

**Report for “Fostering an ‘Open’ Culture at Empire State College: An Ethnographic Study of Niagara Frontier Center Participant Observations” (AY 2012-2013)**

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**ABSTRACT**

This research project grew out of a paper presented at the 2011 All-College Conference of Empire State College (ESC) in Saratoga Springs, NY. As part of a plenary session entitled “Empire State College as an Open University: Open to Whom?” Principal Investigator Rhianna Rogers presented a paper entitled “Is ESC’s Niagara Frontier Center (NFC) a Culturally ‘Open’ Center for Learning?” This paper discussed Rogers’s tentative findings about cultural views within the Niagara Frontier Center (NFC) student population (2010-2011). Data utilized in all stages of this project (2010-2013), combined Western New York (WNY) Regional Census reports, ESC Census data, and general findings from informal and formal surveys to discuss the level of cultural understanding at NFC and whether it correlated with student academic performance, retention, and persistence. Pilot survey data from the AY 2010-2012 indicated a general lack of cultural understanding among student populations and suggested that culturally diverse students were not being adequately engaged. Results of the AY 2012-2013 formal survey reaffirmed many of the pilot survey results, but also yielded new information about WNY culture and its impact on students, not previously considered. Information collected from both the pilot and formal surveys were later used to create cultural activities to engage students at the Center. Positive feedback and regular attendance at these events by student, staff, and faculty suggested the validity of this research. The results of this data collection are articulated in the report presented below.

**INTRODUCTION AND CURRENT LITERATURE**

The premise of this research project is twofold. First, it builds upon the State University of New York (SUNY) initiative to support SUNY-Empire State College “as a nationally recognized open university” (“The Institute for Open Education and SUNY Empire State College,” 2012). As such, it is committed to the Institute of Open Education (IOE)<sup>1</sup> principle that “the best practices of openness” include “openness in all its forms, from Open Innovation and Open Leadership to Open Governance and Open Learning.” Secondly, it builds upon recent socio-

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<sup>1</sup> In May 2012, SUNY ESC opened the Institute for Open Education (IOE). Its mission and purpose is “to be homologous in that its focus on open education would both support and strengthen the work of SUNY—Empire State College as a nationally recognized open university and to establish the initial framework upon which to build OPENSUNY and/or other larger collaborative ventures.”<sup>1</sup> As such, “Open institutions” are those that are completely committed to removing the barriers that restrict access for those traditionally underserved by higher education. To learn more about IOE, please read the following article: <http://www.esc.edu/news/releases/2012/new-york-institute-for-open-education.html>.

cultural research into student engagement and retention in collegiate settings. The outline presented below is the realization of this full-fledged research project.

One of the key barriers to openness has been the discrepancy in equity and access experienced by students that have been historically underrepresented in higher education. Toward this end, several scholars across the disciplines have examined the impact that demographic divides have on student academic performance, retention, and persistence (Bridgeman & Wendler, 1991; Brown & Cross, 1997; Daugherty & Lane, 1999; Galicki & McEwen, 1989; Lu, 1994; Porter, 1990; Schram, 1996). However, the vast majority of current research has concentrated on the plight of traditional college students, ages 18-24/25. In order to expand on this current research trend, this study utilized a non-traditional college student population from one of SUNY Empire State College's 7 Regional Centers, Niagara Frontier Center (hereafter referred to as NFC), located in Western New York. A sampled population at NFC was used to determine if the same factors impact a non-traditional student body. A combination of demographics and behaviors were measured to determine what factors increased (or decreased) students' risk of attrition and made them amenable to change or intervention at various stages in their student life. With the hopes to address these informal research objectives, two sets of criteria were measured in our survey project: 1) sociocultural demographics and 2) measuring perceptions of culture in NFC and WNY compiled through survey matrix questions and open-ended questions. This information was tabulated and used to identify independent variables impacting our nontraditional students' population at NFC. Therefore, in this study, we hope to gain a better understanding of how culture impacts NFC students, and determine if knowledge of this data can promote a more "culturally open" regional center.

## **DEFINING "CULTURALLY OPEN"**

In order to verify our results, it is important to first define our use of "culturally open." Within academia, many scholars have discussed the role of cultural openness, usually coining it as a form of Intercultural Competency (Bennett, 1993; Byram, 1997; Chen & An, 2009; Deardorff, 2006, Deardorff, 2008; Deardorff, 2009(a); Deardorff, 2009 (b); Deardorff, 2010; Nwosu, 2009; Spitzberg & Changnon. 2009). Though this terminology is usually associated internationally with Educational Qualifying Frameworks (EQFs), we elected to adopt this definition as a universal measure of cultural openness to support our goal to be as open and inclusive as possible. Keeping this in mind, we referred to the European group LIMA (Labour-Market Integration of Migrants and Refugees through Advice and Guidance) as a guide for developing a universal definition. They provide an excellent definition for Intercultural competence in Institutions, which we have included below and later modified for our study:

Intercultural competence of institutions refers to the capacity of the institutions concerned to adapt their structure and performance (rules & regulations governing the interaction between employees and members of the target group, mono-cultural or multi-cultural composition of the institution's workforce, etc.) to the demands of intercultural encounters. ("LIMA Distance Learning Package", 2000).

It is with this broader definition in mind that we define "culturally open" in this project as an institution concerned with the modification and adaptation of structural and performance

elements including, but not limited to, rules & regulations governing the interactions as well as cultural factors impacting interactions between 1) students and employed members of the NFC community, 2) NFC students at NFC-Cheektowaga and its regional units, and 3) multicultural and monocultural constituents within NFC and WNY in order to measure the intercultural encounters between said groups and determine their impacts on student performance, retention, and persistence.

## **RESEARCH QUESTION AND OBJECTIVES**

Based on these aforementioned concepts, the following research question was developed:

1. How can ESC/NFC become a more culturally ‘open’ regional center?

Based on this question, we developed the following research objectives. Our hope is to:

1. *Understand* and or construct a localized cultural history for ESC/NFC students and faculty in the context of the surrounding WNY cultural populations;
2. *Comment* on the role of culture in each representative demographic group at ESC/NFC and the greater Buffalo region; and
3. *Determine* what, if any, have occurred in or around ESC/NFC that may have positively or negatively impacted the learning processes for diverse populations.

## **THEORETICAL OVERVIEW**

This project utilizes aspects of the Grounded Theory approach, first introduced by Drs. Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967), in conjunction with the quantitative principles of the Multivariate Analysis. Viewing this study through both of these lenses will allow us to use historical and contemporary research, survey and census data, and participant profile tabulations to observe the effectiveness of NFC as a culturally open regional center and measure their impacts on student performance, retention, and persistence. Participants submitted informal surveys as part of the pilot (AY 2010-2012) and formal surveys (AY 2012-2013) about the role of cultural understanding both at NFC and in the greater Buffalo area. A sample of the data collected is presented below.

## **METHODOLOGICAL OVERVIEW**

This project utilized multiple distribution platforms to collect information from students, including the dissemination of in person surveys, emailed surveys, mailed surveys, and electronic surveys. Information was provided in a global email to students once each term about the Buffalo Project, how to take part in the project, and a link to the project website (<http://commons.esc.edu/rhiannarogers/the-buffalo-project-an-ethnographic-study-of-western-new-york/>). All Participants were required to fill out three (3) online forms, a Consent Form, a Participant Profile Form, and a Participant Survey Form to be formally included in this study. The only difference between each mode of survey delivery, were with those that elected to complete the survey online. Due to the format of the *Survey Monkey Professional* Software

system, online participants were not required to provide their name in the Consent Form.<sup>2</sup> All data was put into searchable Excel Spreadsheets for data collection and processing.

Table 1. **Project Timeline** AY 2012-2013 Formal IRB Survey

<b>Date</b>	<b>Survey Collection</b>
Sept. 11-Dec. 23, 2012 (Fall 01 and Fall 02)	Collect data online and in person from students across ESC-NFC
Jan.-March 2013	Data Processing
April-May 2013	Report Write Up and Presentation

## **PROCEDURES**

We sorted the Buffalo Project survey collection and processed all data according to the following procedures. A total of 768 students were registered at NFC during the Fall 01 and Fall 02 terms, Fall 01 starting in September 2012 and Fall 02 starting in March 2012 respectively. Between September and December 2012, 94 surveys were collected from NFC students of which 79 were completed in their entirety. Those students who did not complete all three IRB forms (i.e., the survey consent form, the participant profile form, the participant survey form) were excluded from the sample. All printed documents (email and print surveys collected) were color coded and labeled according to student name. Once all documents were coded, names were removed and a list of all AY 2012-2013 survey participants were compiled in an Excel spreadsheet titled *Confidential Participant Names and Numbers AY 2012-2013* and stored in a secure file cabinet. Once initially sorted, the Participant Profile Forms and Participant Survey Forms were grouped into two Excel Spreadsheets titled *Participant Survey Form AY 2012-2013* and *Participant Profile Data AY 2012-2013*. From there, data was transferred into SPSS for data processing. The information below illustrates a sample of those results.

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<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to note that students in the online survey platform tended to be more candid with their answers than those who were required to give their names. This may be something we considered eliminating in future iterations of this survey project.

Table 2. Total Tabulations for Surveys Collected in AY 2012-2013 Formal Survey<sup>3</sup>

<b>Total AY 2012-2013</b>	<b>Total Incomplete</b>	<b>Total Complete</b>
Print Surveys	73	65
Emailed Surveys	6	4
Survey Monkey Surveys	15	10
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>79</b>

## **RISKS**

The risks for this project are no greater than minimal. As mentioned above, students' names were removed from the print documents and all survey participant names (both print and online) were stored in a separate location on a secure flash drive. The participants were fully informed of the experimental tasks before they consented, and only individuals who volunteer and provide consent were counted as participants. The participants were advised in the consent form that they could decline to answer any questions that made them uncomfortable and they could terminate their participation at any time (see Appendix A). It is important to note that students did elect to skip questions, but no students decided to terminate their involvement in the project. No adverse effects were encountered; however, we did note their classification as disabled. Since we were not aware of all of the participant's personal histories, there was a possibility that we could have encountered "at risk" individuals in our survey population, including those who may be classified as "disabled, mentally disabled, and/or physically ill." As mentioned above, we did note that a few students classified themselves as disabled (n= 8). However, the information collected in this study did not specifically target these populations or require that these individuals disclose any of the aforementioned information if they elected not to and skip the question. As such, we believe that these individuals' rights and welfare were not impacted by their participation in this project.

## **DATA SAFETY:**

The Primary Investigator (PI), Dr. Rhianna C. Rogers, continues to be responsible for ensuring data integrity and safety monitoring for human subjects who are involved in the research. The data that will be monitored and collected, including respondents' survey responses, and will be overseen by Dr. Rogers; additionally, all discussions and potential participant feedback for this project will be collected and stored by the PI. Digital records with identifiable information will be stored separately for verification purposes.

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<sup>3</sup> NOTE: We excluded duplicate and incomplete surveys when encountered as well as those completed beyond the December 2012 cut off period of this study.

The PI will be responsible for SEPs. If SEPs do arise the PI will meet and report them in an expeditious manner. Due to the low risk, we believe that little could warrant stopping the study, save a breach in security of de-identified data, in which case the project would be stopped. Principal Investigator, Dr. Rhianna C. Rogers, will be responsible for communicating any negative outcomes to the IRB expeditiously. We hope that materials created in this study can be used for future educational purposes within Empire State College as a whole and, more specifically, at NFC and in the greater WNY region.

**SUBJECTS**

1. Describe the salient characteristics of the subjects including the age range, sex, institutional affiliation and any other special criteria.

As previously stated, this survey included 79 complete responses, which may include both graduate and undergraduate students. Information collected in the Participant Profile Form and collected on the Excel Spreadsheet titled *Participant Survey Form AY 2012-2013* provided the following data related to age range, sex, and institutional affiliation. Below is a listing of said data. NOTE: We excluded duplicate and incomplete surveys when encountered as well as those completed beyond the December 2012 cut off period of this study.

Table 3. Total Tabulations for Student Ages

<b>Total AY 2012-2013</b>	<b>Under 20</b>	<b>20-39</b>	<b>40-49</b>	<b>50-59</b>	<b>60-69</b>
Age Range	0	30	27	21	1
<b>TOTAL</b>					<b>79</b>

Table 4. Total Tabulations for Sex (M/F)

<b>Total AY 2012-2013</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
Sex	22	57	<b>79</b>

Table 5. Total Tabulations for NFC Enrollment Status

<b>Total AY 2012-2013</b>	<b>Full Time</b>	<b>Part-Time</b>	<b>Non-Matriculated</b>	<b>Total</b>
How are you affiliated with SUNY-Empire State College? (mark all that apply)	48	31	0	<b>79</b>

Table 6. Total Tabulations for How Long Participants Lived in WNY

<b>Total AY 2012-2013</b>	<b>0-5 yrs</b>	<b>6-10 yrs</b>	<b>11-15 yrs</b>	<b>16-20 yrs</b>	<b>21-25 yrs</b>	<b>26+ yrs</b>	<b>Total</b>
How long have you lived in WNY?	4	7	2	3	7	55	<b>78</b>

Table 7. Total Tabulations for Student Income

<b>Total AY 2012-2013</b>	<b>Less than \$20,000</b>	<b>\$20,000- 29,999</b>	<b>\$30,000- 49,999</b>	<b>\$50,000- 74,999</b>	<b>\$75,000- 99,999</b>	<b>\$100,000 +</b>	<b>Total</b>
What is your approximate average household income?	6	9	21	14	15	11	<b>76</b>

Table 8. Total Tabulations for Student Occupation

<b>Total AY 2012-2013</b>	<b>Sales/ Marketing</b>	<b>Trade / Labor</b>	<b>Educatio n/ Student</b>	<b>Manage r</b>	<b>Medic al</b>	<b>Profession al</b>	<b>Other <sup>4</sup></b>	<b>Tota l</b>
Which of the following best describes your current occupation?	7	2	15	10	7	17	20	<b>78</b>

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<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that this other category did not include a dominate classification. Responses ranged from business owner to unemployed to administrator. Surprisingly, there was only one listed as unemployed.

Table 9. Total Tabulations for Student Religious Affiliations

<b>Total AY 2012-2013</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>If yes, what<sup>5</sup></b>	<b>Total</b>
Do you consider yourself religious and/or spiritual?	55	20	49	<b>58</b>

Table 10. Total Tabulations for Student Relationship Status

<b>Total AY 2012-2013</b>	<b>Married</b>	<b>Living together</b>	<b>Single</b>	<b>Never Married</b>	<b>Widowed</b>	<b>Separated</b>	<b>Divorced</b>	<b>Total</b>
Relationship Status	35	9	17	2	7	1	8	<b>79</b>

Table 11. Total Tabulations for Racial Self Classification(s)<sup>6</sup>

<b>Total AY 2012-2013</b>	<b>America</b>	<b>Total</b>
American	46	
Italian American	7	
Irish American	11	
African American	12	
German American	5	
Native American	2	
Hispanic/Latin American	4	
Polish American	6	
Middle Eastern American	6	
Bi Racial	1	
Multiracial	4	
Immigrant	0	
Other	2	<b>106</b>

<sup>5</sup> The formal question was "If yes, please indicate which religion or spiritual group." It is important to note that the vast majority of those religious preferences specified fit under the Christian category (n= 38), with the rest classifying as unidentified (n=6), New Age (n=1), my own (n=1), and nondenominational (n=2) respectively.

<sup>6</sup> Students were allowed to classify themselves in more than one category. The fact that so many elected to do so is a telling statistic.



Table 12. Total Tabulations for Student Household Location<sup>7</sup>

<b>Total AY 2012-2013</b>	<b>America</b>	<b>Total</b>
Buffalo/City	17	
Kenmore	2	
Lancaster	3	
Tonowanda	1	
North Buffalo	1	
Orchard Park	4	
South Buffalo	2	
Amherst	4	
Lockport	3	
Niagara Falls	2	
Depew	2	
Town?	2	
Williamsville	5	
Town of Tonowanda	1	
North Tonowanda	1	
Cheektowaga	3	
Grand Island	1	
South Wales	1	
Depew/Cheektowaga	1	
Akron/Newstead	1	
Akron	1	
Hamburg	2	
Cowesville/Attica	1	
West Seneca	5	
Town of Conewango	1	
Manlius	1	
Blasdell	1	
Cherry Creek	1	
Wellsville	1	
Strykersville	1	
Caneadea	1	
Geneva	1	
East Aurora	1	
Gerry	1	
Town of Amherst	1	
East Amherst	2	
I have many dwellings	1	
Other	2	<b>106</b>

<sup>7</sup> Students were allowed to classify themselves in more than one category. The fact that so many elected to do so is a telling statistic.

Table 13. Total Tabulations for Military Students

<b>Total AY 2012-2013</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Total</b>
Military	5	73	<b>78</b>

Table 14. Total Tabulations First Generation College Students

<b>Total AY 2012-2013</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Total</b>
First Generation College Student	19	59	<b>78</b>

Table 15. Total Tabulations for Student Primary NFC Location

<b>Total AY 2012-2013</b>	<b>NFC-Cheektowaga</b>	<b>NFC-Olean</b>	<b>NFC-Lockport</b>	<b>NFC-Jamestown</b>	<b>NFC-Fredonia</b>	<b>NFC-CDL</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>NFC Home Location</b>	49	0	3	2	0	5	<b>59</b>

2. Explain the selection of special and/or vulnerable populations and, if there are alternatives, why they are not being used. Explain how the rights and welfare of these special populations will be protected.

No vulnerable populations are targeted for inclusion in this study (see comments in Data Safety section above and see Table 16 below).

Table 16. Total Tabulations Students with Disabilities (Self Classified)

<b>Total AY 2012-2013</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Total</b>
Disabilities	8	70	<b>78</b>

3. Explain how the subjects are to be recruited and what compensation, if any, is offered. Attach a copy of the recruiting materials (letter, poster, advertisement).

Participants were voluntarily recruited and asked to sign a consent form, as fill out the Participant Profile and Participant Survey forms, if they wished to participate. Though the PI is an instructor, only those students who consented had their experiences included in the analysis,

including students who may have taken or are taking courses with the PI. Status of consent did not impact course grades in any way. Each student was informed in writing that their participation in this study, in no way impacted their grades in any way. Further their participation was wholly voluntary and data analysis did not take place until after final grades have been assigned.

Recruitment consisted of an announcement via email and informed consent, Participant Profile, and Participant Survey forms delivered via email, as well as a verbal announcement made in various courses and during various activity days at NFC. All verbal announcements for this project were given at NFC-Cheektowaga. NFC students in the Units were provided only with email announcements. Some Unit coordinators were given print versions of the survey; however, it is unknown which version of the survey was more readily used by Unit participants.

For course, the students were asked to volunteer for the study, either by the PI or the project Research Assistant. Signed consent forms were held in sealed envelopes until the appropriate time for data to be analyzed (see Tentative Timeline above).

4. If relevant, describe how permission has been obtained from cooperating institution(s) – school, prison or other organization. For research within school districts, New York State law requires that the superintendent of schools grant permission, not the principals. Attach the approval letters.

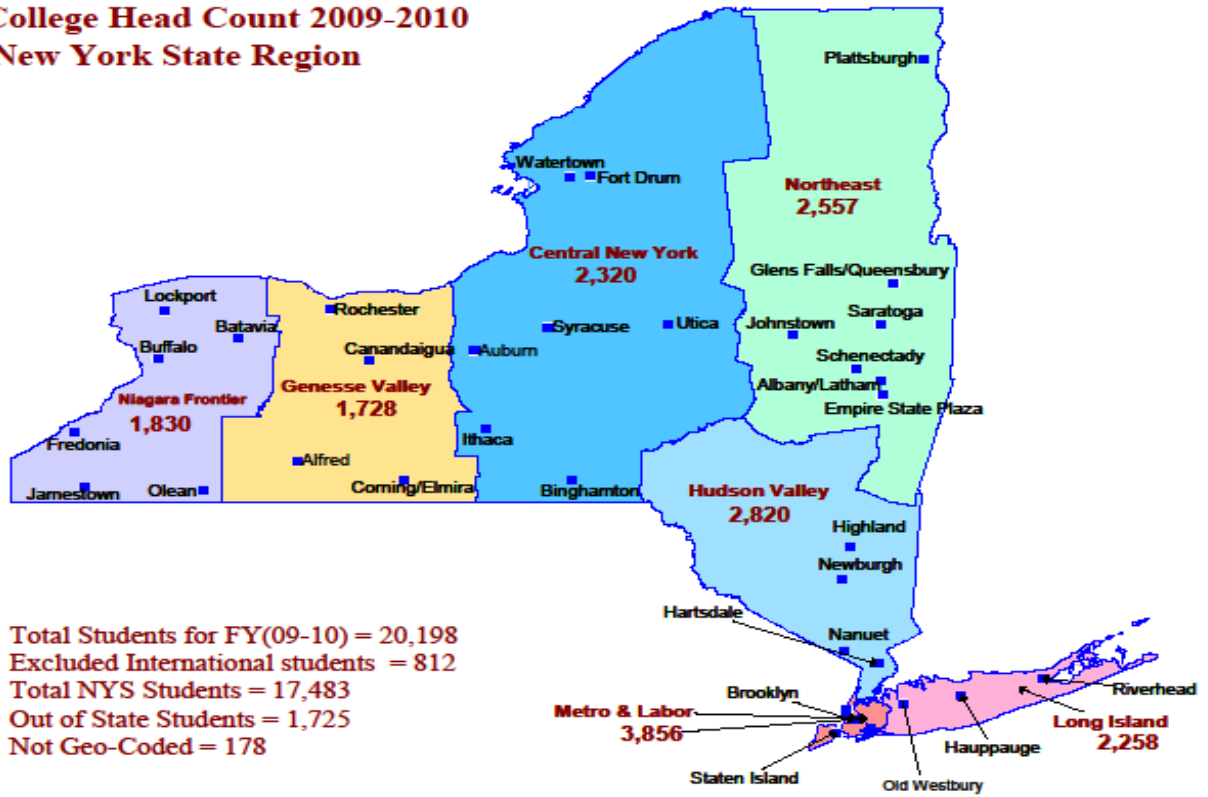
N/A

## **GENERAL INTERPRETATION OF NFC DEMOGRAPHICS**

As Dean Nan DiBello states “The Niagara Frontier region serves more than 1,100 undergraduate students annually at five locations in Western New York. Home to more than 4,500 alumni, our region is rich with talented, motivated people who are involved in the community. The Buffalo regional administrative office is in Cheektowaga and four smaller offices are located in Fredonia, Jamestown, Lockport and Olean.” (“Welcome to Niagara Frontier Center,” 2013).

Map 1. Empire State College Student Demographics by Region (2010-2011)

**Empire State College Head Count 2009-2010  
By New York State Region**



A closer examination of the sampled demographics yielded a few expected and unexpected results. As expected, the NFC age range, sex, and institutional affiliation fell mostly within the 2010-2011 College-wide student demographic data, collected and analyzed in 2012 by the Center for Planning and Institutional Effectiveness. NFC age range included participants representing ages 20-69 yrs, with the largest percentage represented those within the classification of 20-39 yrs (n=30). This data is consistent with the ESC's overall average student age, currently 35.5 yrs.<sup>8</sup> NFC sex ratios indicated that 72% (57:79) of the participants were female, while only 27% (22:79) were their male counterparts. This illustrates a somewhat inflated calculation compared to the 2010-2011 statistics for the overall College, which indicate

<sup>8</sup> 2011-2012 Fact Book: *Prepared by the Center for Planning and Institutional Effectiveness*. Saratoga Springs: State University of New York, Empire State College, Revised 12/2012, pg. 37

the ratio between men and women are F (57.3%) and M (42.7%) respectively. This may indicate that NFC has a larger population of female students than do other locations across the College. As would be expected, the vast majority of our students are Full-time (n= 48) and Part-time (n= 31) attendees of NFC; however, we did not have any non-matriculated students within this survey. This could indicate their lack of involvement within everyday activities of this Center or a low enrollment of these types of students. In addition, most of the students who participated in this survey were from NFC-Cheektowaga (n= 49); however there was some representation from other parts of the Center including Lockport (n=3), Jamestown (n=2), NFC-CDL (n=5). Students in NFC-Olean and NFC-Fredonia did not participate in this survey. This may indicate a lack of effective communication between the main location in Cheektowaga, the survey coordinators, and NFC Units.

Some unexpected demographic data collected in this survey related to household income, neighborhood classification, and students who classified themselves as first generation college attendees. There are many assumptions presented as facts in current literature about WNY history, including the assumption that most individuals in WNY culture represent a “blue collar” standard of living; however, the data suggests that students who attend NFC more likely representing a higher economic bracket than represented in the Greater Buffalo region. The 2010 Census data for Buffalo indicates that a median household income for 2007-2011 is \$30,230.<sup>9</sup> Our survey results indicated that 27% (21:76) of the population fell within this WNY median income range (\$ 30,000-49,999); however, 52% (40:76) of the population surveyed have incomes well beyond this average (\$50,000-100,000+). While 19% (15:76) of the population made less than the median income average. This tells us that students within this region who attend NFC may represent a “white collar” constituency previously unaccounted for general historical data. Additionally, we found it interesting how many different neighborhoods were classified by participants (n=38). Based on the history of segregation in the region, both racial and socioeconomic, this is not a surprising statistic; however, it is interesting to see it substantiated in our data. This was further reinforced in the actual survey when 76% (36:47) of people indicated that the preservation of neighborhood identity was important to them. Due to the assumption that WNY is comprised on “blue collar” individuals mostly, many assume that the vast majority of people and their family members have not attended college. This assumption was negated by our research in that those who classified themselves as first generational college students consisted of only 24% (19:78) of the population survey. This indicates that the vast majority of the student population, 76% respectively (59:78), came from families who had members who had (or are) attending college. One can speculate that this, again, reinforced the notion that our student body is *not* comprised of a solely “blue collar” populace; rather, it may mean that our population is reflecting a more middle to upper class “white collar” demographic.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/36/3611000.html>

## **BENEFITS AND ASSOCIATED ACTIVITIES**

As indicated in the abstract, the collection of data from this project is meant to help NFC improve its connection to diverse student populations and become a more “culturally open” Regional Center. Through the dissemination of student survey results and the solicitation of feedback from students, faculty, and administration between AY 2010-2013, we hoped to gain insight about the best ways to implement activities that reflected students’ comments articulated in the survey. Additionally, we hope to uncover factors impacting current student performance, retention, and persistence. To help support the goals of this project, the following activities and events were developed and instituted at NFC to help reinforce the goals listed above.

1. 1st Annual Cultural Diversity Luncheon for NFC faculty, staff, and students (Fall 2010)
2. Culture Across the Curriculum Residency (Fall 2011) which included a plenary titled “What is Cultural Sensitivity” Plenary Session (Nov 2011)
3. Buffalo Project Plenary Series (2012-present)
  - a. “Why do We Celebrate Native American Month?” Unseen Tears Movie Viewing and Plenary Session (Nov 2012)
  - b. “Understanding African American Culture?” Unseen Tears Movie Viewing and Plenary Session (Nov 2012)
  - c. Future Events include: Women’s Plenary (Fall 2013); Native American Plenary (Fall 2013); Buffalonian Neighborhoods Plenary (Spring 2013); Middle Eastern American (Summer 2013)
4. Developed an NFC Student Club- SUNY ESC NFC CARES (Jan 2013-present)
  - a. Club Website: <http://sunyesc cares.wordpress.com/>
  - b. Club Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/SUNYESCCARES?fref=ts>

## **NEED FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

We plan to expand on this first survey in AY 2013-2014 by doing the following: 1) incorporating another PI, Dr. Aimee Woznick, to help with the Student Service perspective and impacts of our data set 2) utilizing a completing “blind” consent form that does not require student names and 3) expand our survey range to include more respondents from Units. It is our view that this work has a lot to offer the broader anthropological, ethnographic, and Student Service communities of this region as well as those researchers who are specifically interested in the application of cultural research to broader educational concepts of cultural sensitivity, student retention, academic performance, and persistence. We believe it has the potential to improve student retention at NFC as well as increase awareness of cultural diversity and interests already present at the College. In addition, this project has the potential to allow instructors, in both local and regional capacities, the ability to better tailor their studies to students’ diverse cultural interests, which ultimately will allow for the enhancement of learning opportunities for future students and their retention by this institution.

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## APPENDIX A

### SURVEY CONSENT FORM

**Purpose of the Research.** We are conducting an ethnographic study of cultural openness at Empire State College's Niagara Frontier Center (ESC-NFC) and its affiliated Units. This project utilizes aspects of the Grounded Theory approach, first introduced by Drs. Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967), in conjunction with the quantitative principles of the Multivariant Approach. We hope that the combination of both theoretical approaches will allow us to use historical research, survey and census data, as well as participant profile tabulations to observe the effectiveness of NFC as a culturally open regional center. Participants will submit surveys in order to communicate with external and internal audiences the role of cultural in the learning process at NFC.

**Procedure & Duration.** This study will include a short survey and participant profile form about your experiences with culture at ESC-NFC.

**Voluntary Nature.** Participation is voluntary and responses will be kept confidential. You have the option to not respond to any survey questions that you choose. Participation or nonparticipation will not impact your relationship with Empire State College. Though the PI is an instructor, only those students who consent will have their experiences included in the analysis, including students who may have taken or are taking courses with the PI. Status of consent will not impact course grades in any way. You are free to withdraw your participation at any time without penalty.

**Confidentiality.** During this survey you will not be asked for your name. Your survey responses will not impact your grades at ESC in anyway.

The results from the study could be presented in educational settings and at professional conferences, and the results might be published in a professional journal. No identifying information will be presented in any capacity to protect your anonymity.

**Risks and Benefits.** Whenever one works with the internet there is always the risk of compromising privacy, confidentiality, and/or anonymity. We've taken precautions to insure this does not happen but if you participate in the online survey and submit answers, you should close your browser.

The results of the study will be used for improving future courses at Empire State College, to improve learning experiences at ESC-NFC, and for scholarly purposes only.

Compliance Officer, Empire State College, One Union Avenue, Saratoga Springs, NY 12866-4391; 518 587-2100 ext. 2358.

**Implied Consent.** By signing below, you imply that you have read this information and agree to participate in this research. By signing this informed consent to participate you affirm that you are at least 18 years of age. Thank you for your participation.

Participant Name (Printed): \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B

### PARTICIPANT PROFILE FORM

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Dr. Rhianna C. Rogers

RESEARCH ASSISTANT: Maria L. Tripi

#### Theoretical Overview:

This project utilizes aspects of the Grounded Theory approach, first introduced by Drs. Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967), in conjunction with the quantitative principles of the Multivariant Approach. We hope that the combination of both theoretical approaches will allow us to use historical research, survey and census data, as well as participant profile tabulations to observe the effectiveness of NFC as a culturally open regional center. Participants will submit surveys in order to communicate with external and internal audiences the role of cultural in the learning process at NFC. To do so, this project utilizes multiple distribution platforms to collect information, including mini-disclaimer lectures and online postings that correlate with the use and collection of online web surveys and in-person survey results.

**Directions:** Please check all boxes that apply

1) What is your gender?

Male       Female       Other

2) What is your age?

Under 20       20-39       40-49       50-59       60-69       70-79

3) Where do you currently live? (e.g. City/Town/Neighborhood)

\_\_\_\_\_

4) How long have you lived in Western New York? (years)

0-5yrs       6-10yrs       11-15yrs       16-20yrs       21-25yrs       26yrs and over

5) Estimate your annual household income (US Dollars)

Less than \$20,000       \$20,000-\$29,000       \$30,000-\$49,000

\$50,000-\$74,999       \$75,000-\$99,000       \$100,000 and above

6) Do you consider yourself religious and/or spiritual?

Yes       No

If yes, please indicate which religion or spiritual group: \_\_\_\_\_

7) Which of the following best describes your occupation?

- Sales/Marketing       Trade/Labor       Education/Student  
 Manager       Medical       Professional  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

8) What is your relationship status? (Check all that apply)

- Married       Living together       Single       Never Married  
 Widowed       Separated       Divorced

9) How do you classify your race? (Check all that apply or fill in space below)

- American       Italian-American       Irish-American  
 African-American       German-American       Native-American  
 Hispanic/Latin American       Polish-American       Middle Eastern-American  
 Bi-Racial (please clarify) \_\_\_\_\_       Multi-Racial (please clarify) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Immigrant (please clarify) \_\_\_\_\_       Other (please clarify) \_\_\_\_\_

10) Have you ever served in the military?

- Yes       No

11) Would you classify yourself as a student with a disability?

- Yes       No

12) Are you the first in your family to attend college?

- Yes       No

13) How are you affiliated with SUNY-Empire State College (mark all that apply)

- Part-time student       Full-time student       Non-matriculated student  
 NFC-Cheektowaga       NFC-Olean       NFC-Lockport  
 NFC-Jamestown       NFC-Fredonia       NFC-CDL (Primary Learning Center)

## APPENDIX C

### PARTICIPANT SURVEY FORM

**Project Research Question and Objectives:** How can ESC/NFC become a more culturally ‘open’ regional center?

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Rhianna C. Rogers, Ph.D.

RESEARCH ASSISTANT: Maria L. Tripi

To help us better serve you, please complete this survey and return it to us. Thank you!

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I believe that ESC-NFC is a culturally open institution					
I believe that cultural understanding is important to the college learning environment					
I believe that my own cultural identity is important					
I believe that other peoples’ cultural identities are important					
I believe that the preservation of neighborhood identity is important					
I believe that the preservation of Western New York identity is important					
I take the time to understand various cultures and their differences and similarities					
I enjoy learning about different races and ethnicities in a college setting					
I enjoy learning about different races and ethnicities in a personal setting					
I am unsure how to approach others about their cultural backgrounds					
I believe that cultural misunderstandings hurt others					
I believe that discrimination of any type still exists					
I consider myself culturally sensitive					

I believe that other peoples' languages are important to include in the college environment					
I believe that the use and knowledge of technology differs between cultural groups					
I believe socio-economic opportunity impacts culture and subcultures differently					

1. What do you think it means to be "cultured"?

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2. What do you think would make ESC/NFC a more culturally open educational institution for students?

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3. What do you think is your greatest obstacle for being a success at ESC?

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