



“Physically present, but emotionally present, too”: Graduates of Colour developing emotional intelligence as student employees

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Abstract

Despite a robust body of literature related to how institutions of higher education help prepare students for the workforce after graduation, little research has explored the lived experiences of Students of Colour as they reflect on their undergraduate employment as it relates to their development of marketable skills. Moreover, no studies have engaged with Graduates of Colour to understand whether they developed emotional intelligence as undergraduate student employees. To fill a considerable gap in the literature, this qualitative study, framed by Salovey and Mayer's (1990) model of emotional intelligence, explored the undergraduate student affairs (student support) employment experiences of 12 Graduates of Colour (now professionals) to understand how they developed emotional intelligence to be more successful employees and leaders in their respective workplaces. The findings suggest Graduates of Colour developed all four tenets of emotional intelligence during their undergraduate employment experience, with direct impacts on their work in their careers. Implications for research and practice in universities are discussed.

Keywords

Graduates of Colour, Students of Colour, college students, emotional intelligence, employability, career readiness, student employment, on-campus employment

Introduction

Researchers have explored how college students develop a sense of career readiness through their higher education experiences (Blau & Snell, 2013; Burnett & Taylor, 2022; Peck et al., 2016; Stokes, 2015). Many studies have focused on how on-campus student employment (e.g., a college student employed by their institution to work on-campus part-time) helps college students develop marketable skills to increase their career readiness and, ultimately, their job prospects (Burnside et al., 2019; Fried, 2012; Hora, 2016; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). However, considerable gaps in the literature persist, especially research pertaining to the on-campus employment experiences of Students of Colour (e.g., students who identify as a racial and/or ethnic, non-Caucasian minority) and their development of career readiness.

That said, some extant research has pointed to equity gaps when considering Students of Colour and on-campus employment. First Students of Colour have not accessed on-campus employment – and many other facets of higher education, such as involvement in student organisations – at the same level as their peers (Banks & Dohy, 2019; Bluml, 2019; Kuh et al., 2017; Riggert et al., 2006; Turner, 1994), as Students of Colour often report feeling as though they are ‘guests in someone else’s house’ (Turner, 1994, p. 355). As a result, Students of Colour have not benefited from on-campus employment as much as their White peers, possibly leading to inequitable postgraduate outcomes, including securing gainful employment upon graduation (Burnett & Taylor, 2020, 2022; Hora, 2016; Kuh et al., 2017; Wood & Williams, 2013). To date, few studies have explored how Students of Colour access and experience on-campus student employment, with studies largely focusing on first generation students (Wilkie & Jones, 1994) and undergraduates (Elliott & Smith, 2022), instead of intentionally engaging with Students of Colour (Giles-Gee, 1989; Wood & Williams, 2013). Of the studies that have focused on the experiences of Students of Colour, none have explored how they benefit from on-campus employment, specifically with respect to enhancing their emotional intelligence; a critical characteristic of successful professionals (Brackett et al., 2011; Fall et al., 2013; Romanelli et al., 2006; Singh, 2015).

Although many definitions exist (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009; Cherniss, 2000; Dulewicz & Higgs, 2000), emotional intelligence was first and most authoritatively defined by Salovey and Mayer (1990, p. 185) as:

a set of skills hypothesized to contribute to the accurate appraisal and expression of emotion in oneself and in others, the effective regulation of emotion in self and others, and the use of feelings to motivate, plan, and achieve in one’s life.

This definition of emotional intelligence informed this study and has been one of the leading theories for human development, generating tens of thousands of citations (Landry, 2019). Researchers who have used Salovey and Mayer’s (1990) model of emotional intelligence have found that the world’s most successful leaders, educators, researchers and employees have a keen sense of emotional intelligence, allowing them to thrive in nearly any professional field (Brackett et al., 2011; Fall et al., 2013; Romanelli et al., 2006; Singh, 2015). However, research has largely ignored how Students of Colour may benefit from on-campus employment, with no studies zeroing in on their emotional intelligence development. As a result, this study engaged with 12 Graduates of Colour (bachelor’s degree holders and current professionals) who held on-campus employment during their undergraduate career to explore how Students of Colour may benefit from on-campus employment, informing future research and potentially improving college practices supporting retention and graduation outcomes for Graduates of Colour.

Literature review

Students of Colour and on-campus employment

Historically, researchers have reported that Students of Colour often do not feel welcomed on campuses, especially at predominantly White institutions (PWIs), leading to Students of Colour feeling minoritised and excluded from many aspects of college life, including on-campus employment (Banks & Dohy, 2019; Bluml, 2019; Kuh et al., 2017; Riggert et al., 2006; Turner, 1994; Wood & Williams, 2013). However, as a high-impact practice, on-campus student employment has been found to be a critical method of student retention and a driver of positive post-graduate outcomes (Kuh et al., 2017). A wealth of research has found that on-campus employment helps college students better connect to their institution and can increase academic achievement, leading to improved student outcomes (Blau & Snell, 2013; Burnett & Taylor, 2022; Fried, 2012; Hora, 2016; Riggert et al., 2006). Even though Students of Colour may experience minoritisation and may be excluded from transformative experiences such as on-campus employment (Kuh et al., 2017; Turner, 1994; Wood & Williams, 2013), few studies have investigated how Students of Colour seek or are recruited to work on campus, as

well whether on-campus employment is impactful for Students of Colour (Burnett & Taylor, 2023; Elliott & Smith, 2022).

Specific to student affairs employment (ex: working in a position that provides student support, such as mentoring, tutoring, supervision or service), Athas et al.'s (2013) study surveyed both student affairs employees and their supervisors to learn which skills student employees developed as well as their challenges on the job. Students suggested that they learned communication, teamwork strategies and leadership skills, while citing the difficult nature of balancing work and academic commitments. Similarly, Ludeman (2022) examined how student affairs programs manage and train student employees, asserting that supervisors of student employees should attempt to make the employment experience student centred to avoid burnout. Perozzi (2019) also wrote about the importance of providing students in student affairs employment with opportunities to develop leadership skills and prepare for future careers, although Perozzi's (2019) work did not gather empirical data specifically regarding student affairs employment experiences or the lived experiences of Students of Colour in student affairs employment positions.

Moreover, although Foster's (2019) study engaged with only two current Students of Colour (a Black woman and a Hispanic/White man), their findings suggested that student affairs employment may help Students of Colour develop confidence and a sense of self. However, these findings were not connected to postgraduate employment outcomes. Foster (2019) engaged with 12 former student affairs employees, with five being Students of Colour, and learned that several Students of Colour did not receive respect from 'older white men' (p. 178) and felt a sense of marginalisation from these experiences. Additionally, Students of Colour in Foster's (2019) study shared that there were employment experiences that did not make them feel safe, including supervising students on a zipline in campus recreation. Despite these findings, the Students of Colour reported generally enjoying positive experiences in student affairs employment, yet the study's researchers did not investigate the postgraduate outcomes of these students (Foster, 2019).

Of the few studies that have explored which types of students access on-campus employment, several do not mention race at all (Athas et al., 2013; Bentrin et al., 2013; Riggert et al., 2006), instead disaggregating data by class standing or gender. Limited research has found that Students of Colour either do not access on-campus student employment at the same level as their white peers or have fewer positive experiences during on-campus employment (Elliott & Smith, 2022; Quaye et al., 2014). The earliest study to incorporate racial data into an analysis of on-campus employment found Black students who participated in on-campus employment were more likely to be retained than students who did not (Giles-Gee, 1989). Emple's (2012) study of nine college graduates' perceptions of their former on-campus employment revealed that many graduates found that on-campus employment helped provide them with marketable skills for their current professional position, such as problem solving and interpersonal communication. Yet, of Emple's (2012) participants, only two were Students of Colour, and Emple (2012) did not explore whether students' identities (e.g., race and gender) affected their ability to gain on-campus employment or influenced any postgraduate outcomes for Students of Colour.

More recently, Su (2018) explored the on-campus employment experiences of 12 international students from China attending institutions of higher education in the United States to understand how these students learned U.S. cultural practices and developed relationships through their on-campus employment. Su (2018) ultimately found that these students – although bound to on-campus employment through their student visas – found on-campus employment an important source of knowledge for developing English language skills, as well as learning how to work with a diverse, multicultural team to accomplish goals. However, Su (2018) did not explore which marketable skills students developed or during which employment experiences these skills were developed.

Finally, Elliott and Smith (2022) surveyed 131 students (22 Students of Colour) from 28 different on-campus employers at an urban, Midwestern university to learn about on-campus employment

experiences as they relate to a student's identities. The researchers found that Students of Colour may experience on-campus employment less positively than their white peers, as Students of Colour generally reported feeling less valued and respected by peers. Yet, Students of Colour often reported feeling more connected to their campus community because of their on-campus employment, possibly increasing their likelihood of degree completion, although the researchers did not track retention specifically. Furthermore, the researchers did not survey the students regarding any marketable skills they developed, nor which on-campus employment experiences led to this skill development.

Students of Colour and emotional intelligence

In United States settings, emotional intelligence has been heavily researched at the K-12 (elementary and secondary school) level as it relates to the academic and personal development of Students of Colour (Elias & Arnold, 2006). These studies have consistently found that Students of Colour who possess a greater level of emotional intelligence are more academically successful and persist in their education at higher rates than Students of Colour with lower levels of emotional intelligence (Freeman, 2014; Tominey et al., 2017; Zirkel, 2004). Moreover, other educational partners, such as teachers and parents impact the emotional intelligence of K-12 Students of Colour (Abacioglu et al., 2021; Ambarwati, 2018). Yet, this work has not been extended to career planning or employability studies at the K-12 level.

Research is much sparser at the higher education level, both in the United States and beyond. Within this body of research, Jaeger and Eagan (2007) investigated emotional intelligence as a noncognitive factor predicting academic performance in college, finding that college students who held a higher degree of emotional intelligence tended to perform better academically. Extending this work, Zhoc et al. (2020) explored the association between emotional intelligence, student engagement and its relationship to key learning outcomes and satisfaction with the college experience. This work was able to corroborate that emotional intelligence can predict many dimensions of student engagement to promote key learning outcomes, including participation in student organizations and engagement in on-campus activities. This finding connects the potential impacts of *affective engagement* (Zhoc et al., 2020), where students feel a personal connection to the institution, to emotional intelligence development and to learning outcomes. However, as student on-campus employment can facilitate strong feelings of connection to the institution for some students (Burnett 2021; Kuh et al., 2017; McClellan et al., 2019), the concept of *affective engagement* may provide a connection between on-campus student employment and employability development for graduates.

As explained in this section, while emotional intelligence has been thoroughly researched at the K-12 level in United States settings (Abacioglu et al., 2021; Ambarwati, 2018; Freeman, 2014; Tominey et al., 2017; Zirkel, 2004), there are few studies that have explored the concept in higher education settings globally. While research has consistently found that on-campus employment is beneficial for college students as they prepare themselves for graduation and a subsequent career (Athas et al., 2013; Bentrin et al., 2013; Burnett, 2021; Quaye et al., 2014; Riggert et al., 2006), research has inconsistently paid attention to Students of Colour and their experiences with on-campus employment (Elliott & Smith, 2022; Su, 2018), with no studies focusing on emotional intelligence. Moreover, no studies at the higher education level have focused on the role of emotional intelligence development during on-campus employment or how emotional intelligence impacts postgraduate employability. Thus, our study aims to fill this gap in the literature by answering the following research questions:

1. Upon graduation and successful employment, do Students of Colour feel they developed emotional intelligence while employed in student affairs as an undergraduate?
2. If Students of Colour did develop emotional intelligence, which of the four tenets of emotional intelligence did students develop and how has this development impacted their professional careers?

Researcher positionalities

To fully understand this study's scope and its findings, it is critical to acknowledge our positionality as authors and researchers. The first author identifies as a White, cisgender man who has worked in higher education for over twenty-five years in roles serving low-income students and Students of Colour. As a child, he attended schools in racially minoritised communities. As a White minority in these educational settings, witnessing the educational inequities through these experiences and dedicating his career to the service of Communities of Colour. As a professional, he developed a civic engagement program for abandoned and homeless youth of Colour aimed at bringing institutions of higher education closer to these communities and served as a mentor for a college success programs at four institutions successfully mentoring students across race and gender in support of their transition, retention, persistence, and graduation. Moreover, he chose to attend two Hispanic-Serving Institutions in the U.S. South for undergraduate and graduate degrees and developed professional and personal relationships with peers and students of Colour, which guided the research study at hand.

The second author identifies as a White, cisgender man who has worked in education for fourteen years, working in exclusively low-income neighbourhoods and school settings. As a child, he attended predominantly schools of Colour until middle school, when his family moved into a predominantly White, rural area in the Midwest. Throughout his undergraduate years, he worked at the most racially diverse high school in his city and supervised Asian Club, a social organisation serving Hmong students at the middle and high school level. Once graduating from college, he chose to work for two Title I schools (i.e., high-poverty; U.S. Department of Education, 2025) at the K-12 level, serving low-income students of Colour. Once attending graduate school, he researched linguistic inequities faced by communities of Colour, starting a research centre focused on simplifying and translating higher education materials for minoritised language populations to specifically serve communities of Colour pursuing U.S. higher education.

Although neither researcher identifies as a person of Colour, both researchers hold an affinity for communities of Colour through lived experiences and the development of lifelong professional and personal relationships with people of Colour. They acknowledge the systemic racism that people of Colour have endured in the United States, and they hope to work toward racial equity through research and practice in higher education settings. As a result, both individuals have dedicated research agendas to liberating voices of Colour in hopes that other researchers – both White and from minoritised backgrounds – continue to engage with students of Colour to learn from their experiences and support their educational journeys and their lives.

Theoretical framework

To answer our research questions, we utilised a qualitative research design involving one-on-one, in-depth, semi-structured interviews. We employed Salovey and Mayer's (1990) model of emotional intelligence as a framework for this study, as their theory has been critical to understand human motivation for emotional regulation and relationship building. Salovey and Mayer's (1990) model encompasses four major tenets: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship management. The first tenet, self-awareness, relates to one's ability to understand their own emotions, recognise their current emotional state and provide oneself with resources and information to regulate one's emotions. The second, self-management, refers to one's ability to recognise the impacts of one's behaviour and accept responsibility for one's actions, critically reflecting on how one's decisions impacts one's well-being and the well-being of others. The third, social awareness, is the ability to understand and empathise with others, acknowledging the emotions and norms of other people and other groups, including from personal backgrounds and cultures that differ from one's own. Finally, relationship management, as the term suggests, is one's ability to manage relationships

and foster growth between oneself and others, including fostering growth and relationships between other people.

These four tenets of emotional intelligence have been identified as critical competencies for successful professionals in a wide variety of fields (Brackett et al., 2011; Fall et al., 2013; Romanelli et al., 2006; Singh, 2015). In professional work, Smith et al. (2020) explored the experiences of addiction counsellors and the relationships between emotional intelligence measures and cultural empathy, which are crucial for successful addiction counselling. Ultimately, Smith et al. (2020) learned that Professionals of Colour were more likely to hold higher levels of emotional intelligence than White peers, equating with higher levels of cultural empathy. At the higher education level, Hammond et al. (2010) surveyed 171 Students of Colour attending a Historically Black University and correlated emotional intelligence with career decision-making. This study found that African American students, both men and women, who held higher levels of emotional intelligence were more likely to make measured, professional decisions when exploring career pathways and potential employment. However, prior research has not used Salovey and Mayer's (1990) model to frame the experiences of Students of Colour within undergraduate employment contexts, which is a goal of our study. As such, this study engages with Salovey and Mayer's (1990) model of emotional intelligence to better understand how Students of Colour develop into professionals, utilising the four tenets of emotional intelligence to situate and ground the work.

Methodology

Participants

As members of the research team, we collectively held over 20 years of full-time professional employment experience at the sampled university. As a result, we conducted purposive, convenience sampling of Graduates of Colour with former on-campus employment experience at a single university in the Southern United States. The sampled university generally has an enrolment of 50,000 students or more annually, and its student body is comprised of 55% women and 45% men, with a racial composition of 34.6% White, 24.8% Hispanic, 21.1% Asian, 9.8% international student, 5.3% Black, 2.7% multiracial, 0.1% American Indian or Alaskan Native, 0.1% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and 1.6% race unreported.

We had maintained contact with former Student Employees of Colour through email, phone calls and other forms of communication since leaving their on-campus employment, graduating and moving onto professional careers. Over the past two years, we re-connected with these former Student Employees of Colour who were holding full-time professional appointments to explore whether they viewed their on-campus employment as a catalyst for emotional intelligence development. We sampled College Graduates of Colour who had on-campus employment experience during their undergraduate career, ranging from the 1980s until the 2020s. Participants were eligible for the study if they had graduated from their institution, were currently employed and held on-campus employment when they were a student. Further, we required that participants must have held a professional position long enough (at least six months) to allow time for individuals to reflect on their on-campus employment and think critically about how that employment and any emotional intelligence development parlayed itself into their current career. In all, 12 Students of Colour (bachelor's degree holders and current professionals) responded to our recruitment emails and were sampled for this study. Table 1 outlines the demographics of the participants (pseudonyms) involved in the study.

Table 1: Participant demographics (n=12)

Participant	Graduation year	Race	Age	Gender	Degree	VP&SA unit	Employment length	Professional title
Banita	2018	Indian	23	Woman	Communications	Dean of Students Office	2 years	Sr. Executive Associate
Brayton	1993	African American	49	Man	Marketing & Advertising	Housing and Dining	2 years	Senior Art Director
Cedric	2018	African American	24	Man	Biology	Housing and Dining	3 years	Healthcare Administrator
Denisa	2020	Latina	22	Woman	Human Development and Family Science	Vice President's Office	2 years	Development Associate
Felix	2010	Latino	32	Man	Biomedical Engineering	Recreational Sports	4 years	Marketing Manager
Hugo	2019	Latino	23	Man	Economics	Vice President's Office	2 years	Technology Sales
Keisha	2017	African American	25	Woman	Philosophy	Dean of Students Office	1 year	Consulting Analyst
Nerida	2018	Latina	24	Woman	Marketing & Advertising	Recreational Sports	4 years	Jr. Art Director
Pasqual	2016	Latino	26	Man	History	Recreational Sports	5 years	Software Developer
Reena	2019	Asian	24	Man	Biology	Recreational Sports	3 years	Medical Student
Savanah	2019	Latina / White	24	Woman	Psychology	Recreational Sports	2 years	Project Manager
Trini	2017	Latina	25	Woman	Human Development and Family Science	Recreational Sports	4 years	Registered Nurse
Warren	2019	African American	23	Man	Finance	Recreational Sports	2 years	Financial Analyst

Recruitment and data collection procedure

We obtained approval from our university's Institutional Review Board (IRB, Approval # 2021-179) before beginning data collection. Initial recruitment of participants began in December 2019 through a solicitation email, approved by the IRB. Once all participants had responded to the email, the first author corresponded with each participant over the phone to schedule one-on-one interviews using the Zoom platform. Graduates of Colour participated in one-hour open-ended interviews (Patton, 2014) regarding their perception of relationships between their undergraduate student affairs employment and their current professional employment. These interviews incorporated an experiential facilitation, and fill-in-the-blank structural questions inspired by Spradley's (1979) dyadic questions for ethnographic interviews (Burnett & Taylor, 2025). Interviews were scheduled at the convenience of each participant and, to provide additional depth and organisation to the study, basic demographic information, including race, gender, age, and length and location of employment, was collected. All interviews were audio recorded then the research team manually transcribed interviews to best capture accurate student voices and their authentic experiences, rather than relying on automated technology.

Data analysis

Our analysis of the qualitative data occurred concurrently with data collection. A concurrent data collection and analysis strategy helped correct for blind spots and facilitated the generation of interim reporting (Miles et al., 2014). To inventory and organise the interview response data, we employed a partially ordered meta-matrix (Miles et al., 2014). Initially, both researchers used an exploratory open coding system (Miles et al., 2014), which facilitated a general understanding of the data, then more detailed understandings about what participants were expressing. We did this by coding data from each interview separately first, then collaborating across the data from all interviews to compare results.

Then, the researchers conducted a first round of inductive coding across all interview transcripts resulted in three codes – development of marketable skills; development of emotional intelligence; and connections to professional work – with an intercoder agreement score of 0.80 utilising a binary coding strategy and calculating correlation scores.

After this round, both researchers convened to discuss initial findings before moving onto a second round of deductive coding aligned with Salovey and Mayer's (1990) model of emotional intelligence. Ultimately, we arrived at four major codes aligned with Salovey and Mayer (1990) and applicable to the role of on-campus employment in developing marketable skills. These codes – self-awareness; self-management; social awareness; and relationship management – had an intercoder agreement score of 0.70 utilising a binary coding strategy and calculating correlation scores. Then, both researchers compared codes across both rounds and collaborated to merge codes into themes, drawing upon insight from prior studies to arrive at the final themes for the study, which aligned with this study's research questions. The final themes were Self-awareness as a marketable skill relevant to professional work, Self-management as a marketable skill relevant to professional work, Social awareness as a marketable skill relevant to professional work and Relationship management as a marketable skill relevant to professional work.

Findings

Ultimately, all Students of Colour in this study responded that they developed all four tenets of emotional intelligence while an undergraduate student affairs employee, answering this study's first research question. Of these tenets, study participants asserted that they developed self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management, answering this study's second research question. Moreover, Students of Colour shared that these tenets of emotional intelligence

helped them be more successful employees and leaders in their professional workplaces, also helping to answer this study's second research question.

Self-awareness: A marketable skill relevant to professional work

First, self-awareness relates to one's ability to understand their own emotions, recognise their current emotional state, and provide oneself with resources and information to regulate one's emotions. During interviews, Students of Colour shared stories of their undergraduate employment experience and how that experience developed their sense of self-awareness, especially as it related to negative self-image and self-esteem regulation. For instance, Banita shared that she often 'felt impostor syndrome and felt failure' while she was a college student. However, by working on campus she developed an ability to 'remind myself that I am worthy' and 'the strength to reflect and learn to feel better about myself because I belong.' Both Warren and Reena shared stories of when they were working on-campus and had to, in Reena's words, 'calm down and think,' to make sure 'I was staying self-aware so I could lead.' Warren said he developed self-awareness as a student employee after 'having to put out fires and have to be calm' because 'if you're freaking out, that's not going to help the situation.' Savanah was much blunter, stating:

It's funny that you say self-awareness because all of the executives that I support and that I've talked to have been like, 'You're really self-aware.' It's just weird. I've been told that randomly over the course of these past two weeks specifically. I learned a lot of self-awareness from student employment. I just have so many fun memories of me having a bad day and going into my supervisor's office and crying and then being like, 'I'm fine. I'm going to go to work now. I'm good.'

Here, Savanah connected her current professional position to the self-awareness she developed as a student employee, realising that she learned this valuable trait years ago as an undergraduate. Similarly, Trini said that on-campus employment helped her 'see my own strengths' and 'feel better' about who she was in difficult professional situations. In these cases, on-campus employment not only developed a sense of self-awareness in Students of Colour, but it also improved their self-esteem to be better professionals in their everyday work.

Self-management: A marketable skill relevant to professional work

Self-management refers to one's ability to recognise the impacts of one's behaviour and accept responsibility for one's actions, critically reflecting on how one's decisions impacts one's well-being and the well-being of others. Hugo recalled a story where he exemplified his development of self-management as a student employee, acknowledging his responsibility to be a professional. Hugo explained:

Sometimes for a solid part of my role whenever people reach out, I was a pretty solid resource and someone handy to be around that I knew. I had to be physically present but emotionally present, too. Just having that sense of like, okay I got a stake. I got to be held accountable, and I have to be here physically present, emotionally present and ready to be my best self.

In Hugo's case, he recognised that he needed to be physically present to do the work, but he had a responsibility to be emotionally ready to work, as his job required both physical presence and interpersonal communication. Pasqual also shared what he learned about failure and self-management as a student employee, stating that he needed to accept responsibility because the team relied on him. Pasqual said,

I definitely made a lot of mistakes, sometimes big mistakes, while working at RecSports. But I owned it. Everything is a learning experience. You're not going to get it right all the time, but you gotta accept responsibility because other people need you.

Similarly, Reena also learned that her actions affected others, stating, 'Another part of it was I had to manage the group that was there, just to make sure that we were doing our jobs. Because if we didn't do it, people wouldn't have a good experience.'

Finally, Denisa shared an important part of self-management, which is caring for oneself to understand how to care for others. Denisa said that during her student employment, she 'was saying yes to everything but that wasn't sustainable.' She quickly learned that 'Hey, my plate's full,' so she started 'setting boundaries' so she could be more productive as a student and student employee. Like Denisa, Felix echoed Denisa's sentiment, sharing that student employment 'was the best thing that's ever happened' to him, as he learned to manage his time and his workload to become a better professional.

Social awareness: A marketable skill relevant to professional work

Social awareness is the ability to understand and empathise with others, acknowledging the emotions and norms of other people and other groups, including from personal backgrounds and cultures that differ from one's own. In this case, Felix reflected on his path to college as an international student and developed an important sense of cross-cultural competency as a student employee. Of his international student and student employee status, Felix explained, 'I wasn't the only one there. All of a sudden, you find this little community that you're able to be a part of. It makes you feel like you're part of something.' Here, Felix reasoned that he connected with other international students during student employment, becoming a more socially aware individual.

Through student employment, Reena claimed that she made diverse friendships and developed social awareness both personally and professionally. Reena said:

I had a bunch of different friends from very different backgrounds. But especially after working on-campus, I developed relationships with people from very different backgrounds. I think that just helped me realise that we don't always come from the same background, whenever you have people in your life like that, it's a very different experience.

Similarly, Nerida learned to be more socially aware and be less judgmental. Nerida said, 'Student employment taught me we're quick to judge people based on how they're acting that day or what they might say. Working with types of students really allowed me to take a step back before jumping to conclusions.' Keisha also developed a similar sense of social awareness through student employment, explaining that, 'just in terms of understanding different cultures, and how that helps build interpersonal relationships,' was critical in her development as a student and as a professional.

Banita, Brayton, Pasqual, and Trini also shared brief stories when they interacted with students or individuals who were different from them and learned to build relationships and conduct themselves professionally. In these cases, Students of Colour consistently were able to connect their on-campus student employment to development of social awareness. Moreover, these Students of Colour explained that this sense of social awareness made them a better professional, underscoring the importance of on-campus student employment.

Relationship management: A marketable skill relevant to professional work

Finally, relationship management, as the term suggests, is one's ability to manage relationships and foster growth between oneself and others, including fostering growth and relationships between other people. Of all traits of emotional intelligence, Students of Colour most shared their stories and experiences with student employment as it related to relationship building and teamwork. Nerida began by stating that the most important part of her student employment was 'making sure that my employees felt comfortable talking to me or talking to each other.' Cedric also reasoned that he learned how to 'manage people' and build 'teamwork' while a student employee, as he often 'worked with other students as well managers to accomplish shared goals.' Cedric also said he had the 'chance

to teach, to teach other students, new student employees what to do,' which helped him build relationships with peers and student subordinates.

Felix added, 'In my job, I manage a team of seven, eight engineers. I learned how to elevate people and delegate responsibilities, see the strengths in different people and ask them to use their assets. That's what I learned [in student employment].' Beyond managing, Felix was much more specific in what makes him a great professional—his ability to motivate people. Jaimie detailed:

It was teamwork for sure. That team-building ability was good because people would change semester after semester, but you knew what you needed to do. You knew how to lure people into your team and have them buy-in that. Saying, 'We're in here. You're missing out. You're getting paid well. Let's get it done. Let's just finish it and get it done.' All of a sudden, you have a team around you, and you're part of a team. Building teams and being a part of a team was, again, impressive.

In all, Felix and his fellow Students of Colour—now full-time professional—developed a great overall sense of emotional intelligence across all four major traits. From here, there is much that this research implies for future student affairs practice and research, especially as it relates to supporting Students of Colour through on-campus employment to increase emotional intelligence and, ultimately, employability.

Discussion

Originally, Salovey and Mayer's (1990) model for emotional intelligence was meant to understand how individuals develop skills to express emotion in oneself and in others, effectively regulate one's and other's emotions, and use 'feelings to motivate, plan, and achieve in one's life' (p. 185). However, in this study, Students of Colour clearly articulated substantial growth and development of emotional intelligence through on-campus student employment, which they carried with them into their professional careers. From here, many implications for research, practice, and equity emerge related to the personal and professional development of Students of Colour, primarily with how on-campus employment experiences bolstered the career development of these students.

First, this study finds that Students of Colour substantially benefited from their on-campus employment experience. Beyond the scope of this study, all students shared that their on-campus employment experience was positive, fulfilling, and helped them secure a full-time professional position after graduation. However, Students of Colour also shared that they developed critical emotional intelligence traits to help them persist as a student and thrive as a professional. As a result, this study's findings build upon scant prior research (Elliott & Smith, 2022; Giles-Gee, 1989; Quaye et al., 2014), strongly asserting that Students of Colour benefit from on-campus employment and should be provided every opportunity to work on campus and develop critical workplace competencies, including emotional intelligence. As a result, practitioners who hire student employees should seek opportunities to connect with Students of Colour—through student organisations, affinity groups, and other avenues—to intentionally recruit Students of Colour to work on campus and reap the benefits that their White peers have reaped for so long. Moreover, these professionals could explore holding career development fairs and workshops specifically for Students of Colour to facilitate a safe affinity space for these students, possibly increasing their willingness to participate and comfort in these events.

In addition, Students of Colour often expressed their development of emotional intelligence as helping them persist through difficult situations and experiences of negative self-talk or poor self-esteem. Students of Colour already deal with racism, xenophobia, and intersectional oppression on college campuses and have for years (Quaye et al., 2014; Turner, 1994). Although Students of Colour recalled their on-campus employment experiences fondly, it is critical for future research and theory work in the career development space to explore whether Students of Colour experience racism and

xenophobia while working as on-campus employees and how these students navigate these systemic issues. Moreover, prior research has found that on-campus employment has a positive impact on academic achievement (Burnett & Taylor, 2023; Kuh et al., 2017; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Wilkie & Jones, 1994). Here, career development professionals could explore their student participation data to better understand how their programming is impacting the academic achievement of their students, particularly their Students of Colour. Extending this work, this study finds that on-campus employment may help Students of Colour persist at their institution, improving their relationships with themselves and with peers and possibly mitigating the effects of racism and xenophobia on campus.

Specifically related to social awareness and relationship management, Graduates of Colour in this study strongly asserted that on-campus student employment strengthened their ability to relate to others, build relationships, and lead a team, all of which were crucial abilities in their current professional roles. In prior career development theory in higher education, theorists have disregarded the experiences of Students of Colour in pre-professional employment positions, such as on-campus employment (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Perozzi, 2019). However, this study finds that Students of Colour substantially developed their emotional intelligence as student employees, including how traits of emotional intelligence such as self-awareness led to a sense of self-worth and persistence. These student traits of leadership, self-worth, and persistence are not only valued by institutions of higher education (Burnett & Taylor, 2023) but are also valued by employers competing in the labour market. Future research and theory could explore how Students of Colour, through on-campus employment, develop a sense of self-worth and an understanding of their community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), taking pride in their intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) and leveraging their skills to become refined pre-professionals.

Moreover, this study finds that Students of Colour developed emotional intelligence through supervisory positions where students oversaw their peers and led them as part of a team. The ability to lead and facilitate teamwork is a skill highly valued by modern employers, (Burnett & Taylor, 2020; Carnevale et al., 2019; Riggert et al., 2006), as well as emotional intelligence (Brackett et al., 2011). In this regard, Students of Colour developed emotional intelligence and employability as student employees, increasing their odds of securing a position in their field and persisting as a professional. From here, career development professionals could explore how Students of Colour develop marketable skills, such as leadership, while employed on-campus, helping to understand how these leadership skills translate to the postgraduate job market and a closing of the racial wealth gap. The racial wealth gap has been well documented (Sullivan et al., 2016), and findings from this study suggest that on-campus employment for Students of Colour may help mitigate the racial wealth gap through emotional intelligence development and employability.

Limitations of the study

To begin, a primary limitation of this study was the single institutional context, as there are many institutions of higher education that employ Students of Colour. Second, to complete the study in a timely and feasible manner, this study was limited to a purposive criterion convenience sample of participants whom the researchers personally knew or who were referred by other professionals within the researchers' professional network associated with the institution. However, many of this study's limitations are intentional delimitations on the part of the researchers. Although this study investigated the experiences of a purposive, convenient sample of participants, the researchers felt confident that these participants provided rich and in-depth feedback regarding their on-campus employment experiences, thus enriching the data and findings of the study. This could be conceptualised as a strength of the research design, as this familiarity with the institution may yield deeper findings and more critical research outcomes to improve the literature focused on emotional intelligence development among Students of Colour.

Conclusion

Ultimately, hiring managers on college campuses need to recognise the benefits that Students of Colour earn from on-campus employment and facilitate more equitable access for this population. Moreover, researchers could focus much more on the lived experiences of Students of Colour in an on-campus employment to uncover any discrimination, marginalisation, or oppression that these students face while employed as a student. Although Students of Colour in this study brought considerable community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) with them onto campus when they arrived, Students of Colour deserve more opportunities to advance themselves through on-campus employment toward professional development and career readiness. Further investigation into how Students of Colour develop marketable skills for postgraduate success is critical, as postsecondary attainment and gainful postgraduate employment has been found to directly impact the racial wealth gap (Sullivan et al., 2016), which, in turn, could help Students of Colour balance the labour market and increase socioeconomic equity for people of Colour in U.S. society (Carnevale et al., 2019). If this study is any indication, Students of Colour benefit greatly from such opportunities, and now practitioners need to take the opportunity to hire Students of Colour and help push against the racial wealth gap and persistent socioeconomic inequalities facing individuals and communities of Colour everywhere.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Non-Use of Artificial Intelligence

The authors did not use artificial intelligence for any part of this study.

Contributions against CReDIT

C.B.: Conceptualisation, Methodology, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing-Original draft preparation, Reviewing and Editing. Z.T.: Formal Analysis, Writing-Original draft preparation, Reviewing and Editing.

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