

ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: A Phenomenological Examination of the Diversity Experiences of Undergraduates at a Private, Religiously-Affiliated University

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The purpose of this study was to explore the essence of diversity experiences of some undergraduates on a private, religiously-affiliated university. Sixteen undergraduates from a Midwestern private, religiously affiliated university were interviewed and described their diversity experiences. The key components of their experiences revealed five emergent themes: Types of diversity experiences, Forms of diversity experiences, Influence of previous context, Benefits of diversity experiences, and Faith issues regarding diversity experiences. These overarching themes were viewed through van Manen's (1990) notion that phenomenological themes may be defined as the structures of experience. This examination of a progression or flow of the themes explained how the following progression or flow worked within a system of contextually related experiences to help bring about benefits of student and faith development within the participants' educational lives.

The progression began when forms of diversity experiences enabled different types of diversity experiences to take place in the undergraduates' lives. In turn, the dynamics created within those types of diversity experiences instigated critical reflection of the participants' previous context and previous held beliefs and values. This process of reflection/critical thinking

enabled personal reassessment/transformation to take place as the benefits of diversity experiences produced life change within the undergraduates' lives. In sum, the progression or theme flow enabled significant individual student and faith development to take place as a result of diversity experiences within the undergraduates' educational lives.

Embracing van Manen's (1990) concept of themes defining the structure of experiences may allow the progression or flow of themes to provide the possibility for colleges/universities to chart an intentional course along that progression directed towards achieving the positive benefits that diversity experiences can bring to undergraduates' within their educational lives.