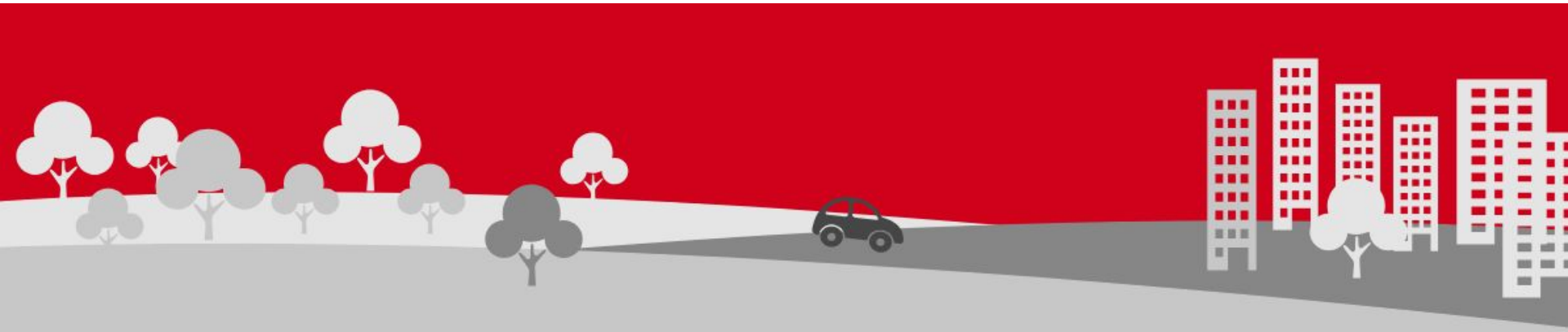


# Finding your place without losing your roots:

Creating inclusive campus environments for students of diverse linguistic backgrounds

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North Carolina State University



# A Missing Element in Campus Diversity Discussions

- Higher education in the United States is increasingly diverse
- Missions of increasing enrollment/augmenting student success for students from diverse and historically underrepresented backgrounds.
- Discussions of diversity in higher education have become more intentional
- However, language as element of diversity still not systematically addressed



# A Missing Element in Campus Diversity Discussions

- Discussions of language diversity remain largely absent among student affairs professionals
- Few examples of systematic and sustained collaborations between linguists and student affairs professionals.
- This represents a notable gap in our efforts to create wholly inclusive and supportive campus environments for our students.



# Call to Action

“Linguists also have a great deal to contribute to the conversation about undergraduate education as a whole, particularly how to best support and empower underrepresented students. These broader issues of overall equity and justice need to be addressed if the linguistic aspects of justice—that is, linguistic equity and linguistic justice—are also going to be manifest”

(Charity Hudley, 2018, p. 201)



# Call to Action

- Call to action for both student affairs practitioners and faculty
- In this session:
  - Why language diversity matters for creating inclusive campuses
  - Examples for working together to leverage respective expertise and empower each other as colleagues to more fully support our students



# Our Campus: North Carolina State University

- 25,000 undergraduate students; 10,000 graduate students
- Roughly 45% of our students are from small towns/rural areas
- Roughly 1 in 5 of our students are first generation college students
  - NCSU was founded by First Gen Students!
- 23% URM; PWI
- About  $\frac{1}{2}$  of undergrads receive need-based aid; around  $\frac{1}{4}$  receive Pell
- Students from all 100 North Carolina counties
- All 50 states
- Over 120 countries



# How it all started: A study on the influence of dialect on college experiences

- Research question: What role does language play in the college experiences of students from rural, Southern Appalachian who attend college outside of Appalachia?

# Methods

- Basic interpretive qualitative, aided in description by sociolinguistic analysis of language
- Interviews, sociolinguistic analysis of speech
- Analysis of language use and reported college experiences
- Target population: Rural Appalachian college students in NC, from Southern Appalachia
  - Students identified as male/female; self-identified as White or African American
  - Between ages 18-25
- Lived in Appalachian area since before age 12
- Assistance from university planning office, students who list graduating from Appalachia county on initial application
- Contacted via email



# Findings: Language and Academic Experiences

- **Elements of course participation and performance can be influenced for more vernacular students**
  - Speaking up in class
  - Degree of comfort in a course
- **Feel additional barriers in academic settings.**
  - Feel they have to work harder to prove intelligence
  - Have to overcome stereotypes
- **Role of Language in Academic Identity**
  - **Sounding like a scholar**
    - What a person needs to sound like to be taken seriously/viewed as scholar
    - How peers/faculty view them as scholars
    - Enjoy proving others wrong when stereotyped

# Findings: Language and Sense of Belonging

- Coming to college made students aware of stigmatization of speech
- Contradictory notion that campus is supportive of linguistic diversity on large scale, but also that to be taken seriously on campus one needs to speak a standard variety
  - Contradiction seems to be explained by campus subcultures
    - Difference between acceptance in certain disciplines, departments, groups
    - Students code-switch in certain, less accepting environments
- Sense of belonging can be influenced to a degree by language
  - Subcultures on campus, micro vs macro
- Influences how accepting some perceive Southern State is compared to other campuses
  - For some students, played a role in college choice
  - CHANGE OVER TIME

# Findings: Language and Interactions with Others on Campus

- **Language and Attraction to Others**
  - Influences, to a degree, the type of people to whom they are initially drawn when making friends and establishing relationships.
  - Cue for identifying other rural students
- **Language and Peer Perceptions**
  - Feel that peers' perceptions of their intelligence is influenced by dialect
  - The way peers view them is influenced by their speech
  - Teasing is often an expression of peer perceptions
  - Sometimes teasing is not perceived as being good-natured or all in fun
  - Establishing relationships can initially be difficult due to stereotypes
  - Perceptions change/diminish over time.
- **Interactions with Faculty**
  - For the most part, participants were not too concerned about the role of language and interaction with faculty:
  - Some have had bad experience with faculty or staff, but this is rather limited
  - Some think faculty might be surprised to hear them and know that they're smart

# Discussion

- Adaptation strategies (code-switching, namely) underscore the presence (and the awareness of most students) of a language of power on campus and role that language plays for students in feeling a need to change to fit in.
  - Involvement may be influenced if they feel like language is rejected in certain arena- subcultures on campus, some more tolerant than others.
  - Influence on initial impressions of university and college choice
  - Change over time
- “Student subcultures and affinity groups have considerable influence over their members, particularly in the first year or two of college” (Kuh 2001, p.32)

# Why does language matter for a diverse campus?

- Language use varies along numerous, intersecting dimensions
- Sense of belonging is critical for student success (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hausman, Schofield, & Woods, 2007; Strayhorn, 2012)
- *Validation* (Rendón, 1994, 2002) particularly important for student success and belonging (Hurtado, Ruiz Alvarado, Guillermo-Wann, 2013)
  - “As originally conceived, validation refers to the intentional, proactive affirmation of students by in- and out-of-class agents (i.e., faculty, student, and academic affairs staff, family members, peers) in order to: 1) validate students as creators of knowledge and as valuable members of the college learning community and 2) foster personal development and social adjustment.” (Rendón Linares & Munoz, 2011, p.12)



# Why does language matter for a diverse campus?

## Student experiences:

- Influences academic performance (Dunstan & Jaeger, 2015), sense of belonging, interactions with others on campus (Ardoin, 2013; Dunstan & Jaeger 2016)
  - Speaking up in class
  - Making friends
  - Interacting with faculty
  - Pressure to code-switch
  - Feeling a sense of belonging
    - *Hearing and seeing* representation



# Why does language matter for a diverse campus?

## Student experiences: Belonging

Sense of belonging can begin pre-arrival; can influence college choice, prime student perceptions before beginning:

*“And then the more, you know, the closer it got to me leaving [for college], I was like, ‘Ehh’ kind of, you know. Cause the girls on tour here were, the tour guides didn’t really have an accent and stuff so I was like, ‘**Oh I don’t want to be the only one with an accent’ you know, so...**” (Megan)*



# Why does language matter for a diverse campus?

## Student experiences: Belonging

Coming to college made students more aware of stigmatization of speech; to participate in academic discourse community, one must speak a certain way. As such, students with more nonstandardized features feel need to code-switch.

*“I know that my success as a student comes from my abilities instead of the way I talk. I change the way I talk, though, to keep people from automatically judging me **so they don’t see me as some dumb hillbilly.**” (Lauren)*



# Why does language matter for a diverse campus?

## Student experiences: Belonging

Students are teased (good naturedly or not); subject to stereotyping by peers, faculty and staff:

*“Like I said, a lot of my friends like to make fun of me, but it’s in like a joking way, but when I first moved here, I didn’t like it. After a while, kinda got used to it, but I guess the way it affected me, ‘cause I didn’t like people making fun of like my country talk and slang, my drawl, so...”*  
*(Jessica)*

*“And here, people more or less think you’re an idiot. Or they think, you know- a lot of time I think people think I’m an idiot. Just because of the way I talk or dress or things like that. And it takes them a little while to understand that I’m not.”* (Hank)

# Why does language matter for a diverse campus?

## Student experiences: Belonging

Students note that some social situations make them more likely to feel less sense of belonging, more likely to code-switch:

*“...like if I’m meeting new people that I feel like would exploit my accent- want me to be ‘the entertainment.’” (Emily)*

Students also note that some programs/departments on campus are more inclusive/accepting than others:

*“I guess in Soc[iology] classes it’s kind of backwards the way it’s supposed to be. I guess in the Soc classes I’ve noticed more of the professors they think I’m a little slower and stuff like that...” (Christopher)*

# Why does language matter for a diverse campus?

## Student experiences:

*“Sometimes I think that people might think that I’m not educated because of it, just because **I have this accent and you hear a country accent and you think hillbilly, and then hillbilly, no education. So I think it’s just the social norm to think that way.**”*



# Why does language matter for diverse campus?

## Faculty/staff representation:

*“I’ve noticed that a lot of the professors don’t have country accents like mine” (Elizabeth)*

**“...scholars don’t have Southern accents.** There’s not hardly anyone in the Anthropology department that actually has a Southern accent, which is kind of weird...There are several teachers at my high school who had very Southern accents but here in the university setting I don’t feel like professors have Southern accents and **so I feel like that’s also an easy way to kind of hide or ignore your accent that you have, and that would go into my image of a better student. I think that goes back to having a Southern accent people tend to think that you are less smart.”** (Sara)

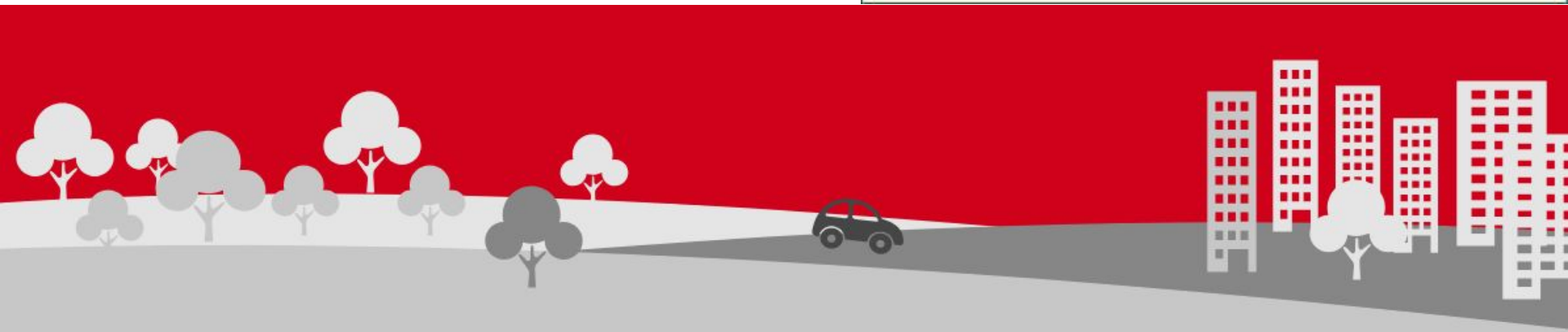
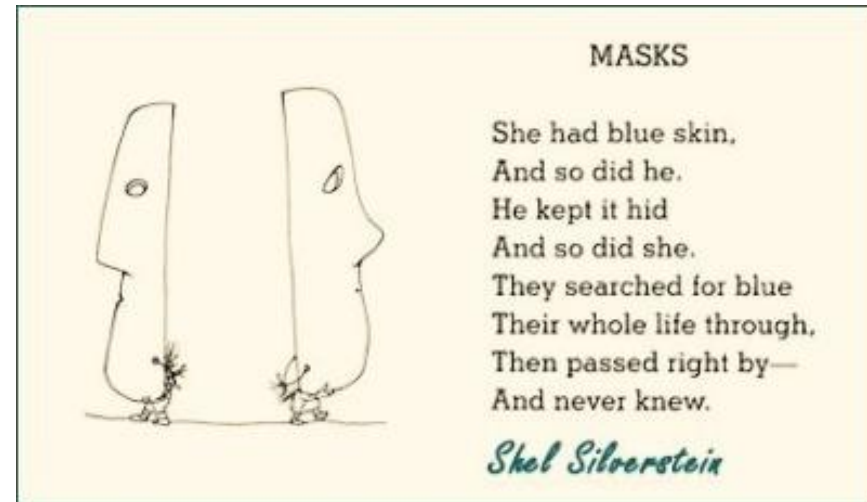


# Why does language matter for diverse campus?

## Faculty/staff representation:

Faculty Dialect Study at NC State findings similar results

- Pressure to code-switch
- Importance of hearing representation
- Notable among:
  - Faculty of color
  - Faculty from working class backgrounds
  - Faculty who are first gen
  - Women faculty



# Implications

- If students feel like the academic community does not value their language (which can be tied to a number of facets of their identity), they may feel a pressure to change or, as they feel an aspect of their identity is rejected, they may reject the institution and be less likely to engage, succeed, or persist (Kuh, 2001).
- Model the behavior we want to see
- Dialect diversity education for faculty and students alike is critical to create inclusive campus environments, particularly classroom environments.
- Consider language as element of diversity when thinking about campus environment and the messages sent to prospective students and community
- Student affairs professional are in prime position support dialect diversity awareness; often first and most frequent point of contact with students
  - Housing
  - New Student Orientation leaders
  - Communication/marketing

# What we are doing: Campus Diversity Initiative

## PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

- 1.To raise awareness about language as a form of diversity on college campuses and specifically at NC State.
- 2.To educate a full range of members of the campus community about language variation and diversity.
- 3.To provide multifaceted resources and strategies for the campus community to facilitate the inclusion of language diversity in diversity programming.

# What we are doing: Campus Diversity Initiative

Through a multipronged, multidisciplinary approach we offer:

- Interactive workshops,
- Training sessions,
- Free curricula and supplementary audiovisual materials,
- Facilitation of discussion, and
- Community outreach (e.g. Alternative Service Break Trip).

All activities are centered on language diversity and the role that it plays in our daily lives. We tailor these workshops/training sessions/discussions to the specific needs of the audience, but they share common themes of addressing pervasive myths about language/dialect (and speakers of those languages/dialects) through teaching about dialects of North Carolina.

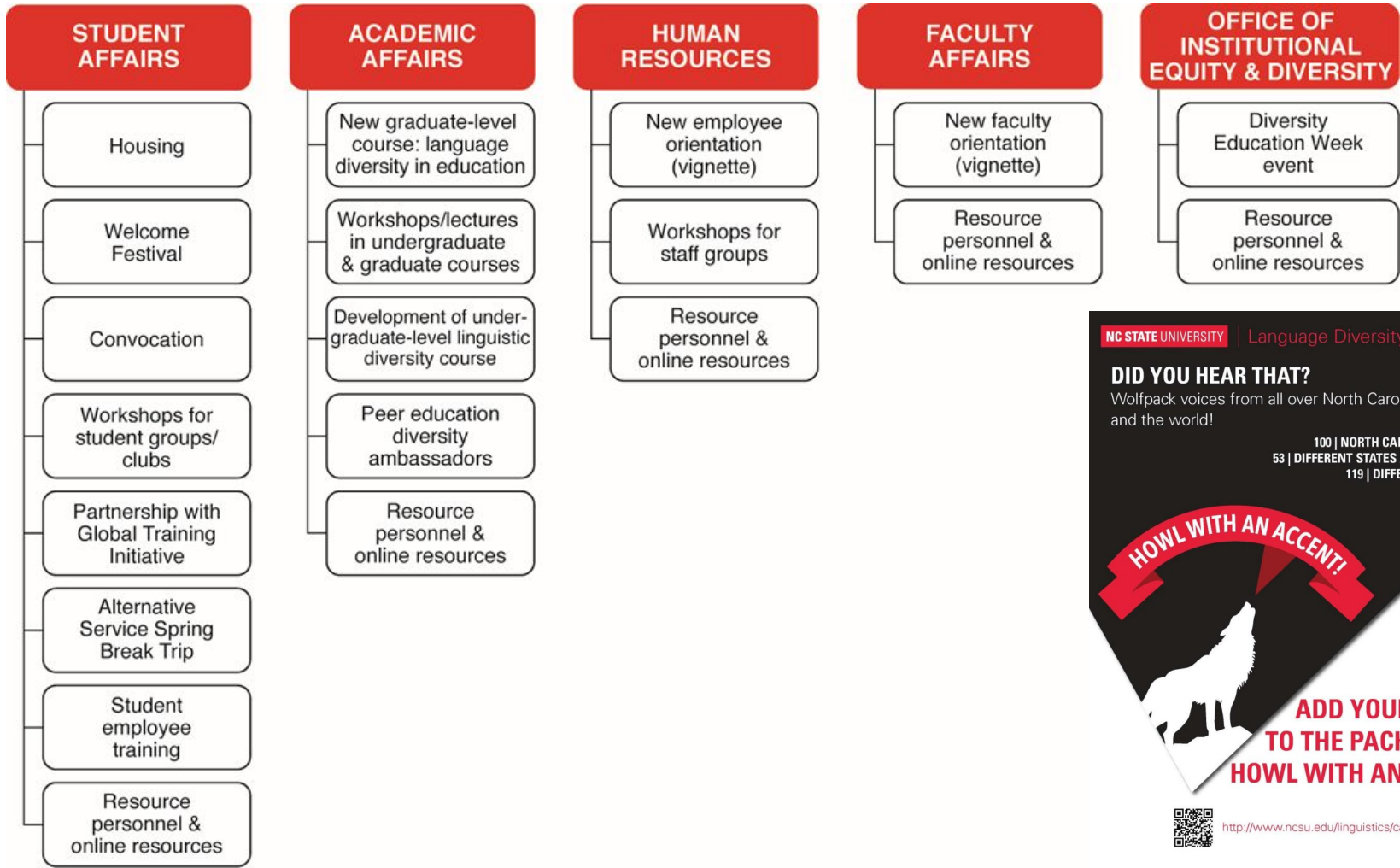


# What we are doing: Campus Diversity Initiative

## WE TEACH:

1. The scientific study of language does not acknowledge a single correct variety or “standard” of any spoken language; variation in language is a natural occurrence, and “standards” are social and political constructs.
2. Speakers of any language necessarily speak a dialect of that language; it is not possible to speak a language without also speaking a dialect.
3. All dialects are systematic, patterned, and rule governed.

# What we are doing: Campus Diversity Initiative



**NC STATE UNIVERSITY** | Language Diversity at NC State

**DID YOU HEAR THAT?**  
 Wolfpack voices from all over North Carolina, the US, and the world!

100 | NORTH CAROLINA COUNTIES  
 53 | DIFFERENT STATES AND TERRITORIES  
 119 | DIFFERENT COUNTRIES

**HOWL WITH AN ACCENT!**

**ADD YOUR VOICE TO THE PACK and HOWL WITH AN ACCENT!**



# What we are doing: Language Diversity Ambassadors

- Mentoring of undergraduate and graduate students actively engaged in peer education about language diversity and social justice.
- Registered student driven organization
- Sponsored events on campus, for example:
  - *Talking Black in America* screening in partnership with UAB Black Student Board; panel
  - “Damsels, Discourse & Disney” (Fought & Eisenhauer 2016a); Women in Science and Engineering (WISE) Village promoted
  - “Native Voices of North Carolina: An Interactive Panel”
  - Workshop on Deaf Culture and ASL: led by the Dean of College of Humanities and Social Sciences (Gallaudet alum) partnering with LDAs



# Digital outreach: #ISoundLikeAScholar



# Areas for improvement:

- Promote partnership with Chief Diversity Officer
  - Infuse discussions of language diversity throughout campus
- More early intervention
  - New Student Programs
    - Campus tours
    - Orientation
  - Housing
- More faculty intervention
  - Partnerships with Office of Faculty Development



# Areas for improvement:

- Language/Dialect diversity education is important, but limited in scope.
  - Opportunities for partnerships with WPAs
  - MacSwan (2018) calls for, “a return to a more asset-based approach to school and home language differences in mainstream language education research, a revitalization of the progressive roots of sociolinguistic research in education, and a corresponding decreased focus on the special characteristics of the language of social elites” (p.3)
  - How can we incorporate critical language and asset based pedagogies into higher education?



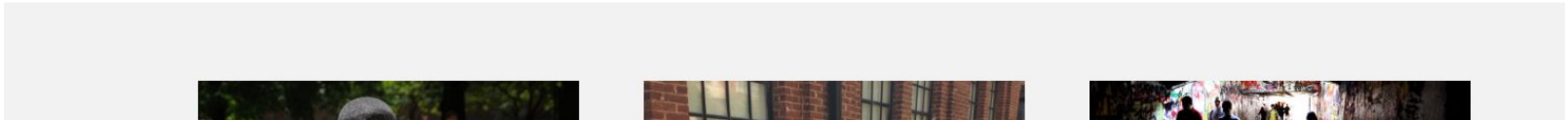


# Areas for improvement:

- Shift from institutions placing onus on students- we must practice student serving models to support the whole student.



We promote the success of the whole student.



# The Challenges

- Buy-in
- Feeling lack of expertise, time, resources
- How do we make connections between student affairs, faculty, students supporting language diversity?





# What we can do:

“I want to encourage the current, and next, generation of linguists to think about the comprehensive support of underrepresented undergraduate students as a main focus of the social justice mission of linguistics.

We have had several generations of linguists who have shed light on the linguistic and social conditions of those who are marginalized in societies.

Our response to that groundbreaking work is that we must now articulate a way for individuals from such backgrounds to enter our universities and succeed in linguistics. Otherwise, the hypocrisy in our work will ring apparent and our intellectual contributions will be markedly incomplete.

Only through the concerted efforts of both individuals and groups of linguists, including departments, programs, and our professional organizations, including the LSA, will the diversity that is reflected in the languages that linguists study also be reflected in the students, faculty, and other researchers who study them” (Charity-Hudley, 2018, p. 211)

# Assessment

Pre- and post-workshop surveys from *subsample of student participants (N=149)* asked questions tied to program learning outcomes as well as attitudes and beliefs about language diversity.

Findings: The majority of students indicated they agreed/strongly agreed that:

- the workshop was interesting and that they learned something new about language diversity (97%, N=144)
- they learned something new about dialects of North Carolina (99%, N=147)
- the workshop changed the way in which they view their own speech (75%, N=112) and that it changed the way they viewed the speech of others (86%, N=132).
- it improved the way they view their own speech (66%, N=99)

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