

# Chapter 15

## Supporting the Development of Students' Scholar Activist Identities: A Teaching Team's Collaborative Autoethnography

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Socially conscious with unique struggles, many first-generation Black, Indigenous, People of Color students come to higher education with a social cause to engage. While undergraduate research experiences are often disconnected from communities, scholar activism provides an avenue to build the connection between FG BIPOC students and social causes. Based on the collaborative autoethnography of former students and course assistants with their professor, this chapter provides insight into*

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*pedagogical practices that support the scholar activist identity development of FG BIPOC students. This chapter identified that mentoring from the professor and course assistants, the bridging of theory and practice, centering on the student, creating a community of scholar activists, and the engagement of the future scholar activist were essential practices for the SAID that our team both experienced and witnessed.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Socially conscious with unique struggles, many first-generation Black, Indigenous, People of Color (FG BIPOC) students come to higher education with a social cause to engage (Castellanos et al., 2022). These students enter institutions with the dual goal of personal and community growth. While many research universities in the United States were established with similar goals to prepare students for active participation in the community (Checkoway, 2001; Morphey & Hartley, 2006), institutional practices are often misaligned with these missions (Checkoway, 2001). As the population of university students becomes increasingly diverse (RTI International, 2019), university settings continuously perpetuate White dominant values, and BIPOC students face challenges to decenter whiteness in their learning (Alim et al., 2020; Valencia-Garcia & Coles-Ritchie, 2021).

The dissonance between students and their communities is often perpetuated through undergraduate research experiences (UREs) embedded in positivism, which reinforces traditional notions of knowledge creation and separates learning from community initiatives (Trott et al., 2020). While traditional UREs contribute to student learning, they often do not engage the social causes that are important to FG BIPOC students. However, when universities bridge curriculum and research to a social cause, FG BIPOC students show greater motivation in and attribute greater value to their education (Castellanos et al., 2022; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). This engagement promotes intellectual, professional, and personal growth (Castellanos et al., 2022; Cuban & Anderson, 2007).

In UREs, the connection between students and social causes can be fostered through scholar activism. Scholar activism extends beyond the tradition of research *on communities* to engage *with communities* through direct participation in community-driven work (Ramasubramian & Sousa, 2021). This work seeks to reduce social inequalities by examining and transforming injustices that affect marginalized and minoritized individuals (Ramasubramian & Sousa, 2021; Quaye et al., 2017). Despite the disconnect of institutional practices from community values (Checkoway, 2001), scholar activism provides an avenue for FG BIPOC students to become agents of change through research (Castellanos et al., 2022).

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