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Culturally Relevant Approaches: Towards Reducing Equity Gaps at a Hispanic-Serving Institution in the Apparel Major

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Abstract

This pilot study was developed to learn more about Apparel students and support their success based on primary challenges identified with equity gaps among Under-Represented Minority (URM) students who are Hispanic, Black, and/or Indigenous. This pilot study was developed to learn more about Apparel URM students and support their success. We took practitioner-scholar approaches to apply Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) with students and faculty. The objectives were: (1) to identify Culturally Relevant (CR) perspectives of Apparel students, including their motivations, barriers, and recommendations; (2) to intentionally engage with students and faculty to improve a sense of achievement, excellence, and student-teacher relationships; and (3) to strategically implement CR approaches with undergraduates in the Apparel major. Research methods included student focus group interviews, and surveys based on project activities that included hosting a faculty workshop and supplemental instruction. This study conveys the feasibility of integrating CR approaches in Apparel practice-based approaches to support students and begin to address equity gap issues.

Keywords: culturally relevant, equity gaps, Hispanic-Serving Institution, students, education

Introduction

Based on equity gaps and abrupt challenges with the pandemic that impacted minoritized and socio-economically disadvantaged students, a 4-year public university system made efforts to close gaps to improve student graduation (CSU, 2022a). Demographics of students attending the university system during Fall 2022 was 52% students of minorized backgrounds (CSU, 2022b). Approximately 57% were female, and 43% were male. We sought to learn more about undergraduate students' challenges due to the pandemic and the transition back to campus to support their success. The target population of the study is undergraduate students enrolled in Apparel courses in a 4-year public university in a Hispanic-Serving Institution. The major is underrepresented in academia with various hands-on learning approaches that contribute to economic development in major urban cities in the United States, including Los Angeles and New York.

This study was informed by Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) as a conceptual framework. Shifts in student demographics with minorities expected to be a majority, historical achievement gaps among minority students, and lack of diverse teachers prompted efforts towards CRP (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011). CRP aims to address: (1) identity and achievement that includes attention to the student's identity, culture, multiple perspectives; affirming diversity, and validation of home-community cultures, (2) equity and excellence, which involves recognizing the distinct needs of students and holding them to high standards, (3) student-teacher relationships that includes being caring, maintaining a connection, interaction, and creating a welcoming classroom atmosphere for a strong "community of learners" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 480). This is especially critical with the status of the university being a Hispanic Serving Institution. This study was influenced by Garcia et al.'s (2019) multidimensional framing of "servingness" at Hispanic Serving Institutions, which aims to "elevate" the "S" to address primary equity and justice challenges (Garcia, 2023, p. 2). This further aligns with calls

for CRP as part of the "hard re-set" to address challenges induced by the pandemic and existing inequities (Ladson-Billings, 2021b, p. 72), and can stimulate consideration of "what kind of human beings/ citizens we are seeking to produce."

We took practitioner-scholar approaches to apply CRP principles in this pilot study with students and faculty. The objectives were: (1) to identify Culturally Relevant (CR) perspectives of Apparel students, including their motivations, barriers, and recommendations; (2) to intentionally engage with students and faculty to improve awareness of key CR ideas, such as sense of achievement, excellence, and student-teacher relationships; and (3) to strategically implement CR approaches with undergraduates in the Apparel major. We explored two practiced-based approaches: Faculty Development and Supplemental Instruction.

Literature Review

Hispanic-Serving Institutions

Based on changing demographics in the United States with emerging and historical challenges of Hispanic student enrollment in education systems, and influence of the civil rights era, Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI's) emerged over the past 50 years for greater educational equity and success (Laden, 2004; MacDonald et al., 2008; NCES, 2020; Torres et al., 2019). HSI's are federally acknowledged through the Higher Education Act of 1992 to address gaps in higher education institutions with a significant enrollment of minority, Hispanic students (Garcia, 2015; Laden, 2004). HSIs are defined as degree-granting, public or private, non-profit colleges and universities with 25% or more total Hispanic undergraduate full-time equivalent enrollment; additionally, at least 50% of Hispanic students must be eligible for financial assistance, such as Pell grants (US Department of Education, 2020). The Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities organization was pivotal, impacting policy and supporting development of HSI's (HACU, 2023).

As of 2020, there were approximately 560 HSI's that collectively enrolled 2.2 milllion Hispanic students in undergraduate institutions; there were also an estimated 390 emerging HSI's that enrolled 15% to 24.9% Hispanic students (HACU, 2022). HSI's are leaders in providing economic mobility opportunities for low income, minority students. They "meet students where they are" and provide value that benefits students, their families, and the local community. Although HSI's only represent 16% of all higher education institutions, they enroll 65% of all Hispanic undergraduate students. A common theme among cohorts of students who attend minority serving institutions, such as HSI's, is lack of college academic preparedness, coming from high schools in urban areas with high populations of minoritized students, and being socio-economically disadvantaged (Flores & Park, 2015).

Scholars identify distinctions between "Hispanic enrolling" and "Hispanic serving" institutions, the latter which intentionally seeks to address Latinx student success (Cuellar, 2019; Garcia, 2023; Garcia et al., 2019). Previous challenges identified among a sample of HSI leaders include lack of funding, academic under-preparedness of students for college, and issues with student retention and graduation rates (de los Santos & Cuamea, 2010). Institutional resources, such as academic and student support, are found to influence student graduation and HSI's are expected to continue to build capacity through funding to serve students (Garcia, 2013).

Aligned with these issues is the lack of "servingness" to meet students' distinct needs based on multidimensional factors to inform research, policy, and practice (Garcia et al., 2019; Maestas et al., 2007). Key multidimensional factors that apply to the current study are efforts to improve outcomes, such as student engagement and GPA, with intentional approaches involving students and faculty as important stakeholders. These efforts are critical internal organizational aspects that align with multidimensional factors to address "servingness."

Addressing Needs in an Underrepresented Major

The Apparel major was first introduced through the U.S. Department of Agriculture as "Home Economics." There are currently 190 colleges and universities that offer a fashion, textiles, and/or retail majors (U.S. Department of Education, 2024). There are limited studies in the field that focus on the intersections of race, ethnicity, and gender as they relate to student success. Previous research showed that apparel students often experience parental resistance when deciding to pursue a fashion degree (Hodges & Karpova, 2009). Specifically, male students in the apparel major had challenges navigating gendered stereotypes in the female-dominated major, and needed to persistently justify the major for academic rigor and career opportunities (Chuang et al., 2009; Karpova et al., 2015). Given that female students are more likely than male students to be encouraged by their parents and friends when selecting majors (Mastekaasa & Smeby, 2008), understanding the impact of students' cultural surroundings is critical to support their success.

Practices to Address Challenges

CR approaches were developed based on increasingly diverse student populations in the U.S. (Dee & Penner, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2021a; O'Leary et al., 2020; Rendon, 1994). There are extensive opportunities for greater implementation of CR approaches (Garcia et al., 2019; Massar, 2022). Addressing the needs of apparel students with culturally relevant and/or responsive approaches is critical and efforts are emerging (Villanueva & Eike, 2025).

Faculty Professional Development

Faculty play a critical role in acknowledging and validating students' lived experiences and can contribute to local and applied approaches to improve student experiences (Gonzales, 2015). Previous studies regarding HSI faculty conveys their strong sense of purpose, knowledge of students' status as first-generation, socio-economically disadvantaged, and/or geographically underserved (Ek et al., 2010;

Gonzales, 2014). They acknowledge contextual barriers and inequities that can inhibit their students' success. Faculty are also increasingly considering their cultural identity and roles within HSI's (Murakami-Ramalho et al., 2010).

Considering the lived experiences of students based on their culture can support students' success in HSI's (Gonzales, 2015; Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011). Nonetheless, there is an urgency for more professional development opportunities focused on culturally responsive teaching to create inclusive and equitable learning environments in increasingly diverse campuses (Massar, 2022). Workshops about inclusive excellence are effective to increase faculty awareness of social identity and implicit bias, while providing a space to discuss challenges that impede student success, and develop actionable steps to adjust teaching approaches to allow all students to succeed (O'Leary et al., 2020). Faculty learning about creating safe learning environments for diverse students was significant to reduce barriers such as stereotype threat, microaggressions, and integrate a growth mindset.

Supplemental Instruction

Supplemental instruction (SI) was first introduced in 1973 to address high attrition amongst students enrolled in professional schools (Arendale, 2002). Today, SI represents a well-established mode of academic support that is used in a variety of courses including Engineering and Social Sciences. SI is widely offered to students with the intent to improve academic performance and student success, especially for at-risk students (Adebola, 2021; Paloyo et al., 2016). SI has positively impacted grades, lowered failure, and withdrawal rates, while also improving retention and increasing graduation rates (Bowman et al., 2023; Dawson et al., 2014).

SI offers direct support from peers– where SI leaders are trained in both collaborative learning and study techniques—to promote student interaction and mutual support. SI leaders serve as model students who receive formal training, materials, and faculty support throughout the program. SI

workshops are offered on a voluntary basis and serve as a tool for students who may benefit from the development of additional academic skills in historically challenging courses. SI and similar peer-led academic support models aid minoritized students by taking cultural backgrounds into consideration, as well as the effects of prior academic involvement (Anfuso et al., 2022). Students are encouraged to engage with content, practice organization, think critically, develop articulation skills, and hone newly expanded study strategies in a safe and comfortable environment (Stone & Jacobs, 2008).

Research Methods

Culturally Relevant Study Design

With IRB approval, we used CR mixed methods approaches with faculty and students. Prior to the practice-based CR approaches, focus groups were conducted to collect baseline CR information to develop content. All primary project team members attended meetings to become familiar with CR project goals, and were trained in creating a psychologically safe environment (Cañedo & Heimler, 2022).

Three undergraduate research assistants took leadership roles. They took a strengths assessment and were encouraged to bring their unique identities to support project goals and implementation. Studies have shown the positive impact of engaging students in active, collaborative, experiential learning, as well as undergraduate research as High Impact Practices (HIP) to improve their critical thinking, intercultural effectiveness (Kilgo et al., 2015), and to reduce equity gaps (Bhattacharyya & Chan, 2021; Bowman & Holmes, 2018).

Focus groups were prepared with CR approaches (Rodriguez et al., 2011), and apparel students moderated the focus group sessions. Students in pre-determined Apparel courses were recruited during early Spring 2023 through a Qualtrics online interest form. Nineteen students expressed interest, and seven students participated in four face-to-face focus group sessions. Focus group sessions were audio

recorded with an assigned primary and secondary moderator. While the primary moderator led the session, the secondary moderator noted observations based on participant engagement. Interviews were transcribed with Otter.ai software and moderators edited the transcription for accuracy. Moderators developed a code book for data analysis and used Dedoose software to apply codes to the transcripts. In an inter-rater reliability evaluation in Dedoose, researchers obtained Kappa agreement between 0.75 and 0.81, which indicates substantial agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977). The focus group data provided a foundation for latter parts of the study, such as a CR Apparel faculty workshop and CRSI sessions that were hosted during Spring 2023.

Practice-Based Approaches

Faculty Professional Development Department Workshop. Project faculty members with diverse lived experiences and training focused on equity, inclusivity, and cultural relevance developed an Apparel department workshop. The workshop focused on three major parts: (1) defining Cultural Relevance, (2) introducing faculty to the project activities and brainstorming ideas for implementation, as well as (3) obtaining feedback regarding the CR approaches.

Culturally Relevant Supplemental Instruction (CRSI). Based on the focus group data, CRSI sessions were developed by research assistants to address challenges identified by students and for faculty to encourage their students to engage in a CR activity. Session themes included "Pathways to the Apparel Major," "Navigating Courses 101," and "De-Stress Mixer" to name a few.[1] The CRSI occurred in person and in hybrid formats with options to join on zoom.

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[1] "Pathways to AMM" (100% participation); "Navigating AMM Courses 101" (63% participation); "AMM De-Stress Mixer" (60% participation); "AMM Study Skills & Habits (38% participation); "Building AMM Connections & Networking 101" (42% participation); "Thinking about the Future: AMM Career Development" (57% participation); "Open Day: AMM & Q&A" (70% participation)

Assessment

To assess the influence of the CR faculty workshop and SI sessions, surveys with closed and open-ended questions were distributed during May 2023. Survey questions were framed around the primary definitions of Cultural Relevance (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1995). The faculty survey aimed to identify the CR ideas that resonated most during the faculty workshop, and open-ended questions about the CR activity implemented and challenges. The student survey aimed to understand student belonging certainty, identity safety, institutional growth mindset, self-efficacy, social belonging, social connectedness, trust and fairness (SEP, 2021), as well as effectiveness of SI (Simmons et al., 2020; Stanich et al., 2018). Figure 1 provides an overview of the CR study design.

Figure 1

Culutrally Relevant study design inclusive of students and faculty

Target Samples

Apparel students were recruited for CR focus groups and CRSI activities as shown in Table 1. They were recruited through a department listserve and in courses during Spring 2023. It is important to note the data is not fully representative of all students since not all students completed the voluntary survey.

Table 1

Pilot Study Student Demographics

Student Engagement	Race/Ethnicity			Class standing*				Gender		1st Gen	Transfer	Working Part Time
	Hispanic	Asian	Caucasian	Fr	So	J	Se	F	M	Yes	Yes	Yes
Focus Groups	4	2	1	2	0	4	1	6	1	3	2	2
Supplemental Instruction	3	1	0	0	1	1	2	3	1	3	3	2
TOTAL	7	3	1	2	1	5	3	9	2	6	5	4

Note. *Fr = Freshman, So = Sophomore, J = Junior, Se = Senior

Apparel faculty participated in the CR workshop as shown in Table 2. An email was shared through the department listserve with reminders. A financial incentive was provided to faculty who participated in the workshop.

Table 2

Faculty Demographics

Faculty Engagement	Race/ Ethnicity				Position		Gender	
	Hispanic	Asian	Caucasian	Mixed	Tenured/ Tenure Track	Lecturer	F	M
Workshop	2	6	1	1	4	6	8	2

Results & Discussion

Focus Groups

Participants

A total of 7 students participated in the focus groups. All were Apparel majors: five with concentrations in Retail and two in Design/Production. Students who entered as freshmen expected to graduate in a 4-year timeline, and transfer students expected to graduate in a 2-to-3-year timeline.

CR Factors. There were several CR factors that influenced students to major in Apparel. This includes the availability of the Apparel major, and influence of family, friends, and/or high school/community college teachers. Participants expressed their interest in fashion and seeking a university that can meet their distinct interests. Some shared experiences and concerns with fashion and art schools, which would not provide a traditional university experience, concerns with expenses, and desire to be close to home. Students are holding themselves to a higher standard with intentional efforts to seek a 4-year university with a "learn by doing" approach that includes hands-on activities, not only lectures. Additionally, students are held to a high standard by their family. First generation students expressed being role models for siblings and feeling strong familial support, which can add pressure. These preliminary findings align with previous research regarding factors that influence minority student enrollment, including students' familial influence, desire to attend college close to home, socio-economic status, and recommendations from teachers (Cuellar, 2019). It further aligns with previous Apparel student research indicating familial and peer influence (Callahan, 1993; Hodges & Karpova, 2009).

Support for Student Success. Participants expressed several aspects that impacted their sense of achievement and excellence. Student-teacher relationships impacted their sense of success, especially based on whether they felt comfortable asking questions. Students appreciated a welcoming classroom environment, feeling like the faculty wanted them to learn, and faculty's willingness to answer questions. They appreciated learning about faculty's field of expertise, including professional experiences for motivation. This aligns with students' needs to feel that they can be "open and transparent" with faculty to support their success (Edens & Kiresich, 2022). Other support included being in-person for classes and access to campus resources, such as cultural centers, clubs, or dorms.

Having friends in the same department, or from a previous school was helpful for students to share common experiences.

Barriers. Students identified several challenges related to the pandemic, transition, and mental health. Students shared challenges during the pandemic with courses that were hard to engage in a meaningful way due to being online, and lack of a "learn by doing" approach. Nonetheless, students expressed that the pandemic allowed them to take more courses and get good grades since they were at home. When the mode of instruction shifted to in-person, many continued to try to hold themselves to a high standard to get good grades and expressed challenges with the course expectations, short attention span, additional time to commute, and trying to make friends. Some students expressed mental health challenges, such as feeling anxious or depressed, and a need for social support. This aligns with broader research indicating student mental health challenges due to the pandemic and abrupt online transition (Edens & Kiresich, 2022).

Recommendations. Students provided several recommendations for faculty to improve the classroom and overall experience. They expressed interest in engaged and interactive lecture sessions for active learning. This can contribute towards building a stronger sense of community beyond regular group work in classes. New students felt they needed more guidance with the resources available, including finding a "safe space." They also expressed desires for improved communication between students and faculty, flexibility, a consistently welcoming environment, and additional resources (e.g., faculty time, tutoring).

Faculty Professional Development Workshop

Survey Responses. Eighteen Apparel faculty participated in the workshop, including 15 tenured/tenure-track faculty and adjunct faculty, and three faculty facilitators. A total of ten faculty completed the post-workshop survey, including four tenured/tenure-track faculty and six adjunct faculty.

Six participants had more than five years of teaching experience, and four had less than five years experience. Seven faculty previously participated in training to create a psychologically safe class environment; four also participated in equitable and inclusive teaching, and/or anti-racist teaching trainings.

Cultural Relevance. Based on the CR faculty workshop, the most relevant factors that affirm students' sense of identity and achievement included paying "attention to a student's culture" (n=7), "considering multiple perspectives" (n=6), and "attention to student's unique identity" (n=5). Nine faculty believe that "recognizing students' distinct needs" is relevant to affirming their equity and excellence, and five agreed it is also aligned with "holding students to high standards." All faculty were in consensus that the most relevant factors that affirm student-teacher relationships is "creating a welcoming classroom atmosphere for a strong community of learners," followed by "interaction," "being caring," and "maintaining a connection." This coincides with the focus group finding that students seek a welcoming classroom environment and interaction with faculty.

Implementation. Seven faculty implemented CR strategies suggested during the Spring 2023 workshop. The workshop prompted faculty to share additional resources to support students' success. Examples include creating a new resource in their Learning Management System with resources focused on diversity, first generation, cultural groups on campus, and/or basic college skills. They also encouraged students to attend the CRSI sessions. Faculty shared their lived experiences based on the workshop and/or connected it to the course content to encourage student dialogue and rapport. A faculty also aimed to address students' distinct needs by providing customized experiences based on student group interests, observations of their learning styles, and abilities. This conveys a variety of approaches based on faculty preferences.

Perceptions of Student Receptiveness & Faculty Needs. Faculty expressed positive responses from students after integrating CR ideas. This includes students gaining new knowledge, feeling like an inclusive environment was created with faculty noticing more engagement, and/or appreciation. Representative comments include:

- Many students expressed that they did not know where to find the resources for diversity, or students success opportunities until presented resources for diversity in the class.

- Students felt more confident as they shared examples they had personally witnessed within tourist gift culture.

However, faculty also reported several challenges in implementing CR approaches to assist students, suggesting the need for additional support for faculty to help students. For example, faculty indicated the additional time and effort to provide more catered support for students. Representative comments include:

- Students appreciated my feedback, but again it was time-consuming to write customized feedback even for each team.

- Also need more one-on-one help with our under represented students. I think a student aid/assistant/tutoring for [technical] skills.

Additionally, lack of student interest, motivation, and attendance were identified challenges during the semester, which may have impacted faculty's experiences or lack of implementation.

This suggests varied, nuanced experiences among faculty who implemented and did not implement CR approaches. With the equity gaps among URM and Non-URM identified as the issue being addressed with several parts of the project (focus groups, faculty workshop, supplemental instruction), there was no specific approach that was identified as the solution. This was mimicked with the varied faculty approaches. Although not all faculty were able to implement CR approaches, the

workshop aimed to direct faculty attention to equity gap issues among Apparel students, the project's inclusive approach with students to emphasize their significant, unique roles. Efforts to engage Apparel faculty to address equity gaps continued based on this initial experience (Trejo et al., 2024, 2025).

The CR Faculty Professional Development workshop provided an opportunity to re-set and re envision teaching philosophies to engage students towards success in lieu of the uncertainties induced by the pandemic and post-pandemic recovery (Ladson-Billings, 2021c). The "hard re-set" involves questioning the status quo to better understand cultural values that may impact persistence of inequities (Ladson-Billings, 2021b), as well as considering current cultural practices (e.g., learning styles, role of technology). Faculty willingness to learn about the student experiences post-pandemic is an initial step and CR stimulates faculty to "engage and interrogate their own worldviews and develop the facility to move from the center to the margins" as a de-centralized approach to better serve minoritized students (p. 77; hooks, 2015). Closing equity gaps is an ongoing effort in HSI's (Garcia, 2023; White et al., 2021), and these findings convey early efforts to engage with Apparel faculty and students to address this complex challenge.

Culturally Relevant Supplemental Instruction Sessions

Participants. Sixty-five students participated in seven CRSI sessions. Courses for which they participated conveyed moderate to significant equity gaps among URM and Non-URM students (California State University, 2023). Courses had equity gaps ranging from 0.15 to 0.7 between URM and Non-URM students during the academic year 2021-2022. The average participation rate of students who signed up and successfully participated was 61%. With in-person and hybrid modes, online participation via zoom yielded the highest participation rates. The session with highest participation was "Thinking about the Future: Career Development." A total of four students completed the SI post-survey.

Cultural Relevance in Courses. Students identified key culturally relevant elements that helped affirm their sense of equity and excellence in the course. All four students agreed that "considering multiple perspectives" was affirmed. Three students also agreed that the following factors were affirmed: "attention to [their] unique identify," "attention to [their] culture," "affirming diversity," and "validating [their] home and community cultures."

Regarding the role of faculty, all four students agreed that "faculty [hold them] to high standards" and three agreed that "faculty [recognize their] distinct needs." Additionally, all students identified "faculty being caring" as being critical to affirm a student-teacher relationship, followed by "faculty consistently interacting" and "faculty creating a welcoming classroom atmosphere for a strong 'community of learners.'" Although the sample size is limited, this suggests agreement with CR elements implemented by the faculty in the courses. These practices align with previous approaches, which provide academic validation to students and support their learning (Rendon, 1994).

Connected with ideals of Cultural Relevance, especially equity and excellence, further survey questions identified students' sense of belonging, identity safety, growth mindset, social belonging and connectedness, as well as trust and fairness. Students expressed agreement that the courses affirmed these factors as shown in Table 3, which also conveys the average responses. The concept of "identity safety" that involves a sense of community, mutual support among peers, and affirming students' identity can be explored further as it received the lowest level of agreement, near neutrality (SEP, 2021). This also relates to concepts of "social connectedness," "belonging certainty" and "social belonging" that students expressed agreement, but to a lower extent compared to strong agreement towards the "growth mindset," "self-efficacy," "trust and fairness." A previous study at an HSI indicated that students' experiences and perceptions with diversity can positively influence sense of belonging (Maestas et al., 2007), which can support retention efforts.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics from CRSI Survey Course Responses

CRSI Survey Scale Items	Mean and Standard Deviation (n=4)
Belonging Certainty*	4.62 ± 0.51
Identity Safety*	4.12 ± 1.24
Institutional Growth Mindset*	5 ± 0
Self-Efficacy*	5 ± 0
Social Belonging*	4.75 ± 0.44
Social Connectedness*	4.35 ± 0.90
Trust and Fairness*	5 ± 0
Who is SI for?**	3.35 ± 1.75
SI Self-Efficacy**	4.6 ± 0.49
SI Effectiveness**	4.55 ± 0.51

Note. Likert Scale (Strongly Disagree = 1 to Strongly Agree = 5)
*Adapted from (SEP, 2021)
**Adapted from (Simmons et al., 2020; Stanich et al., 2018)

Students' Perceptions. The survey results indicated that most students strongly agreed CRSI sessions were helpful on the course level, specifically in understanding the course materials and gaining resources needed to succeed in the course. Additionally, students strongly agreed that SI sessions helped them on a personal level, such as to become more confident in courses, be motivated to do well in class, and meet other students. All students also strongly agreed to attend future CRSI sessions, and recommend the CRSI sessions to other students. Students' encouragement for others to attend CRSI session is a practice previously identified; a common barrier for lack of student participation in SI is their limited availability (Simmons et al., 2020).

Further CRSI directly related to course content with study groups can be an area for future development to aid students. Tailoring CRSI to students at various stages of their education, including freshmen and transfer students will be essential to address the needs of diverse students. Although the timeline of this study limited the full assessment of whether equity gaps were closed, CRSI has shown to

be effective in reducing equity gaps among URM students in STEM (Stanich et al., 2018) and can be further explored with Apparel students.

Conclusions & Future Research

This study conveys the feasibility of integrating Culturally Relevant approaches in Apparel practice-based and research approaches to intentionally support underrepresented student success and address equity gaps. This study was influenced by Garcia's (2019) multidimensional framing of "servingness" at HSI's and cultural relevance (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2021a). This study focused primarily on student and faculty experiences and outcomes with Culturally Relevant approaches. We aimed to learn more about apparel students' experiences with focus groups, and shared research findings in a faculty workshop along with CR resources. The focus group data informed research assistant students' development of CR supplemental instruction. This pilot effort aimed to reach as many students in the Apparel department as possible with several opportunities to engage.

Future efforts can include being more intentional about engaging students who are minorized in the major, including male, Black, and Indigenous students. This can be supported in collaboration with cultural centers on campus (e.g., Black Resource Center, Native American Student Center, etc.). Engaging with university wide student successs initiatives to address equity gaps and improve graduation rates can also be helpful, especially with recent efforts to support Black student success (CSU, 2024).

This study conveys initial efforts that can be further expanded to build capacity and longevity of "servingness" approaches. This effort expanded awareness of where we are as a department and how much more work is necessary to contribute to broader institutional efforts to implement "servingness" for minoritized students. Consistent, longitudinal Culturally Relevant approaches can help determine

whether these efforts helped meet Apparel student graduation goals and reduce equity gaps. Garcia (2018) proposes "structures of serving" that are beyond traditional tracking of academic outcomes to determine impact; it can include additional attention to qualitative approaches, such as case studies or content analysis, which aims to build capacity towards HSI servingingess. A version of this study was presented at a conference in the apparel field (Trejo et al., 2024). The presentation was scheduled in sessions with Apparel faculty and students from different Minority Serving Institutions, which suggests opportunities to share ideas and best practices in the field.

A major limitation to the study is the lack of generalizability based on the unique context of the study in the specific Apparel major and in an HSI where there is no previously published research. There are several 4-year and 2-year HSI's in proximity to the location of the study with similar student populations and apparel departments, which suggests future opportunities. HSI's are highly heterogenous and a typology of HSI's have been proposed to position them in the broader context of U.S. higher education institutions to be able to compare for broader generalizability in the future (A.-M. Núñez et al., 2016). Key concepts of the politicization of being an HSI and cultural relevance were out of the scope of the current study; however, the transformation of HSI's to truly serve minoritized students will rely on a deep understanding of social, cultural, economic, environmental, and political factors that limit equity and justice in order to identify solutions (Garcia, 2023). Implementing social justice pedagogy in apparel education can help further meet these goals to address needs identified by scholars (Karpova et al., 2015; Matthews & Reddy-Best, 2023; Reed et al., 2023).

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Declaration of Interests

There are no potential conflict of interests to report.

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