

Friends of Fondren Essay

Originally, our project was for SOCI 381: Sociological Research Methods. For our class, we had the option of choosing our own research project and, as a group, decided to complete a study on how the racial/ethnic representation of faculty impacted the undergraduate student experience. In particular, we were interested in the potential benefits and harms stemming from the presence or absence of underrepresented minorities (URM) faculty as teachers and mentors. To do this, we sent out a survey and conducted interviews on a voluntary basis to provide a deeper perspective on the undergraduate experience.

As a team, we relied heavily on Fondren's database to connect us to current research. Fondren's access gave us entry to a plethora of sources that we would have otherwise been denied, including a pivotal study conducted by Ebony McGee and David Stovall (2015) on the mental health of black undergraduate students. This helped tremendously as we were able to see previously done research and allowed us to pick methods that were best suited to our project. Fondren's database kept up by the library historian also provided us a general history of URM faculty at Rice. For instance, the fact that Rice hired its first African-American professor in 1965.

While extensively sifting through current research using Fondren's access, we realized that aside from looking at the URM faculty experience and the effects of URM representation on African American students, not much research has been done. This gave us a lot of freedom to decide exactly how we wanted to formulate our project to our specific research question while also providing a framework in how we framed our questions and chose our sample.

The most vital Fondren resource that was the key to our success was not something that could be found within the literature, but was rather provided by the library's building itself, the study rooms. Fondren's study rooms allowed us to conduct our interviews in a private, neutral space. By conducting our interviews here, participants were able to feel comfortable and confident that their privacy and anonymity would be respected. The study rooms also gave us a space where our team could have meetings throughout all hours of the day (or night) while keeping us motivated and on track. The TVs within the study rooms allowed us to practice our project presentation tirelessly until we were confident our project was ready.

Fondren was essential to our success by going above and beyond to provide students with all the resources we could need. Not only is Fondren exceptionally prepared to help students by providing a plethora of academic literature as a basis for research projects, but also provides students with the spaces and tools to complete and fine-tune these projects. Without Fondren, our team would not have been able to produce the research project we had envisioned at the beginning of the semester.