JCAPS

"IT REALLY EMPOWERED ME": HOW COLLEGE STUDENTS OF COLOR AMPLIFY THEIR COMMUNITY CULTURAL WEALTH AND SOFT SKILL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH ON-CAMPUS STUDENT EMPLOYMENT

Dr. Christopher A. Burnett, Colorado College
Dr. Z. W. Taylor, The University of Southern Mississippi

Sparse research has explored how on-campus student employment may help students of Color develop soft skills to increase their career readiness. Filling this critical gap through Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth framework, this study explored how 12 graduates of Color developed soft skills working an on-campus position. Findings suggest students of Color predominantly developed interpersonal communication and organizational skills that helped them stay enrolled as students and assisted them as current professionals. Implications for research and practice are addressed.

Prospective college students have articulated a wide variety of reasons as to why they chose to enroll in college, many saying they pursued college to have new experiences and build new personal relationships (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Others have desired a deep exploration of a specific academic topic of interest (Astin, 1993). However, for generations, many college students have said they wanted to pursue a postsecondary credential in pursuit of a career (Burnett & Taylor, 2020; Hart Research Associates, 2015; Johnson, 2017; Kaufman & Feldman, 2004). In fact, this may be a shrewd financial decision for enrolling in higher education, as completing a postsecondary credential has been found to be one of the most certain, time-tested, long-term financial investments an individual can make in their lifetime (Carnevale et al., 2011; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). For example, recent reports assert that bachelor's degree holders will earn an average of $2.8M over the course of their working life, compared to only $1.6M for high school diploma holders and $1.2M for those without a high school diploma (Carnevale et al., 2021).

However, people of Color in the United States (U.S.) have been socioeconomically marginalized by many inequitable employment policies and practices that have contributed to a persistent racial wealth gap (Carnevale et al., 2019; Sullivan et al., 2016). Yet, equitable postsecondary access and postgraduate outcomes could partially mitigate the racial wealth gap, especially for Black and Latinx people (Carnevale et al., 2019). Although Asian American college graduates have largely maintained pace with the postgraduate earnings of Whites, Black and Latinx college students and college graduates continue to be marginalized in the workforce (Carnevale et al., 2019). As a result, institutions of higher education have been called upon to be catalyst to help eliminate the racial wealth gap by credentialing and preparing students of Color, especially Black and Latinx students, to be competitive in the 21st century labor market (Carnevale et al., 2021; Hart Research Associates, 2015; Hora, 2016).

For generations, college students have explored a wide variety of campus experiences to bolster their résumé and increase their postgraduate career readiness, including on-campus employment (Burnett & Taylor, 2023; Hora, 2016; McClellan et al., 2018; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Yet, akin to many other on-campus experiences—due to persistent racism and systemic exclusion from social groups—students of Color have also been marginalized

from on-campus student employment (OSE) (Quaye et al., 2014; Riggert et al., 2006; Turner, 1994). As a result, students of Color have not benefited from OSE as White peers have, possibly leading to inequitable postgraduate outcomes, including securing gainful employment upon graduation (Burnett & Taylor, 2020; Hora, 2020).

Yet, rarely has the educational research community engaged with students of Color to explore their experiences with OSE, particularly how students of Color develop soft skills, transferable to their postgraduate profession. Described by Knight and Yorke (2004), soft skills are "…practices needed for the deployment of disciplinary expertise and those generic practices that enable disciplinary expertise to be applied effectively in the employment arena" (p. 88). Attributes associated with soft skills are self-management, the capacity to work productively with others, awareness of internal politics of organizations, the ability to deal with divergent points of view, and the ability to determine what is possible in a given situation (Knight & Yorke, 2004). However, employers have consistently reported that college graduates do not possess adequate soft skills to fill any number of jobs in many professional sectors (Carnevale et al., 2013; Hart Associates, 2015; Wilkie, 2019). Even though soft skills are critical for postgraduate employment (Carnevale et al., 2013; Hart Associates, 2015; Wilkie, 2019), sparse studies have examined how students of Color develop soft skills specifically through OSE (Elliott & Smith, 2022; Wilkie & Jones, 1994; Wood & Williams, 2013).

Filling this critical gap in the literature, this study intentionally engaged with 12 graduates of Color (bachelor's degree holders) who participated in (OSE) during their undergraduate career to explore whether these students developed soft skills, how these soft skills were developed, and how these soft skills translated into the workforce. Here, this study answers a critical research question related to how students of Color can benefit from OSE:

> Upon graduation and successful employment, which soft skills do students of Color report developing as a result of their on-campus student employment as an undergraduate?

By answering this question, practitioners and institutional employers can better understand how students of Color experience their employment, develop skills, and prepare themselves for the labor market. Moreover, these practitioners can better facilitate OSE experiences for students of Color to better integrate students of Color on-campus, potentially increasing their sense of belonging, retention, and postgraduate outcomes. Subsequently, institutions of higher education may be better able to embrace the skills and abilities that students of Color bring to campus (Yosso, 2005) and amplify those skills and abilities through OSE, preparing graduates for the skills that employers demand and helping push against a persistent racial wealth gap in the United States (Carnevale et al., 2019; Sullivan et al., 2016).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is framed by, and attempts to extend, Yosso's (2005) theory of Community Cultural Wealth (CCW), an outline of six forms of capital cultivated by communities of Color that resist a deficit framing of people of Color. The six forms of capital identified are aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistance capital (Yosso, 2005), and these forms of capital are explained by Yosso (2005) as dynamic processes that overlap and interact with each other to develop unique forms of cultural wealth not described or valued in traditional conversations of education, learning, or career readiness.

Aspirational capital, according to Yosso (2005), "refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers" (p. 77). Described further as resilience, aspirational capital in communities of Color is handed down from generation to generation in hopes that the younger generation can break the cycle of poverty or oppression of the older generation to enhance their academic and occupational attainment (Gándara, 1995 as cited by Yosso, 2005). Linguistic capital is described as the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and reflects the idea that students of Color are raised by families and support systems and attend schools from diverse language backgrounds (Yosso, 2005). Familial capital centers on the cultural knowledge handed down from older generations that serves to preserve community history and cultural intuition (Yosso, 2005). It is through a commitment to one's heritage that an individual maintains connections to a community and its resources (Yosso, 2005).

Social capital refers to the networks of people and community resources one can access for, "instrumental and emotional support to navigate through society's institutions" (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). Historically, people of Color have engaged their social networks to acquire education, health care, and employment and reciprocally communities of Color serve as repositories of information and resources gained through these institutions back to their social networks (Yosso, 2005). Navigational capital, according to Yosso (2005), refers to the skills required to navigate social institutions which have not been created without consideration of communities of Color. Systems like higher education, for example, feature a meritocratic structure and pedagogy that are remnants of an exclusive and oppressive White culture, a culture proven to be difficult to access and more difficult within which to thrive and experience success (Yosso, 2005). Finally, Resistance capital is described by Yosso (2005) as a combination of skills and understanding facilitated, "through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality" (p. 80). Stemming from the intergenerational opposition to subordination exhibited by communities of Color, resistance capital undermines the fusillade of societal messaging devaluing communities of Color (Smith et al., 2011; Yosso, 2005).

This study frames students of Color as possessing wealth that they can leverage as college students (Yosso, 2005), yet we also acknowledge that students of Color may amplify their CCW through college experiences that can amplify both their CCW and their soft skills as defined by Knight and Yorke (2004). For instance, a student of Color with linguistic capital may be a native speaker of a non-English language, providing them with a unique communication skill set. However, we theorize that OSE can help a student of Color amplify both their English and non-English speaking skills, empowering these students and preparing them for the professional workforce.

As Yosso (2005) explained, "… there is a contradictory nature of education, wherein schools most often oppress and marginalize, while they maintain the potential to emancipate and empower" (p. 74). From this perspective, the concept of soft skill development can be seen as a mechanism to amplify CCW and both emancipate and empower students of Color. In fact, one student of Color in this study spoke to how the experience of OSE "empowered" them to be a better student, employee, and ultimately, full-time professional.

METHODS

To successfully answer these research questions, we employed a qualitative research design. This section will outline our qualitative design, as well as how we identified and sampled participants, how we gathered and analyzed data, and how we addressed limitations and made delimitations to the work. This study was approved by the authors' Institutional Review Board (IRB), and more information can be provided by the authors upon request.

University of Study, Target Population, and Participant Identification

This study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic (mid-to-late 2021), and subsequently, we conducted purposive and convenience sampling of participants who were all graduates of a single institution of higher education. Central Canyon University (a pseudonym, CCU) is in a predominantly Republican state, typically enrolling 50,000 undergraduate and graduate students annually. CCU employs over 3,000 faculty members and confers over 14,000 degrees annually across 18 colleges. CCU's student body is 55% women and 45% men, with a racial composition of 34.6% White, 24.8% Hispanic, 21.1% Asian, 9.8% international student, 5.3% Black, 2.7% multiracial, 0.1% American Indian or Alaskan Native, 0.1% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and 1.6% unreported race.

When formulating the study, we wanted to sample participants who 1.) once held on-campus student employment (OSE) as an undergraduate for at minimum two long semesters, 2.) had graduated and moved on to a professional position not affiliated with student affairs, and 3.) had held that professional position long enough to allow time for them to reflect on their OSE experience as it related to their current professional position. As a result, CCU was an appropriate sampling site, as we collectively held over 20 years of full-time professional employment experience at CCU and held close, professional relationships with many hiring managers and student supervisors on CCU's campus. Through these connections with managers and supervisors, we asked to be connected with former student employees of Color through a purposive sampling framework. During the pandemic, we connected with these graduates of Color who held full-time professional positions to explore their

views of their former OSE. As a result, 12 college graduates of Color were sampled for this study. Table 1 below outlines the demographics of the participants of this study.

Table 1. *Participant demographics (n=12)*

Participant	Grad Year	Race	Age	Gender	Degree	VPSA Unit	Employment Length	Professional Title
Badari	2018	Indian	23	Woman	Communications	Dean of Students Office	2 years	Sr. Executive Associate
Chris	1993	African American	49	Man	Marketing & Advertising	Housing and Dining	2 years	Senior Art Director
Davante	2018	African American	24	Man	Biology	Housing and Dining	3 years	Healthcare Administrator
Florita	2020	Latina	22	Woman	Human Development and Family Science	Vice President's Office	2 years	Development Associate
Hector	2010	Latino	32	Man	Biomedical Engineering	Recreational Sports	4 years	Marketing Manager
Karlos	2019	Latino	23	Man	Economics	Vice President's Office	2 years	Technology Sales
Monique	2017	African American	25	Woman	Philosophy	Dean of Students Office	1 year	Consulting Analyst
Nina	2018	Latina	24	Woman	Marketing & Advertising	Recreational Sports	4 years	Jr. Art Director
Oscar	2016	Latino	26	Man	History	Recreational Sports	5 years	Software Developer
Reena	2019	Asian	24	Woman	Biology	Recreational Sports	3 years	Medical Student
Tamara	2019	Latina/ White	24	Woman	Psychology	Recreational Sports	2 years	Project Manager
Vida	2017	Latina	25	Woman	Human Development and Family Science	Recreational Sports	4 years	Registered Nurse
Wilson	2019	African American	23	Man	Finance	Recreational Sports	2 years	Financial Analyst

Data Collection

We connected with graduates of Color through email to schedule one-on-one interviews. All interviews were recorded (audio) and transcribed for detailed analysis. All interviews were conducted via an online video platform, Zoom, with only the audio portion of the interview recorded. Interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the participant. These graduates of Color participated in one-hour open-ended interviews regarding their OSE, their potential skill development, how those skills were developed, and how those skills transferred to their professional position. These one-hour long interviews involved standardized open-ended interviews (Patton, 2014) and fill-in-the-blank structural questions inspired by Spradley's (1979) dyadic line of questioning. Experience and behavior questions (Spradley, 1979) and mini-tour questions (Patton, 2014) followed to dig deeper into the specifics of the participants' lived experience (Patton, 2014). During this series of interview questions, we incorporated elaboration probes (Patton, 2014) to tease out more reflection from the participants' past OSE.

Data Analysis

Our analysis of the qualitative data occurred concurrently with data collection. A concurrent data collection and analysis strategy helped correct for blind spots and facilitated the generation of interim reporting required

by many studies (Miles et al., 2014). To inventory and organize the interview response data, we employed a partially ordered meta-matrix (Miles et al., 2014). Initially, we employed an open coding system (Miles et al., 2014) which facilitated a general understanding of what the data and what participants were expressing, coding data separately and then collaborating to compare results.

Next, we conducted a round of deductive coding, leveraging definitions of employable skills forwarded by (Carnevale et al., 2020, 2021), systematic literature reviews (Deep et al., 2020; Hart Research Associates, 2013; Marin-Zapata et al., 2022; Matteson et al., 2016; Schulz, 2008; Stewart et al., 2016; Touloumakos, 2020) and professional organizations (NACE, 2021; UNESCO, 2022). During this round, we specifically coded the text for the presence of skill development that aligned with any prior literature outlining employable skills in-demand by employers. The interview responses were partitioned individually (Miles et al., 2014), where the parent code group represented the foundational literature (Carnevale, NACE, etc.) and the child codes represented the skill inherent in the participant's response (interpersonal communication, persistence, etc.).

Then, we conducted another round of deductive coding, sorting codes into Yosso's (2005) categories of Community Cultural Wealth. This round of coding allowed us to begin to make connections between the employable skills that employers demand with Yosso's framework that positions people of Color as foundations of knowledge, rather than empty vessels. After multiple rounds of thematic coding and one round of collaborative coding, we arrived at major themes related to the role of OSE in developing soft skills, as well as the types of experiences that best facilitated soft skill development and which soft skills most often transferred to professional positions. In all, four themes and one sub-theme emerged directly related to the above research questions, as this study's data suggests that students of Color developed soft skills including 1.) Interpersonal Communication, 2a.) Organizational Skills and Ability to Multitask, 2b.) Time Management, 3.) Creativity, and 4.) Persistence.

Limitations and Delimitations

The main limitations of this study are the sampling technique and number of participants—however, sampling from a single institution was most feasible given the communication restrictions of the pandemic. Yet, future studies could engage with greater numbers of students of Color from different employment backgrounds and institutional contexts to further investigate the role OSE plays in college student development and career readiness. Future research could also reach beyond four-year universities and student affairs units, exploring how community college students of Color benefit from on-campus employment or whether benefits vary depending on the unit in which a college student is employed.

FINDINGS

Interpersonal Communication Skills

Students of Color discussed OSE as it related to soft skill development in depth, easily able to hearken back to their student employment experiences and recall which soft skills they developed, what context they developed them, and how those soft skills translated to their professional position. However, students of Color most frequently discussed how they developed interpersonal communication skills, predominantly in face-to-face settings within a team framework, and how these soft skills have been critical for their success as a professional. This interpersonal communication skill development could be viewed as an amplification of Yosso's (2005) navigational, social, and linguistic capital.

Navigational and Social Capital

To begin, all 12 students of Color mentioned "communication" at least once in their response to the question, "Which skills do you think you developed in your on-campus student affairs employment experience?" In fact, students of Color often provided long, detailed responses to this question, including Vida. Vida reported developing interpersonal communication skills while working in recreational sports, especially communicating with people face-to-face and navigating work relationships, soft skills valued by employers. Vida explained:

I developed communication. Communicating and knowing who you're communicating with because how you communicate with people differs. If I'm at the event talking to a child, it's different talking with them than talking to my supervisor…from talking to a college student who I'm trying to get to come out to this event. Learning to tailor my communication to the person that I'm speaking to, which I think is important in everyday life and my work.

Here, Vida not only specified that she developed the soft skill of communication and relationship management during a recreational sports event, but she developed the capacity to communicate with different educational stakeholders, demonstrating her capacity for self-management and amplifying her navigational and social capital (Yosso, 2005). Oscar echoed Vida's sentiment, saying, "I had to learn these skills first to make sure that I can adequately tell people what needs to be done, what they need to do. Learning the better ways that I can communicate with different people." Moreover, Oscar's statement illustrates his understanding of how important communication is in working with others and the self-management required in articulating tasks that need to be done and how to do them to coworkers. Additionally, Oscar said his specific position on-campus facilitated communication with many different people, which did not come naturally:

When I started working at recreational sports, I was very introverted. The position forced me to go talk to people and communicate. For me, I couldn't do my job well unless I was engaged. Not only communicating with people that needed things fixed, but also with other students and with my supervisors.

Here, Oscar developed soft skills and self-management to better navigate relationships and professional work, an extension of Yosso's (2005) social and navigational capital. Similarly, Reena emphasized her development of interpersonal communication with her OSE and how it translated to her work as a medical professional. Reena explained, "I think that's another big thing that my recreational sports job taught me was how to communicate because your medical team is made up of a nurse, a respiratory therapist, a doctor, your charge nurse. You have to be able to communicate with lots of different people." Reena then connected her professional experience to her OSE, stating, "Being able to effectively communicate in my current job is a result of interacting with patrons, a diverse staff, and a structured organization while I was employed at recreational sports." Here, several students of Color developed communication skills and the capacity to adjust communication styles for fluctuating audiences that helped them be able to connect with different stakeholders, amplify their social capital, and navigate complex institutions.

Linguistic Capital

For other students of Color, OSE facilitated the confidence that they needed to become better communicators, developing their sense of linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005). Florita exclaimed, "Oh my goodness! My time with the VPSA, I always worked on my communication skills. I hated presenting, absolutely despised it. I was a very anxious person." However, by the end of her OSE, Florita had worked with her student affairs supervisor to hone her public speaking abilities to the degree where one of her professors asked her during class, "Wow, what did you do this summer? You didn't start shaking this time!" Florita replied, "I know! Thank you!" Similarly, for Hector, having OSE helped him feel more confident as an international student from Mexico. Hector said:

It really empowered me. Working empowered me and provided me a dimension and a place for me to work the soft skills that have really opened the doors that I would not have gotten. Especially for me as an international student from Mexico, English is not my first language. I could not pronounce debris or availability. I was very intimidated when talking to patrons, especially with patrons that are very demanding. Walking through tours, talking to people day in, day out, engaging with my peers, got me comfortable to the point where I am now able to speak in front of anyone and be comfortable. It really gave me that confidence to just talk and be able to express myself the best way possible.

Here, Hector's linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005) as an international student was further amplified by his communication and soft skill development, rendering him an even more prepared future professional. Chris made a similar comment, as he said, "I developed tools like interpersonal communication, interpersonal communication dealing with different types of people."

However, Wilson discussed development of interpersonal communication skills as something that made him and others more comfortable, whereas Badari reasoned that her writing skills were sharpened in OSE, giving her an edge, and augmenting her linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005). Wilson said that after working on-campus,

he was able to connect with colleagues better. Wilson remarked, "Now, it's not awkward like, 'I barely talk to my coworkers.' We're a very small team, so it'd be worse if we didn't talk. I feel like I'm able to communicate with coworkers and that's an environment I was in at recreational sports." Similar to Wilson's development but through problem solving, Badari said, "To me, now, I have a unique skill set." Badari continued by saying she had developed "technical skills" while a student and on the job as a professional, but because of OSE, she also has "really strong writing skills and strong communication skills that I was able to develop because of my [OSE]." In all, these students of Color immediately identified their development of communication-related soft skills—an augmentation of their linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005)—connecting those soft skills to their experiences working with others during OSE, translating to their professional positions.

Developing Navigational Capital Through Organizational Skills and Ability to Multitask

Followed closely by communication was students of Color articulating how their OSE experience facilitated growth in organization skills and an ability to multitask, a soft skill that many students of Color brought into their professional position. Like communication skills, students of Color developed organization and multitasking skills in a variety of ways and through a variety of OSE experiences, amplifying Yosso's (2005) notion of navigational capital. Nina, for instance, remembered her time both as a college student and employee as a catalyst for this soft skill development:

> As a student, I'm going through a ton of stuff. Trying to maintain a good GPA and taking full hours, and on top of that, having to work and be responsible for other people at work. But when I was in the office, I learned how to be able to separate those things from each other and just focus on my task, whether it was just supervising or going through timesheets. That's helped that now. That's just a skill that I learned to develop as a student employee.

Also related to organization, Florita commented on her soft skill development, remembering that, "I'm thinking of resources and knowing what resources you have and being responsible over those resources. Knowing how to find resources and knowing how to bring everything together. I learned that." Here, several students learned how to better organize responsibilities and resources from their OSE, facilitating a further development of these students' navigational capital (Yosso, 2005) and a development of their soft skills.

Somewhat similarly, both Chris and Reena shared OSE experiences when they resolved conflicts, and in the process, learned to organize processes and multitask, both valuable soft skills. Chris likened his OSE experiences to "putting out a lot of fires all the time," but that he learned to be comfortable "juggling a lot of things" to lead a team and accomplish goals. Reena also spoke about her development of multitasking skills through having to delegate and lead as a student employee:

> It taught me a lot of multitasking. You have to just delegate and multitask and it taught me how to be a leader. One of the best things I learned was don't ever ask your supervisor to do something you wouldn't do. Never ask your team to do something that you as a leader would not be willing to do. The best leader will never say, "You do what I tell you." You're going to do it, and we're going to do it together. If I have a minute, I'm going to go mop the mats just like I would ask somebody else to do. That's what I learned, just how to be a good leader, how to multitask, how to talk to people, and how to manage a giant building.

From these OSE experiences, students of Color developed organizational and multitasking skills, including how to manage people, delegate processes, and resolve conflicts, necessary to navigate their roles as college students and employees. Other students such as Davante and Tamara shared similar stories, recalling that they learned to organize their work in ways that allowed them to be better at their job and be better students, as in Davante's words, "Working on-campus helped me stay focused as a student." Moreover, Nina said that developing organizational skills while a student helped her organize her work as a professional, which has allowed her to practice better self-advocacy, a critical soft skill. Nina said:

> Being able to progress at my current job is a result of having my own set of responsibilities as a leader while I was a student. I had to make my own agenda, make my own programs, and a lot of things that involved asking for things. I guess just having my own responsibilities and actually acting on those responsibilities

helped me in my current job to ask for what I wanted and be able to communicate that clearly.

As a result, given the information provided by Davante, Tamara, and Nina, findings suggest that some students of Color may also benefit academically through OSE experiences that improve their organizational skills, while others may develop an important sense of self-advocacy and navigational capital (Yosso, 2005) that can parlay itself into successful development of soft skills and a navigation of higher education and future employment.

Time Management (Sub-theme of Organizational Skills and Ability to Multitask)

One sub-theme related to the prior theme of Organizational Skills and Ability to Multitask is the theme of time management. In all, seven of the 12 students of Color interviewed commented specifically on how OSE enhanced their ability to manage their time, a soft skill they have carried into the professional workplace to help them navigate their career. In fact, several students felt that the time management skills they developed during OSE was their most important soft skill, bolstering their navigational capital (Yosso, 2005). Additionally, students of Color explained that their development of time management skills allowed them to be better students and manage their academic time along with their work time. Both Wilson and Tamara directly connected time management skills to their OSE and their undergraduate coursework, with Wilson explaining that:

> Oh boy, I think time management is probably the biggest one. If I said I couldn't work because I had to study, but then I didn't, and someone else who had an exam or had to study was working because you weren't, then I was just being lazy. It made them feel bad, and it should make you feel bad, too. That's probably the biggest thing I learned, time management.

Here, Wilson was trying to balance school and work obligations while also considering the impact it may have on his peers, who he knew were struggling with the same school and work obligations. Similarly, Tamara said that time management was "super important," and she also needed to balance school and work with her social life:

> In conjunction with having to take classes, it's not like I could just be President of this org and work and not do school. I had to do well. I learned a lot of time management, a lot of time management actually. That was huge. I was in a social group as well, and I had to make sure that I did all of the requirements for that and met with all the people that I needed to meet with. I really had to be creative with how I spent my time and maximize that and be as efficient as I could.

For Monique, she learned to keep her academic and student employment "ducks in a row." Similar to Monique, Hector also connected his OSE experiences to his capacity for professional efficiency, saying that, "My time management responsibilities at my student job helped me be a better professional and diligent professional at my current job. Time management, God, that was important." Hector then shared a specific situation where he was late for his OSE position and his supervisor said bluntly, "Be on time, figure it out." Hector said he took that message to heart and in his words, "I figured it out." In these cases, students of Color developed their extant navigational capital (Yosso, 2005) and their soft skill of time management to become better students and in Hector's words, a "better professional."

Social Capital Development Through Creativity

Although less prevalent than other themes related to how students of Color developed soft skills through OSE, seven of 12 students of Color spoke about how they developed creativity while working on-campus. In fact, all seven students shared experiences about developing creativity out of a sense of collaboration with peers that led to creative synergy, an extended iteration of Yosso's (2005) social capital. Karlos put it best when he said, "I loved having a creative mind to approach. Me and students that work around the office, they all relied on us to bring our creative juices and to see what types of approaches we're going to have and who has a great idea." Monique also shared her creativity development because of networking with supervisors to understand the bureaucracy of the institution. Monique asserted:

> Creativity. The light bulb, the instincts, something that just came to mind. That happened because I got to see the behind-the-scenes contributions from the top down, from where I am to where my supervisor was, to where our VP was, to where you were. I got to see how all the moving parts drove the institution. That helped.

Here, because Monique was exposed to social situations and supervisors that allowed her to see how the institution functioned as a bureaucracy, Monique was able to see what the institution was and was not going to allow her to do in her role, fostering a sense of creativity, potentially to solve problems or do her work more efficiently while developing social capital (Yosso, 2005) and the soft skill of demonstrating resourcefulness. For Reena, that sense of creativity she developed in her OSE experiences absolutely helped her solve problems and delegate work. Reena said that working on-campus helped her with "creativity," explaining that "you just had to get creative with how you solve problems and how you delegated things." Reena continued by sharing a situation when she needed to organize a year-end meeting and create decorations for the gathering. She said, "Creativity is being able to think outside of the box and think critically to find different solutions to what some people might think are straightforward answers. That just helped me be a creative leader in all aspects." This soft skill of creativity or resourcefulness, catalyzed through interactions with colleagues and a utility of navigational capital, allowed students to further develop social capital (Yosso, 2005) both on-campus and after graduation.

Aspirational Capital Through Persistence

Finally, several students of Color (six) in this study shared OSE experiences that helped them persist and engage with their aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005), including as a student employee and a professional. Reena shared an experience when she and her family had to shelter during a natural disaster, likening it to her OSE. Reena said, "Like that situation, you just had to make it through and keep rolling on. I would definitely say that ties back to perseverance." Vida also shared a story about a particularly difficult day on the job as a student employee, saying, "We just had a tough day where you don't really know if you're going to be your best, but you have to keep on keeping on." Vida then connected that memory to her current role as a nurse, saying, "Those patients that you can't necessarily pinpoint what's wrong with them, you have to keep going and just figure it out because at the end of the day, they're relying on you." Here, students of Color connected their prior experiences leveraging their aspirational capital to their student employment experiences, further strengthening their aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005) to inform their work as professionals.

Two students also specifically mentioned imposter syndrome and how their work in OSE helped them overcome those feelings, develop a sense of belonging on campus, and persist as a student and professional. Nina remembered that her time managing a climbing wall in recreational sports triggered feelings of being "a failure" and feeling "that I was doing a bad job." Yet, Nina said that her OSE allowed her to find moments to fail safely and say to herself, "Oh, I failed. I need to learn from this, and I was allowed to." As a result of being allowed to fail and being given more opportunity, Nina said:

> Especially in the imposter syndrome realm, I had to constantly remind myself that I was hired for this student position for a reason and the people who hired me saw that I had potential and that I could lead. That sense of failure and sense of impostor syndrome still exists with my current job. I still have to remind myself that I'm worthy of this job, I can do it, and I was hired for a reason. I think more of just a parallel experience with being a student employee and professional.

Here, Nina leveraged her aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005) and student employment experiences to persist as a student, which then helped her persist as a professional. Like Nina, Badari also shared her feelings, saying, "I think I will always feel a sense of failure and a sense of impostor syndrome." However, because she remembers her growth within her OSE experiences, she still has "a reminder of the growth and the progress that I've experienced since then." As a result, Badari insisted that in her professional role, "I will feel failure, and I will feel crappy at times, but also, I have the strength to talk to myself and bring myself up and know that I belong here."

Here, students of Color tied their sense of professional persistence back to their experiences with OSE, suggesting that on-campus employment both bolstered their aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005) and developed their persistence and determination, two critical soft skills. Then, several students were able to connect that sense of belonging and self-confidence to their professional work, reaching back to their OSE memories to find strength within their aspirational capital, understand their feelings of imposter syndrome, and remember that people believed in them and relied on them both as a student employee and current professional.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Ultimately, students of Color, who are now full-time professionals, shared that their on-campus student affairs employment (OSE) experiences helped them develop critical soft skills to increase their career readiness and their prowess in their current position. These soft skills included interpersonal communication, organizational skills, and ability to multitask, time management, creativity, and persistence. Given the critical gap in the literature that this study fills, there are several implications for research and practice related to students of Color and their OSE experiences.

First, regarding students' experiences, participants in this study recalled a plethora of moments from their OSE that developed soft skills, which in turn students were able to translate to their professional role. Perhaps more importantly, many of these skills were developed while students were working in supervisory roles, leadership roles, or networking with supervisors to learn more about the institution and being a professional. Described as navigational capital, Yosso (2005) explained that students of Color possess the ability to navigate organizations and power structures that have historically excluded them, including institutions of higher education. In this study, Yosso's (2005) navigational capital was absolutely present in the narratives of students of Color. These students navigated a hegemonic, White structure and translated their skills developed as a student employee to postgraduate outcomes. This fusion of individual agency through leveraging navigational capital coupled with individual experiences of student employment bolstered these students' ability to navigate predominantly White social institutions like their university and future job market. As a result, practitioners could consider facilitating not only more on-campus employment opportunities for students of Color but specifically experiences that position these students as supervisors, leaders, or being present with their supervisors and leaders. These experiences seemed to be the most memorable and impactful for students of Color and could amplify their navigational capital (Yosso, 2005) even further.

Next, more research could be dedicated to how OSE may amplify the linguistic capital of students of Color, facilitating a further development of navigational capital in both academic and professional spaces. In this study, students of Color strongly asserted that their OSE helped them communicate and become organized in ways that helped them succeed academically as students and as future professionals, developing soft skills that their future employers have benefitted from. Referred to as linguistic capital, Yosso (2005) suggested that most college students of Color possess multiple language and communication skills and, therefore, have unique intellectual and social capabilities that can be deployed in academic and social contexts. Yet, students of Color spoke about how their continued development of communication skills—an extension of linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005)—may allow them to better navigate academic and professional settings,

bolstering their navigational capital. Although prior research hinted at the role that on-campus employment may improve academic outcomes (Elliott & Smith, 2022; Giles-Gee, 1989), this study strongly suggests that OSE could help students of Color achieve in the classroom, allowing them to move past the institution and achieve in the professional workplace through further development of linguistic and navigational capital. The same research and practice could also focus on how OSE can improve a student of Color's sense of belonging, as Quaye et al.'s (2014) and Elliott and Smith's (2022) prior work asserted that students of Color should be allowed experiences that increase these students' sense of belonging. Although a wealth of research has shown the benefits of on-campus employment on sense of belonging for White students (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Wilkie & Jones, 1994), much more research could continue to explore the experiences of students of Color.

Finally, closing the racial wealth gap (Carnevale et al., 2023; Sullivan et al., 2016) may involve helping students of Color develop marketable, employable skills that their future employers want. This requires institutions of higher education to recruit and retain more students of Color, strategically placing them in OSE experiences to amplify their soft skill set and Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005). For example, through mentoring relationships during OSE, students of Color could learn how to leverage their navigational capital (capacity to navigate divergent social institutions), aspirational capital (resiliency in the face of perceived barriers), and resistant capital (verbal and nonverbal methods of resisting tropes and stereotypes) into a unique and powerful conglomerate of

employability capital (Peeters et al., 2019) for induction into the postgraduate labor market. In this study, students of Color were easily able to articulate their soft skill development, tie that development to OSE experiences, and relate those experiences to their professional work. If employers truly do demand soft skills (Rockwood, 2021; Schulz, B., 2008; Stewart, C., et al., 2016), institutions of higher education should help students of Color convey their possession of both Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005) and soft skills to future employers.

CONCLUSION

As a result of OSE, students of Color largely echoed a simple message: "It empowered me." In an era of U.S. higher education where students of Color routinely feel marginalized and excluded (Quaye et al., 2014; Turner, 1994), on-campus student employment may be a path toward racial equity. This change could come in the form of equitable hiring practices of student employees of Color, considering that students of Color are often marginalized from many on-campus experiences that White students have benefitted from for years. To become an institution that practices equity, both during enrollment and after graduation when students become professionals, institutions must strive to include students of Color in OSE when possible, amplifying these students' community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) and resisting the exacerbation of a historically persistent racial wealth gap (Sullivan et al., 2016). Clearly, OSE was empowering for students of Color, even years after their graduation. Now, it is time for institutions to do the same and leverage their power to facilitate career readiness for students of Color in the future.

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