

## Theory of Social Change

*Who I identify as before and after arriving at Clark has changed. Before Clark, I was unsure of the impact I could make in college as I had no idea what truly motivated me and why. I felt like I was going through the motions of what I thought I should be doing in high school and my first few weeks at Clark were no different. In the spring of my freshman year at Clark, I took Complexities of Urban Schooling with Professor John Ameer. This course made me dig deep into how I saw myself and the type of work I was interested in. From readings, discussions, and observation hours my identities formed. I could now confidently say I grew up in a dysfunctional home, had a learning challenge in my younger years, and a first-generation college student. I hold these identities close as they all have stemmed from experiences that made me who I am today. I think of these identities first because they are how I see myself and impact the way I view the world around me. How I see the world through these lenses is seen in the social inequality I have identified and want to pursue change through my work and research. This social inequality is the lack of access to college knowledge. College knowledge I describe as the college application and research process but also the personal development that builds tools for success. These three factors heavily impact a student's plans for after high school and the confidence they have wherever they end up.*

*As a first-year at Clark after taking Complexities, I decided that I wanted to be a youth worker. When looking through my email I came across a program at Clark called Collegiate Success Institute (CSI) that was a mentor program for juniors and seniors at Claremont High School applying to college. Instantly I was interested in being a mentor as the college process was one I enjoyed due to my immense personal research, but also a program I connected with. Many of the students at Claremont are first-generation college students, like myself, and that drove me even more to be a part of this. Since starting my educational career at Clark my passions have grown and deepened each semester; however, a consistent one has been working with students to become confident in how they see themselves as students but also educating on the opportunities each one has. Not knowing my worth in terms of my education and how that would transfer into being a college student was a constant fear. While not every high school and or first-generation college student feels this way, it has come up numerous times when working with these youth from Claremont. Working to create a program that would not only grow their*

*knowledge of college but also build their confidence in themselves as a student and equal when entering college or future careers.*

*As a white middle-class female, I will never fully understand the realities of the youth at Claremont. Being aware and critical of this is important when working with students as the education system in the United States is built on and still plagued by the country's racist ideology. My positionality stems from my identities as well as being cognizant of the privileges I have had. While I did have a dysfunctional home and family life for many years I did have a mother who pushed me to achieve my goal of higher education. I also was fortunate enough to have the resources to apply for student loans that allow me to attend college today. Being aware of these privileges allows me to be critical of the work I am doing and the position I have in it. The potential similarities in being a first generation college student, home lives, and or learning challenges are ways I can connect with these youth, however, I also can learn from them. In my work, I hope to create spaces for conversations that will help them through this process but also after high school in general. Learning how to talk about yourself and experiences not only is valuable for college as this becomes more common but also allows students to learn about themselves and their identity. Developing my sense of self and my identities has been invaluable in my growth and combining this with the college application process would only be a benefit.*

*To address this social issue I have seen in my praxis site I plan to take the current program and go deeper to create a greater impact. As of right now the mentors and I do workshops on vocabulary, resumes, essay work, financial aid, and more. While I see these as great elements of CSI as students learn a lot to help with the overall application, I know there could be more. To go deeper, the program would start with basic vocabulary and introductions and quickly shift to introducing and starting the college essay. For many of the prompts, students are to reflect on different experiences or challenges they have faced. Through my time with CSI, I have learned that students are very foreign to personal writing and this skill is required and expected for each essay prompt. Starting with this not only allows for more time to work on the essay but also to start the process of self-reflection. This can be done through readings, poems, examples, and conversations with the mentors and or as a group. Being vulnerable in a safe space for personal development is very important in building confidence. As a high school student myself I was a part of a retreat and later club run through the California Conference of Equality and Justice that allowed each of us to unpack our experiences and grow our sense of*

*self through personal work but also group conversations. Activities from programs like these and many others I believe are a starting point for these youth and will lessen the impact from the current inequality of access to knowledge regarding college and the tools for success that go along with it.*

*My interest in addressing this social issue and the research I hope to pursue has been guided by my experiences and role models. A role model of mine at Clark has been Andrea Allen. Andrea has been my advisor for CSI since I joined the program. She has not only guided the mentors and me through this but has given each of us space to create activities that we feel to be impactful. By giving us all space to develop our curriculum I have been able to identify what areas of interest I wish to dive into for my research and time with CSI. Being involved with CSI for three years now has heavily impacted my life at Clark and my plans for after graduation. Concluding that I see myself in a school as a counselor instead of a teacher was partly a result of my passion for working with youth in the position as a mentor. Having the opportunity to teach and provide guidance to youth not only drives me to pursue this work but I also learn more about myself and goals from the youth I work with. Without the guidance and room for growth from Andrea in CSI, I would not be at the stage of interest for this research as I am today.*

*The social inequity I have identified is one Andrea, my fellow mentors, and I have seen through our work. The work I hope to conduct will create an impact on the lack of access I have identified at Claremont for the students I work with. I feel privileged to have the opportunity to work with these youth and grow as a researcher and student myself. This work will be student-oriented and run by both myself and my peers but driven by these youth. Developing my curriculum and goals as we go through the program is important as each student and group of students is different. The program would not be disrupting the current social inequality if the curriculum was mentor created and led. In order to disrupt, the curriculum and conversations need to be based on the needs, wants, and goals the students have vocalized making them active participants.*

### **Reflection**

The inequality I have found to be the most important to my work has changed since I last wrote this. In the beginning I believed there needed to be a stronger emphasis on narrative writing throughout the application process as well as in college and while I still find this an

important topic to discuss, I now feel that to begin addressing this that college readiness as a larger topic is my main focus today. By having the opportunity to develop a completely new curriculum I was able to take the time and really think about the inequality I really wanted to try and directly address.