Engaging college students of color in higher education policy studies and advocacy:

Preliminary results from three college student-led community-based participatory action research studies

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Summary

This report describes the results from three *college student-led community-based participatory action research* (CBPAR) studies. Each of the studies involved research partnerships between education mentors and college students of color, where students led the design and implementation of research about the college and career preparation experiences of their peers (fellow students of color at their own institution). The overall goal of the studies is for the student researchers to conduct research that could inform advocacy and policy change to benefit themselves and their fellow students in their own communities. In this report, we present preliminary findings from the three ongoing studies on the college and career transitions experiences of (1) African American students at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, (2) Muslim American students at Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago, and (3) HMoob (also spelled "Hmong") American students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The report details each study's goals, significance, methods, and preliminary findings, followed by our conclusions and action items for postsecondary professionals and policymakers regarding the career-related experiences of college students of color.

Key findings from the study of African American students at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater include:

- The study team documented key factors influencing student career paths through this rural predominantly white institution (PWI), including the strong connections between high school experiences, mostly in and around the Milwaukee area, and college and career trajectories; the challenges involved in navigating campus spaces on a mostly white campus; the psychological, social, and educational effects of the pandemic (unique to 2020) and the racial profiling of Whitewater police (which is not).

- We identified ways that African American college students can create space to engage in academic and career "self-authorship," or empowered narratives allowing students to describe their career development experiences and the terms of their success as they see them, including through student-led research, student organization advocacy and involvement, social capital linked to faculty or staff mentorships and employment-related connections, and continual cross-campus and cross-community conversations.

Key findings from the study of Muslim American students at Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago include:

- The research team documented how family culture—as informed by race and ethnicity, religion, and social class—impacts Muslim American student orientations toward higher education as well as their professional career paths.

- The team also identified student experiences with religious minoritization on campus and in the community, the positive impacts of a diverse and welcoming campus culture, and the role of student organizations in supporting and advocating for Muslim American studies on campus.

Key findings from the study of HMoob American students at University of Wisconsin-Madison include:

- The research team identified a set of key factors that impact the college and career preparation experiences of HMoob American students, including the impact of cultural and familial expectations, processes of institutional gatekeeping, advising, institutional cultures, and interpersonal support networks.

- Follow-up interviews that the team conducted with the HMoob American students in this study indicates concerning impacts of the COVID pandemic and racial unrest, including an increase in racist acts and behaviors towards HMoob American students who physically appear East Asian, an increase in mental and emotional stress and anxiety related to concerns over the future, an increase in financial stress, and finally an increase in family responsibilities.

Together, the three studies illustrate the potential of college student-led CBPAR approaches to engage students of color in higher education research, and to amplify their voices and perspectives in ways that can critically impact higher education policy and practice. We argue that this approach to engaging minoritized college students in higher education policy research and advocacy could be expanded nationally as a way to better align postsecondary institutions with the needs and experiences of the students that they serve—for example, this national scaling could be facilitated by providing research training to educators and student service professionals to start their college student-led CBPAR groups on their own campuses.

Introduction to college student-led community-based participatory action research

While higher education scholars, administrators, and policymakers work to support the education and career goals of their students of color, it is rare for such students themselves to be provided the opportunity to engage in this policymaking process which impacts them and their communities. This report describes three research studies that engaged college students of color in the process of higher education research, utilizing a *community-based participatory action research* (CBPAR) approach. CBPAR is a partnership approach to research that typically involves engagement between academic researchers and community actors with the aim of gaining a more grounded understanding of a given phenomenon (Cooke & Kothari, 2001). While social science research has traditionally derived part of its authority from an opposition between the researcher and the researched (Appadurai, 2006), CBPAR complicates this paradigm by partnering academic researchers and community actors through shared, collaborative decision-making that positions community members as researchers rather than objects of the research (Anderson, 2017). The use of college student-led CBPAR to inform decision-making in higher education policy and practice is particularly needed because college students are themselves often absent from the policy debates that impact their own education (Bovill, Cook-Sather, & Felten, 2011). While CBPAR approaches have been used in a variety of social settings, including youth organizations (Ventura, 2017), K-12 schools (Green et al., 1995), and prisons (Fine & Torre, 2006), they have not often been used in university settings (Anderson, 2017). We contend that CBPAR offers an exciting and needed approach to studying issues in higher education because it not only includes the perspectives and experiences of higher education students—those who are often excluded from policy debates—but it also positions students in the researcher role, guiding the research questions, approaches, data collection, analysis, and writing. This approach produces theory that is conceptually innovative as well as action-oriented, which can help to inform activism, pedagogy, policy debates, and policy implementation.

As both a research approach and a pedagogical tool, CBPAR empowers students to become critical inquirers of their lived experiences as well as producers of knowledge, rather than solely consumers. Furthermore, to engage in CBPAR is to engage in a process of decolonization, personal transformation, and interrogation of power and privilege (Fine & Torre, 2006; Cahill, Rios-Moore, & Threatts, 2008). This translates into a heightened consciousness with regard to personal positionality within an intersectional framework and an articulation of our social locations and relationships to privilege (Anderson, 2017). As such, CBPAR requires a commitment to enacting socially-just changes, wherein findings from the research are used to inform activism, policy debates, and policy implementation. In the field of higher education, CBPAR offers an exciting and much needed research methodology that uplifts the knowledge and experiences of college students from minoritized backgrounds. In Parts I-III below, the report presents the three college student-led CBPAR studies; introducing each study, its significance and methods, preliminary research findings, and conclusion and action items.

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College student-led CBPAR has the potential to engage students of color in research that is relevant to their personal communities and that supports student advocacy work to advance policies that align postsecondary

institutions with the needs and experiences of their students. Given these exciting and transformative possibilities—and with generous funding from The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation—the Center for Research on College-Workforce Transitions (CCWT; ccwt.wceruw.org) launched a set of three college student-led CBPAR studies. These studies include one led by African American identified students at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, one by Muslim American identified students at the Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago, and one by HMoob American identified students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. In each study—with support from CCWT researcher mentors—students engaged in research on the college and career preparation experiences of their peers, the findings of which are presented together in this report.

Part I: Black student experiences at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater

This project focuses on the high school, college, and career preparation experiences of Black or African American college students at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater (UWW), a predominantly White institution in the rural southeastern part of Wisconsin. This institution is primarily known for its business and teacher education programming. UWW is a comprehensive public university enrolling 10,196 undergraduate students in total, 82.1% of whom identify as White, 7.8% of whom identify as Hispanic or Latinx, 5.4% who identify as Black or African American, 3.2% of whom identify as Asian or Southeast Asian, and 0.9% of whom identify as American Indian or Alaskan Native.

Mr. Devin Lewis and Mr. Isaiah Fitzgerald, both undergraduate students at UWW who identify as African Americans, are student leaders of this project. Dr. Ross Benbow (UW-Madison) and Professor Ozalle Toms (UW-Whitewater) are mentoring students on this work. Using semi-structured interviews of student interview volunteers, the study's goals are to (1) identify the sociocultural and institutional factors that impact the career trajectories of Black and African American students at UW-Whitewater and (2) effectively document the educational and career perspectives and voices of these students as they navigate the sociocultural and institutional terrain and the upheaval associated with Covid-19, campus closures, social distancing from friends, classmates, and faculty/staff mentors, and continued police violence and civil unrest.

Background

Data suggest that 70% of employment opportunities will demand some kind of college credential by 2027 (Carnevale, 2019), making the attainment of a degree essential for the next generation of workers. Still, while more Black and African American students are entering higher educational institutions than ever, only 42% of Black students enrolled in colleges or universities graduate after 6 years, as compared to 66% of White students (U. S. Department of Education, 2019). The experiences of Black students in predominantly White institutions (PWIs), where the overwhelming majority of Black students enroll, have been the subject of a wide body of scholarship seeking to better understand these disparities. Ultimately, research shows that Black students and White students have profoundly different experiences in these institutions. While various precollege factors have been shown to mediate these experiences—including the kinds of

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communities in which students grew up (Woldoff et al., 2011), students' connections to family (Guiffrida, 2005) and participation in bridge programming (Strayhorn, 2011), and the racial makeup of high schools they attended (Hall et al., 2011)—many Black students have not had the experience of being racial minorities in predominantly White environments prior to attending PWIs (e.g., Alvarez et al., 2009). The stress of these new encounters, coupled with exposure to explicit and implicit forms of stereotyping and hostility, lead to feelings of culture shock, exhaustion, and loneliness (e.g., Greer & Chwalisz, 2007; Mills et al., 2020). In the face of such stressors, the specter of continuing race-based restrictions on labor market opportunity and access, with which college-credentialed Blacks must contend, can seem insurmountable and sap students' will to persist (e.g., Byars-Winston, 2010).

Research has provided avenues for unpacking, and dismantling, systemic barriers to equitable Black student college-to-career transitions. However, on PWI campuses, previous work has pointed to the importance of physical and social spaces, in particular, where Black students can comfortably express themselves without unfair judgment or scrutiny (e.g., Harwood et al., 2018). Specifically, Black student clubs and groups are an important outlet for social support and validation and are important to feelings of social and academic membership among Black students on PWI campuses (e.g., Museus, 2008; Sedlacek, 1999). Faculty and staff mentors, at the high school and college level, have also been singled out as a significant channel for obtaining advice, information, and support that increase feelings of belonging that can not only help lead Black students to succeed on their own terms (Griffith et al., 2017), but also provide students with employment knowledge that can improve their career trajectories after college (Parks-Yancy, 2012). With this background in mind, scholars and practitioners foregrounding the cultural and social aspects of career identity formation and decision-making further point to several critical strategies for fostering career development among Black college students (Byars-Winston, 2010; Hackett & Byars, 1996; Parks-Yancy, 2012), including the continuing recognition of racial discrimination as well as Black resilience, a commitment to strong family and campus social connections, and the importance of Black self-authorship (Storlie et al., 2018). While research has shown that the latter, in particular, can be advanced through college and career narratives that allow students to describe their career development experiences, there is little research that focuses on the meaning Black students at PWIs make in this regard. Additionally, few studies have sought to engage Black students themselves in the research process.

Methods

We are undertaking a qualitative case study to better understand student perspectives on these issues. Here this approach, which often uses in-depth participant descriptions of their lived experiences to explore a central phenomenon or problem (e.g., Marriam & Tisdell, 2016), was based on student interviews, which the research team believed could more appropriately document Black student collegiate and career development narratives. While the project was meant to focus on students who are enrolled in, or recently graduated from, the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater (UWW), a rural PWI with which CCWT researcher Dr. Benbow has past connections, the study design and direction would also be determined by student researchers and project leaders. Professor Toms, the current Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Diversity, Engagement, and Success at the institution, therefore sent information on the broad outlines of this project to current UWW undergraduate students identifying as Black or African American asking for student researchers who would be interested in co-leading the project. Two students, Mr. Devin Lewis and Mr. Isaiah Fitzgerald, volunteered, were hired, and began qualitative research training with Dr. Benbow in March 2020.

As research training progressed, students became more comfortable with qualitative methods and began designing a semi-structured interview protocol to elicit career narratives. Questions focused on salient aspects of Black student experience from the literature, including high school and bridge programming experiences, decisions to attend college, career goals, as well as perspectives on the recent upheaval to education and social life associated with COVID-19 and the racial justice movement following the murder of George Floyd. After testing this protocol, the team sent one recruitment email to all Black or African American students at UWW asking for interview volunteers. Fourteen interviewees volunteered for the study and were interviewed by Mr. Lewis, Mr. Fitzgerald, and Dr. Benbow (Table 1). Student researchers audio recorded interviews, which lasted roughly an hour, and the research team used inductive coding methods on resulting transcriptions to analyze the data (Saldaña, 2015). Descriptions of four salient themes resulting from this preliminary analysis are presented below.

Table 1. Interviewee attributes (*n*=14)

Attribute	N	%
Gender		
Female	9	64.3
Males	5	35.7
Undergraduate Major		
Arts and Humanities	2	14.3
Business	6	42.9
Education	2	14.3
Social Science	4	28.6
Enrollment Status		
Second Year/Sophomore	2	14.3
Third Year/Junior	1	7.1
Fourth Year/Senior	7	50.0
Fifth Year or Higher	1	7.1
Graduated	3	21.4
First Generation Students	5	35.7
Mean Age	22.9	-

Preliminary Findings

Table 2 includes a summary of the major themes discussed in the research findings for the UW-Whitewater study, which are described in detail in the sections below.

Table 2: Major themes of the research findings for the UW-Whitewater study

Theme	Key points
High school bridges	Salient links between high school and hometown experiences—including preparation and/or resources from urban/suburban or Black/White majority high schools, bridge programs, or neighborhoods—and college and career trajectories.
Whitewater paths and space	Financial, geographic, and family/community paths to UW-Whitewater, what campus students describe as both familiar and alienating because of the lack of Black students and visible culture, stereotypes of black people, and implicit and explicit discrimination.
Black community	Whitewater-specific social and cultural interactions and spaces in which Black students can be comfortable and successful, including particular mentorship relationships, living and study communities, and student organizations.
Health and physical safety	Significant threats to Black student learning, health, and safety from police and pandemic—including continual attention and discrimination, campus closure, social disconnection, and financial and work pressure—with an opportunity for conversations surrounding equity and justice.

High school bridges

The first prominent theme from interviews involved the strong connections students see between "hometown" or high school experiences, on one hand, and college and career trajectories, on the other. A majority of interviewees (ten in total) were from Milwaukee, the state's largest and most segregated city and only a one-hour drive from Whitewater. Of these students, about half attended high schools in the Milwaukee Public School (MPS) district, some of whom noted the school's lack of various resources, including updated textbooks and career counseling services. The other half reported attending Milwaukee private schools or public schools in the Milwaukee suburbs, where they recalled classes with predominantly White students and access to college- and career-preparatory resources. While students across the sample informed us that their high

schools had set them up well academically for UWW, a few private and suburban school graduates told us specifically that their high school experiences had also prepared them *culturally*. "I think that [preparedness for college] comes from me in high school," one student from a suburban high school said. "I was really surrounded by white people so when I got to college, I was in the same boat and I was more comfortable." Another student who attended a private, majority White high school in Milwaukee said his school prepared him well enough educationally but, socially, it taught him "how to deal with and operate in the [White] majority."

Students noted that high school-to-college bridge programs, in which 9 students in our sample participated, also played a significant role in preparing them for college. Many of those involved were in more than one program, including opportunities like TEAM GEAR UP, College Possible, or the Boys and Girls' Club Graduation Plus or Stein Scholars programs, which students said were advertised (or not) depending on whether one attended a majority minority school or not. Students reported that these programs took them on campus tours, assisted students in preparing college and financial aid applications, assisted

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students with ACT/SAT test preparation, provided instructions on what students should expect on campus and in classes, and generally helped students better understand what they would encounter in college. One interviewee, in particular, participated in a bridge program geared towards college career preparation that engaged in resume building, mock interviews, and other career-oriented training. All students who took part in bridge programs said they were helpful not only in preparing students for what college would be like, but in helping them feel like attending college was possible. As one student said, "having that backbone and support gave me a little bit more motivation and determination to succeed and persevere through any of the little challenges facing [me]…nothing [in college] was a surprise." Like a few others, she further explained that the program eased some adjustment concerns she had that came with being the first person from her family to go to college. "If you're a first gen and you have nowhere to go, got no plan, no one to guide you, that has an impact."

Whitewater paths and space
Several of the students we talked to told us their preference in high school was to attend an HBCU—many had toured HBCU campuses through their bridge programs, in fact, and appreciated that the universities had large majorities of Black students—but the financial burden of attending out-of-state colleges had forced them to enroll closer to home. "The financial reality hit me," one of these students reported. "I didn't want to put my family in a situation where they were under financial pressure." Most of the students in our study came to Whitewater because of its close "but not too close" proximity to Milwaukee, as an interviewee informed us, as well as its low tuition and wide reputation it had among members of Milwaukee's Black community. Building on the latter point, a number of students said they knew others who were attending or had attended UW-Whitewater, whether family members or friends. Two students also told us that UW-Whitewater and UW-Oshkosh, in the northeastern part of the state, were often considered to be only two state universities with any Black student presence.

Despite this relative familiarity, however, many students described UWW as a difficult space to navigate, not only because of the small number of Black or African American students on campus, but also because of the predominance of White students who made up over 80% of the student body. Interviewees reported, for example, that the scarcity of Black students at UWW was often exemplified in the inordinate amount of attention and stares one felt in public on campus. As one student explained, it is as if people were "touching their eyes on you," while walking to lunch, in one's dorm halls, or sitting in class. Several students spoke of the experience of being the lone Black student in a class full of White people, as well as the disconnection they felt with others on campus who seemed to have much different interests and viewpoints. "There's a lot of stuff that African Americans don't care about that the White people on the campus do," one student reported. "I don't really blame Black students for not going to a pumpkin carving fest." Aside from difficulties related to underrepresentation, almost all Black interviewees described encountering more explicit forms of discrimination and stereotyping, including microaggressions ("'This is a good paper for you, did you really write it?'" one student said an instructor told him), preconceived notions about Milwaukee and attendant stereotype threat ("As an African American student with my North-Milwaukee zip code, I didn't want to come off as the po' Black child from the ghetto with a sob story of why I can't pull my weight" another student said), and attention from police, described further below. The overall influence of these combined social and environmental factors, students told us, was exhaustion. "It was tiresome," a graduate said. "You don't get to switch up one day and decide to be White."

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Black community

There were positive experiences on campus, however, that students said could help alleviate this stress. Most often these were described as opportunities to spend time with other Black students or mentors in safer, more representative spaces on campus that we describe as "Black community." Many of interviewees, for instance, described the feeling of camaraderie in just seeing another Black student on campus. "You just feel like this little thump in your heart, like, 'Oh my god, there's another one of me!" one student explained. Other students described first-year experiences and cohorts, diverse living communities, institutional support services like the African American Network, and a number of Black student organizations including the TIFU Cultural Ensemble, a student network called Brother to Brother and Sister to Sister Mentors, the Black and Mixed Race Student Unions, the National Association of Black Accountants, and various sororities and fraternities in which students were able to acclimate to campus life and UWW's Black student community more easily. These kinds of outlets, interviewees reported, helped them to grow friendship groups, meet others who had similar interests and experiences, and feel more at ease at UWW. "My [dorm] floor was mostly like Black, Hispanic, Asian," a student reported. "So that was a very comfortable feel compared to the campus, which feels like almost like there's been redlining." Almost every student we spoke to talked of a specific area on central campus where Black or African American students hung out most often, called the University Center, or "The UC," where the campus' Diversity Center and affinity group offices were located. "That's our spot, you'll always catch us hanging out there...that's the place on campus where it's more diverse," one student said.

Faculty and staff mentors on campus were also important to Black students, as these figures provided critical encouragement, support, advice, and also helped connect students more closely to university services and academics so they felt more a part of the university. Often, students told us the best campus mentors were those who not only understand dynamics that made campus life difficult for African Americans, but were also compassionate people who treated them "like normal"—i.e. not like tropes or caricatures, but as regular human beings who were their own individuals. One student described a teacher who allowed her just to be herself, which, she noted, was a somewhat new experience for her on campus. "I appreciate that he allowed me to express my thoughts," she told us. "It was a very liberating experience to not have to limit myself." Another student, however, told us his mentor truly understood what he was going through in a cultural sense. This mentor, he said, "really understood African American students…he really helped us know that there is a place on campus for us." Mentors like these, students seemed to suggest, could open up opportunities and strengthen the Black community on campus. "I would say staff who listen and actively try to create more spaces," another student explained, when asked what kind of mentor encouragement was most helpful. "Some never really interacted with Black people, don't know Black people, and aren't aware of certain experiences so that it's really hard for them to give support." In some cases, students also said that mentors who showed a true understanding of the day-to-day difficulties Black students had—not only on campus but in wider society— could instill in their mentees a sense of safety and belonging. "My professor understands the challenges that African Americans have to go through," one interviewee said. "He talks about the history of African Americans in ways that White people wouldn't really understand, trying to help them understand it." Indeed, while the wider campus community could feel somewhat cold to Black students, the acceptance and understanding offered by such mentors could be motivating.

Health and physical safety

This study is taking place during a time of significant turmoil for students of color who already face a myriad of barriers within PWIs. Preliminary findings indicate several distinct social and educational effects on UWW Black students not only due to the Covid-19 pandemic, but also because of continual discrimination from the police and others in the wider Whitewater community.

For UWW students, the onset of the pandemic erupted after the announcement on the afternoon of Thursday, March 12th that classes would be moving online, spring break would be held a week early, and that students on campus who could stay elsewhere should leave as soon as possible. Most of the interviewees to whom we spoke went through the jarring experience of moving back home to stay with their families soon thereafter, where they began mostly asynchronous

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online classwork. The experience, many said, was "overwhelming." While almost all of our interviewees reported having access to internet and computer technology during their subsequent online classes, several said they had trouble finding the space they needed to concentrate on their schoolwork as parents, siblings, and other housemates were mostly home as well. "I don't really have a space here," one student told us. One of her parents was working from home while her younger brother stayed home for virtual schooling. "It was kind of difficult to find a location that worked." Students had mixed reactions to the online classes themselves. While they understood the predicament UWW and their instructors were in, most interviewees said they were not learning very much online. One student told us, for example, that she was doing well—at least in the short-term. "I'm doing great in my classes," she joked. "I'm just not learning anything." Others, however, were neither

learning nor doing well. Another student said he had failed a math-based course because he did not have the kind of personal, instructor/student support he needed to learn in such courses. "I couldn't get my mind to cope quick enough with just switching immediately everything online," he said. "Taking away that one-on-one kind of assistance that I heavily depended, just like sending videos, I was just completely lost." Another student told us the switch from close, interpersonal contact with classmates to electronic message made things much more difficult. "Like classmates who've got the same math class as you, it's like, 'Dang, I can't just like tap them and ask them a question'…there was an app for it but there was just so many emails. It was just overwhelming." In addition to this, many of the students either continued jobs or took on essential work positions in addition to school. The health dangers from COVID were real, students told us, especially in the African American community, but so was the need to pay bills. "If you don't work…you don't have money to pay bills," a business student said. "You can pay bills or hide, you know?"

Our research team conducted interviews with students at the height of the summer's racial justice movement in the wake of George Floyd's murder. The subject of the sudden concern that exploded in the national media and among the wider public, however, were not new for the students to whom we spoke. Most of the students had either negative firsthand experiences with the Whitewater police or had acquaintances who experienced negative interactions. Indeed, many of the anecdotes students shared involved Whitewater police following Black students, usually when students ventured off campus, as well as pulling Black students over for minor (or nonexistent) traffic infractions. As one student said, "once we get to the area where we want to be, it's fine, but on our way getting there, that's where the police speeder comes and stops you for literally anything." For students, these interactions were understandably fraught with tension and fear. One man, for instance, said whenever he was around police officers he was very cognizant of his body language and demeanor. "I do try to make sure that I stay at ease," he said. "I don't cause any problems or make them feel afraid." For some students, the attention from local police was part and parcel of the negative attention they felt they received from local townspeople whenever they left campus. "I don't feel it's safe in the community," a student told us. "If I'm waiting by myself on my friend to come back from getting gas or something, I'm terrified somebody is just going to come and stop me." This sense of fear off campus extended to protests as well. One of the students who told us she had participated in Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests in the town of Whitewater also had seen signs of local backlash to the movement, including cries of "all lives matter" and defacement of BLM signs. "I've been to protests this year, and I cannot even explain to you the amount of fear I have for being a peaceful protester," she said. Those who talked about the wider protest movement, however, held out some hope that things could change for the better. Far from communicating aggrievement, as many counter protesters had been doing in recent weeks, students who spoke to this issue used language rooted in broader consideration, empathy, and equity. "I hope people do start to understand like what it's like being African American…the fear factor when you do get pulled over by the police that you may never see your family again," one student said. "We don't want people to sympathize, we just want people to understand what we go through."

Conclusions

This study confirms a number of factors that have been shown to influence Black and African American student educational and career trajectories through PWIs in prior research, including family and neighborhood roots, high school bridge programs, student organizations and mentors in college, and the significance of creating space on PWI campuses (e.g., Hackett & Byars, 1996; Griffith et al., 2017; Parks-Yancy, 2012; Sedlacek, 1999). It also speaks to unique dynamics—most directly the academic and career experiences of Black students living

through the pandemic, campus closure, online education, and the contemporary racial justice movement—that are specific to the rural university campus and wider community setting of Whitewater, Wisconsin in 2020. Indeed, the wider context in which this study takes place makes it even more valuable to understanding, and centering the experiences of Black students on PWI campuses. We will discuss future research and actions items for this study, in the conclusion of this report.

Part II: Muslim American College Student experiences at Northeastern Illinois University

This college student-led CBPAR research study investigates the pre-college, college, and career preparation experiences of Muslim American college students at Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU). NEIU is a comprehensive regional public university located on the northwest side of Chicago. It is a federally designated Hispanic Serving Institution, made up of approximately 7,000 total students. NEIU is very diverse; the ethnic makeup of the students is comprised of 39.4% Latinx, 26.5% White American, 10.4% African American, 9.3% Asian American, 1.7% two or more races, 2.1% International student, American Indian, and Hawaiian Pacific Islander (each less than 1%), and the remainder being unknown or elected to not identify.

The research team is comprised of four NEIU students who identify as Muslim American women and who are members and officers of the NEIU Muslim Student Association (MSA), their research mentors Drs. Brian Vivona (NEIU) and Matthew Wolfgram (UW-Madison), and UW-Madison graduate student Alexandra Pasqualone. The study uses semi-structured qualitative interviews to investigate the college and career preparation experiences of Muslim American students with different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The goals of the study are to identify the sociocultural and institutional factors that impact the success of Muslim American college students. The main goal of this report will be to highlight preliminary findings regarding the process of religious minoritization of Muslim Americans on campus as it is impacted by post-9/11 historical moments, such as the "War on Terror," anti-Muslim nationalism, and government policies targeting Muslims and immigrants.

Background

The experiences of Muslim American youth on college campuses in the United States are conditioned by the local, national, and geopolitical contexts that impact the broader Muslim population, in particular following major historical events such as the terrorist attacks on September 11th, 2001, and the subsequent "War on Terror" or the "Global War on Terrorism (Mir & Sarroub, 2019). Scholarship over the years has documented a rise of anti-Muslim sentiment following 9/11, and the continued pattern of aggressive discourse, violence, and discrimination targeting Muslims in the United States. Discrimination against this group is often amplified by U.S. geopolitical engagements such as the Iranian Revolution, the assassination of Anwar-al Sadat, the Lebanese Hostage Crisis, and the Salman Rushdie affair (Lamont & Collet, 2013). While real and imagined threats from "outsiders" has impacted U.S. domestic policies well before 9/11, initiatives including the USA Patriot Act, the National Defense Authorization Act, and Trump's 2017 executive order No. 13769—also known as the "Muslim ban"—have amplified the preexisting Islamophobia proceeding September 11th (McGuire, Casanova, & Davis III, 2016).

Following 9/11, some politicians have even attempted to gain political advantage by stoking fears of Muslims in the United States (Elbih, 2015; Hossain, 2017; Mrayan & Saleh, 2016). Describing a toxic mix of anti-Muslim nationalist sentiment, national security policies, and military adventurism, anthropologist Shabana Mir (2009) notes,

> It was after 9/11 that a campaign of harassment and intimidation was let loose upon Muslims in the United States, through intelligence agencies, through physical and psychological attacks, and indirectly, through military campaigns replete with human rights violations of Muslim populations abroad (p. 210).

These broader political and historical moments have contributed to the religious minoritization of this group, a socio-cultural and institutional process that entails the marginalization of an individual or community based on religious identity. This concept includes actions and representations that marginalize, erase, and delegitimate the experiences of religious minorities, obstruct their access to institutional resources, frustrate their goals, and exclude them from participation in their own communities. Aspects of the process of religious minoritization that are documented in literature on the experiences of Muslim American college studies include:

- *Othering and generalizations.* This process is the representation and promotion of negative stereotypes targeting Muslims, for example as "terrorists," "bad people," "extremists," "towel heads," and more (Calkins, et al., 2011; Elbih, 2015; Melhem & Punyanunt-Carter, 2019; Mir & Sarroub, 2019; Peek, 2003). It also includes the use of these and other stereotypes to generalize across diverse Muslim groups. On college campuses propagation of such stereotypes occur through the use of particular textbooks, classroom media, other course content, and interactions with professors and peers (Speck, 1997). More overt results from these stereotypes, as experienced by college students, include increased surveillance and "nasty looks," microaggressions, and verbal and even physical assaults (Peek, 2003; Elbih, 2015).

- *Religious and gendered hypervisibility.* This is the experience of increased visibility of the gendered and embodied religious practices of Muslim Americans on campus, with heightened attention and scrutiny directed toward individual's dress, diet, public prayer, and other religious expressions (Ali, 2016; Ali & Bagheri, 2009; Calkins et al., 2011). Research examining the hypervisibility of this group has focused especially on the experiences of veiled Muslim women, whose head covering, or hijab, mark their religious identities (Lamont & Collet, 2013; Mir, 2009; 2011; Mrayan & Saleh, 2016; Peek, 2003; Whitehead et al., 2019)

- *Institutional invisibility.* In contrast with the hypervisibility of individual gendered and religious practices, institutional invisibility involves the lack of institutional recognition of religious minorities, the lack of religious representation among faculty and in relative curriculum (Ali & Bagheri, 2009; Speck, 1997), the absence of accommodations required for religious practices (Seggie & Sanford, 2010), the lack of institutional support following local or national discriminatory policies or practices aimed at this group, (Stubbs & Sallee, 2013; Whitehead et al., 2019), and through the propagation of campus culture that favors Judeo-Christian values and priorities (Mir, 2009; Speck, 1997).

- *Spaces of inclusion and solidarity.* Despite this marginalization, Muslim American college students have been able to cultivate spaces of mutual support on campus, such as the Muslim Student Association (MSA) (Mir, 2019; Peek, 2002). Solidarity also occurs through alliances Muslim students form with other minoritized students (Cole & Ahmadi, 2003; Mir, 2019).

- *Constructions and transformations of identity.* In the institutional contexts of the processes listed above, religious minoritization on campus and in the context of the intersectional nature of minoritized student identities in general, Muslim American college students are engaged in ongoing negotiations with various aspects of their identities—ones predicated on the role religion, education, family, race, class, gender, sexuality, and national identity play in their daily lives (Mir, 2009; 2011; Muedini, 2009; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Stubbs & Sallee, 2013; Peek, 2005; Rangoonwala, Sy, & Epinoza, 2011).

Method

The research team relied on research literature centered around the experiences of Muslim American college students (e.g., especially the work of the anthropologist Shabana Mir, e.g., Mir 2009; 2011; Mir & Sarroub, 2019). Student researchers conducted auto-ethnographic journal entries documenting their own experiences as Muslim American college students, which they then theorized by connecting each others' experiences to the themes observed in the research literature. Through this process of documenting and theorizing the student researchers' own experiences, the students and their mentors together developed research questions and a semi-structured interview protocol. Using their personal and university networks, Student researchers recruited fellow Muslim American students at NEIU (Such purposeful techniques have proven to be successful when trying to study populations in the statistical minority; Rankin & Reason, 2008). Twenty-one current NEIU students—all of whom identified as Muslim American—participated in interviews ranging from 45-minutes to 1-hour in length. Table 3 provides demographic data on the sample. A major challenge included recruiting male students. While many were contacted by the researchers only a few agreed to participate. Interviews were transcribed and open coded to generate descriptions of key themes regarding how participants experienced campus life as Muslim American Students.

Table 3: Participant demographics

Gender	Age Range	Ethnicity
Female-18 **Male-3**	18 to 22-13 23 to 27-5 28 and above-3	South Asian-12 Arab-7 Latinx-1 African-1

Preliminary Findings

Table 4 includes a summary of the major themes discussed in the research findings for the NEIU study, which are described in detail in the sections below.

Table 4: Major themes of the research findings for the NEIU study

Theme	Key points
Factors influencing student academic and career paths	A major factor that informed and impacted the students' orientations and motivations toward higher education and careers was family, as influenced by multifaceted factors of culture, religion, immigration, gender dynamics, and complex socio-economic factors.
Evidence of religious minoritization	Instances and patterns of religious minoritization targeting Muslim Americans on campus and in the community include microaggressions, struggles with religious accommodations, surveillance, and bullying. The increased visibility of Muslim religious practices, such as some women who wear a hijab in public, can be associated with instances of targeted religious minoritization.
Patterns of engagement and disengagement	Students tended to report a limited pattern of engagement on campus, for example, attending classes but not working or participating in extra-curricular activities. However, students emphasized the importance of the diverse student population at NEIU in making them feel welcome, and they emphasized the role of student organizations such as the MSA in supporting and advocating for the community.

Factors that influence cultural orientations toward higher education
Nearly all of the Muslim American students that we interviewed discussed how their family—as impacted by culture, religion, immigration, and complex social-economic factors—has informed and impacted their personal orientations and motivations toward higher education and careers. The impact of family culture and social relations on orientations toward higher education was complex and multifaceted.

Several students described the struggles faced by their parents and other relatives in immigrating to the United States. The struggles of recent immigrants, which also resulted in obstacles to college education for immigrant families, included working low-wages to support families, and the difficulty having international college degrees or credits recognized by U.S. institutions. In a few cases, participants also described their parents acquiring

immigration sponsorship debt to their own relatives, requiring them to pay back the debt through larger amounts of unpaid work (rather than pursuing education or remunerative work). Addressing these challenges, Aria, a female student majoring in marketing, described how her family's struggles with immigration and life in the United States has increased her parents' support for her to succeed in college, stating, "They're very supportive. They want me to succeed, because you know they've also seen how much they've personally struggled, so they don't want me to go through the same thing."

The impact of gender on the college orientation of Muslim Americans is highly complex, and impacted by socio-economic factors as well as the family's particular understanding of religion. Several of our female participants reported that their older brothers were encouraged to enter the workforce immediately after college in order to contribute resources to the extended family; or, if their brothers were personally inclined to go to college, their family insisted that they pursue high-wage occupations such as engineering or medicine. For both male and female students, whose parents, siblings, or extended family had a college degree, college education was often highly encouraged, with the possible provision that the family require a particular degree and career focus. For example, Tina (all names of research participants are pseudonyms), a student interested in studying cosmetology and becoming a beautician explained, "my parents said absolutely not. They don't consider that as a real career"—and in this family with brothers who are engineers, and female cousins who are Registered Nurses, only a STEM degree qualifies as a "real career."

> The impact of gender on the college orientation of Muslim Americans is highly complex, and impacted by socioeconomic factors as well as the family's particular understanding of religion.

Many of the female students in our study stated that their families encouraged them to go to college, or that they at least did not object to their college ambitions. Simultaneously, they also reported knowing of families in their community where women were discouraged or forbidden to pursue college. As one student explained:

> *But I know several people that actually they did have to go through such a thing, where their parents believe that – oh, women are not supposed to go to college; that they're supposed to be staying at home. But for me, my parents were like, yeah you need to go to college; you need to get a degree.*

Several female students stated that they could only attend college with their parents' permission; or, after marriage, with the permission of their husbands. For the female Muslim Americans who we interviewed in our study, marriage or the anticipation of marriage is a major factor that impacts how the family considers college education. Maryam, for example, describes her family has being conservative in their religious practices; her family is supportive and wants her to "do well" in college, but they remind her that as she ages, the expectations that she should marry will increase—and after marriage, education becomes a secondary priority:

> Several female students stated that they could only attend college with their parents' permission; or, after marriage, with the permission of their husbands.

> *... they want me to just succeed and really be happy with what I choose. And I think as far as gender goes,*

they do expect me to marry at some point - soon, probably. And I'm just 21, so I don't know how that's going to impact my academic career. But, as far as I know, they do support me wanting to continue my academic career. But, I do know the cultural expectations that come upon a woman once she does marry, and sometimes they are quite difficult, so that education becomes secondary. So, I hope that doesn't happen. I haven't really discussed it yet.

Married women are able to pursue college goals with the support of their husbands, even in situations where in-laws or other relatives object or discourage. Sara who is 52 years old, and studying social work, describes herself as someone whose religious faith is important. Discussing her mother-in-law's frustration with her enrollment in school, Sara explained that "She always reminded me like that I am married now. I don't have to go to school or something. I have to stay home and cook for my husband and I refused to do that." With the support of her husband and other family members, Sara persisted despite such objections.

Importantly, whereas all the participants who we interviewed for this study described themselves as faithful, they varied widely in their knowledge about their religion, the ways in which they practiced their religion, and how they interpreted their religion, ranging from traditional, conservative, and literal interpretations to more open and progressive interpretations (even ones including critical perspectives). Several students argued that religious requirements for women to marry young or prohibitions on women obtaining education are not delineated in religious texts—which would thus carry the force of sacred authority—but are rather cultural traditions which are subject to change. While debates about Islamic religious text and exegesis are beyond the scope of this report, it is important to note that some students we interviewed were critical of the idea that such requirements and prohibitions were based in their religion.

Experiences of hypervisibility, inclusion, and exclusion on campus and in the community
One of the features of Muslim American identity is that of particular dress, including the head-covering known as a *hijab*. The hijab is worn by some woman for religious practices, including daily prayers, and may expose these women to increased visibility in the communities they enter, including on campus. Unfortunately, many of the students we interviewed described experiences being targeted on account of their Muslim American religious identity, including awkward stares, verbal attacks, and threats of physical violence (and a few cases of physical violence). One student who is Mexican American converted to Islam during high school. She wore the hijab but faced regular verbal attacks at her high school and in the community,

Like telling me to take it off, that they were going to kill me, to go back to my country, but they didn't know I was Mexican. So they were like, «Go back to the Middle East.' And I was like, «I›m not from the Middle East.» But you know, like don't be — they shouldn›t even be saying that to anybody either way.

In yet another incident experienced by this same student, a group of men approached her while she was filling her car while at a gas station, "shouting out, like racial slurs…. And they actually took the nozzle where the gasoline is dispensed. And they were pointing it at me telling me they were going to throw gasoline at me. And it's like, you know like, basically burn me alive, because I was wearing the hijab." After that event, this particular student decided to stop wearing the hijab, "*out of just safety reasons.*"

Despite these past incidents, the students that we interviewed for this study reported that the NEIU campus

was a relatively safe and welcoming environment. Students appreciated the diversity of the student population on campus, as one student explained:

> The teachers, faculty and staff were very welcoming towards me. The students as well, were very nice and welcoming…. It's as simple as walking through the halls and people just saying, "Hi, how are you?" You know and you don't even know them. Well you don't find that at every campus community. So like everybody is welcoming and nice, helpful and you know. I never felt like an outsider.

Several of the female interviewees described feeling comfortable wearing the hijab on campus, as one student explained, "I feel normal. I mean it doesn't affect me if I wear hijab in school. I mean there is no discrimination. Nobody bothers me about doing that." Another student described receiving complements on the beautiful colors of her hijab, and another stated that she likes wearing her hijab on campus because it provides an opportunity for other Muslim American students to introduce themselves to one another.

In contrast, some students reported that they felt they were being watched or stared at due to their religious identity. They also reported microaggressions, such as persistent inappropriate questioning from peers. One student described the impact of this gaze in the classroom stating, "When 9-11 comes around… in the classroom, for example, I feel like people are going to be looking at me and like understanding – oh, yeah, she's a Muslim, and Muslims are the ones that like [did] that type of thing." Another student describes how this gaze makes her feel like an outsider on campus:

> There are a lot of Hijabis on campus. Northeastern is pretty diverse. But there's this something, I don't know what it is – is it paranoia or is it just me being used to being watched, but I feel like in some places on campus I feel like I'm being watched, especially hallways, … I never really dwelled on it, but it's just something in the back of my head that was always there like, oh my God, you're being watched, don't look up.

Students also describe being approached by fellow students with persistent inappropriate questions, especially about the hijab. For For example one student notes, "A lot of questions people used to ask is like, 'Do you take the hijab off when you're at home? Like when you take a shower? And all that.' I'm like, 'I just — I live just like you guys, but just when I go out, I just wear the hijab.'"

Another topic that students discussed was the process of obtaining religious accommodations on campus, including arranging a private room for cleansing rituals and prayers, requests to be excused from class to conduct prayers, and rare requests to excuse absences in order to participate in religious observances. Note that students discussed that wearing the hijab might be viewed as a safety concern in some settings—such as in a chemistry or biology lab or in a nursing practicum. They pointed out, however, that there were many ways to

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> Students, however, also reported challenges using the prayer room due to their classes being geographically distributed across campus, calling for more prayers rooms to meet this need.

arrange and tie the hijab to adjust for health and safety situations. Many of the students interviewed for this study were grateful to be able to utilize the designated prayer room in the NEIU Student Union. One student, for example, had to visit a mosque in the community near NEIU, before learning there was a separate room for Muslims to pray on campus. Students, however, also reported challenges using the prayer room due to their classes being geographically distributed across campus, calling for more prayers rooms to meet this need.

Some professors were very accommodating in their response to requests for religious accommodations, and one professor even allowed her student to pray in her office. Others, unfortunately, seemed annoyed and dismissive of such requests. Having experienced this unaccommodating response from educators in the past, both at NEIU and at other colleges, one student described how she mentally prepares herself to talk with professors regarding her need to excuse herself from class for prayers by rehearsing a convincing argument as to why the request is legitimate.

Patterns of engagement and disengagement

The Muslim American students who we interviewed for this study tended to have a fairly limited pattern of engagement on the NEIU campus—coming to campus for classes and then returning home without participating in extracurricular activities—although the Muslim Student Association (MSA) provided a community on campus in which some students participated. The students tended not to report having joined campus clubs, access career advising, or participate in extra-curricular activities. For some students, socio-economic factors may play a role in this limited pattern of engagement. Rose, for example, is a full-time student who works to pay her tuition and other expenses, supports her family, and as a consequence, lacks time to socialize and participate in on-campus events or organizations:

> So, I don't really stay on campus. I just go to my class and I get out. Again, I'm like, I go from work to school and then home because I'm so tired. I don't really stay at the campus unless like, I need to be there for like group projects or something... I mean, I wish I kind of start like communicating with more people because I don't I really don't know anyone in university in NEIU except like...I met a few girls from the, from some of my classes. I know like maybe three girls over there and that's about it.

Female students also reported limiting their involvement on campus because of their families' concerns for their safety, especially concerns over students wearing the hijab and participating in events after dark.

In fact, for many of the students we interviewed, the Muslim Student Association (MSA) was their only form of extracurricular campus engagement. Meetings and events hosted by the MSA offer a social setting providing mutual support for Muslim American students on campus. It connects students with other Muslim Americans, allowing them to talk about religion and other interests, study and pray together, and socialize as members of a shared community. When needed, this association is also able to advocate for the Muslim American community on campus. For example, the annual international business event held at NEIU, which features flags from around the world, recently, removed the Palestinian flag from the display. In response, the MSA advocated for the return of this flag in future events. In addition to serving as a community advocate, this organization also

> **Meetings and events hosted by the MSA offer a social setting providing mutual support for Muslim American students on campus.**

plans cultural and educational programs as part of Asian Pacific Islander and Desi Heritage Month, to promote and celebrate the presence of Muslim Americans on campus.

Conclusion

This research documents the complex and multifaceted relationship between Muslim American family cultures and religious identities, and their orientation toward higher education and professional careers. In addition, the report documents experiences of religious minoritization on campus and in the community, including microaggressions, struggles with religious accommodations, surveillance, and bullying—but the research also finds that there are positive impacts of a diverse and welcoming campus culture and of student organizations which supporting and advocating for Muslim American studies on campus. We will discuss future research and action items for this study, in the conclusion of this report.

Part III: Our HMoob American College Paj Ntaub

Our HMoob American College Paj Ntaub is a qualitative, community-based participatory action research project (begun in 2018) that is in collaboration with HMoob American student activists from the HMoob American Studies Committee as well as researchers at the Wisconsin Center for Education Research (WCER). This project sought out to examine the educational experiences of HMoob American college students at the University of Wisconsin–Madison by investigating institutional factors that influence campus inclusion, educational success, and post-college transitions of this population. Data from this exploratory study suggest that HMoob American students experience exclusion and macro/microaggressions related to the ways UW-Madison's campus is racially segregated, spatially and institutionally. This data suggest that these experiences of exclusion have significant implications on HMoob American students' academic majors, future career plans, and professional social networks. In contrast, the spaces in which participants stated they felt most welcome were student support programs, race-specific student organizations, and HMoob specific classes. Findings from this first study also show that pre-college and college support programs play a large part in how HMoob American undergraduates build academic and social networks throughout their college career (Lee at al., 2019). Our second year of research included current as well as past students and staff in an attempt to investigate the role of institutional and socio-cultural factors in students' discipline and program choices, sense of belonging on campus, job market preparation, and general educational "success." Our preliminary finds from this second year of research suggests that institutional gatekeeping procedures, professional and peer advising and social support, cultural and family expectations, and campus cultures all impact these various aspects of HMoob American students' lives. The history of HMoob displacement, resettlement, and struggles with educational attainment illustrate the need to investigate the factors that impact the HMoob community in Wisconsin so that more intentional educational support can be provided to them. In the next section, we provide a brief history of HMoob Americans' resettlement in the United States.

Background

Beginning in the mid-1970s, the HMoob experienced a forced immigration to the United States as refugees after the conclusion of the U.S. wars in Southeast Asia (Vue, 2015). Approximately 260,000 first- and second-generation HMoob Americans currently live in the United States; the three states with the largest HMoob populations are California (90,000), Minnesota (60,000), and Wisconsin (50,000) (Pfeifer, Sullivan, Yang, & Yang, 2013). HMoob Americans, along with other Southeast Asian students, have among the lowest educational attainment in the country (Xiong, 2012). While educational attainment and poverty rates for HMoob in

Wisconsin have improved in the past 30 years, they remain behind that of the state average (Pfeifer et al., 2013; Smolarek, Vang, & Wolfgram, 2019). Educational literature has documented the racial and ethnic discrimination experienced by HMoob American students in both K-12 and higher education settings and reinforces the need for more research on the educational experiences of this growing population (DePouw, 2012; Gloria et al., 2017; Lee, 2005).

Scholars have demonstrated that students with minoritized identities often face hostile campus climates, especially at Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) (Brayboy, 2003; Cabera, 2014; Gusa, 2010; Winkle-Wagner & Locks, 2013). In examining the higher education experiences of Southeast Asian American (SEAA) students, scholars have found issues regarding invisibility and exclusion (Museus & Maramba, 2010). In their study examining issues of cultural validation among SEAA college students, Maramba and Palmer (2014) found that the low number of SEAA students on their participants' campuses influenced students' knowledge, familiarity, expression and advocacy of SEAA cultures. Maramba and Palmer (2014) also emphasize the importance of institutions validating SEAA cultural backgrounds in order to increase retention and persistence. Moreover, Museus and Maramba (2010) also argue SEAA student data should be disaggregated in order to account for the tremendous diversity found within the "Asian American" classification. In their study of Filipino American college students' sense of belonging, Museus and Maramba (2010) found that educational programming that engages the cultural backgrounds of minoritized students is critical to their success in college and that dissonance between a minoritized students' cultural backgrounds and the dominant culture of the institution may pose significant challenges for students of minoritized identities.

> Scholars have demonstrated that students with minoritized identities often face hostile campus climates, especially at Predominantly White Institutions (PWI).

Studies specifically examining the higher education experiences of HMoob American students have found similar themes to studies examining the general experiences of SEAA students on U.S. college campuses. Namely, Gloria et al. (2017) found the importance of support from fellow HMoob peers in order for HMoob American students to feel comfortable on campus and to succeed in their studies. Similarly, in their study of 85 HMoob American students attending a Midwestern PWI, Lin, Her, and Gloria (2015) found HMoob American students to perceive an unwelcoming environment that could be somewhat mitigated by high levels of self-confidence and a strong social and academic support network. Lastly, DePouw (2012) offered her experiences as the faculty advisor for a HMoob student organization on a PWI campus to demonstrate how HMoob culture was essentialized, exotified, and commodified by her predominantly white colleagues and the campus' predominantly white students. DePouw (2012) also found that the HMoob American students who participated in her organization were often charged with teaching their white teachers and peers about HMoob culture because of the lack of curricula and faculty expertise. Such studies display some of the challenges HMoob American students face on U.S. college campuses and provide clear evidence of the need for additional support for this population.

Method

During the first year of this study (see Table 5), we were able to interview 27 HMoob American undergraduate students, about 10% of all of the HMoob American undergrads at UW-Madison, about their college experiences and pathways into the world of work. With funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation,

this past academic year, our research team was able to expand our sample by interviewing 36 current HMoob American undergraduate students as well as 31 former students including alumni and students who either dropped out or transferred and 4 staff members who work directly with HMoob American students. To date, we have conducted over 98 interviews; for both years of the study, student researchers recruited participants through snowball sampling techniques, which resulted in a diverse sample of HMoob American students. In addition to the semi-structured interviews, we engaged in participant observations at events and workshops that HMoob American students hosted or attended. Team members also conducted observational fieldwork in spaces that were frequented by HMoob American students. Additionally, the team compiled artifacts to be analyzed, such as photos, documents, and news articles. Team members also kept autoethnographic journals, which we are analyzing as data. During April and May of 2020, we conducted follow-up interviews (n=17) with a sub-set of 71 students interviewed in 2019-2020, to document the impact of the pandemic on their social and educational experiences.

Table 5: Participant Background

Participants	2018-2019	2019-2020
Current Students	27	36
Alumni	N/A	24
Drop outs/Transfers	N/A	7
Staff	N/A	4
TOTAL	27	71
GRAND TOTAL		98

To organize and analyze our data, we segmented transcribed interviews, observational fieldnotes, auto-ethnographic journals, and ethnographic photographs and artifacts in MaxQDA software (VERBI Software, 2017) to identify recurrent patterns across the corpus. To address our research question on context, experiences, and impacts of HMoob studies for HMoob American college students, the team applied a set of codes based on our prior research (Lee et al., 2019) and then engaged in a round of inductive open coding of the corpus noting recurrent phrases, ideas, and observations related to factors that impact HMoob American education (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

Preliminary Findings

As mentioned above, our current research study aims to add to our understanding of issues in inclusivity and belonging in higher education as well as the role of inclusivity and belonging in educational success and post-college trajectories by qualitatively examining the educational experiences of a particular minoritized population at a Midwestern Predominately White Institution. To do this, we ask two key research questions: *What are the institutional factors influencing the campus inclusion, educational success, and post-college transitions of HMoob American college students at UW-Madison? And, what are the potential mechanisms for improving those factors?*

Table 6 includes a summary of the major themes discussed in the research findings for the UW-Madison study, which are described in detail in the sections below.

Table 6: Major themes of the research findings for the UW-Madison study

Themes	Key points
Factors influencing student academic and career paths	Cultural and family expectations: For many of the students (current and former) that we interviewed, a large part of their college decision-making choices stemmed from the desire to meet the cultural and familial expectations that were put on them.
	Gatekeeping: Institutional procedures in place to vet students' qualifications for academic programs and institutional resources, which would often frustrate students' educational goals.
	Advising: Students reported negative advising experiences which discouraged or directed them away from their academic and career goals.
	Institutional cultures: Many participants expressed difficulties adjusting to the academic and social life on campus, and found these settings are often isolating and intimidating.
	Interpersonal supports: This referred to the support from academic support programs, student organization, and co-ethnic peer groups that may have provided support and resources for students to persist and preserve through the social and academic obstacles with their college experiences.
Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic	In follow-up interviews during the pandemic, students reported an increase in racist acts and behaviors towards HMoob American students who physically appear East Asian
	An increase in mental and emotional stress and anxiety from concerns over the future.
	An increase in financial stress.
	An increase in family responsibilities.

Cultural and family expectations

For many of the students (current and former) that we interviewed, a large part to their college decision-making choices stemmed from the desire to meet the cultural and familial expectations that were put on them. This ranged from the overall decision to attend college to major career plans.

Cultural expectations were presented in forms, such as pursuing higher education being seen as the only way to succeed and pursuing careers with traditional trajectories. This also came about through the majors and career decisions that students decided on such as careers in the medical field, the legal field, or in business. Communities looked at these career paths as the sole indicators of success. Students were often worried that if they dropped out of school this would go against their community and family's expectations and thus disappoint their families.

> **Students were often worried that if they dropped out of school this would go against their community and family's expectations and thus disappoint their families.**

In discussing family expectations, students described going to college because that was what their parents, siblings, and family members had wanted. They described wanting to succeed in school because of the struggles that their parents had gone through to come to this country and the struggles that they went through to ensure that they could attend college. One student, YP, stated that throughout his undergraduate years, he had decided to no longer pursue medical school. However, many years later now, he told his interviewer that he was considering going back to medical school because he felt that he was a disappointment to his parents for not going to medical school as per his original plan. Furthermore, family expectations were so heavy on HMoob American students that many of our participants shared that if they had known more about the university system and UW-Madison they would not have attended despite their family's wishes.

Gatekeeping

Another factor impacting students' pathway is the gatekeeping practices that are enacted by university actors. More specifically, when referring to gatekeeping, we mean the institutional procedures that are in place to vet students' qualifications for academic programs and institutional resources. There are specific procedures for students depending on their majors. For example, students have to apply to the Business school and be accepted in order to major in one of their degrees. If students do not get accepted into the Business school, but they continue to pursue their desired Business major, this may extend the student's time to degree. Even if students change majors after being rejected, their time to degree may still be extended because they have spent a semester or two taking courses or re-taking courses to qualify or be considered for acceptance. After collecting data this year, we noticed that many of our participants experienced gatekeeping mechanisms such as this. One strong example is a nursing student that we interviewed named Rebecca. She applied to the nursing school, was rejected twice and was finally accepted to the program on her third try. She just completed her first year of nursing school and has one more year to complete before she graduates. It is notable to mention that she will have spent six years as an undergraduate before graduating.

Although people may claim that gatekeeping could happen to anyone, not just HMoob American students, it is important to remember that more than half of our participants are first generation college students who are federal Pell Grant recipients. Many students struggle with navigating through higher education because they

are usually the first ones in their family to attend college and in college, they often do not have access to the advising needed to help guide them on their desired path.

Advising

Our data shows that HMoob American students rely on advising (both formal and informal) from academic advisors, peers, professors, student support mentors, student organization leaders, and others to help guide their college decisions and attainment of knowledge regarding their degree and career paths. Importantly, we also noticed that students' relationship with advisors who are HMoob or people of color is crucial for their retainment, especially because they feel more comfortable talking to them and sharing both academic and non-academic struggles with them.

An important observation that we have made is that academic advising, specifically, seems to be unhelpful—and sometimes even traumatizing—for HMoob American students at UW-Madison. A common academic advising experience for HMoob students is being directed toward new educational and professional programs and new goals, which often made them feel unheard and unworthy of a specific plan or of higher education overall. One of our participants told us about her harmful experience with her academic advisor. In their conversation, she addressed how hard she has worked, what circumstances make college hard for her, and her willingness to work harder. Her advisor responded by telling her to consider transferring out of UW-Madison and back to her hometown. In response to her advisor, she states, "I have nothing to go back to at home because my parents don't think I'm going to be anything in life." This experience left her feeling unwanted at UW-Madison, and like other students who had a bad experience with academic advising, she never went back for more advising, and her academic performance suffered.

Institutional cultures

This year we had the opportunity to focus on our participants' thoughts on how they conducted themselves in academic and professional settings. From our data we found that many of our participants expressed difficulties adjusting to these spaces. Specifically, they expressed challenges of adjusting to spaces that are predominately white. These spaces included in classroom settings, student organizations, professional organizations, and in the larger campus environment.

HMoob students express that these settings are often isolating and intimidating. One of our alumni participants expressed that during their time as a student they did not engage in the typical white college experience. This is in relation to Wisconsin experience which is often characterized by going to football games, tailgating and partying, socializing on State Street, bar hopping, joining organizations, etc. They felt that because they could not relate to their white peers, their experiences must not also be part of the campus community. Another one of our participants expressed that being the only person of color in these spaces can be intimidating, especially in a class room setting. They expressed that they did not feel comfortable engaging because they felt that they would have to filter their behavior to fit in.

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Interpersonal support

The last common factor that impacted our participants' academic experiences and career trajectories is their interpersonal support network. Specifically, this refers to the support from academic and support programs, student organizations, and co-ethnic peer groups that may have provided support and resources for HMoob American students to persist and persevere through the social and academic obstacles with their college experiences.

Our data show that HMoob American students found this support mainly through peers, friends, and family. However, it is not restricted to just those support system; others included student support programs such as the Center for Academic Excellence (CAE), HMoob organizations and committees like the HMoob American Studies Committee, fellowship and religious affiliations like Asian American Intervarsity, Multicultural Greek life, and upperclassmen mentorships founded through those communities and peers. Jane, an alumni we interviewed, stressed the importance of mentorship from advisors and other professional staff members as a crucial part of her college experience.

In analyzing our interview data with current and past students, we realized that the experiences of students now compared to students from ten years ago were very similar in that HMoob American students continue to experience exclusion and marginalization in its various forms. We started conducting our analysis for this project at the onset of the pandemic. As everything in our world started to change, we wondered how the consequences of COVID-19 would impact the lives of HMoob American students. Although already in the middle of analysis, our team decided to reach out to participants that were current students for follow up interviews. These interviews included questions that were specific to the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on their educational experiences.

In addition to the analysis of institutional pathways that impact the college experiences of HMoob Americans, we conducted follow-up interviews (n=17) with our 2019-2020 participants during April and May 2020, to document how the pandemic was impacting the students, which we address briefly in the following section.

COVID and anti-racist activism

To date, we have conducted 17 follow-up interviews. Members of our team reached out to participants that we have previously interviewed via email to ask if participants would be willing to do a virtual follow-up interview. Preliminary themes we identified are that HMoob American college students are experiencing an increase in: racism, mental stress and anxiety from concerns over the future, difficulty finding employment and paying for schooling, and family responsibility to assist their parents (often refugees who do not speak English as a first language). We believe sharing the stories of these minoritized students, many of whom come from low-income refugee families, is vital to ensure their future educational, social, and economic possibilities.

> **Research shows that minoritized individuals who lack resources to manage social, economic, and psychological disruption may be disproportionally affected by the pandemic, and they may struggle more than their peers to return to normal after the pandemic clears.**

Social scientists are only beginning to map the devastating and lasting impacts the COVID-19 pandemic is having on the culture, society, and economy of the United States (Van Bavel et al., 2020). To respond to the ongoing and rapidly changing nature of the pandemic and its impacts, our proposed research is underway and ready to be expanded upon receipt of funding. The research explicitly addresses the social and other impacts of the pandemic for minoritized college students. Research shows that minoritized individuals who lack resources to manage social, economic, and psychological disruption may be disproportionally affected by the pandemic, and they may struggle more than their peers to return to normal after the pandemic clears (Van Bavel et al., 2020). As has occurred in other emergency situations (Fothergill & Peek, 2004), the disruption caused by the pandemic may be deeper and longer-lasting for minoritized college students than for their majoritarian peers. Furthermore, the threat of disease is associated with higher levels of ethnocentrism (Schaller & Neuberg, 2012) and an increase in the dehumanization of people from other groups that can lead to violence (Kteily, Hodson, & Bruneau, 2016).

Asian American college students are particularly vulnerable. Following President Trump and others labeling the COVID-19 virus "the China virus," there has been a rapid rise of anti-Asian racism across the country (Daley, 2020). Anti-Asian graffiti, online bulling, and other racist targeting at UW–Madison and other campuses has grown (Meyerhofer, 2020). In response, UW–Madison Chancellor Rebecca Blank and other university leaders issued a statement denouncing such racism, scheduled a "virtual town hall" to discuss the problem, and advertised a bias incident reporting system and online mental health resources to support students (Blank, Ressor, & Sims, 2020). Yet, our research on the experiences of HMoob Americans at UW–Madison has found that such typical measures do not substantially improve the experience of minoritized college students (Lee et al., 2019). Instead, our preliminary research suggests that the pandemic may uncover and amplify ongoing racist ideologies targeting Asian Americans, such as the long-held idea that they pose an existential threat to safety in the United States—known as "the yellow peril"—and the representation of Asian Americans as "perpetual foreigners" (Lee, 2005). The marginalization of HMoob American students may be amplified at predominately White institutions such as UW–Madison, where minoritized students often struggle with a lack of institutional recognition and where their bodies become racialized and hyper-visible to their White peers and educators (Museus & Maramba, 2010; Ngo & Lee, 2007).

> Following President Trump and others labeling the COVID-19 virus "the China virus," there has been a rapid rise of anti-Asian racism across the country.

- *An increase in racist acts and behaviors towards HMoob American students who physically appear East Asian.* These include both blatant acts as well as microaggressions. On the UW–Madison campus, students report not feeling safe to walk around on their own, taking different (sometimes longer) routes to avoid racial violence, receiving stares and people physically moving away from them, being called "Corona," having eggs thrown at them, and intentionally not wearing masks or other protective equipment so that they are not targeted.

- *An increase in mental and emotional stress and anxiety from concerns over the future.* Graduating seniors are worried about the job market, and those who had been extended job or internship offers before the

pandemic are finding that these positions are being terminated. Current students' expressed concerns about what the fall semester would look like (if courses would be online, if campus would open up) and whether or not they would be able to continue schooling virtually.

- *An increase in financial stress*. Much of this is due to students losing their on-campus jobs, an increased difficulty in finding employment, and parents being laid off because of the pandemic. Participants share that they worry about how they will pay rent; others share that they have been working longer hours in order to send money home to their families.

- *An increase in family responsibilities*. These include taking care of younger siblings while parents work, helping siblings navigate online courses, providing financial support to the family (helping parents pay rent/mortgage and bills, purchasing groceries/necessities), assisting parents with accessing resources and navigating institutions (unemployment benefits, writing wills).

All these factors affect students' ability to focus on schooling. Moreover, as a result, some students are considering leaving the university. Just from these preliminary findings, we can see that the pandemic has exacerbated many of the institutional and systemic inequities that minoritized students like HMoob Americans experience. As such, the team is being intentional about the dissemination of our findings.

Conclusion

Our preliminary findings thus far suggest that there are different factors and actors that impact HMoob American college students trajectory through college and subsequently, into the workforce, impacting students' discipline and program choices, their sense of belonging on campus, their job market preparation and readiness, and general educational "success." (By "success," we are referring to a dominant narrative of a linear college journey in which students achieve high grades, graduate college in four to five years, and obtain employment in a field related to their major shortly after graduating.) More specifically, our findings indicate that these key factors include cultural and family expectations, institutional gatekeeping, advising encounters, institutional cultures, and interpersonal support networks. The findings also suggest that the struggles associated with college and career paths of HMoob American students are begin amplified by the current COVID-19 pandemic, by the financial, emotional, and social instability it has entailed, and by the Anti-Asian racism on campus and in various communities targeting HMoob Americans in particular. Overall, our research findings foreground narratives that have traditionally been left unheard in educational spaces. This evidence leads us to conclude that HMoob American students are in many ways rendered invisible at the institutional level.

In the following conclusion of this report, we will discuss our steps forward towards the "action" part of CBPAR, including additional research, advocacy and community outreach for the three sites of this research.

Conclusions and Action Components

This report details three college student-led Community-Based Participatory Action Research (CBPAR) studies that examine the experiences of minoritized students at three Midwestern college campuses. This research demonstrates the powerful nature of student-led CBPAR to engage the voices and perspectives of underrepresented student populations not only as research participants but also as researchers who guide research design, data collection, analysis, and dissemination. Through CCWT's partnerships with these student researchers, significant, and often unheard student perspectives have been brought to life and amplified. Furthermore, the action component of CBPAR enables these perspectives to push for robust policy and institutional changes that can considerably improve the learning conditions of minoritized populations. Likewise, this research also demonstrates its transformational nature through the increasing critical consciousness exhibited by student researchers.

During these uncertain times when our country is struggling through a pandemic, racial violence, and economic insecurity, we contend that student-led CBPAR offers an important and transformational tool for critical inquiry and equitable change. These studies show that when skilled academic researchers partner with critically-minded students to examine the experiences of minoritized student populations, powerful knowledge and motivated action are produced that have the potential to amplify the voices and experiences of often unheard populations. We argue that this approach to engaging minoritized college students in higher education policy research and advocacy can be expanded nationally as a way to better align postsecondary institutions with the needs and experiences of the students that they serve. Our future plans for our CBPAR work include expanding the research, continuing counter-institutional invisibility work, and scaling the use of college student-led CBPAR.

Expansion of CBPAR research at CCWT

The points below address plans for future data collection, analysis, and dissemination of research findings for the three CBPAR studies discussed in this report.

- The UW-Whitewater team will continue its analysis of the dataset to publish findings speaking to the many other issues that student participants discussed, such as the connections among family, community, and career goals; the kinds of support at UWW that have been helpful and not so helpful to academic- and employment-related success; the links between interactions with mentors and career decision-making; and the influence of feelings of empowerment and camaraderie on academic and career trajectories.

- The NEIU research plans to expand their sample by recruiting more male students and Muslim Americans from more diverse ethnic backgrounds. Our current sample size is small (n=21) and there is a limited number of male students (n=3). Also, the sample consists primarily of the two largest ethnic groups on campus—South Asians (n=12) and Arabs (n=7). The team is also currently working on an article manuscript with an extensive literature review and empirical findings from the CBPAR study, on the process of the religious minoritization of Muslim American college student in the United States.

- The UW-Madison study is currently engaged in analyzing the larger corpus of data that they have collected using MaxQDA qualitative analysis software; and is engaged in disseminating research findings as academic articles and a book, which will be the first monograph of a CBPAR study in a higher education setting.

Ongoing counter-institutional invisibility work

The findings of the three studies indicate that the experiences and perspectives of students of color are not often recognized by their postsecondary institutions, rendering them invisible on an institutional level. In efforts to shed light onto this institutional invisibility, our teams engage in what we call "counter-institutional invisibility work." At its core, counter-institutional invisibility work interrogates and pushes back on the powers and structures that perpetuate the invisibility of underrepresented communities. Gathering and amplifying counter-narratives is what initiates this work. Counter-narratives are stories that deconstruct meritocracy and unravel oppressive mechanisms and processes. At the same time, counter-narratives are a call for action against the injustices and inequities that are presented. Therefore, counter-institutional invisibility work is a push for systematic change and a tool to critically inform institutional policies. Ongoing and futured counter-institutional invisibility work include:

- The UW-Whitewater team will present research findings to general student and leadership audiences at UWW as well as community leaders in the Office of Student Diversity, Engagement, and Success, the Black Student Union, and other Black student organizations at UWW, with a focus on more strongly connecting these audiences around important equity issues on campus. Working with educators, the team will explore avenues for increasing the career-oriented social capital of Black and African American students at UWW, including developing models for measuring student connections on and off campus as well as discussing possible ways to foster the kinds of interactions that our interviewees and the literature show improve student academic and career outcomes. Using our research findings as a guide, the research team will actively support UWW students, campus organizations, and others seeking to bring members of the Black community together with representatives of the Whitewater police department for conversations around discrimination, safety, and equity, modeled on similar programs around the country (e.g., Allen, 2017).

- The NEIU research team will present findings to the NEIU Muslim Student Association to receive feedback from the community of Muslim American students on campus, and then will present findings to the larger NEIU community of students, staff, and administrators. We also plan to write a brief report on the experiences of Muslim American college students engaged in the process of managing religious accommodations, with recommendations for educators and administrators on how to support students who seek to obtain religious accommodations in higher education settings.

- The UW-Madison research team plans a series of brief reports and documents to communicate findings to higher education administrators and policymakers and to support student advocacy work. For example, we are currently working on a report detailing the impacts of HMoob Studies coursework for HMoob American students at UW-Madison, which student activists will use to advocate to maintain and expand funding for the curriculum during the coming budget cuts following the COVID-19 pandemic. Another example of this student advice memos that members of our team put together with the intention to provide hope and advice in navigating higher education for HMoob American students and other minoritized students who are prospective students or current first-year students.

Scaling of college student-led CBPAR approaches

The studies featured in this report demonstrate the possibility of college student-led CBPAR projects to engage students of color in higher education research that is relevant to their communities and to support policy and advocacy to align postsecondary institutions with the needs and experiences of their students. It centers the voices, experiences, and perspectives of the college students who are often excluded from debates and decision-making that directly impacts their own education and careers. CCWT is exploring strategies to expand and scale-nationally the use of college student-led CBPAR approaches to higher education policy research and advocacy. One promising strategy is to offer a summer methods camp for education researchers and college student services professionals, to provide intensive training and practical experience in the CBPAR approach. The goal of the training will be to equip participants with the necessary skills and knowledge to return to their own postsecondary institutions to establish and mentor new college student-led CBPAR teams, to conduct research and advocacy grounded in the issues faced by minoritized colleges students in their own institutions.

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The CBPAR research teams

The UW-Whitewater Team (Names in alphabetical order)

ROSS J. BENBOW

Ross J. Benbow is a researcher at the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Wisconsin Center for Education Research. With a background in political science, international education and development, and comparative analysis, he specializes in ethnographic and social network approaches to research questions. Dr. Benbow's research focuses on the relationships among teaching and learning, public policy, and social and cultural transition in domestic and international educational contexts, with a particular interest in patterns of inequity in colleges and universities.

ISAIAH FITZGERALD

Isaiah Fitzgerald is a sophomore at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater majoring in Computer Science with a comprehensive emphasis. Originally from Milwaukee, WI, Mr. Fitzgerald is the Vice President of the Student Undergraduate Research Organization (SURO) and a member of the Phi Eta Sigma honor society at UWW. After graduation, he plans to obtain his Master's degree in Computer Science and pursue a research-oriented career in Artificial Intelligence.

DEVIN R. LEWIS

Devin R. Lewis is a senior at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, originally from Milwaukee Wisconsin, who is majoring in Human Resources Management. Mr. Lewis is a student leader who has served as the membership liaison for Black Student Union at UWW and is the current President for the Zeta Iota chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.

PROFESSOR OZALLE TOMS

Professor Ozalle Toms is an Assistant Vice Chancellor and Associate Professor of special education at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. She earned her doctorate from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Her areas of interest are teacher education, campus culture and culturally responsive instruction. She was a high school special education teacher for 8 years supporting students with learning disabilities, behavior disorders and intellectual disabilities.

The NEIU Research Team (Names in alphabetical order)

LAELA ARMAN

Laela Arman is a CCWT student researcher and 20-year-old senior at Northeastern Illinois University. She is majoring in biology and her career goal is to become a pathologist.

MALEEHA CHUGHTAI

Maleeha Chughtai is a CCWT student researcher and undergraduate student at Northeastern Illinois University studying social work. She grew up in Germany and came to the U.S. seven years ago. In her journey as a Muslim woman in America, she has experienced being judged for her religion, but also found comradery and spaces of belonging. In her current research program, she is exploring the Muslim-American student experience at NEIU, in the hope to learn more and help the Muslim community of NEIU.

ROZAN DEEB

Rozan Deeb is a CCWT research intern and a recent graduate from Northeastern Illinois University with a BA in Human Resource Development. She is a proud Muslim American hijabi woman, who enjoys spending free time cooking and watching movies.

ALEXANDRA PASQUALONE

Alexandra Pasqualone is a CCWT research intern in her second year as a PhD student in Educational Policy Studies and History. Her research interests include youth protests, Arab-American identity formation in schools, and more broadly, urban and immigration history.

KHUSHBAKHAT SIDDIQUI

Khushbakhat Siddiqui s a CCWT student researcher and undergraduate student at Northeastern Illinois University studying Psychology. She moved to Chicago 2 years ago from New York City to peruse her education.

BRIAN VIVONA

Brian Vivona, Ed.D. is an Assistant Professor of Human Resource Development at Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago. His research interests are varied, however most of his work has focused on how humor functions in relation to occupational identity, organizational culture, leadership, and learning in the workplace. He is a research affiliate at the CCWT.

MATTHEW WOLFGRAM

Matthew Wolfgram is an anthropologist of education and senior researcher at CCWT. He is a research mentor for the UW-Madison and the NEIU research groups featured in this report.

The UW-Madison Research Team (Names are ordered as appearing in the photograph left to right and back to front)

PAYENG MOUA

Payeng Moua is an undergraduate researcher at CCWT. As a PEOPLE scholar, she is a senior studying Health Promotions and Health Equity while also completing an Asian American Studies Certificate with a HMoob emphasis and in hopes to complete her Leadership certificate as well. She hopes to one day be able to blend the sciences and remedies of health with the knowledge of HMoob culture and mannerism to give back to her community and not invalidate the beliefs and identities that they hold, but instead to add knowledge on health to communities cultural, religious and medicinal practices.

ARIANA THAO

Ariana Thao is a recent graduate from UW Madison. She majored in Political Science, Sociology, and has a certificate in Asian American Studies with a HMoob American studies emphasis. She is a Chancellor's scholar alumna as a part of the Mercile J. Lee scholarship program. Currently she serves as a Resource Development & Implementation Specialist for Extension's Office of Access, Inclusion, and Compliance and intends to attend law school in the near future.

BAILEY B. SMOLAREK

Bailey B. Smolarek holds a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction and is an Associate Researcher at the Wisconsin Center for Education Research.

ODYSSEY XIONG

Odyssey Xiong graduated from UW-Madison with a B.A. in Sociology and a certificate in Asian American Studies with a HMoob emphasis.

MATTHEW WOLFGRAM

Matthew Wolfgram holds a Ph.D. in Anthropology and is a Senior Researcher at the Center for College-Workforce Transitions at the Wisconsin Center for Education Research.

LISA YANG

Lisa Yang is an undergraduate researcher on the team. She is currently a senior studying Education Studies, and has a certificate in Asian American Studies with a HMoob American Studies Emphasis. She is a PEOPLE scholar and hopes to support spaces that center youth and healing. This research has shown her that she enjoys creating art and literature that can build HMoob Studies.

LENA LEE

Lena Lee is an intern at CCWT and is currently working on the "Our HMoob American College Paj Ntaub" research project. She has a B.A in Psychology and a certificate in Asian American Studies with a HMoob American Studies Emphasis. Lena is a proud PEOPLE and Rotary alumna who actively participated in student activism through the HMoob American Studies Committee (HMASC). She plans to attend graduate school in the near future and hopes to work with underrepresented students in education.

MAINENG VANG

MaiNeng Vang (pronouns: she/her/nws) is a Ph.D. student in the Educational Policy Studies program at UW-Madison with a broad research interest in the educational experiences of minoritized students. More specifically, she is interested in understanding how race, ethnicity, gender, and class intersect to inform the lives and experiences of HMoob American students and their families. Mai Neng is currently a project assistant for the HMoob American College Paj Ntaub research team, a community-based participatory action research project.

PA KOU XIONG

Pa Kou Xiong is an intern at CCWT and a Behavior Support Specialist at Silvercrest Group Home in Neenah, WI. She has a B.S. in Human Development and Family Studies with Psychology. Pa Kou is a CAE alumna who actively participated in social justice work through the HMoob American Studies Committee (HMASC). She plans to attend graduate school and pursue a career in the field of mental health in the future.

YING YANG YOUA XIONG

Ying Yang Youa Xiong is a graduate student in the School of Human Ecology at UW-Madison.

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