



ACTIVISM TRENDS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: SNAPSHOT FROM 2018 AND 2021

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Throughout the history of higher education, students have engaged in activism, demanding that institutions become more and more equitable. This study shares data collected across Big10 institutions through the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership regarding trends in activism involvement, activism behaviors, and social issues around which those behaviors were focused. Findings indicate that 1) overall, activism-related behaviors increased, and 2) issues about social identities and policies increased. By better understanding student activism, student affairs educators can adapt, change, and grow with student needs, especially working with and for student activists.

Throughout the history of higher education, students have engaged in activism, demanding institutions to change, adapt, and become more equitable. Student activism is “efforts to create change on or off-campus related to a broad range of social, political, and economic issues, often using techniques outside institutional channels (Kezar, 2010, p. 451). The literature also describes activism as mobilizing groups, coalition building, and actions that lead to social change (Hamrick, 1998; Linder et al., 2020; Mendes & Chang, 2019). This paper aims to share activism involvement trends, activism behaviors, and issues in which student activists engage. By connecting the historical importance and context in understanding activism, this paper utilizes Linder’s (2019) Power-Conscious Framework. By sharing these data, student affairs educators can adapt, change, and grow with the student needs, especially working with and for student activists.

CONTEXT: 2018 AND 2021

In the years leading up to 2018, the political context in the U.S. was hostile toward minoritized people. It highlighted the importance of fighting for fundamental human rights under the Trump Administration (Columbia Law School-Human Rights Institute, 2019). Several events during 2018 further highlighted the divisive politics, including the polarized responses to the Parkland Shooting, the migrant family separation policy enactment, and voter suppression in Georgia during midterm elections (Montanaro, 2018). Within the broader context, national and campus-based activism was rising (Cudé, 2021). Regarding racial justice issues, the continued #BlackLivesMatter activism and organizing in response to the #MuslimBan were visibly on the rise (Washington Post, 2018). In 2018, the national increase around the #MeToo movement and campus-based activism challenged the dominant narratives about sexual assault (e.g., boys will be boys or victim-blaming) and raised awareness of the mishandling of sexual violence cases (Clark & Pino, 2016; Linder, Myers, Riggle, & Lacy, 2016; Rhoads, 2016). Additionally, the years leading up to 2018 were the deadliest for the transgender community, with most victims being people of color (Christensen, 2019; HRC, 2018). After decades of environmental activism, scientists ringing alarms around the climate crisis, and more recent protests against the Dakota Access Pipeline at Standing Rock, youth organizing around climate change caught global attention with school strikes becoming more prominent (Crouch, 2018; Hersher, 2017; Marris, 2019).

Since 2018, many social issues have continued to draw student engagement and activism nationally. In 2019, 46% of Americans said climate change was a critical problem, while 40% and 26% perceived racism and sexism

as critical issues (Dimock & Gramlich, 2021). The political division in the U.S. continued to peak during the 2020 Presidential Elections (Dimock & Wike, 2020). Although students of color voting rates remain lower than their white counterparts, student voting reached a record high in 2020 (Carrasco, 2021). By the Spring of 2021, college students and our larger society had experienced almost a year of a global COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to the pandemic amplifying the college student mental health challenges, the continued racial injustices Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) have been facing in the U.S. for centuries were difficult to ignore (Cudé, 2021; Hoyt et al., 2021). George Floyd's videotaped killing sparked national and international protests and increased support for the #BlackLivesMatter among two-thirds of adults in the U.S. (Dimock & Gramlich, 2021). Environmental activism visibility increased, including Greta Thunberg's address at the U.N. Climate Action Summit in 2019. This visibility continued with the perceivable decrease in fossil fuel rates connected to the quarantines during the COVID-19 pandemic (Smith, Tarui, & Yamagata, 2021). Misinformation about the COVID-19 pandemic fueled hate crimes targeting Asian Americans, which rose 76% in 2020 (Ong, 2021; Barr, 2021). Additionally, hate crimes against transgender people reached another peak, with 350 transgender people murdered in 2020 (HRC, 2020).

HISTORY AND CURRENT STATUS OF ACTIVISM IN U.S. HIGHER EDUCATION

Since the start of colonial colleges, white supremacist ideology, colonization, genocide of Indigenous populations, and chattel slavery were directly connected to creating America's higher education (Clair & Denis, 2015; paperson, 2017). The economic benefits slavery produced encouraged the first colonial colleges to maintain slavery, and today's higher education institutions still stand on Indigenous lands (Mustaffa, 2017; paperson, 2017; Wilder, 2013). Since higher education began, students have expressed dissent on college campuses regarding the issues affecting them at their institutions, communities, and nationally (Broadhurst, 2014). In the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, students advocated against restrictive policies, the classical curriculum, and harsh disciplinary actions (Burton, 2007; Moore, 1976; Novack, 1977). In the 20th century, student activists engaged in many social issues that affected the national population (Broadhurst, 2014). Issues that arose were class mobility challenges, war protests, and a greater interest in socialism and communism (Broadhurst, 2014). In the post-war era, higher education saw an enrollment increase. After this, the Civil Rights movement gained momentum. Correspondingly, student activists participated in sit-ins, voter registrations, and freedom rides to end segregation and promote equal rights (Bartley, 1995; Broadhurst, 2014; Lawson, 1991).

One of the most diverse generations yet, Generation Z (Gen Z), born in 1995 or later, is incredibly savvy with technology and vocal about world issues (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). Those in Gen Z are also described as "digital natives" (Kubaryk, 2020, para. 5). Not surprisingly, campus activism in the 21st century has shifted to incorporate emerging technologies. While traditional tactics such as sit-ins, marches, boycotts, and protests are still utilized, student activists are now expanding their strategies to include information and communication technologies (ICT) such as social media (Biddix, 2010; Kezar, 2010). For example, Bryne et al. (2021) found that students who were already organizing used social media to broaden their campus movement as a form of counter-storytelling and to avoid violent interactions.

Some social issues student activists in the 21st century advocate for mirror issues that have existed since colonial colleges began, especially hostile climates toward underrepresented students (Broadhurst, 2014). Broadhurst (2014) details the similarities between these issues. For example, in 2013, the Israeli occupation of the West Bank led student activists at the University of California, Berkley, to challenge their institution to divest business from Israel. This movement at Berkley is similar to the 1980s divestment movements from South Africa during apartheid (Broadhurst, 2014; Hallward & Shaver, 2012). Furthermore, with over 500 activism data points, the Education Advisory Board reported that between 2015-2020, the largest motivation for participation in activism was racial justice (55%), with political events/external speakers (19%), and the COVID-19 institutional response well behind (7%; Cudé, 2020).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Our present society, with oppressive policies, an increasing need for climate action, violence against those with marginalized identities, and continued efforts to address these national cultural aspects warrants an increased understanding of how college students are engaged in actions and behaviors to influence change. This study employs Linder's Power-Conscious Framework (2019) to understand better how student activism, societal oppression, and our role as college educators may intersect to promote change and develop our student leaders.

Power-Conscious Framework (PCF) requires addressing both the symptoms and causes of oppression (Linder, 2019). The framework makes three key assumptions: "(1) power is omnipresent, (2) power and identity are inextricably linked, and (3) identity is socially constructed" (Linder, 2018, p. 21). Six tenets make up Linder's (2019) power-conscious framework. This model requires one to: "(1) engage in critical consciousness and self-awareness; (2) consider history and context when examining issues of oppression; (3) change behaviors based on reflection and awareness; (4) name and call attention to dominant group members' investment in and benefit from systems of domination and divest from privilege; (5) name and interrogate the role of power in individual interactions, policy development, and implementation of practice; and (6) work in solidarity to address oppression" (Linder, 2018, p. 25). While all tenets were not enacted in this paper, the authors utilized both assumptions and tenets to create a lens to understand the findings. Understanding student activist behaviors is facilitated through this framework, the national context's impact, and how educators can engage with student activists. Linder (2019) recommends using a power-conscious framework for engaging with student activists.

DATA & METHODS

Data Source & Participants

Data for this study were collected through the 2018 and 2021 Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (MSL) from the following "Big Ten" institutions: Indiana University, Northwestern University, Purdue University, Rutgers University, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, University of Maryland, University of Minnesota, University of Michigan (2018 only), and University of Wisconsin (2021 only). Most, but not all, universities included in the study are the public flagship institutions in their respective state and have similarly large student body sizes. The MSL primarily measures undergraduates' socially responsible leadership development (Dugan, 2015). The Big Ten institutions participated as a Coalition, providing the opportunity to identify topics of interest around which custom items were developed, including the activism items analyzed here, to provide more context around the broader leadership items. Each institution drew a random sample of 4,000 undergraduate students, to which the MSL instrument was administered online. In 2018, 5,141 students responded to the activism-related items across all Big Ten institutions. In 2021, 4,637 students responded to these items. Sample demographics are provided in Table 1. For the present study, the research team was interested in respondents' activism-related behaviors and associated topical areas of interest by racial/ethnic, gender, and sexual orientations.

Table 1. *Sample Demographics*

		2018		2021	
		N	%	N	%
Age					
	18	548	11%	706	15%
	19	1170	23%	1148	25%
	20	1187	23%	1095	24%
	21	1216	24%	985	21%
	22	600	12%	444	10%
	23+	402	8%	228	5%

Table continues on the next page

		2018		2021	
		N	%	N	%
Gender					
	Man	1969	39%	1688	37%
	Woman	3059	60%	2781	61%
	Non-Binary	53	1%	93	2%
Sexual Orientation					
	Heterosexual	4065	80%	3349	73%
	LGBQ+	998	20%	1179	26%
	Preferred Response Not Listed	44	1%	37	1%
Racial Group Membership					
	White/Caucasian	2959	58%	2672	58%
	Middle Eastern/Northern African	63	1%	36	1%
	African American/Black	239	5%	157	3%
	American Indian/Alaska Native	4	0%	1	0%
	Asian American	845	17%	816	18%
	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	3	0%	3	0%
	Latino/Hispanic	258	5%	180	4%
	Multiracial	515	10%	525	11%
	Race Not Listed	230	4%	203	4%

Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Study Purpose

To explore changing patterns in student activism, the authors devised three research questions through which the authors examined student responses. The questions center on two related topics: 1) reported engagement in activism behaviors and 2) the social issues on which those activism behaviors were focused. The specific research questions guiding this study are:

1. How did the overall rate of student involvement in at least one activism behavior change from 2018 to 2021?
2. Did the types of activism-related behaviors in which respondents indicated they engaged change between 2018 and 2021?
3. Did the issues or social movements change from 2018 to 2021 for students who reported engaging in activism-related behaviors?

Measures & Data Analysis

Two survey items were used as the variables of interest in this investigation. The first item asked students to indicate which “activism-related activities” they had participated in in the past year; respondents could check all that apply. Responses were recoded into a new variable to indicate if a student had participated in any activism-related behaviors in the previous year. The second item was a follow-up question. For the different behaviors respondents endorsed in the previous question, they were asked to indicate the issues or social movements those issues addressed; respondents were again allowed to select all that apply. To answer each research question, the authors conducted chi-square goodness-of-fit tests to determine if there were statistically significant changes from 2018 to 2021.

Limitations

Although the questions included in the present study were the same in both administrations, some response option wording changed slightly between the two administrations. For example, in 2018, one response option

to the question regarding what issues or social movements respondents were involved in was “education access,” while in 2021, this response option was changed to “education access and reform (e.g., higher education).” These wording changes may have affected how students responded to these items differently between the years, more so than a change in issue interest or behavior preference. A complete listing of language and wording changes is noted in Table 2.

Table 2. *Language Differences in Administrations*

	2018	2021
Activism Related Behaviors		
	Contacting elected officials (e.g., emails, phone calls)	Contacting elected officials (e.g., emails, texting, phone calls)
	Organizing	Organizing/Canvassing (e.g., door knocking, assisting with Census efforts)
	Demonstrations/Marching	Demonstrations/Marching/Protesting
	Voting	Exercising your right to vote
Issues/Social Movements		
	Black Lives Matter	Not included (for the present analyses, the respondents selecting this response option in 2018 were merged with those who selected “racial issues/racial justice,” which was asked in both years)
	Education Access	Education access and reform (e.g., higher education)
	Immigration	Immigration Reform

In addition to these wording changes, the 2021 administration included additional activist behaviors for respondents to consider (e.g., helping others register to vote) and additional issues and social movements (e.g., health care reform). The present study did not include these new response options; however, their presence on the instrument may have influenced how students responded.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: Rate of Involvement

The authors were primarily interested in the students’ broad behaviors and how these may have changed over time; thus, our first research question of interest was: How did the overall rate of student involvement in at least one activism behavior change from 2018 to 2021? The activism behaviors included as options were: boycotts, contacting elected officials, organizing demonstrations, petitions, and voting. Our analysis determined there was a significant difference in the number of students engaging in at least one activism-related behavior in 2021 (71%) as compared to 2018 (61%), $\chi^2(1, n = 4637) = 179.3, p < 0.0001$.

Research Question 2: Types of Activism-Related Behaviors

Our second research question investigated whether the types of activism-related behaviors in which respondents indicated they engaged changed from 2018 to 2021. Our second research question was: Did the types of activism-related behaviors in which respondents indicated they engaged change between 2018 and 2021? Activism-related behaviors were essential to observe as they could signify the format in which activists engage and the issues in which they are involved. Results are presented in Table 3. Our analysis found that for most activism-related behaviors, there was a significant difference in the proportion of students who reported engaging in each behavior. Specifically, there was a significant difference (increase) in the proportion of students reporting they engaged in (a) boycotts in 2021 (9%) as compared to the 6% observed in 2018, $\chi^2(1, n = 4637) = 81.01, p < 0.0001$, (b) contacting their elected officials in 2021 (23%) as compared to the 19% observed in 2018, $\chi^2(1,$

$n = 4637$) = 54.35, $p < 0.0001$, (c) protests, marches, and demonstrations in 2021 (24%) as compared to the 17% observed in 2018, $\chi^2(1, n = 4637) = 171.23$, $p < 0.0001$, and (d) voting in 2021 (61%) as compared to the 44% observed in 2018, $\chi^2(1, n = 4637) = 569.36$, $p < 0.0001$. There was also a significant decrease in the proportion of respondents indicating that they engaged in organizing-type behaviors in 2021 (6%) as compared to the 15% observed in 2018, $\chi^2(1, n = 4637) = 335.54$, $p < 0.0001$.

Table 3. Activism Engagement

	2018		2021	
	N	%	N	%
Engaged in at least one Activism Behavior***				
Yes	3158	61%	3291	71%
No	1983	39%	1346	29%
During the past academic year, in which of the following activism-related behaviors have you participated? (those selecting "Yes")				
Boycotts***	303	6%	418	9%
Contacting elected officials (e.g., emails, texting, phone calls)***	982	19%	1083	23%
Organizing**	783	15%	257	6%
Demonstrations/Marching***	876	17%	1123	24%
Signing Petitions***	1609	31%	2261	49%
Exercising your right to vote***	2256	44%	2842	61%
Other	47	1%	52	1%
Which of the following issues or social movements did those efforts address?				
Education***	791	25%	964	29%
Environmental Causes***	988	31%	1359	41%
Housing Reform**	235	7%	325	10%
Immigration Reform***	914	29%	732	22%
Labor Laws*	236	7%	285	9%
LGBQ Issues***	721	23%	1051	32%
Racial Issues/Racial Injustice***	1127	36%	2259	69%
Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Rights***	434	14%	747	23%
Voting Rights***	648	21%	1419	43%
Women's Rights	1150	36%	1209	37%

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

Research Question 3: Social Issues in Which Activists Engaged

Finally, the last research question in this investigation concerns the issues and social movements with which these activism-related behaviors corresponded and whether the primary topics of interest changed from 2018 to 2021. Our third research question was: Did the issues or social movements change from 2018 to 2021 for students who reported engaging in activism-related behaviors? The analysis identified differences between the two-time points in the percentage of respondents indicating they engaged in activism behaviors around social identity issues. Analysis showed a significant increase in the proportion of students reporting they engaged in activism-related behaviors regarding (a) Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Queer (LGBQ) issues in 2021 (32%) as compared to the 23% observed in 2018, $\chi^2(1, n = 3291) = 156.04$, $p < 0.0001$, (b) racial injustice in 2021 (69%) as compared to the 36% observed in 2018, $\chi^2(1, n = 3291) = 1555.76$, $p < 0.0001$, and (c) transgender and gender non-conforming issues in 2021 (23%) as compared to the 14% observed in 2018, $\chi^2(1, n = 3291) = 225.38$, $p < 0.0001$. Results are presented in Table 3.

Our analysis also found differences within policy-related issues, although the pattern is inconsistent. First, there was a significant increase in the proportion of students reporting they engaged in activism-related behaviors regarding (a) education in 2021 (29%) as compared to the 25% observed in 2018, $\chi^2(1, n = 3291) = 32.33, p < 0.0001$, (b) environment in 2021 (41%) as compared to the 31% observed in 2018, $\chi^2(1, n = 3291) = 152.88, p < 0.0001$, (c) housing reform in 2021 (10%) as compared to the 7% observed in 2018, $\chi^2(1, n = 3291) = 29.43, p < 0.0001$, (d) labor laws in 2021 (9%) as compared to the 7% observed in 2018, $\chi^2(1, n = 3291) = 6.383, p = 0.012$, and (e) voting rights in 2021 (43%) as compared to the 21% observed in 2018, $\chi^2(1, n = 3291) = 1033.00, p < 0.0001$. Second, there was a significant decrease in the proportion of students reporting they engaged in activism-related behaviors regarding immigration in 2021 (22%) as compared to the 29% observed in 2018, $\chi^2(1, n = 3291) = 70.99, p < 0.0001$. Finally, there was not a significant difference in the proportion of students reporting they engaged in activism-related behaviors around women's rights in 2021 (37%) as compared to the 36% observed in 2018, $\chi^2(1, n = 3291) = 0.16, p = 0.688$.

IMPLICATIONS FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS PRACTICE & CONCLUSION

Reflecting on these findings produced several recommendations for staff engaged in programming efforts. These recommendations span how one might consider their behavior and learning, who is brought to the table for collaboration, how programs are provided to students and the role of technology, and the intentionality with which programming is provided for student activists focusing on their learning and development.

Recommendation #1: Stay Informed

When considering the statistically significant increase in activism engagement and related social issues, there appears to be a connection to a current national context, which is vital to understand when planning engagement opportunities with and for students. In alignment with Linder's (2019) PCF, this implication asserts the historical and contextual importance when examining the changes in activism engagement and the necessity of being self-aware. For example, with knowledge about the xenophobic changes to national immigration policy by the Trump administration and the perceptions that the Biden administration has more inclusive policies, the decrease in focus on immigration rights activism from 2018 to 2021 is understood. As such, it is recommended that student affairs educators stay informed and up to date on current events. Beyond individually being informed by subscribing to newspapers and periodicals, educators can host discussion groups and professional development sessions that feature books, articles, or resources focused on current events and contested issues. While these conversations could be challenging for some practitioners, staff must first be familiar with these issues and manage difficult conversations to have meaningful conversations with student activists.

Recommendation #2: Infuse Social Justice into Campus Programming through Partnerships

As Generation Z enters higher education, the profession needs to investigate how to best support these students; collaboration with others is critical in this work. How can student affairs educators provide programs and engagement opportunities connected to students' social identities and interest in activism? In alignment with Linder's (2019) PCF, these efforts must be connected to and informed by awareness regarding how the student experience is influenced by power, privilege, and oppression. This first requires concerted efforts to understand the demographics and characteristics of Generation Z, the traditionally aged students currently on college campuses. Based on the Generation Z literature and this study, it is evident current students are involved in advocating for social issues and asking critical questions (Kubaryk, 2020; Rue, 2018; Seemiller & Grace, 2016).

Student affairs educators should embrace this generation and their social issue involvement, thus helping them make a difference on campus and in the world. To do so, staff should center social justice and issues that student activists care about into campus programming, allowing institutions to live out existing diversity statements and foster a sense of belonging among the most marginalized communities. For example, during Spring 2022 at the University of Maryland, College Park (UMD), the Multicultural Involvement and Community Advocacy (MICA) office collaborated with student activists to create the "Say Gay Parade" program in response to state legislatures' increase in passing policies focused on the erasure of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and

Queer (LGBTQ+) identities from K-12 educational settings. In collaboration with LGBTQ+ students, a traditional paint-and-sip style event was hosted. Rather than simply creating art, this common program type used for community building and well-being added a purposeful layer: to make protest posters for the upcoming parade. Attendees could glean the traditional art program outcomes while feeling seen and having their broader societal concerns validated by those organizing the event. How could other existing programs be adapted to appeal to and support activist students? Offering leadership development training applicable to student activists may allow students to directly apply their learning and press for deeper understanding, much like a semester-long community service series that offers training and reflection around students' service. Additional programming ideas may be to host speakers, listening sessions, activist-centered wellness programs, or debrief sessions on current events, partnering with campus counseling and health centers with expertise in processing trauma and attending to student activists' mental health.

It is crucial to note that identity and politics are thoroughly embedded in student affairs work, whether hosting controversial speakers or over-policing certain student events (e.g., cultural organizations or Black and Latinx-/a/o fraternity and sorority events). Student affairs professionals are urged to pay attention to what events are happening on campus, what voices are missing from programming efforts, and observe what events campus police or security chooses to monitor. Consider starting the process to change it by asking hard questions! When working alongside student activists, listening to their concerns, and acting in a manner that aligns with social justice, big problems like re-examining campus policies become more manageable.

Recommendation #3: Embrace Technology

By recognizing Gen Z as “digital natives,” contemporary forms of activism expand to include information and communication technologies (ICTs) (Kubaryk, 2020, para. 5), and incorporating these forms of activism into our understanding of student engagement is needed. ICTs such as computers, cell phones, text messaging, and social media sites have allowed activists to connect, garner support, even worldwide solidarity, and organize like no other time in history (Biddix, 2010). The data explored in this study indicate a decrease in organizing efforts. The decrease in organizing efforts could result from the item wording, suggesting in-person activities, which may have been few due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Still, using and monitoring activity on ICTs moving forward is an important action. For example, in May 2017, 2nd Lt. Richard Collins III, a Bowie State University student, was murdered at a bus stop at the University of Maryland, College Park. This tragic murder fueled outrage on Twitter, with BIPOC students taking over an official athletics hashtag, #FearTheTurtle, to verbally express their experiences with racism and anti-Blackness on campus (Byrne et al., 2021). From this example, it is clear that social media activism may be used to enhance and broaden in-person movements, provide a counter-story, and potentially avoid violent interactions with authorities, such as the #FearTheTurtle campaign (Byrne et al., 2021). Thus, student affairs educators need to expand activism definitions to include ICTs. Working with student activists to strategize how to use ICTs to their advantage should be considered since social media can be a venue for activism, aligning with PCF's (Linder, 2019) call to educate students regarding how to navigate institutional rules.

Beyond ICTs, incorporating technology into programming efforts to make more events accessible through hybrid and asynchronous formats should be considered. Living and working through the COVID-19 pandemic has enhanced our ability to utilize technology; as a field, student affairs should continue to provide opportunities for student development centered on activist engagement that allows students to participate using various engagement methods.

Recommendation #4: Center Student Learning and Development

These opportunities to engage students, whether in person or online, synchronously or asynchronously, will result in student learning, growth, and development. Embracing student learning and intentionally designing activism-related programs to foster specific outcomes, such as socially responsible leadership or effective organizing, are essential to developing critically conscious citizens. Educators engage with students power-consciously by highlighting and supporting learning and development in connection to student activism (Linder, 2019).

The increase in students engaging in at least one activism behavior from 2018 to 2021, along with the historical context of activism in higher education and the current divisive climate within the United States, indicates that student activism is here to stay. As such, student affairs educators should invest in student activist development and view engagement in activism as an essential leadership skill. Investing in activism also requires a shift in how administrators and educators perceive identity-based activism, which should be viewed as positive civic and campus engagement (Linder, Quaye, Stewart, Okello, & Roberts, 2019). With this paradigm shift comes the opportunity to intentionally develop and foster these activism behaviors on college campuses, starting with self-identified student activists and groups.

To accomplish this, partnerships with community organizations and other campus departments with a long history of developing activists, organizers, or leaders should be explored. For example, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU, 2021) does a week-long National Advocacy Institute for high school and college students, encouraging participants to be social justice advocates and learn more about grassroots organizing, policy, and legal advocacy. At the University of Maryland, College Park, the Multicultural Involvement and Community Advocacy Office and the Leadership Community Service-Learning Office have a long-standing collaborative program called Mosaic: Leadership and Identity Retreat. In addition to providing skill-building workshops focused on creating social change, this partnership addressed the perception differences between organizing workshops held by identity-based units compared to leadership units. Imagine a possibility where institution partners with an organization like the ACLU to bring a similar program to their campus.

Understanding demographics and characteristics is a start. Using PCF, student affairs staff should also name and interrogate power in student affairs practice. Rather than coordinating programs *for* students as a field, can the field take a more collaborative approach? Kezar (2010) suggests that when staff and faculty foster deep student collaboration, deepened education, mediation, and mentoring are provided. An example is at Holyoke High School, where members of Pa'lante Restorative Justice (Pa'lante Restorative Justice, 2021) partner with teachers and community members to engage in youth participatory action research (PAR) that address issues facing students of color within their school, such as racism. The Pa'lante Restorative Justice Program provides excellent examples of how to apply PCF by encouraging critical consciousness and self-awareness development and modeling solidarity work with its PAR approach. Several scholars have called for creating partnerships with student activists (Linder et al., 2019; Kezar, 2010), but only a few institutions have taken this call into action within higher education. Consider ways in which student affairs, particularly programming units, can work with and for student activists to make lasting changes on our college campuses.

DISCUSSION

While activism on college and university campuses is not new, how higher education professionals adapt, support, and develop student activists needs to be reimaged. Scholars and practitioners must understand that context, time, and place matter when working with student activists. Higher education and campus activism history in the United States should be considered, and collectively, acknowledgment of the systems of power and privilege that exist and permeate our society needs to be expanded. In addition, with the rise of technology and student activism, higher education needs to address how it responds to critical issues. Much qualitative work has been done on the experiences of student activists, and there is anecdotal evidence regarding how students engage in these behaviors. This study, however, provides a broader, multi-institutional quantitative perspective on activism popularity.

Activists are often viewed and labeled as “trouble-makers” by the media and, sometimes, campus administrators. Given that 71% of the present sample engaged in at least one activism behavior in 2021, this perspective needs a drastic change: activism is a valuable learning and leadership experience for students (Barnhardt & Reyes, 2016; Biddix, 2014; Linder, 2019), and in fact, most students are already engaging in these behaviors. Who is perceived as “trouble-makers” could be related to identity or issue (Linder, 2015; Linder et al., 2020). Linder (2015) stated that students engaged in identity-based activism related to their race or immigration status, for example, are often labeled as trouble-makers by university members instead of activists engaging in issues like labor laws (e.g.,

not closely related to university matters). Future research may investigate activism behavior predictors such as identities, their intersections, and campus experiences or investigate the extent to which engagement in activism is related to other co-curricular outcomes such as socially responsible leadership.

Similarly, for those staff members supporting student activists, student affairs educators may struggle to understand how to support student activists when activism is viewed by institutional leadership as a disruption (Harrison, 2010; Stewart et al., 2022). First, the consideration to partner with other units across the institution bears repeating. The more staff involved in engaging student activists, the more credibility and support these events will have. A partnership can provide more credibility and support for student affairs educators, who are expected to mediate tensions between student activists and upper-level administration (Gaston-Gayles et al., 2005). It also sends a message that multiple stakeholders across campus see this as a need rather than a single office or individual, further increasing the initiative's credibility. Second, share data! As this paper suggests, students are likely engaged in activism whether or not the administration wants them to be. Engaging students through relevant programming and, as such, providing ways in which students can engage on campus around these behaviors and beliefs is prudent. Finally, echoing Linder's (2019) suggestion that as college and university employees, reflection on personal and professional values is needed, the authors suggest determining what actions or inactions by an institution may lead one to make the challenging decision to seek new employment.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, campuses do not function in siloes separate from national and global contexts. All staff must be familiar with this context when working with current and future student activists. Future students and democratic society will benefit when student activists are presented as student leaders, and their development is supported. Student affairs educators must remain familiar with current technology and understand its use as an effective form of activism and facilitate accessibility for student engagement and learning. How the lessons learned are applied will shift with time, and the professional should be prepared to adapt.

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