How Space Matters: Reflections from a Student Inquiry Project on Race, Space, & the PCC Landscape

Knowledge-building is a collaborative effort.

The perceptions of people of color regarding race and space, while valid, are often not considered.

While some patterns emerged, students of color were not homogenous in their responses to questions regarding space.

There is a lack of education about CRT among PCC community members.

People of color are more complex than just our racial and ethnic identities.

People of color are under-represented in PCC spaces, curriculum, artwork, faculty, administration, and other dimensions of educational environments.

When conceptualizing campus spaces there are opportunities to create platforms where dominant narratives, that perpetuate historical injustices, can be addressed through design.

White supremacy prevails in society through norms, traditions, and beliefs that manifest in built environments, destroying the integrity of humanity.

A colorful space does not necessarily communicate an inclusive environment to people of color.

Normative built environments reinforce and conceal “the white gaze,” which alienates some students of color from PCC spaces, and inhibits the confidence to engage fully in learning experiences without self-censorship.

Questions to Consider...

- How will the spatial environments you plan to inhabit and travel PCC campuses?
- How might design maintain or disrupt the status quo?
- How will the environments you create condition the people that inhabit and access resources?
- How might design inform design decisions?
Reflections: Student Survey

On conducting surveys on space:
- We found the survey difficult to plan, design, and execute comprehensively due to time and resource constraints.
- As an informal inquiry project much of what we learned is inconclusive.
- Participant awareness of terminology regarding spatial categories was a barrier to responses.
- Findings help illuminate direction for more formal research in the future.

Out of 138 students of color surveyed across the district, the following observations were made:
- 36% said they did not feel that spaces in the PCC environment represented them.
- Student suggestions indicated three potential contributions to spaces that would feel more inclusive: artwork and visual representation, forums that allow students to talk about concerns and issues, and spaces which encourage connection and collaboration.
- Three potentially significant reasons students provided for avoiding spaces include: a lack of representation, crowdedness, and access to/distance from spaces.

44% of student responses claimed resource centers came to mind as “intersectional-space”
72% of student responses claimed resource centers came to mind as “under resourced-space”

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About Space Matters

Space Matters was a project of PCC Facilities Planning as a means to align built environments with PCC’s strategic vision for equity and inclusion. Through training and practical experience, Space Matters invited students to explore CRT and spatial theories as a means to design campus-based inquiry projects that seek to explore relationships between race and space at PCC. Students participate in 3 daylong workshops, conduct activities in between workshop sessions to further campus-based inquiry projects (ex: taking photos, talking to peers, conducting research), and present project insights and reflections to the PCC community.

Space Matters is also part of a dissertation study. The aim of the study is to increase knowledge that may help educational leaders and campus planners to align facilities planning and design with institutional values for equity and inclusion. The experiences and perceptions of PCC students of color provide valuable insight into ways in which CRT may open possibilities for equity and inclusion in facilities planning and design at a community college. For more information about Space Matters contact Amara H. Pérez, ahperez@uncg.edu.