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Community Identity Development and Interpersonal Development in Tertiary Education in Trinidad and Tobago

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Abstract

Given the rapid increase in tertiary enrollments in Trinidad and Tobago over the past 2 decades, there is a critical need for locally based research to guide practice in student support services. The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between the work of student support services—in particular, students' interactions with student support services staff, interactions with their peers, and cocurricular engagement—and student development in Trinidad and Tobago. Findings regarding the importance of student support services in contributing to student development have important implications for practice in Trinidad and Tobago and also for the ways in which we might understand student engagement and student development in a collectivist cultural context.

Over the past two decades, participation in tertiary education in Trinidad and Tobago (T&T) has skyrocketed, up from 7% of the total population in 2001 to over 65% by the end of 2013 (Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, 2014; Herbert & Lochan, 2014). As Altbach, Reisberg, and Rumbley (2009) have noted, when higher education systems expand rapidly, they "initially struggle just to cope with the demand" (p. 2); over time, however, higher education practitioners turn their focus to how to best support those students who are enrolled and to higher-order questions of student learning and development (e.g., United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2009). Mirroring this assertion, the field of student support services is growing throughout the Caribbean in general and in T&T specifically (Reynolds, 2008). Although there is a great need for locally based theories to guide research and practice in student support services in T&T and around the world (e.g., Louisy, 2004; Speckman & Mandew, 2014), currently the majority of theory and research on student development in tertiary education comes out of the United States.

The goals of tertiary education in the Caribbean are driven by local/regional statements and policies (e.g., "The Ideal Caribbean Person," published by the Caribbean Community [CARICOM], 1997), as well as major international organizations (e.g., Caribbean Exami nations Council, 2015; UNESCO, 1996, 2009). In a recent review of documents and mission statements pertaining to tertiary education in the Caribbean, Williams and Niehaus (2015) identified themes of independent and critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, self-confidence and emotional security, personal well-being, social/civic responsibility, and tolerance of and respect for diversity. Many of these goals reflect the whole-student approach to development that is at the foundation of the field of student affairs and services in the US (American Council on Education, 1949), as well as common US-based models of holistic student development (e.g., Baxter Magolda, 2004), which encompass the cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal domains of development. As argued in *Learning: The Treasure Within* (UNESCO, 1996): "Formal education systems tend to emphasize the acquisition of knowledge [cognitive development] to the detriment of other types of learning" (p. 37); as such, our focus in this article is on two of those "other types of learning": students' interpersonal and intrapersonal development. Specifically, the purpose of this study was to explore the

relationship between the work of student support services—in particular, students' interactions with student support services staff, interactions with their peers, and cocurricular engagement—and student development in T&T.

Student Development in Caribbean Tertiary Education

Economic development is clearly a key driver of the investment in tertiary education in T&T (Miller, 2007), but as noted earlier, there are a number of other goals for tertiary education promoted by local, regional, and international interests. According to the Caribbean Examinations Council (2015), "The Ideal Caribbean Person" (CARICOM, 1997) and *Learning: The Treasure Within* (UNESCO, 1996) are particularly relevant documents for understanding the broader learning goals of tertiary education in T&T. The strategic plan for 2015–2025 published by the T&T Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training (2015) begins by positioning tertiary education in T&T within the regional Caribbean context, drawing from both UNESCO and CARICOM developmental imperatives, and listing the characteristics of "The Ideal Caribbean Person" (p. 3). Although this strategic plan is specific to the government of T&T in place at the time of this study, prior governments' documents reflect similar emphases on the importance of individual, family, and community development: for example, *Education Sector Strategic Plan: 2011–2015* (Ministry of Education, 2012), and *Vision 2020: Operational Plan 2007–2010* (Ministry of Planning and Development, n.d.).

These various documents address, among other outcomes, the goals of interpersonal and intrapersonal development in tertiary education. As Baxter Magolda (2004) explained, *intrapersonal development* is "an evolving process in which we continually rework our sense of ourselves and our relationships with other people as we encounter challenges in the environment that call our current conceptualizations into question" (p. 18). Intrapersonal development is often referred to as identity development and encompasses individuals' internal sense of self as well their understanding of their various social identities (e.g., race, class, gender, sexual orientation). *Interpersonal development*, on the other hand, is how one understands and navigates one's relationships with others. Although these two areas of development

are closely intertwined (e.g., Baxter Magolda, 2004; Pizzolato, 2010; Torres & Hernandez, 2007), they are often treated, at least in the US, as distinct areas of development (e.g., Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009).

US-based theories of holistic student development (e.g., Baxter Magolda, 2004) can be a good starting place for understanding interpersonal and intrapersonal development in T&T, but theories developed in the US were based on a highly individualistic culture, which may not reflect the collectivist culture in T&T. According to Hofstede and Hofstede (2005), cultures that are more collectivist are ones "in which the interest of the group prevails over the interest of the individual" (p. 74), while more individualistic cultures are ones in which ties between individuals are loose and the individual takes precedent over the group. The emphasis on the individual versus the group tends to relate to a number of other specific cultural differences. For example, in more individualistic cultures people tend to place more value on privacy, to focus on tasks, and to expect individuals to have and voice their own opinions, whereas in more collectivist cultures people tend to emphasize belongingness, to focus more on relationships, and to expect individuals to defer to the group. As with all dimensions of culture, national cultures fall somewhere along a spectrum of individualism and collectivism, with some being more individualistic, some more collectivist, and others falling somewhere in between. Although the US and T&T are quite similar on most dimensions of culture, the two populations are at opposite ends of this spectrum. On a scale with 0 reflecting a purely collectivist culture and 100 a purely individualist culture, the US scores 91 and T&T scores 16 (Hofstede Insights, 2018).

Even within the US, theorists and researchers have begun to question the emphasis on the individual within core theories such as self-authorship, emphasizing the need to consider broader social contexts that shape development (e.g., Hernández, 2016). Although national cultures are clearly not absolutely predictive of individual personalities or behaviors (Hofested & Hofested, 2005), research on the role of culture in development has demonstrated the importance of individualism and collectivism in understanding personal development. For example, Cross, Gore, and Morris (2003) explained that "many collectivist cultures view the person as embedded in a social network, defined by their social roles and position, and fully human only in the context of personal relationships" (p. 934). Schwartz, Zamboanga, and

Weisskirch (2008) explained that people in more individualistic cultures focus on developing a sense of identity and direction separate from group identity, while those in more collectivist cultures focus on the obligation to the group over individual needs. Clearly these differing concepts of self in relation to others can influence manifestations of interpersonal and intrapersonal development in both cultures, necessitating a context-specific understanding of each construct.

Interpersonal Development

The CARICOM statement on "The Ideal Caribbean Person" (CARICOM, 1997) focuses on the need to develop citizens who see "ethnic, religious, and other diversity as a source of potential strength and richness" (p. 9) and who nourish in themselves and others "the fullest development of each person's potential without gender stereotyping and [embrace] differences and similarities between females and males as a source of mutual strength" (p. 9). Similarly, one of the four pillars of *Learning: The Treasure Within* (UNESCO, 1996) is: "Learning to live together, by developing an understanding of other people and an appreciation of interdependence—carrying out joint projects and learning to manage conflicts—in a spirit of respect for the values of pluralism, mutual understanding and peace" (p. 37). These statements mirror the emphasis in the US-based student development literature on interpersonal development —"What kind of relationships do I want to construct with others?" (Baxter Magolda, 2004, p. 8)—or perhaps more relevant to the collectivist Caribbean context, interpersonal development envisioned through a critical lens—"What relationships do I want with others for the benefit of my social world?" (Hernández, 2016, p. 176).

Intrapersonal Development

In addition to embracing diversity, the ideal Caribbean person is also someone who is "emotionally secure with a high level of self-confidence and self-esteem, ... has a strong appreciation of family and kinship values, community cohesion, and moral issues, including responsibility for and accountability to self and community, . . . [and has an] informed respect for the cultural heritage" (CARICOM, 1997, p. 9).

Similarly, the fourth pillar of *Learning: The Treasure Within* (UNESCO, 1996) is: "Learning to be, so as better to develop one's personality and be able to act with ever greater autonomy, judgement and personal responsibility" (p. 37). In some ways these statements mirror much of the US-based student development literature on intrapersonal development—the question of Who am I? (Baxter Magolda, 2004)—although much of the literature on intrapersonal development from the US focuses on issues of social identities such as race, gender, and sexual orientation (Torres et al., 2009). The focus on autonomy, responsibility, and self-confidence and self-esteem perhaps more closely maps onto theories such as Chickering and Reisser's (1993) seven vectors, which include managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, and establishing identity, including "sense of self in a social, historical, and cultural context, ... self-acceptance and self-esteem, ... [and] reflecting on one's family of origin and ethnic heritage [and] defining self as part of a religious or cultural tradition" (p. 49). The focus on family, kinship, community, and cultural heritage, especially in the CARICOM statement, however, is an aspect of intrapersonal development that is generally not found in the US-based literature.

Student Support Services

Traditionally in US higher education, students' interpersonal development and intrapersonal development are within the domain of student affairs and student services educators (American Council on Education, 1949). According to Reynolds (2008), student services in T&T can encompass a wide variety of programs and services that include sports, career services, residence halls, orientation, financial aid, facilities, counseling, clubs and organizations, and student government. We focused on three broad areas—students' interactions with student support services staff, interactions with their peers, and cocurricular involvement—related to the work of student services professionals that (a) have been shown in the US-based literature to be related to student development (e.g., Bowman, 2010, 2011; Dugan & Komives, 2010), and (b) were relevant to the work of student services professionals at the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT), the site for this study.

Interactions With Student Support Services Staff

Researchers in the US have identified the important role that student services and student affairs professionals can play in students' development. Dugan and Komives (2010) found that having a mentoring relationship with student affairs staff was a significant positive predictor of students' leadership development, particularly their ability to work collaboratively with others. Campbell, Smith, Dugan, and Komives (2012) similarly found that student affairs professionals were more effective mentors than were faculty members when it came to promoting students' capacity for socially responsible leadership. Although there is not much other literature that focuses on the effects of interacting with student affairs professionals broadly, other research has pointed to the importance of interactions with academic advisors specifically. Hatch and Garcia (2017) found significant relationships between levels of academic advising (which included staff members taking an interest in students as individuals), academic support, and social support to students' intent to persist in community college.

Peer Interactions

In addition to interacting with faculty and student support services staff, one of the key contributors to students' development is their interactions with diverse peers. Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, and Gurin (2002) argued that diversity experiences are key to facilitating development and commitment based on increased cognitive complexity and self-determination, rather than reliance on prior experience and authority. Gurin et al. found that informal interactions with diverse peers were a strong predictor of democratic outcomes, and meta-analyses have shown that these interactions have a positive effect on cognitive gains (Bowman, 2010) and civic attitudes and behaviors (Bowman, 2011).

Unfortunately, not all interactions with diverse peers are positive or lead to positive outcomes. In a study of students in introduction to sociology and intergroup dialogue courses, Mayhew and Engberg (2010) found that negative interactions with diverse peers (having tense, cautious, hurtful, and/or unresolved interactions and feeling silenced by discrimination when sharing personal experiences) was a negative predictor of students' moral reasoning development. Other

studies have shown these types of negative interactions to be a negative predictor of self-confidence (Nelson Laird, 2005) and pluralistic orientation (Engberg, 2007).

One way students may engage directly with their peers is through in-class group work, although there are mixed findings from both the US and the Caribbean on the effectiveness of group work relative to more traditional methods of instruction. Terenzini, Cabrera, Colbeck, Parente, and Bjorklund (2001) found that collaborative learning in the context of US engineering courses was positively associated with students' perceived gains in multiple outcomes, including group skills. In a project management course in T&T, however, Ali (2011) found no significant differences in students' knowledge and application of project management principles between those who had been taught using a traditional lecture style and those who had engaged in collaborative learning. Group work is another area where the individualism/collectivism cultural differences between the US and T&T may be particularly important. In a study of culturally diverse students engaging in group work in the Netherlands, Popov et al. (2012) found that students from individualist and collectivist cultural backgrounds perceived group work quite differently: students from individualistic cultures placed more emphasis than students from collectivist cultures did on the challenges of students free-riding within groups and less emphasis on challenges related to cultural differences within the group.

Cocurricular Involvement

In addition to interacting with students directly and facilitating interactions among diverse peers, a third way that student services professionals in T&T might affect students' development is through coordinating opportunities for cocurricular involvement through clubs and organizations. There is a vast body of research, both in the US and internationally, that has pointed to the positive benefits of cocurricular engagement. In the US, for example, Dugan and Komives (2010) found that being involved in clubs and organizations is positively related to students' leadership development. Dugan and Komives also identified the relationship between community service engagement and leadership outcomes, a finding that has been echoed by other researchers

who have identified the relationship between community service participation and students' interpersonal and intrapersonal development (e.g., Keen & Hall, 2009; Niehaus & Rivera, 2015).

Cocurricular engagement has also been well studied outside of the US. For example, in a survey of over 25,000 students in South Africa, Wawrzynski, Heck, and Remley (2012) found student engagement in cocurricular activities (e.g., sports, student societies, and residence events) to be positively related to outcomes such as positive self-concept, sense of institutional connection, interaction with people from diverse backgrounds, stress relief, and career decision-making. Magpily and Mercado (2014) similarly found a positive relationship between the frequency with which students in the Philippines engaged in extracurricular activities and their grades. There is also evidence that cocurricular engagement has no effect on measures of student development and success; Radloff and Coates (2010) found no relationship between extracurricular activities and students' grades.

Method

Purpose and Research Questions

The US-based and international literature clearly points to the potential for interactions with student services staff, interactions with peers, and cocurricular involvement to facilitate students' interpersonal and intrapersonal development (e.g., Dugan & Komives, 2010; Bowman, 2010, 2011; Gurin et al., 2002; Wawrzynski et al., 2012), but equally clear is the challenge in applying US-based theory and literature in the context of T&T considering the vast cultural differences between the two countries (see Hofstede Insights, 2018). Considering the importance of student development in the goals of tertiary education in T&T (CARICOM, 1997; UNESCO, 1996; Williams & Niehaus, 2015), there is a need to explore how student support services staff can best promote students' development. As such, the purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which specific tertiary education experiences are related to student development in the unique cultural context of T&T. Specifically, we sought to answer the following research question: What is the relationship between students' engagement with

student services staff, with their peers, and in cocurricular activities and students' interpersonal and intrapersonal development?

Research Site: The University of Trinidad and Tobago

Over the past two decades, tertiary education in T&T has grown rapidly; prior to this recent expansion, access to tertiary education—primarily provided by the University of the West Indies—was limited to economically privileged and/or academically gifted students (Miller, 2007). In 2002 the Prime Minister of T&T launched the "Vision 2020 National Strategic Plan," laying out a vision "to transform the country into a developed nation by the year 2020" (Ministry of Planning and Development, n.d., p. v). Following this vision, the Government of T&T made substantial economic investments in tertiary education, including creating UTT and establishing the Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses (GATE) program to fund the full cost of undergraduate education for all students at any institution (Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, 2013). Today, UTT has grown into a large comprehensive university with a wide array of areas of study. UTT has 11 campuses across Trinidad and 1 in Tobago where students can earn certificates, diplomas, bachelor's, and master's degrees (UTT, n.d.). In the 2016–17 academic year UTT enrolled a total of 7,752 students (UTT, 2019).

Sources of Data

The data for this study come from a larger, mixed methods study of student engagement and student development in T&T, which included a cross-sectional survey of students at UTT during the semester of Spring 2017, and interviews with students at 3 different institutions across T&T over the course of that same semester. For this study we relied solely on the quantitative data that came from the survey of UTT students. The survey included demographic information and questions about students' enrollment, interactions with student services staff, interactions with diverse peers, involvement with clubs and organizations, and perceptions of the effect of their tertiary experiences on their development. The survey was developed based on the existing US-based and international literature on student engagement and

development in collaboration with student services professionals at UTT to ensure cultural and linguistic appropriateness and that the information in the survey reflected those professionals' specific needs. We conducted a small pilot study in 2016 and made minor revisions to the survey to ensure completeness and clarity.

Instructors in 7 undergraduate courses agreed to administer the survey at the beginning or end of class during the second half of the semester. Courses were chosen to reflect a range of the most popular areas of study at UTT. Of the 919 students who completed the survey, 41.9% identified as Indian, 34.3% as Black, 15.9% as mixed race, and 7.1% as another race. The majority identified as Christian (62.7%), while 20.2% identified as Hindu, 6.9% Muslim, 6.9% having no religious affiliation, and 3.2% being affiliated with another religion. In terms of other demographic factors, 82.2% of respondents identified as wealthy or middle class, while 17.8% identified as poor; 84.9% were single, while 15.1% were married or with a partner. When it came to educational factors, 63.9% were pursuing a bachelor's degree, 29.1% a diploma, and 7.0% a certificate; 57.1% were majoring in engineering, 15.3% in education, 15.1% in arts/fashion/ humanities, 9.6% in another field, and 2.9% in science and technology; 78.2% attended courses primarily during the day, while 21.8% attended primarily in the evening; and 79.0% attended full-time while 21.0% attended part-time.

Conceptual Framework

The survey for this study was designed using Astin's (Astin & antonio, 2012) inputs–environments–outcomes (I-E-O) model; we focused our attention on students' tertiary experiences (the environments block) while accounting for both inputs and bridge variables as described below.

Outcomes. The outcomes for this study were two scales reflecting students' intrapersonal and interpersonal development. Both scales were developed for this survey specifically and were based on the goals of tertiary education in T&T and the specific cultural context. Considering the need to account for the collectivist cultural orientation in T&T (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005), our intrapersonal development scale is titled Community Identity Development and reflects

students' sense of self within community. The Interpersonal Development scale reflects students' relationships with people who are different from themselves. We tested all scale items during the pilot study in 2016 and analyzed the pilot data using exploratory factor analysis to identify preliminary constructs from the survey. For this study we conducted confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to further refine the scales and ensure appropriate model fit. Scale items, reliabilities, and CFA fit indices are presented in **Table 1**.

Inputs. The student input variables in this study were students' race/ethnicity, prior tertiary experience, religious affiliation, socioeconomic status, and marital status.

Race/ethnicity was measured by asking students to check all that applied from the following options: Black/African descent, Indian descent, Asian descent, Syrian/Lebanese, White, and other (with a write-in option). All students who selected more than one option or selected "other" and wrote in some variation on "mixed race" were classified as mixed. Due to the relatively small number of students who selected Asian, Syrian/Lebanese, White, or other (without writing in some version of mixed race), these students were grouped into one other category, leaving us with variables representing Black, Indian, mixed, and other.

Students were also asked to select their religious affiliation from a list of options including Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Spiritual Baptist, no religious affiliation, or other (with a write-in option). After grouping students who selected other and wrote in an affiliation that clearly matched an existing option (e.g., Anglican matching Christian) and combining Buddhist and remaining write-in options with other due to the small numbers in each group, we were left with variables reflecting Christian, Hindu, Muslim, no religious affiliation, and other. Both race and religious affiliation were coded using effect coding, a strategy that allows researchers to obtain parameter estimates for all groups (Mayhew & Simonoff, 2015).

Prior tertiary experience was measured with a single question that asked students to indicate whether they had previously attended any other tertiary institution: coded 0 for no, 1 for yes. Socioeconomic status was measured with a single question asking students to indicate whether they would describe their family's current financial situation as *wealthy (very comfortable financially), middle income (fairly*

comfortable financially), or *poor (really struggling financially)*. We chose to collapse the wealthy and middle income groups to create a dichotomous variable: 0 for wealthy/middle income, 1 for poor. Finally, marital status was measured by asking students to indicate whether they were married, living with a partner, or single; this was collapsed into a single dichotomous variable: 0 for single, 1 for married/living with a partner.

Bridge Variables. In the I-E-O framework, bridge variables reflect decisions that are made prior to enrollment, but "continue to affect the student's development during the college years" (Astin & antonio, 2012, p. 80). The bridge variables for this study are program level (certificate, diploma, or bachelor's degree), major (engineering; education; arts, humanities, and fashion; science and technology; or another field), time of attendance (day or evening), and enrollment status (part-time or full-time). As with race and religious affiliation, program level and major were coded using effect coding in order to obtain parameter estimates for all groups.

Environments. The environments in the model were the main student experiences of interest: interactions with student support services staff, interactions with peers, and cocurricular engagement. These experiences were (a) of interest to the student services staff at UTT and (b) those that have been shown to be important experiences in facilitating student development and student success in the US (e.g., Bowman, 2010; Dugan & Komives, 2010; Gurin et al., 2002; Wawrzynski et al., 2012).

Interactions with student support services staff was measured by students indicating the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each of the following four statements:

- Student support services staff on this campus have taken an active interest in my life.

- I have at least one student support services staff member on this campus who I know I can go to when I have a problem.

- I feel a sense of connection to one or more student support services staff members on this campus.

- I have been mentored by a student support services staff member on this campus.

Peer interactions were measured with three separate items reflecting the frequency with which students had positive interactions with people different from themselves, had negative interactions with people different from themselves, and engaged in group assignments or activities in class, each with the response options: 0 (*never*), 1 (*rarely*), 2 (*occasionally*), and 3 (*frequently*).

Finally, students' cocurricular involvement was measured by asking how frequently (using the same response scale above) participants had engaged in common formal and informal activities available at UTT: student government/guild, volunteering, sports clubs/organizations, religious clubs/organizations, academic clubs/organizations, cultural clubs/organizations, arts clubs/organizations, and social clubs/organizations. We were less interested in specific forms of involvement than in the extent to which students were involved overall, so we created a composite measure by summing all eight participation items.

Data Analysis

Although Astin's I-E-O model generally points to linear regression analysis, variables reflecting inputs, bridge variables, and environments are often interrelated in more complex ways that influence student outcomes (Bryant, Gaston Gayles, & Davis, 2012). To better account for the interrelatedness of these groups of variables and their direct and indirect relationships with student development, we developed the conceptual model presented in **Figure 1**. This model hypothesizes both a direct relationship of student inputs on their development and also an indirect relationship by accounting for the ways in which student inputs influence the experiences they have in tertiary education. The model also hypothesizes that certain experiences (e.g., engagement in group work and cocurricular involvement) may have both a direct relationship on student development and also an indirect relationship by influencing students' interactions with other students and with student support services staff.

We employed structural equation modeling (SEM) in MPlus (Version 7.11) with robust standard errors to account for the nesting of students within classrooms during the data collection and maximum likelihood estimation to account for missing data in order to test our hypothesized model. We computed a separate model for each outcome
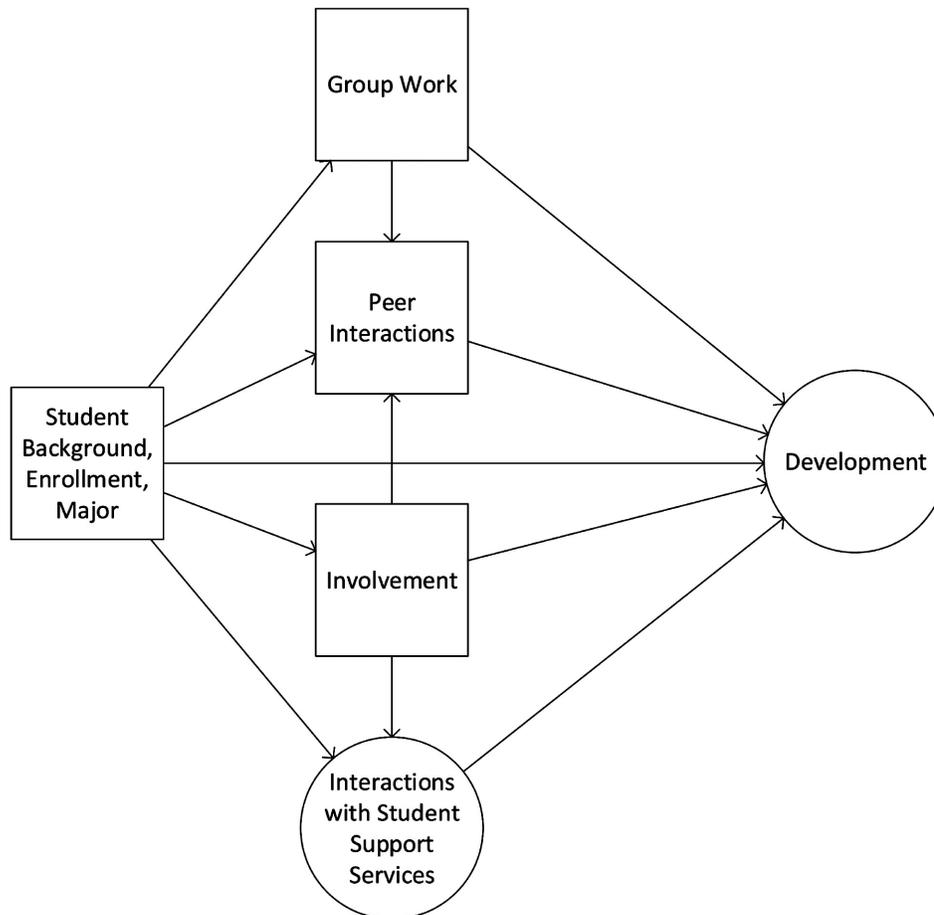
Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Predictors of Student Development at UTT

variable, reflecting students' interpersonal and community identity development. As we used effect coding for a number of variables in our framework, we conducted each SEM analysis twice in order to obtain parameter estimates for each of the groups in the model (Mayhew & Simonoff, 2015).

Limitations

It is important to note a few key limitations of this study. First, our sample is limited to students at UTT, and we were not able to randomly sample students within the institution. As such, our findings may not be generalizable across all tertiary institutions in T&T or across all UTT programs and campuses. Second, our outcome measures reflect

students' own self-reported gains from their tertiary experiences, which previous research in the US has indicated might not be valid measures of actual learning and development (e.g., Bowman & Seifert, 2011). While these measures do say something about how students are experiencing tertiary education, future research is necessary using more direct measures of student development. Finally, this survey took place at the beginning of an economic downturn, which necessitated major changes to the GATE program (Office of the Prime Minister, 2017). As the funding of tertiary education changes in T&T, it is possible that students' investment and experiences in their tertiary education will, too. This provides an interesting possibility for future researchers looking into the effect of funding models on student engagement, learning, and development.

Results

The CFA demonstrated strong reliability and good model fit for each latent variable in the model: community identity development (α = .869, RMSEA < .001, CFI = 1.00, SRMR = .007), interpersonal development (α = .868, RMSEA < .001, CFI = 1.00, SRMR = .005), and interactions with student services staff (α = .863, RMSEA < .001, CFI = 1.00, SRMR = .007). Results of the CFA can be found in **Table 1**.

The initial SEM analysis for students' self-reported community identity development (CID) indicated that there was no significant direct or indirect effect of group work, positive interactions with diverse peers, or negative peer interactions on this outcome; in order to be most parsimonious in our modeling, we ran the SEM again without these variables included. The results of this analysis demonstrate that more frequent interactions with student services staff had a positive direct effect on students' CID (see **Table 2**). Cocurricular involvement had both a positive direct effect on CID and a positive indirect effect through its positive relationship with students' interactions with student services staff. Overall the model explained 21.4% of the variance in CID and had acceptable model fit (RMSEA = .042, CFI = .946, SRMR = .024).

The initial SEM analysis for students' self-reported interpersonal development (ID) showed significant direct and indirect effects of all

Table 1. Standardized Factor Loadings, Scale Reliability, and Fit Indices for Latent Variables

Item	Factor Loadings	α	Fit Indices
Community Identity Development[a]		.869	RMSEA < .001 CFI = 1.00 SRMR = .007
Understanding of the role of religion in your life	.847		
The value you place on your cultural heritage	.632		
Strength of your religious identity	.890		
Commitment to a particular religious tradition	.855		
Commitment to improving your community	.656		
Interpersonal Development[a]		.868	RMSEA < .001 CFI = 1.00 SRMR = .005
Ability to get along with people different from you	.704		
Understanding of people different from you	.913		
Interest in interacting with people different from you	.822		
Respect for people different from yourself	.723		
Interactions with Student Services Staff [b]		.863	RMSEA < .001 CFI = 1.00 SRMR = .007
Student support services staff on this campus have taken an active interest in my life	.655		
I have at least one student support services staff member on this campus who I know I can go to when I have a problem	.781		
I feel a sense of connection to one or more student support services staff members on this campus	.945		
I have been mentored by a student support services staff member on this campus	.754		

a. Question stem: To what extent do you think that your experiences at your current institution, whether inside or outside of the classroom, have positively influenced you in the following areas? 1 (*not at all*), 2 (*a little*), 3 (*somewhat*), 4 (*quite a lot*).
b. Likert response scale: 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

environmental variables in the model (group work, positive peer interactions, negative peer interactions, and cocurricular involvement) on this outcome, except for interactions with student support services staff. To examine the most parsimonious model possible, we ran the model again without the variable for interactions with student support services staff (see **Table 3**). Positive peer interactions and negative peer interactions were the only environmental variables to have a

Table 2. Direct Effects for Community Identity Development (Unstandardized coefficients)

	Involvement	Interactions With Student Services	Community Identity Development
Inputs			
Black [a]	−0.013	.015	−.064
Indian [b]	0.843**	.064	−.033
Mixed Race	−0.631	−.036	.028
Other Race	−0.199	−.043	.069
Prior Tertiary Experience	−0.292	.004	−.088
Muslim[a]	0.820	.021	.335
Christian [b]	−0.105	.049	.163**
Hindu	0.644	−.087	.273
Other Religion	1.119	.089	−.238
No Religious Affiliation	−2.478***	−.072	−.532***
Socioeconomic Status (Poor)	0.528	−.036	−.037
Marital Status (Married or With Partner)	0.369	−.170	.085
Bridge Variables			
Certificate Program[a]	−0.002	−.002	−.133
Diploma Program[b]	−0.109	.007	.059
Bachelor's Program	0.111	−.005	.074
Major: Education[a]	−1.116***	−.101**	.469***
Major: Engineering [b]	−0.880**	.073*	−.074
Major: Arts, Fashion, or Humanities	−0.128	−.024	−.286***
Major: Science & Technology	1.190	.053	.129
Major: Other	0.934**	−.001	−.238*
Time of Class Attendance (Day)	0.977	.060	−.052
Enrollment Status (Part-Time)	−2.071*	.036	.137
Proximal Environments			
Caring Interactions with Student Services Staff	—	—	.393***
Cocurricular Involvement	—	.017***	.029*
R^2	0.065***	.110	.214***

RMSEA = .042, CFI = .946, SRMR = .024.
a. Variable excluded in first analysis.
b. Variable excluded in second analysis.
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

direct effect on students' ID: more frequent positive peer interactions had a positive direct effect on ID while more frequent negative peer interactions had a negative direct effect. Both group work and cocurricular involvement, however, had indirect effects on ID, as both had a positive effect on students' positive peer interactions. Overall, the model explained 17.8% of the variance in ID and had good model fit (RMSEA = .039, CFI = .96, SRMR = .018).

Table 3. Direct Effects for Interpersonal Development (Unstandardized coefficients)

	Group Work	Negative Peer Interactions	Positive Peer Interactions	Cocurricular Involvement	Interpersonal Development
Inputs					
Black [a]	—	.065	−.083	−0.008	−.001
Indian [b]	—	.106	−.002	0.836**	.024
Mixed Race	—	.077	.024	−0.633	.100
Other Race	—	−.247*	.061	−0.195	−.122
Prior Tertiary Experience	—	−.093	−.010	−0.295	−.090
Muslim [a]	—	−.121	−.027	0.815	.158**
Christian [b]	—	−.204*	−.055	−0.119	.002
Hindu	—	−.097	−.043	0.639	.056
Other Religion	—	.330	.019	1.146	−.285*
No Religious Affiliation	—	.091	.107	−2.481***	.070
Socioeconomic Status (Poor)	—	.125	−.087**	0.544	−.165
Marital Status (Married or With Partner)	—	−.141*	.004	0.358	−.157*
Bridge Variables					
Certificate Program [a]	.158*	−.102	.043	< .001	.020
Diploma Program [b]	−.275**	.017	−.026	−0.107	−.029
Bachelor's Program	.117	.085*	−.017	0.107	.010
Major: Education [a]	.070	.122	−.073*	−1.045***	.174***
Major: Engineering [b]	−.136**	.057***	.029	−0.896**	−.063
Major: Arts, Fashion, or Humanities	−.126**	.035	−.043	−0.166	−.082
Major: Science & Technology	.303	−.162	.100*	1.203	.127*
Major: Other	−.111	−.052	−.013	0.904***	−.156***
Time of Class Attendance (Day)	−.381	−.219	.343**	0.991	.030
Enrollment Status (Part-Time)	.370	.245	−.333*	−2.069*	.160
Proximal Environments					
Positive Interactions with Diverse Peers	—	—	—	—	.154***
Negative Interactions with Diverse Peers	—	—	—	—	−.066*
Group Work in Class	—	.074	.519***	—	−.001
Cocurricular Involvement	—	.016	.015**	—	.014
R^2	.057	.048***	.364***	0.065***	.178***

RMSEA = .039, CFI = .96, SRMR = .018.
a. Variable excluded in first analysis.
b. Variable excluded in second analysis.
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Although the main focus of our analysis was the relationship between student environments (group work, peer interactions, and interactions with student services staff), we also found a number of noteworthy direct and indirect effects of student inputs and bridge variables on both CID and ID. These effects were particularly complicated when it came to students' major areas. For example, we found that majoring in education had a significant positive direct effect on

both CID and ID, but a significant negative direct effect on cocurricular involvement, interactions with student services staff, and positive peer interactions. Majoring in engineering had a negative effect on group work and involvement, a positive effect on interactions with student support services staff and negative peer interactions, and no significant remaining direct effect on either CID or ID. Majoring in arts, fashion, and humanities had a negative direct effect on CID, and a negative indirect effect on ID through its negative effect on group work. Majoring in "other" fields had a positive effect on involvement, but a negative direct effect on both CID and ID. There were also a few noteworthy effects of time of class attendance and enrollment status. Being a part-time student had a negative effect on involvement (thus having a negative indirect effect on both CID and ID) and positive peer interactions (accentuating the negative indirect effect on ID), while attending classes during the day had a positive effect on positive peer interactions (thus a positive indirect effect on ID).

Discussion and Implications

Our findings point to important implications for practice in T&T, and also to ways in which we might understand student engagement and student development in a collectivist cultural context. Of the three main college environments we examined in this study, we found that only student's cocurricular involvement had a significant direct effect on both community identity development and interpersonal development. This is consistent with research by Wawrzynski et al. (2012) in South Africa and Magpily and Mercado (2014) in the Philippines, both of which pointed to the importance of cocurricular involvement in predicting student development and success. The effect of cocurricular involvement for students at UTT was magnified by its indirect effects on both CID and ID. In addition to having direct effects on both development outcomes, cocurricular involvement also had a positive indirect effect on CID through its positive effect on students' interactions with student support services staff, and a positive indirect effect on ID through its positive effect on students' positive peer interactions. This provides strong support for the importance of institutional support and promotion of student involvement in clubs and organizations at UTT.

As noted above, consistent with the existing US-based literature on the importance of interacting with student affairs and student services professionals (Campbell et al., 2012; Dugan & Komives, 2010; Hatch & Garcia, 2017), we found that at UTT having positive interactions with student support services staff had a significant direct effect on students' CID, but no effect on ID. Interestingly, Dugan and Komives (2010) did not find relationships between students' having a mentoring relationship with student affairs professionals and the three personal dimensions of leadership development that they measured (consciousness of self, congruence, and commitment); the only positive relationship that having a mentoring relationship with student affairs professionals had with leadership development was through students' ability to collaborate with others, reflecting interpersonal development. This is, in some ways, the opposite of our findings at UTT. It may be that the type and content of these interactions are different in the US than at UTT, as the findings of Campbell et al. (2012) have shown that mentoring processes matter in student leadership development in the US. Qualitative research might be used to explore the specific ways in which student services professionals are interacting with and mentoring students at UTT to better identify how these interactions are influencing students' development.

Our findings regarding the relationship between peer interactions and students' development at UTT also shed light on the potential for student services professionals to further affect students' development. In general, the frequency with which students engaged with their peers through course-based group work had no direct effect on students' CID or ID; however, group work did have a positive indirect effect on ID in that engaging in group work had a positive effect on the frequency with which students had positive peer interactions. Students' interactions with diverse peers, both positive and negative, had direct effects on students' ID, which is consistent with work on diversity interactions in the US by Gurin et al. (2002) and others (e.g., Bowman, 2010, 2011; Engberg, 2007; Mayhew & Engberg, 2010; Nelson Laird, 2005). Similar to Engberg's (2007) findings about the negative effect of negative diversity interactions and interpersonal outcomes, we found that positive peer interactions had a positive effect and negative peer interactions had a negative effect on students' ID.

Although Mayhew and Engberg (2010) found that generally negative diversity interactions had a negative effect on students' moral

development, when they examined students in an intergroup dialogue course separately from those in an introduction to sociology course, they found that negative diversity interactions no longer had a significant effect for students in the intergroup dialogue course. They theorized that the intergroup dialogue courses encouraged students to reflect on these negative experiences and provided the necessary supports for students to do so, thus attenuating the typically negative effects of negative diversity experiences. Student services professionals can work to promote positive interactions across difference, but can also engage in discussions with students to help them make meaning of negative interactions they may have with diverse peers.

Based on Gurin et al.'s (2002) theory of diversity interactions—which focuses on the importance of cognitive dissonance provided by diversity interactions in promoting students' identity development—it was surprising that neither positive nor negative diversity interactions had any effect on UTT students' CID. This may be one situation where the cultural differences between the US and T&T are particularly relevant. Gurin et al. (2002) argued that increased self-determination, rather than reliance on external authorities, is a key part of the developmental process for students in the US, reflecting the individualistic nature of US student development. Our measure of intrapersonal development, CID, focuses more on students' sense of self in relation to community (in general and specifically related to religious and cultural community), a collectivist interpretation that may be affected differently by peer interactions than intrapersonal development that is viewed with a more individualistic notion. It may also be that our focus on interactions with diverse peers failed to capture the extent to which interactions with similar peers may influence students' community identity development. For example, in a study of US students' experiences with immersive service-learning programs, Niehaus and Rivera (2015) found that, particularly for Students of Color, volunteering in a racially similar community was related to students' understanding of their own racial/ethnic identity (intrapersonal development), while volunteering in a racially different community was not. Scholars using quantitative research in this area might include a wider variety of types of interactions with peers, and qualitative research could be used to investigate in more depth the ways in which students are making meaning of their peer interactions.

Although our focus was mainly on the tertiary experiences that are related to students' interpersonal and intrapersonal development, we also identified a number of differences in development based on students' race/ethnicity, religion, prior enrollment, socioeconomic status, and academic major. This may provide some important insight for student services professionals at UTT and in T&T more broadly when considering how demographically different students may be experiencing tertiary education differently. Of particular note were the direct and indirect effects of major on both CID and ID. Majoring in education, for example, had positive direct effects on both outcomes, yet it had negative indirect effects on both outcomes, in that education majors reported lower levels of cocurricular involvement, fewer positive interactions with student services staff, and less frequent positive interactions with diverse peers. On the other hand, majoring in a field other than one of those specified had negative direct effects on both outcomes, but had positive indirect effects on both outcomes, in that students in other majors reported higher levels of cocurricular involvement than their peers. These findings may reflect the disciplinary content or other pedagogical practices employed within different fields that facilitate student development beyond the effects of students' out-of-class experiences. Future research might shed more light on why these differences exist by major and what student services professionals can do to maximize the engagement and development of all students.

Conclusion

As more emphasis is placed on the role of tertiary education in promoting positive economic development and citizenship in T&T, more research specific to this cultural context is needed on the experiences, learning, engagement, and development of students. This study is one early step toward creating a robust research base for tertiary education practices in T&T, especially for student support services professionals. The findings from this study point to the importance of the work that student support services professionals do on campus, especially when it comes to interacting directly with students, fostering meaningful peer interactions, and promoting cocurricular involvement.

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