, economic, and policy context. Acevedo-Gil (2017)'s nonlinear, serpentine framework involves self-advocacy and peer support (spiritual activism); deciding to attend college (*el arrebato*); searching for college information (*nepantla*); anticipating college obstacles (*coatlicue)*; planning for and applying to college (*el compromiso*); choosing a college (*coyolxauhqui*); and a clash of realities (conflicts with college).

Including Cultural Community Wealth (Yosso, 2005) in our framework prompts us to identify the ways in which students draw from their cultural background to empower themselves and each other throughout their college choice process. Critical Race Theory (Solorzano and Yosso, 2001) creates space for us to center race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination in our analysis, with an eye towards

challenging the dominant ideology and upholding our commitment to social justice as researchers.

In order to examine the recruitment and college experiences of Black/African American students at Dominican, two of our group members hosted two focus groups comprised of Black/African American students currently enrolled at Dominican University. We recruited for the focus groups by developing and distributing fliers (see Appendix A) via email and posting around campus. We also announced the focus groups at an existing Black Student Union meeting and connected as well with the Black Student Union president who encouraged participation among members. Several students also mentioned that they had 'spread the word' among their peers to encourage participation. It is important to note that, although we utilized connections among BSU students to recruit most of the participants, not all participants are members of the organization.

The focus groups followed a semi-structured conversation, utilizing five to seven guiding questions to encourage students to share specific experiences (see Appendix B). During the first focus group, students contributed to the conversation sporadically in more of an open discussion style whereas students in the second focus group organically fell into a pattern of taking turns answering questions one by one. This may be attributed to a fairly significant size difference between the two focus groups as 13 students attended the first focus group while three students attended the second.

To capture demographic information of the participants, students were asked to fill out a brief online survey as they arrived, which asked about race and ethnicity and gender. Eight of the participants identify as Black/African American, three identify as Afro-Latinx, one identifies as Latina and one identifies as White. Ten of the students identify as female and four identify as male. 64.3% of the participants reported visiting the campus before enrolling.

The survey also included questions regarding the recruitment process. When asked what interactions from Dominican they experienced during the recruitment process, 50% of the participants reported receiving physical mailings in the forms of brochures or fliers while 57% reported receiving emails. 14% of the participants spoke with Dominican at a college fair while 21.4% utilized Dominican's website as their main source of information.

Findings

Our research found that Black/African American student college choice was influenced by four key factors: price, the perception of place, interactions during recruitment, and the navigation of systems. The four factors were experienced in varying ways by our student participants, but they all critically shaped student's decision-making process along the way.

Cost of Attendance (Price)

The price of tuition played a major role in prospective Black/African American students' choice to attend Dominican University but varied depending on the student's experiences and access to scholarships. For some, large aid packages and ample gift aid made the school a more attainable financial option than other universities. For others, Dominican's high tuition created a major barrier to enrollment, both in terms of actual cost and the implication of what payment might mean for them and their families.

On one end of the spectrum, students who received scholarships and financial aid packages cited cost as a deciding factor in their choice to attend. Dominican University offers Merit Scholarships ranging from $17,000 per year to $25,000 per year based on the cumulative weighted GPA of incoming first-year students. Additionally, any funds awarded to the student through the Federal Application For Student Aid (FAFSA) or Cal Grants are added, or "stacked" to the Merit-Based Scholarships. Furthermore, Dominican offers additional need-based financial aid to students who may not be eligible for a full Pell Grant which typically benefits middle-income students. The various scholarship and grant options, as well as the stacking of scholarships and grants, make Dominican a more affordable option for many students.

Dominican also partners with several local Community-Based Organizations in the Bay Area to provide full-ride scholarships to students who are involved with their programs. For participants who received a full ride to attend DU, the choice was easy:

> **"I didn't visit, and said, regardless, I am coming here on a full ride scholarship. Whether I liked it or not, this is where I am going."**

For others, price created a major barrier while they navigated their decision to enroll. Students and their families were dismayed by the high tuition costs, and some felt that the school was not for them based on the cost. Further, this impending expense caused disagreements within families around where individuals should enroll, both between parents and expanded family members.

> **"My mom was very into it...but my dad didn't want me to go to a rich, White people school. He said if I went here that we wouldn't be able to send my younger sister, who's four years younger than me, to school, and he wanted me to go to a cheaper school or take the year off. But my mom said he would just pick up a third shift to pay for it. "**

For students who did not receive enough scholarship or aid, they spent a majority of their time between their admission and move-in date looking for ways to pay for tuition and other amassing costs. One student described a stressful struggle to find housing in the area two

months before school started after she learned that tuition did not include on-campus room and board, and she could not afford these additional fees.

Perception of Place

A prospective students' perception of place, that is the physical and social environment, impacted students' feelings about their enrollment decision. In our study, students' perceptions of place were informed by a variety of factors including marketing materials, the university website, and other online resources, the opinions of friends and family, and in-person campus visits.

A strong influence on a prospective students perception of DU was the way the campus looks. The campus, between the architecture of buildings, the proximity to nature and the look of the surrounding neighborhoods, generated strong feelings, both positive and negative, among the students as they considered DU. For some, the campus felt beautiful, serene, and calming, and seeing the university in real life solidified their decision to attend DU. One student, who did not intend to enroll at DU, described his on-campus tour as the moment he "fell in love" with the school "harder and harder". However, the physical space and the neighborhood was more commonly seen as intimidating, bougie, and "for white people". One student shared that:

> **"If I had visited this campus, I may not have wanted to go here...because I never realized how WASP-y it was… Luckily, I never visited."**

She further posited that visiting the school would be a culture shock for future prospective Black students and that it creates one of the biggest barriers to enrollment. Others shared that the proximity to nature and seeing wildlife on campus was a strange, weird experience, that at times felt othering.

In addition to physicality, a student's perception of place is also defined by the people who inhabit and frequent the environment. In our focus groups, almost all student participants cited a lack of diversity, specifically a low population of Black/African American students, staff, and faculty, as a barrier to their enrollment decision. As one student quipped, "there are more squirrels than Black people on this campus". Another shared that a big red flag for their aunt, who attended Admitted Student Open House with them, was that there were almost no students of color.

Some students felt deceived by the marketing materials sent to them, which featured photos of people of color. Others felt that seeing more people of color in marketing materials, such as banners, on campus would be more welcoming. Students also mentioned that many of the people of color pictured on marketing materials were no longer students. The outdated

photos seemed to emphasize the lack of Black faces on campus. It is also important to note that many of the photos of Black/African American students used in marketing materials and on the website are photos of male students even though most of the Black/African American students enrolled at DU are female.

Interactions During Recruitment

The interactions students had with others during the recruitment period of their college choice were critical in their decision-making process. Admission counselors, current students, and faculty played a mostly positive role in the recruitment process. Students also reported feeling welcomed, reassured and supported by their academic advisors. Others enjoyed speaking with faculty members at outreach events, as well as on campus. Many students also reached out to Black/African American peers and current students to better understand the university's offerings. One of the student participants recalled a particularly meaningful engagement,

> **"My advisor called me and said she would be helping me with my schedule. We spent time on the phone talking about Star Wars and favorite places to eat and when it was time right before move in I reached out to her and told her how nervous I was and she said 'it's okay I got you.' She met with me and said everything was going to be okay."**

For others, interactions with current students, faculty, and staff during the recruitment process revealed the lack of diversity on campus and a further need for diversity training. Students shared that they had experienced or witnessed racial microaggressions from faculty and staff during campus events, classes, and other interaction, including confusing names of students and making assumptions about student relationships.

> **"A white male confused my name with another Black students' name...and gets my name wrong. It happens all too often… the staff can't tell Black students apart."**

Navigation of Systems

The navigation of university systems and services emerged as a major barrier for students, especially during the period between their admission and move-in day, as they negotiated fees, move-in, and class registration, and with various offices and staff personnel. For many, these were painful and confusing exchanges that made them feel like their education and retention at DU was at risk.

Often the processes were elongated or confused by staff ineptitudes, inconsistency or a lack of communication with students, and also between offices. Specific examples included a student fighting to reclaim a scholarship mistakenly given to someone else, being passed from office to office for weeks without any support, and a general lack of clarity around deadlines, processes, and expectations. These experiences prevented students from moving forward with decision-making and was when they were the most unsure about their choice to enroll. Having to persistently advocate for themselves and their needs, students felt isolated and like they were working in opposition against the university.

Students already feeling out of place at DU, had their anxieties and concerns further inflamed by classist attitudes of staff they encountered in various offices.

> **"The Financial Aid office will shut you down. Semester before it was time to register, I did not have any financial support, other than me. The Financial Aid Office told me 'this is not the type of institution that is set up for somebody who does not have additional financial help' Well, then this is not the place for me, because I don't have anybody… all I want to do is get my education. If I didn't keep on trying and gave up, I may not be here."**

Navigating systems was felt the most by students with "non-traditional" payment situations, including a student whose parents are veterans and another who was a foster child, whose education was partly paid for by the state. One student explained that registering for classes was very difficult and involved working with the registrar, financial aid office and various professors because of her previous enrollment at other institutions. The process made her want to leave school and give up. The staff lacked understanding and empathy for her situation.

> **"I faced so many roadblocks, throwing me back and forth between different departments… it took a year for everything to get sorted. The coordination is horrible here. They do not connect with each other… and it prevented me from signing up for classes, made me not like the school anymore. Y'all are making it difficult for me, had my professor not been here, I would not be here. I would have been out."**

**Discussion of Findings: College Choice, Racial Barriers, and Overcoming Obstacles**

Our study found that as students moved through the three phases of college choice, *predisposition, search* and *choice*, they engaged with these four frames of price, perception of place, navigating systems, and interactions during recruitment. We found that similarly to Avecido's college-conocimiento model for Latinx students, Black students at Dominican moved through phases in a cyclical, non-linear manner, depending on interactions with the institution, staff, peers, family, and friends, as they applied to the four frames (depicted in the graphic).

Cost of Attendance/Price and Perception of Place

Overall, the themes of price and perception of place seemed to rest mostly in the predisposition phase. Regarding place, students and their families were inclined to have positive and negative perceptions of what DU was like based on the physical and social environment (beautiful campus vs. white "bougie"; lack of diversity on campus). For price, this frame was dependent on the student's financial reality and access to scholarships, which was a major factor in the decision-making process for many students.

Search: Navigating Systems and Interactions During Recruitment

During the search process, students received marketing communications from the university or used outside resources such as College Board to learn more about DU. Others were able to go on campus tours to see the campus with family members and some used online chat services to connect with advisors or attended college fairs. Students shared they had incredible support from their advisors and faculty, while others reflected on grievances with the systematic procedures of enrollment, such as documentation and added fees before move-in day that created barriers to complete the enrollment. These interactions with marketing materials, individual staff and offices provided students with both positive and negative reactions to the university that could shift their perceptions they originally held in predisposition.

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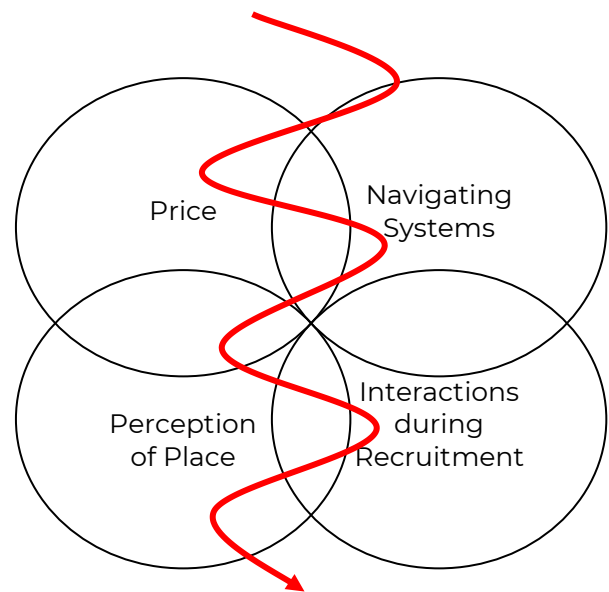
Throughout the college-choice process all four themes were in constant conversation. Certain themes had very strong relationships, indicated by the overlapping circles in the graphic, which prompted them to move back and forth between predisposition and search. For example, a student's relationship with price directly impacted their navigation of systems (i.e. working with the financial aid office to receive funding for the state because their parent was a veteran). Another example of frame overlap would be how interactions during recruitment could shift an individual's perception of place. If a prospective student connected with a peer they felt more informed about the school and their perception of Dominican University could shift positively, alternatively if they experienced a microaggressive behavior that perception would shift negatively.

Barriers: Further Examining Race and Marginalization through the Enrollment Process

Throughout all of these themes and findings, we saw that race impacted the process of recruitment and student experience. Applying Critical Race Theory, we were able to identify how students were marginalized through bureaucratic barriers and price, a lack of communication, knowledge and understanding among the staff at DU, and the absence of diversity on campus.

In regards to navigating systems, students felt as if the institutional processes were made more difficult for students of color, primarily in the offices of financial aid, registrar, and admissions. When a student chooses DU they must complete a long enrollment process before move-in day or the semester starts. This process requires students to submit final transcripts, choose your classes with an advisor, make a housing deposit, complete a roommate application, and finalize their financial aid package. Some students noted that their experiences with navigating the processes and talking to staff created feelings of anxiety due to staff error and inconsistency.

> **"It just makes it a lot harder for students, you want to feel like you have someone in your corner, and especially being that, it not being a diverse staff and the staff themselves are very elitists (and don't seem to understand their financial realities and offer solutions to money issues- they just assume that you should just have it) "Oh just take out a loan" is often said by staff."**

Interactions with these offices were othering and created huge institutional barriers for admitted students struggling to enroll. Deeply tied to this is the price of DU and the navigation of financial aid, as shared by the following student;

> "**There are Financial Aid hurdles, how are they going to recruit with how expensive it is. Do I recommend this place to students of**

color? No. I go home every opportunity I get, I want to graduate and leave."

Specifically, with financial aid, students encountered staff who assumed students' families can afford tuition or that they can access other resources in order to pay for DU. Students requested that staff be more supportive and knowledgeable about "non-traditional" financial situations.

In regards to perception of place and interactions during recruitment, underrepresentation of black students on campus also served as a barrier to enrollment. Students often cited increased diversity as a need for their campus, both in enrollment decisions and for broader campus concerns. Their experiences around the campus as a minority community have led to feelings of not belonging on campus or being welcomed.

"DU feels a little standoffish, the neighborhood intimidates me and makes me feel like I shouldn't be here."

Additionally, microaggression and racism have been part of students' admissions experiences. Students shared stories of staff misidentifying them as another black student or forgetting their names. In a particular case, a student acknowledges how disappointing it was to have an admission counselor forget them when that same counselor visited the student's high school a few weeks before the student attended a campus tour. Many students requested diversity training for staff and faculty as a way to mitigate harm to future prospective students.

Overcoming: Community Cultural Wealth and Student Accomplishment

Throughout the focus group discussions, students spoke of the different strategies and resiliency they employed in order to successfully navigate the recruitment and enrollment processes as well as the racism and microaggressions they experienced after enrolling. We recognize these strategies as a form of Navigation Capital utilized by marginalized students to negotiate the predominantly White and wealthy spaces on Dominican's campus as well as throughout the surrounding San Rafael area.

Students also spoke about the strength and support they had access to by developing a network of peers with similar backgrounds and experiences and how these community spaces provided them with a sense of belonging on campus. Students have successfully used their Social Capital to build a supportive and protective space for themselves on a campus that has made them feel unwelcomed.

Finally, through their involvement with student led organizations such as Black Student Union, their participation in Associated Students of Dominican University sponsored student diversity panels, and their ongoing critique of Dominican's processes, policies, and practices, students have demonstrated a strong sense of Resistance Capital. Even in their willingness to

participate in our focus groups and their openness in sharing their experiences with us they have demonstrated their ability to advocate for themselves and others.

Limitations

As a research group, we recognize the limitations that exist due to our identities and employment positions within the university. We feel that it is important to name these limitations for the sake of transparency and the integrity of our research. First, all members of the research group are non-Black identified, including both focus group hosts, which may shape assumptions and/or biases regarding this project as well as the comfortability and responsiveness of student participants.

Also, two members of our research group are employed with Dominican University; one is employed with the Office of Admissions while the other works within the Student Life Department. Both of these members hosted the focus groups which may have influenced the way students responded to questions or discussed their experiences. Additionally, students that went through the recruitment process but chose not to enroll in Dominican as well as students who had transferred to another institution after enrolling at DU were not involved in the focus groups which prevents us from understanding their perspective of the recruitment experience.

Finally, one of the focus groups was very large and the other very small which may have shaped responses or answers to focus group questions. A more balanced set of groups may have yielded different conversations and/or answers to questions. Also, a handful of the participants do not identify as Black/African American which may have responses at the peer level. Regardless of these limitations, we feel that the focus group discussions among participants as well as our conceptual framework and additional research provide sufficient support for our recommendations to Dominican University.

Recommendations

Given our findings, we recommend the three following steps in regards to our themes of price, perception of place and navigating systems and interaction during recruitment:

- We recommend that Financial Aid, Registrar, and Residential Life develop an assessment process that allows them to identify potential, and existing, gaps in services and communication that pertain to students with low socioeconomic backgrounds, foster youth, and students of color. We also recommend that the university require training on a broad range of financial realities for all staff in order to prevent ostracizing and othering many Black students.

- We recommend that Dominican enact a policy of transparency to ensure that students are aware of "hidden" costs and barriers such as annual tuition increases and FAFSA verification selection. We also encourage the university to engage parents and families in conversations about scholarships, grants and other financial support to assuage any fears or concerns they may have.

- We recommend the university make an effort to support the growth of peer networks by working with the continuing Black/African American students in order to create more robust programs that will allow prospective students to connect with current students with shared identities in meaningful ways. This can be done through a peer-mentor program, enacting partnerships with BSU, and facilitating events geared towards prospective Black/African American students.

In addition, we recommend the following actions be taken directly by the Office of Admissions as a means to address a lack of diversity, remove barriers, and provide deeper intentional support for Black/African American students throughout the recruitment and enrollment process:

- Target recruitment efforts to areas and high schools with higher populations of Black/African American students.

- Make an effort to hire more Black staff in the enrollment division specifically, in positions that hold decision making power and/or participate in outreach.

- Shift to a test optional model in order to remove barriers for low income students and students of color.

- Implement cultural awareness and anti-racism training for all staff in the enrollment division.

- Develop marketing and recruitment materials that demonstrate resources that are geared towards Black/African American students

- Make intentional marketing decisions regarding photos on campus banners, social media posts, website content, and print materials.

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Appendix A.

 Recruitment Poster

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE DOMINICAN? THE BLACK STUDENT EXPERIENCE

PARTICIPATE IN A NEW RESEARCH STUDY ON THE BLACK STUDENT EXPERIENCE AT DU!

GROUP INTERVIEWS:

8:00PM | NOVEMBER 12 | FANJEAUX STUDENT UNION

5:00PM | NOVEMBER 14 | ANGELICO 214

In collaboration with BSU, Jose Membreno and Lexi Amrhein are a part of a team of graduate students from the University of San Francisco currently conducting a research study on the Black student admissions experience at DU, focusing on recruitment efforts and college choice. Attend a focus group in the second week of November and add your voice and experience to this crucial study. The voices of Black students are under-represented in the higher education research landscape, so your participation is valuable and means a lot to us!

Questions?
Contact Jose (jose.membreno@dominican.edu) or Lexi (lexi.amrhein@dominican.edu).

Appendix B

Interview Questions

Focus group questions are informed by College Choice Model "phases," *predisposition, search, choice.*

- *Predisposition:*

    ○ When you were in high school, what was your perception of DU?

        i. So, why were you interested in applying there?

        ii. What did your family think about you going to DU?

- *Search:*

    ○ Before applying to DU, how did you seek out information about the university?

        i. Which of these methods was the most helpful and why?

        ii. Did you learn anything that surprised you?

        iii. If you visited campus, how was that experience?

    ○ Can you tell us about your first interactions with DU staff?

        i. Did you connect with your admission counselor? Why or why not?

- *Choice:*

    ○ After you were accepted at Dominican, what steps did you take before enrolling?

        i. From the time you made your enrollment official to orientation, what was your experience with completing all documents and processes?

    ○ What factors determined your final choice of Dominican?

        i. Examples: finances, distance, family, program, etc.

- *Reflection:*

    ○ This year, the number of black/ African students that enrolled at DU were 5 students, what are ways you think that DU can improve in recruiting the population?

        i. Looking back, how might have the admissions office better supported you in choosing DU as your university?

    ○ In your first year, how did your experience of DU compare with how you thought it would be prior to enrolling?

- ○ What recommendations would you make to a prospective Black student who wants to find out if DU is right for them?

Closing

Is there anything else you would like to share?

Thank participants; offer your contact information, inform them of next steps

Appendix C.

Handout (Findings, Testimonials, Recommendations)

Recruitment at Dominican University of California: The Black/African American Student Experience & College Choice

The purpose of this study is to examine the enrollment decisions of Black/African American students at Dominican University in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the Office of Admissions recruitment strategies. Through our research, we found that Black student college choice was influenced by four key factors; price, the perception of place, interactions during recruitment, and the navigation of systems. These factors were connected and in constant conversation with one and other as students moved through various phases of their college choice process.

College Choice Factors for Black Students at DU
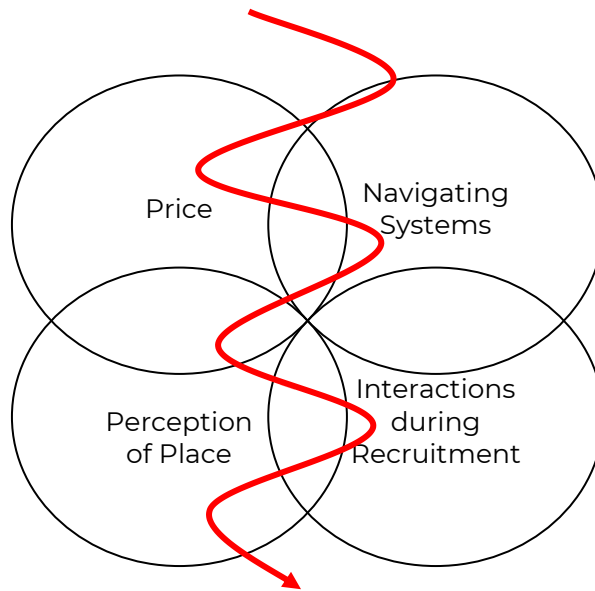
Price	• Positive: Ample grants and scholarships as a served as a deciding factor.
	• Negative: High price as a barrier to students and families.
Perception of Place	• Physical: how the campus looks, including buildings, location, and setting.
	• Social: who makes up the campus community
Interactions during Recruitment	• Positive and negative interactions with students, staff and faculty
Navigations of Systems	• Lack of communication and clarity in the process played a major barrier to enrollment

<u>Student Testimonials</u>

"Being in admissions and being an ambassador, I am the only black ambassador and speaking with underrepresented students a constant barrier is... they don't see any other black students on campus on their tour except for me. With faculty it is difficult because many departments do not have people of color..it makes its hard for students who are black to feel like this would be a place for them. They say they don't know how they would feel here."

"The Financial Aid office will shut you down. The semester before it was time to register, I did not have any financial support, other than me. The Financial Aid Office told me 'this is not the type of institution that is set up for somebody who does not have additional financial help' Well, then this is not the place for me, because I don't have anybody… all I want to do is get my education. If I didn't keep on trying and gave up, I may not be here."

"It just makes it a lot harder for students, you want to feel like you have someone in your corner, and especially being that, it not being a diverse staff and the staff themselves are very elitists (and don't seem to understand their financial realities and offer solutions to money issues- they just assume that you should just have it) "Oh just take out a loan" is often said by staff."

<u>Recommendations</u>

<u>Navigating Systems</u>

We recommend that Financial Aid, Registrar & Residential Life develop an assessment process to identify potential and existing gaps in services and communication that pertain to low-income students & students of color.

<u>Familial Discussions</u>

Engage families in conversations about scholarships, grants, and other financial support to assuage any fears or concerns they may have regarding cost. Develop programming specifically geared toward including family networks in the processes.

<u>Price</u>

Enact a policy of transparency to ensure that students are aware of "hidden" costs and barriers such as annual tuition increases and FAFSA verification selection.

<u>Interactions During Recruitment</u>

Supporting the growth of peer networks by working with returning students in BSU to create robust programs that allow prospective students to connect with current students with shared identities in meaningful ways.