

The Evolution and Future of Access and Support for Diverse Students in Higher Education

Karly Taylor

University of South Florida St. Petersburg

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### Abstract

Diversity in higher education has become a standard. Universities pride themselves in having diverse campuses, homing students of varying races, ethnicities, socioeconomic statuses, and nationalities. While college campuses are trying to increase their access to higher education, the resources for these students changes once they are enrolled. Social justice pushes for the representation of these students on campus, but does the pride in these students go beyond the statistics? Since access to higher education has extended to the masses in recent years, there is the new consideration of providing resources to these newly added groups. As the demographics on campus change, there is a demand to change resources to meet the unique needs of these new students. This paper seeks to address the factors that may influence access to higher education for diverse students, and how these students are supported once they are on campus. In this paper, it is explained that socioeconomic status, academic unpreparedness, and lack of multicultural training for instructors are all factors that place diverse students at a disadvantage. With financial aid, culturally responsive teaching, and conscious discussions, there may be an opportunity to change these statistics.

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### The Evolution and Future of Access and Support for Diverse Students in Higher Education

The melting-pot that we call the United States has made a push to display its diversity at the collegiate level. Universities market themselves with terms like diversity and inclusion, but what is the meaning behind these words? The National Education Association has created a “Diversity Toolkit Introduction” that defines diversity as the sum of the ways that people are both alike and different (National Education Association, 2008). Diversity is broken down into various dimensions that include race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, culture, religion, class, and other identities. For the purpose of this paper, the term diverse students will be used to refer to students that are non-White, such as Black, Hispanic, Asian, and Pacific Islander/Alaskan Native. As the social, political, and economic climate of the United States has changed to benefit higher education, with more students of all identities having access to college now than ever before; there is now a demand to represent the mass diversity of the United States in the world of higher education. The concern now is how do we cater to diverse students and ensure that their opportunity for access can turn into success once at their institution.

#### **Trends Based on Race**

There are some general educational trends based on student race and ethnicity. One observation shows that the percentage of Hispanic, Black, White and Asian students who have earned a high school diploma or higher has increased since the 1960's, but the gaps in degree attainment are pronounced at the postsecondary level. While bachelor degree attainment for Hispanic, Black, White, and Asian adults has increased, the attainment gap is almost double between Whites and Blacks, as well as between Whites and Hispanics, and these disparities are present in the working world as well, with earnings being strongly correlated to not only college completion, but race and ethnicity too (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). The Department of

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Education released a report in 2016 concerning diversity and inclusion in higher education, stating that the bachelor's degree attainment has risen over time for Hispanic, Black, White and Asian adults from 6 percent for both Hispanic and Black residents in 1974, to 15 percent and 22 percent respectively in 2014 (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). However, the attainment gap in bachelor's degrees has increasingly widened between Hispanic and White bachelor's degrees' attainment from 9 percent to 20 percent during the period of 1974 to 2014. This pattern can similarly be seen in the gap increase of 6 percent in 1964 to 13 percent in 2014 between Black and White U.S. residents obtaining bachelor's degrees (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). These statistics reflect that while there has been an increase in access, there is a growing disparity in actual degree attainment based on race. These students are still being provided access, but once on-campus, something is occurring to result in Hispanic and Blacks students being less likely to obtain their degrees.

Supporting the statistics above, there are also overall trends in enrollment that display similar discrepancies. While non-White undergraduate enrollment has consistently increased since 1980, fewer Hispanic and Black students are enrolled full-time than White and Asian students. In general, it has been observed that White and Asian students are more likely to enroll full-time, while Black and Hispanic students mostly enroll part-time. From 1980 to 2014 there has been a percentage increase in White and Asian students enrolled full-time, while this same measure has barely increased for Hispanic students, and has decreased in Black students (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). In addition to this fundamental difference, Hispanic students are more likely to enroll in two-year institutions, while students of other races typically enroll at four-year institutions. The burden of paying for education has transferred from being the responsibility of the masses or the government, and has become the responsibility of the

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individual student and their families (Hu & St. John, 2001). This transition has occurred due to the fact that an increase in access has resulted in a decrease in governmental assistance to higher education institutions, requiring financial help through the individual. In higher education systems where financial aid is not present, or the responsibility falls primarily on the student and their family, the number of students that enroll in college decreases dramatically. Hispanic students tend to come from lower-income areas, and are less likely to have the individual resources to immediately enroll in a four-year institution, and will initially begin their degree attainment at a two-year institution.

### **Trends in Degree Completion**

Although discrepancies among races and ethnicities are seen in the pursuit of higher education, there are also gaps in the rate of completion for bachelor's degrees among undergraduate students of varying races and ethnicities. The gap in completion rates can be credited to the lack of enrollment in four-year universities in Black and Hispanic students, which was mentioned previously. Following the same pattern, it generally takes Black and Hispanic students longer to complete a bachelor's degree, as seen in 2013-2014 percentage rates. There was a 54 percent completion rate for Hispanic students, 41 percent for Black students, 63 percent for White students and 71 percent for Asian students (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). In the realm of graduation, there is a basic pattern of on-time completion rates being lower for Black and Hispanic students, while White and Asian students are more likely to finish on time. Retention rates fall with Black and Hispanic students, with 44 percent of Hispanic and Black students dropping out before completion, and only 34 percent of White students and 20 percent of Asian students (U.S. Department of Education, 2016, p. 27). Regarding non-White students, Asian students are more likely to complete a bachelor's degree once enrolled, with an overall

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rate of half the number of Asian students completing, while only fewer than one in five Black or Hispanic students completing (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). There is a pattern of Black and Hispanic students being less likely to enroll and complete their degree once at their institution, while the rates of White and Asian student enrollment and completion have a stronger positive correlation. White and Asian students are more likely to stay at their institution, and the factors of why these student populations have better retention and completion rates will be discussed later.

### **Impact of Other Factors: Socioeconomic Status, Family Education, and Gender**

Other than race, socioeconomic status and first-generation status are contributors to the gap in attainment. While students of all races can fall within these parameters, there is a relationship between race and socioeconomic status. These factors are connected because racial and ethnic minorities are the fastest-growing population, and as a result are a disproportionately large segment of the economically poor population (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1999). Since minority students tend to fall on the lower socioeconomic side, they may be the first in their family to attend college. These pressures may influence educational attainment outcomes that are also impacted by race and ethnicity. Within the dimension of race, the gender of the students influenced completion rates of students as well. For example, if the students were male, Black males were less likely to graduate compared to Asian and White students, and Black females were more likely than Black males, while still being less likely to complete compared to Asian and White females. Although Black and Hispanic students do not typically attend selective institutions, the gap in completion narrows when they do. Students of color benefit greatly from attending these selective universities, and are more apt to graduate from these institutions. Selective universities, which are universities that

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accept students based on a specific criterion (i.e. academic performance), may have a higher completion and retention rate for diverse students based upon the idea that these students may be more academically prepared, or may have been prepared appropriately to enter and succeed into the higher education system

### **Trends for American Indian/Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander Students**

Due to the availability of statistics and information, this paper mainly focuses on diverse students that are Hispanic, Black, and Asian compared to White students. However, these factors influence smaller populations of students of color, including American Indian/Alaska Native students, and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander students. The undergraduate enrollment number has increased drastically from 1980, with Fall 2014 marking 138,600 American Indian/Alaska Native students enrolled, compared to the previous 77,900 students (U.S. Department of Education, 2016, p. 29). While the enrollment rate has increased, almost half of the American Indian/Alaska Native students were previously enrolled in two-year community colleges, with a percentage rate of 48 percent in 2014, compared to 36 percent of white students and 38 percent of Asian students, excluding Pacific Islanders (U.S. Department of Education, 2016, p. 29). Like other diverse students, graduation rates were lower among the American Indian/Alaska Native undergraduate students than the graduation rates of White and Asian students. 2010 was the first year in which institutions reported Asians and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islanders separately for enrollment, and enrollment has fallen from 57,500 in fall 2010 to 52,300 in fall 2014 (U.S. Department of Education, 2016, p. 30). While, once again, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander students reported lower graduation rates than White and Asian students, there were three times as many Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific

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Islander students enrolled at for-profit institutions, compared to White students (U.S. Department of Education, 2016, p. 30).

### **Trends for Students of Two or More Races**

Starting in Fall 2010, there was a new category for students that identify as two or more races, and the number of students in this category has increased from 293,700 to 579,500 in 2014 (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). This group is the first section of diverse students that has similar rates to White students. For example, 73 percent are enrolled at public institutions compared to 76 percent of White students, 15 percent were enrolled at private, non-profit universities while there was an 18 percent enrollment rate for White students at the same institutions, and 12 percent enrolled at for-profit institutions, which is twice the number of White students (U.S. Department of Education, 2016, p. 31). The rate that is most surprising, however, is that 65 percent of students that identify as two or more races completed their bachelor's degree, and it was 63 percent among White students (U.S. Department of Education, 2016, 31). While most of the statistics explained above support the claim that there is a gap in completion rates for diverse students, Asian students seem to break these patterns by having higher completion or retention rates than White students, in some cases.

### **Historical Background**

Beginning in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there has been a revolution in higher education, and the war of providing equality to students is just getting started. Higher education was conceived in 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany, and has since been in the process of expanding. According to Trow, there are three basic stages of access to higher education: worldwide elite access, mass access, and universal access (Trow, 2006). These stages can be explained as worldwide elite access referring only to populations with the resources available to them to attend a postsecondary institution.



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Historically speaking, this population has been White males. This would result in the foundation of postsecondary education being modeled to benefit that specific student group. Mass access can be explained as access that has expanded to include the majority, but not everyone. Higher education in the United States is currently in a state of mass access, meaning that more students than ever can be granted entrance into institutions (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

However, mass access has not transitioned into universal access because of factors like finances, enrollment criteria, and such. Universal access would result in anyone who wanted could attend a postsecondary institution, in some cases universal access may include free tuition and access for the institution. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there has been a push for mass access to higher education across the board. Recent trends described above in higher education show that there is an overall increase in student participation, along with more diverse students being accepted and granted access to higher education. The desire for mass access is mostly limited to postsecondary-education, and this has been seen in universities across and the world, and in cases where access has not been extended to the masses, there is still a general increase in student participation. Now that the trends in higher education have been tracked and understood, there is a push to understand why these trends have happened, and why is it happening now.

### **U.S. History and How It Influenced Higher Education and Access**

The constant changing economic and social climate of developed countries has resulted in this push for mass access. The economy post-World War II changed drastically, with there being more emphasis on high-skilled jobs, and which would imply an emphasis on pursuing a college education, which previously may not have been necessary. However, mass access had not quiet been reached yet. College was still only attainable for those with the financial resources, and it was still primarily geared towards White students. Once the job market demand

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changed, the people had to follow. Following the war, there was also a change in the industrialization of the United States. There was an emphasis on urbanization, and this required a change in the skill level of the workers. Urbanization results in the introduction of skilled jobs over manual labor, which would require education. In addition to this change in the economy, there was a social movement happening. The integration of women into the workplace while men were at war sparked a change in the mindset of America. Women began fighting for their rights and placed pressure on the government, which resulted in the influx of women pursuing college. Universities saw this social movement, and began acknowledging it by providing easier access to higher education for women. This was also present in the early-1960's during the Civil Rights movement. As the government felt the pressure to provide equal rights to Black people, it was also the beginning of Black people demanding equal access to resources, such as higher education. The decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* pushed for the integration of public schools, which combined with access to postsecondary education being expanded to include women as well, would lead to the introduction of mass access for higher education.

### **The Impact of Diversity on Education**

The Civil Rights movement brought something greater to higher education as well. Multicultural education, which can be considered any form of education or teaching that incorporates the histories, texts, values, beliefs, and perspectives of people from different cultural backgrounds, was born from this movement in the United States (Partnership, 2013). As mentioned before, this process began with African-Americans, but as more groups were being discriminated against in education, multicultural education would be extended to include these demographics. However, with the standard of diversity at institutions today, there is a demand to integrate more diverse, multicultural approaches to education at the collegiate level.

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Generally, access to any privilege is granted to the wealthy, white men first. Rights are given to those that can afford them, which has historically been that demographic. Although, over time women and minority groups have used their voices to protest this, and to have the opportunity to access the same rights. This pattern was seen in giving women and minorities the right to vote, and now it is being seen in access to education. The social and economic forces of post-World War II America created the perfect environment for access to education to expand. However, now that access to higher education has evolved, the question is “What do we do next?”

At this time, there must also be some considerations of the implications that are created from providing access to these groups. Once women and minorities were accepted into universities, there must be a change in staff, resources, and policy to reflect the needs and wants of these groups. Institutions have been geared toward wealthy white men, and now there must be programs and organizations placed in the university system to protect and support women and minorities. Access is just one-half of the equation to providing education to the masses. Once access has been granted, there should be the question of catering to these groups. In addition to the manpower it will require to provide this support, there is also a financial burden that is included in massification of higher education. As access increases, the financial implications include less federal support for research, an increase in tuition fees, and a freeze in the salary of current employees in the system (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009). With a push for college access to become a public good, there will be a greater cost for education. Due to the financial situation of globalization, it will be more difficult, and more expensive, for students to study abroad, or move out of the country for their studies. With the recent explosion of international travel and global business, studying abroad has become an integrated aspect of the college

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experience. However, now there is a threat of losing financial aid and support for these students.

In addition to the increased inability to come abroad, there will be less resources for these students once they arrive in the other country.

### **Next Steps for Supporting Diverse Students in Higher Education**

Bonilla-Silva's 2009 book, *Racism without Racists: Colorblind Racism and the persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*, exposed the truth behind the seemingly unnoticeable difference between the opinions of discrimination between Whites and Blacks. Recently, there has been more attention towards the treatment and biases against minorities in our society, and Bonilla-Silva highlights the reality of these opinions. When asked if they believed that Blacks still experience discrimination currently in the United States, 89.5% of Black and 82.5% of White respondents said yes; however, when these respondents were asked to the degree that they agreed or disagreed with the statement "Blacks are in the position they are today as a group because of present-day discrimination," 60.5% of Blacks either agreed or strongly agreed, with only 32.9% of Whites responding the same (Harper, 2012, p. 12). While these statistics are not specifically related to higher education, these ideas and underlying biases contribute to mindset that impacts the collegiate experience for students. These perspectives must be addressed, because they can become potentially dangerous when trying to support these diverse students and providing them with the empathy they need. Professors, professional staff at the institution, or other students may hold these opinions, and this can result in there being biases against diverse students, and can lead to a lack of support on their end.

To help cater to these students, new pathways have been introduced to establish a foundation for success in some institutions. Curriculum design needs to change, with some institutions integrating backgrounds and perspectives of previously excluded subcultures in

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teaching materials and learning experiences (Partnership, 2013). The transformation of learning standards through common core is sensitive to English-language learners and students with special needs, while new educational programs concerning ethnic and gender studies promote the introduction of social justice within the educational system (Partnership, 2013). The biggest implementation of change has been teacher education and school staffing. Representation within the school system is essential for students to have a physical manifestation of their goals. If students have professors or staff that looks like them, it will reinforce the idea that they are also capable of attaining these goals. Since the 1980's, accrediting organizations and state departments of education began requiring education programs to have potential teachers include multicultural coursework and training, with states like California, Florida and Massachusetts attempting to train teachers for working with multicultural education and catering to students that have English as a second language (Partnership, 2013).

Demographics have become an essential determination of the student body of a university. When applying, the student must disclose their age, race, gender, financial situations, and more. All this information is gathered and curated into a report of the student body, and this report later becomes a statistic of retention and graduation rates of the students, based on these individual aspects. Universities pride themselves in reporting higher numbers of diverse students than other schools, however these students are more than just statistics.

### **Methods**

To understand and analyze the current theories, research, and methods within the Student Affairs discipline, a literature review of articles and journals was conducted. These articles range in time from the 1960's through today, which provide a range of information and the evolution of the theories concerning diversity and inclusion over the past 60 years. There are a small

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number of articles analyzed because when conducting an initial search, I discovered that to address the issue of support in higher education for the diverse students that are being granted access, research in higher education presents common methods of providing this support. I decided that it would be more effective to analyze these articles in depth, rather than provide many articles at a surface-level interpretation. Each article will be summarized and connected to the larger issue of providing these students support through common ideas presented in research. A literature review was chosen because when analyzing why diverse students are not as successful once given access to higher education, I found that the various articles I read expressed the same ideas. Explaining less articles in more depth provides the opportunity to better understand and change these ideas to improve the future of support in higher education. The method of the literature review follows in the order of discussing the explanations of why diverse students are provided less access or support on campus, and then having suggestions as to how to mitigate these discrepancies.

In addition to analyzing what the research is implying, there will also be explanation of how these sources were discovered. The purpose of this paper is to research, understand, and analyze the position that higher education has taken in supporting diverse students. While there has been a general increase in the access to higher education for diverse students, a degree attainment gap still prevails, and is arguably increasing. To provide a better education to these students, there must be an understanding of the current theories or research that has been done, and then to provide commonalities or suggestions based on this research. The articles compiled are a small segment of research done in the discipline of higher education, and this is only one part of a large problem. This research is meant to answer these research questions:

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- What resources can be provided to support and retain diverse students at their respective institution?
- What factors influence student success in enrollment and retention for postsecondary education?

These articles were discovered in multiple ways. Meetings with library specialists provided insight on using Google Scholar to have a broad search, and then the use of back citations for more specific information. A preliminary Internet search for “diversity and inclusion in higher education” helped to discover sources that provided statistical information shown in the introduction of the paper, such as the U.S. Department of Education’s student report. This search also provided articles from Harper, specifically Race Without Racism. Once articles were found, I would use back citations to compile further sources. The article from Trow was found through this method. When I found an article that was interesting, I would also try to find and use the sources that the article would cite. Other articles, such as Gay’s “Preparing for Culturally Responsive Teaching”, were found through the suggestions of my Thesis Advisor. There are four articles that are outlined in depth throughout the literature review, however, there are several other articles that are referenced in the pieces being analyzed.

Overall, the process of synthesizing the articles came from reading articles that were all related. These articles have cited one another, or have been built on the foundation of other researchers. This results in it being easier to outline common themes or ideas because they all interact with one another. Some of the research found may have been done for K-12 information, however they still relate to the topic of access and support in higher education because the K-12 educational system contributes to the system that lacks support for these diverse students.

Education is a process, and the collegiate level is only one part of this process. Research from K-

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12 may not be specific to the problem, but it does provide insight on the foundation of education that relates to the likelihood that diverse students feel prepared for higher education and will enroll in higher education.

### **Researcher Bias and Limitations**

The researcher is a 21-year-old female that is an undergraduate student in the College of Business at this university. I am a member of the Honors College, and I am a senior at this university. While trying to reduce bias in my researching and analysis, I am, however, a white presenting Hispanic student that has lived on campus for three years. I am a Resident Assistant for the Housing and Residential Life department and I am planning on pursuing a career in Student Affairs. Due to my personal connection to higher education and my desire to help diverse students professionally in the future, there will be some influence of these opinions in this study. This study will also be limited due to the inability to read and analyze every piece of literature within the Student Affairs discipline that addresses this topic. This study is based upon the scope and ability of the paper, as well as the researcher.

### **Literature Review**

There are four articles that will be summarized, analyzed and interpreted below. The first two articles, “Access to and Opportunity in Postsecondary Education in the United States: A Review” (Baker & Velez, 1996), and “Student Persistence in a Public Higher Education System” (Hu & St. John, 2001) address the statistics mentioned previously in this paper. These articles provide explanations for why there are discrepancies between enrollment and completion for diverse students and White students. The third article discussed, “Race without Racism: How Higher Education Researchers Minimize Racist Institutional Norms” (Harper, 2012), displays how racism influences research and explains the how it can impact experiences for diverse



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students, resulting in an increase of these discrepancies between races/ethnicities. The literature review is wrapped up through “Preparing for Culturally Responsive Teaching” (Gay, 2002). It is important to end the literature review with Gay’s article because it provides a solution to some of the issues that have created these differences in enrollment and completion among diverse students compared to White students.

### **Author Information (Baker and Velez, 1996)**

The first article that will be reviewed is “Access to and Opportunity in Postsecondary Education in the United States: A Review” by Baker and Velez (1996). Authors Therese L. Baker and William Velez both have Ph.D. degrees, with Baker having been the Professor and Chair of the Department of Sociology at California State University; and Velez an Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (Baker & Velez, 1996). Baker’s focus on nontraditional postsecondary students and predictors of access and completion match well with Velez’s interest in access to, and retention, within postsecondary education help to provide a strong foundation for their research. They discuss the changes in access to Black and Hispanic/Latino students, and utilize their research in pedagogy and how it relates to diverse students, to create suggestions in how to increase degree completion for these students.

### **Article Information and Summary for “Access to and Opportunity in Postsecondary Education in the United States: A Review (Baker & Velez, 1996)**

“Access to and Opportunity in Postsecondary Education in the United States: A Review” explains the relationship between socioeconomic status, as well as social and academic-integration into college, and the success of Black and Hispanic students. This article explains how there has been a change in the average student, and how this student is no longer the

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traditional student. At the time of this article being published, the research supported the idea that the average student was “a woman, older than 22, working and perhaps supporting her own family, and possible attending classes only on a part-time basis” (Baker & Velez, 1996).

However, the issue is that while the demographics of students have changed, there had not been a change in the research collection methods. Information gathered about students had been based in researching students who transitioned directly from high school into college, and these students were predominantly male, and since the 1960’s, racial differences had been ignored. A large population of the nontraditional average student had been unrepresented.

Enrollment in college was directly impacted by socioeconomic status. The U.S. Department of Education produced a report in 1994 that explained that the percentage of low-income students entering directly into college was 41 percent, compared to the 57 percentage of middle-income students, and the 81 percent of high-income students (Department of Education 1994). This statistic shows that there is a direct relationship between finances and college enrollment, as well as degree attainment. Baker and Velez (1996) discusses how changes in financial aid policies directly impacts students. When the Higher Education Act of 1965 was enacted, there was a dramatic increase in financial aid for low-income students, and enrollment rate for low-income students increased based on expanded opportunities (Baker & Velez, 1996). However, when the Middle-Income Student Assistance Act was introduced in 1978 there were more opportunities provided to middle-income students in the form of repayable loans (Baker & Velez, 1996). Once financial aid became repayable, low-income students were less likely to accept this assistance, because the cost would continue to accumulate and would result in being more than the student could accept. As financial aid changes, the enrollment of low-income students reacts accordingly.

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**Attitudes based on race (Baker & Velez, 1996).** Baker and Velez (1996) references Steelman and Powell (1993) and their research on the influence that race has on the attitude towards financial aid. The responsibility of paying for college is either placed on the student, their family, or the government. Steelman and Powell explains that minority parents supported government financial aid more than White parents, however with socioeconomic status controlled, parents planned to save the same amount of money, regardless of race (Steelman & Powell, 1993). Overall, minority parents were more likely to support policies that widen access to education for all students, while White parents expected their children to take the responsibility of paying for college (Steelman & Powell, 1993).

**Educational attainment based on race/ethnicity (Baker & Velez, 1996).** There are various ways in which race and ethnicity influence educational attainment. Socioeconomic status, as mentioned above, can be related to race. Black and Hispanic students place more emphasis on financial need, and a lack of financial aid may negatively influence enrollment rates, and consequently completion rates, of diverse students. Socioeconomic status aside, Baker and Velez outlines that there are three other factors that impact diverse students and their degree attainment. A decline in Black and Hispanic enrollment in four-year institutions can be attributed to increasing segregation, inadequate assistance to students that are less-prepared for academia at a collegiate level, and the lack of accommodation by universities for the educational needs of these diverse students (Baker & Velez, 1996). Baker and Velez are not the only researchers that have discovered these ideas, which are also referenced in Orfield and Paul's "Declines in Minority Access: A Tale of Five Cities" (1987-1988).

**Article Information and Summary for "Student Persistence in a Public Higher Education System" (Hu & St. John, 2001)**

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“Student Persistence in a Public Higher Education System” seeks to understand racial and ethnic differences in students and how it influences their success in the higher education system. Hu and St. John measured and compared trends in student performance based on ethnicity and student financial aid. A comparison of the results from a trend and logistical analysis showed that student persistence was influenced by the student race/ethnicity. Hu and St. John studied student characteristics, college experiences, and financial aid among White, Black, and Hispanic students. This article also describes differences in student performance through averaging overall student grades, and how they differ among race/ethnicity.

**Comparisons based on income, grade performance, and financial aid (Hu & St. John, 2001).**

*Income trends and impact on student persistence.* As seen in other articles, Black students were more likely to come from low-income families, with Hispanic students coming from middle-income families, and White students being more likely to come from wealthy families (Hu & St. John, 2001). Therefore, this resulted in Black students receiving larger financial aid packages, Hispanic students being less likely to receive financial aid assistance, and White students not having much financial aid at all. This information is consistent with trends and statistics seen in the U.S. Department of Education reports from 2016. Diverse students that come from lower-socioeconomic backgrounds are at a disadvantage for enrolling in college and obtaining a degree. However, providing financial aid based on need is one method to attempt to lessen the gap that is attributed to socioeconomic status.

*Student performance and influence on student persistence based on race/ethnicity.*

Overall, the college grades differed based on race/ethnicity of the students. Black students had a higher percentage of below-C and C grades compared to Hispanic and White students, while

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White students had a higher percentage earning A and B average grades (Hu & St. John, 2001). Grade averages followed a similar trend as financial aid, with Black students earning lower grades in proportion to White students, and with Hispanic students falling in the middle of the averages. While there were still Black students earning grade averages of A and B and White students earning below-C and C averages, there were higher percentages of Black students earning lower grades and White students earning higher grades. As the title indicates, Hu and St. John wanted to compare the persistence of students, and the grades of students directly influences student persistence (Hu & St. John, 2001). Since Black students statistically received lower grades than White students, they are less persistent to remain in college. This pattern remains true for Hispanic students, who may be more likely to be more persistent than Black student, but not as persistent as higher achieving White students.

### *Comparison that financial aid packages have on persistence based on race/ethnicity.*

Hu and St. John found that financial aid packages showed differences in student persistence based on type of financial aid and the years in which the aid was provided. To summarize, Hu and St. John collected information for the academic years of 1990-1991, 1993-1994, and 1996-1997, and compared the persistence rates of these students based on the aid that they received and their race/ethnicity. For comparison purposes, they also researched persistence for non-aid recipients for Black, Hispanic, and White students. Generally, Black and Hispanic students that received aid persisted better than non-aid recipients of the same race (Hu & St. John, 2001). The financial aid packages discussed were: grants only, loans only, grants and loans, and other packages. Black and Hispanic students that received aid persisted better in the academic years of 1993-1994 and 1996-1997 compared to their counterparts that did not receive aid (Hu & St. John, 2001). Hispanic students in the academic year 1990-1991 that received any aid at all

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persisted better than non-aid recipients (Hu & St. John, 2001). Overall, in the academic year of 1993-1994, all aid recipients, except loan only recipients, persisted better than non-aid recipients, while loan only students persisted the same as non-aid students (Hu & St. John, 2001). White students portrayed different trends. In the academic years 1990-1991 and 1996-1997, only recipients of grants and loans persisted better than non-aid recipients, and in 1996-1997, White students that had other packages for financial aid persisted the same as non-aid students (Hu & St. John, 2001).

The data described above shows that financial aid significantly benefits Black and Hispanic students, while the persistence among White students did not vary as much. As mentioned throughout this paper, diverse students are placed at a disadvantage for degree completion based on financial aid, or the lack thereof. Although financial aid recipients persisted better than non-aid recipients, it is noticeable that diverse students benefited more from financial aid, which helps to close the gap created by socioeconomic status.

### **Author Information for “Race without Racism: How Higher Education Researchers Minimize Racist Institutional Norms” (Harper, 2012)**

Shaun Harper is a faculty member at the University of Pennsylvania, and he serves within the Graduate School of Education, Africana Studies, and Gender Studies, and is also the Director of the Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education at the time in which his paper was written (Harper, 2012). Harper also was recognized with the 2008 ASHE Early Career Award, and in 2011 was elected to the ASHE Board of Directors. (Harper, 2012). Harper’s experience with Africana and Gender Studies provides a mindset that can help appropriately analyze and research the disadvantages faced by diverse students in the higher education system.

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**Article Information and Summary for “Race without Racism: How Higher Education Researchers Minimize Racist Institutional Norms” (Harper, 2012)**

Harper focuses on how researchers explain, discuss, and theorize about racial differences in student achievement, while also documenting how scholars rationalize racial climates and the experiences of diverse students in an institution that has been primarily White students (Harper, 2012). To do this, Harper uses an analytic framework through the eyes of Bonilla-Silva and the 2009 book *Race without Racists: Colorblind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*. Harper uses this book because of Bonilla-Silva’s illustration of the ways in which people rationalize and excuse the differences and disadvantages between diverse students and White students. Bonilla-Silva’s mindset in *Race without Racists* follows the tenet of the critical race theory, and its critiques of neutrality, objectivity and color-blindness that students suffer from when integrated in the higher education system (Harper, 2012).

**Bonilla-Silva’s theories used by Harper.** Harper explains the four ideological frameworks that Bonilla-Silva found through survey data, which are used by people to interpret race and racial situations, that can result in the rationalization of racial differences. These frameworks are: abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization of racism (Harper, 2012, p. 12). Abstract liberalism can be defined as using ideas associated with political liberalism, which includes concepts of equal opportunity without force to achieve social policy, and economic liberalism in an abstract way to explain racial matters, while naturalization “allows Whites to explain away racial phenomena by suggesting that they are natural occurrences” (Harper, 2012, p. 12). However, the other two frameworks can become dangerous when used in higher education. Cultural racism “relies on culturally based arguments, such as ‘Mexicans do not put much emphasis on education’ or ‘Blacks have too many babies’ to explain the status of

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minorities in society,” while the minimization of race framework is based in the suggestion that discrimination against someone for their race is no longer a central factor that affects minorities’ lives and their opportunities (Harper, 2012, p. 12). Harper includes Bonilla-Silva’s explanation that the framework of minimization of racism leads Whites to see discrimination through a narrow lens, and only classify discrimination as outrageous racist acts, and anything that is not grotesque can be misconstrued as the minorities being sensitive or trying to play the “race card” (Harper, 2012, p. 12). This mindset enables the continuance of discrimination in the education system, and if professors, staff, or administration think through some of these frameworks, it could lead to a disconnect between professional staff or White students and diverse students.

**Harper’s methods and findings (Harper, 2012).** Harper utilized an analysis of articles written in seven different peer-reviewed academic journals to determine the attitudes of researchers and their results. Harper analyzed 255 articles throughout these seven journals in the years 1999-2009, with the seven journals being: The Review of Higher Education, The Journal of Higher Education, Research in Higher Education, Journal of College Student Development, Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice, Community College Journal of Research and Practice, and Community College Review (Harper, 2012). The 255 articles chosen were articles that had keywords or topics that focused on campus racial climate, experiences of diverse students on White campuses, racial differences between White and diverse students, and comparisons of White institutions to Historically Black Colleges and Universities, or HBCUs (Harper, 2012). Harper used these articles to understand how researchers explain the differences in access, enrollment, and completion rates of diverse students versus White students. His findings are divided into explanations that do not name racism as a factor, explanations that are



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substitutes for racism, and articles that use the terms “racism” or “racist” in their explanations (Harper, 2012).

*Explanations that ignore racism.* This is a common method used by researchers to not place blame on racism in the higher education system. An example of an explanation that uses anything but racism would be articles that use terms like “may” or “might” when concerning the differences between diverse students and White students (Harper, 2012). This can be seen when the disadvantages faced by diverse students can be attributed to factors like a possible financial hardship, rather than biases held by professors. As referenced by Harper, people still interpret diverse students through biased lenses, with Black people reporting that they believe there is still discrimination present today, and a much smaller percentage of White people reporting the same thing (Harper, 2012). Some White people surveyed have expressed that they believe Black people still use the “race card,” rather than acknowledging that there is still the presence of bias within the White community, in some cases.

Harper’s analysis uncovered other examples in which racism was ignored as a possible explanation. When discussing the difference in average GPA of Black students being lower than the GPA of White students, there is the excuse, which is even mentioned in this paper, of this possibly being because of disadvantaged educational backgrounds (Harper, 2012). However, the fact of racism is not considered. The researchers did not consider the explanation that Black students face opposition from racial stereotypes that make it more difficult to achieve the same outcome as White students, who have not been exposed to the effects of racism throughout their educational career (Harper, 2012). While racism is not the sole reason for diverse students facing discrimination or disadvantages, researchers are quick to create rationalizations that are anything but racism.

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This discrimination goes beyond the classroom, as Harper also explored the experience of diverse students on campus versus the experience of White students. Like student performance, interactions between diverse students and faculty are different than the relationships between White students and faculty. Diverse students are encouraged to take time off to reevaluate goals and to work at community colleges to improve rates of succeeding, however White students do not receive the same type of advice (Harper, 2012). In addition to differences in advice, diverse students interpret and experience campus differently than their white counterparts. Diverse students are less likely to work and research with faculty than White students are; however, research does not contribute this difference to diverse students being impacted by racism, intentional or not (Harper, 2012). White students are more likely to be involved, especially considering that they feel the most comfortable on a campus in which they are the majority. A sense of comfort is essential to the environment on campus, especially since Black students reported a higher level of satisfaction at HBCUs versus predominantly White institutions, resulting in better student performance (Harper, 2012).

***Explanations that substitute racism.*** In his research, Harper found that there were very few articles that used the words “racist” or “racism” when discussing the explanation for differences between diverse and White students. The articles that did use these terms used them trivially, only using them a few times. However, there were many articles that utilized semantic substitutions, some of these being: “marginalizing,” “prejudicial,” “discriminatory,” “unsupportive,” and the like (Harper, 2012, p.20). Rather than using harsh language like “racist” and “racism,” these semantic substitutes are used by researchers to avoid the reality of institutionalized racism that impacts students.

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***Critical Race Theory as an explanation.*** Critical Race Theory is the chance higher education has to discuss and understand how racism within the institution impacts diverse students. While **CTR** has not been implemented in the study of schools, education policy or methods of teaching, it has been increasingly used to analyze the various issues related to racism and the experience of diverse students in education (Harper, 2012). In general, the articles that used CTR treated racism as an individual and institutional issue and were more aware of whether the faculty at an institution supported racist attitudes, practices and policies (Harper, 2012).

### **Article Information and Summary for “Preparing for Culturally Responsive Teaching,” (Gay, 2002)**

Geneva Gay’s article presents brief sketches of the ideas in her book *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice* from 2000. Gay defines culturally responsive teaching as “using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (Gay, 2002). Culturally responsive teaching is important because it provides a framework for diverse students to be taught within their culture and in a way that is familiar, as White students receive every day. Educators can only teach what they know, and White faculty is not knowledgeable in cultural diversity and how to appropriately teach these students. This article is used to express suggestions on how to prepare faculty to be instructed on how to teach to culturally diverse students.

**How Culture Influences Learning.** Culture is one of the most influential factor in how students interpret the world. There are some considerations that faculty must be aware of regarding culture, such as: how certain cultures give priority to communal living and cooperative problem solving, and how these feelings impact educational motivation, aspiration, and

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performance; how different cultures interpret the appropriate ways of interaction between children and adults in instructional settings; and cultural expectations of gender role socialization in various groups for implementing equity initiatives in the classroom (Gay, 2002). Although some instructors believe that their discipline may be immune to diversity, that is untrue. All subjects need to be accommodated to diverse students, and educators must learn multicultural teaching strategies. This can be considered a struggle for current educators because they may not be aware of the contributions of ethnic or diverse groups to their field of study, and it can be difficult to change teaching methods that have been used for years. However, these issues can be addressed through educating instructors on the contributions that different ethnic groups have provided, as well as a deeper understanding of what the multicultural education theory, research, and scholarship (Gay, 2002).

**Creating Curricula that is Culturally Relevant.** Curricula can be divided into three different divisions, formal plans for instruction, symbolic curriculum, and societal curriculum (Gay, 2002). Formal instruction is the type of curriculum that is implemented through policy, governing bodies of the educational system, and are anchored within instruction through textbooks and educational standards (Gay, 2002). Formal instruction in the past has been insensitive to culturally diverse ideas, especially by ignoring controversial issues from the past, including racism. While formal instruction had tried to become more inclusive, there needs to be an analysis of the instructional material and curriculum designs to determine their cultural strengths and weaknesses. After this analysis, there should be a focus on improving the quality, narrative, representation, variety, purpose, and complexity of these materials that are accessible to students (Gay, 2002). An example of some of the changes that need to be made would be the transition from focusing all cultural material on African Americans more than any other ethnic or

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racial groups, and would use culturally responsive teaching to deal directly with controversial issues and would provide multiple perspectives and sources for this (Gay, 2002).

Symbolic curriculum can be described as instructional plans used by schools that include “images, symbols, icons, mottoes, awards, celebrations, and other artifacts that are used to teach students knowledge, skills, morals, and values” (Gay, 2002, p. 108). Symbolic curriculum can be used in free spaces to display information to students and this can be essential in implementing culturally representative material. Changes in symbolic curriculum can help to provide representation of all ethnic groups that are accurate and can help to inform students. While symbolic curriculum seems to be more appropriate for K-12, residence halls within institutions use bulletin boards to communicate with the residents, and this can be an opportunity for culturally diverse information to be spread across college-level students as well, making it applicable at all levels.

Societal curriculum is the most difficult to change. It can be explained as the representation of ethnic groups and diverse through mass media (Gay, 2002). Media is a strong influencer on the perception of ethnic groups to the public, and unfortunately the majority of the knowledge that is accessible through mass media is inaccurate and portrays negative stereotypes and are too impactful to ignore (Gay, 2002).

**Educator Options.** There are a few methods that educators can use to create an environment in which students can learn effectively, while also ensuring that communication is strong and that the classroom content follows in the same path (Gay, 2002). As mentioned in the previous article, Black students reported feeling unsatisfied due to the lack of comfort they felt at predominantly White institutions. It is the responsibility of the educators to create an environment in which the students feel comfortable to be themselves and to discuss difficult

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topics like racial issues. Educators need to challenge themselves to be aware of various ethnic groups and their cultural preferences. Teachers can use cultural scaffolding to assist in teaching students about multicultural ideas, and this can be done by encouraging students to use their own cultures and experiences to increase their intellectual abilities and academic performance (Gay, 2002). Educators must act as supporters and partners in the process of acknowledging and integrating cultures in the educational system.

Understanding how to teach students of different races and ethnic groups requires educators to learn how different students communicate, and then implementing communication methods that best suit each student. This requires educators to take the time to understand the abilities of each student, and then be aware of how their culture can impact their way of communicating. This cross-communication combined with cultural congruity in the classroom can help to engrain culture in curriculum (Gay, 2002). For example, knowing how students communicate, integrating that into how you teach diverse students, while also delivering the content in a way that is accessible to these students helps to mitigate the gap that has been created through catering to White students.

### **Limitations of the Literature Review**

This literature review has several limitations that need to be considered. Overall, there were only four articles that were studied and analyzed. While this may be a small numerical amount, there is extensive information offered through these four articles. Each article referenced research that has led the field of Student Affairs, with Harper referencing several researchers and theories in his own literature review and analysis. Therefore, it felt more impactful to analyze less articles in more depth, rather than trying to do a surface level analysis of more sources. This literature review is limited because it does not reference all works in the Student Affairs field,

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and it also relies on the interpretation of a White-presenting undergraduate senior, who has intentions of working in Student Affairs in the future. This literature review was also restricted to the scope of support for diverse students in higher education, and how it relates to addressing this issue only.

This review is also limited in the representation of Asian, Pacific-Islander and Alaskan Native students. There has not been as much research done on the experiences of these students, and this is a limitation not only for this paper, but for the field of Student Affairs. It is necessary to collect more information on these groups, and to conduct analyses on that information to determine how to support these students as well.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this paper was to understand the reasons that there are differences in the rates of enrollment and completion of diverse students versus White students in higher education, and what support is or can be provided to diverse students to reduce these differences. The literature review conducted above explains few main factors that contribute to these discrepancies between races and ethnicities. Generally speaking, socioeconomic status is a strong indicator of student performance in higher education. When the pressure of paying for college is placed on the student or their family, the student's persistence towards degree completion is lowered. Since Black and Hispanic students are more likely to come from low-income families, they are less likely to enroll in college, due to the financial pressures. However, financial aid can help to mitigate this discrepancy. When provided with financial aid, Black and Hispanic students can focus on their education more, which results in better performance academically.

However, socioeconomic status is not the only factor that leaves diverse students at a disadvantage. Diverse students are also placed at an academic disadvantage. Family education

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can influence enrollment into college, and since Black and Hispanic students are more likely to come from a low-income area, there is a higher probability that they are the first in their family to attend college. In addition to family education, these students may be coming from an educational system that left them unprepared for the rigor of postsecondary education. Without proper resources throughout their entire educational career, diverse students may not have had access to education like White students have, and therefore they have been placed at a disadvantage before they ever arrive at an institution.

While enrollment has increased over time for diverse students, that is only one-half of the equation. Once these students arrive on campus, it is the responsibility of the institution, the faculty, and the student to ensure that all students succeed. Historically speaking, the higher education system has been serving a predominantly White male student body. Therefore, there is an institutionalized preference towards White students. Teachers have accommodated their teaching styles and the information for White students, with curriculum censored to ignore the injustices experienced by diverse students. Once these diverse students arrive on campus, there is a lack of understanding towards them and their experiences. Instructors are not aware of how to appropriately teach diverse students, and their interactions with diverse students can greatly impact the relationship that is created between diverse students and faculty. Diverse students experience racism on campus, whether it be through exchanges with their peers, or with faculty. Black students are the least likely to work directly with professors or to receive research opportunities with faculty. There are several factors for this, but it cannot be ignored that one factor is an implicit bias or racism against diverse students, which can be seen through the actions of professors.

### **Recommendations**



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These ideas are not meant to discourage students from enrolling in college and completing a degree. The purpose of this paper is to highlight these facts, and to provide suggestions to change this vicious cycle of letting diverse students fall through the cracks. There are several ways to reverse these problems. As mentioned above, financial aid is a strong accommodation that can help to close this completion gap. Research shows that financial aid increases performance in Black and Hispanic students, compared to White students. Since financial aid is needed more often for Black and Hispanic students, it is a simple way to begin leveling the field for students. In addition to financial aid, the educators and faculty on campus are strong influences in degree completion. Educators can utilize culturally responsive teaching to integrate multicultural ideas in curriculum. By directly addressing and informing students of racial issues, controversial topics, and complexity of history can help to create a comfort level among students for having these difficult discussions. Changes in formal instruction, such as accurate and high-quality textbooks or standards can help within academia. Although, the environment that is created by educators is important as well. Students need to feel like their experiences are heard, and that they are being understood for who they are. There have been some programs implemented that can help to bridge these gaps, but there is still work to be done.

To help create this relationship, there needs to be multicultural and diversity training provided to all faculty and staff on campus. Educators must understand the abilities of their students, and should know how to appropriately communicate with these students based on their culture and preferences. By integrating proper communication, culturally diverse curriculum, and a comfortable environment, this will help diverse students feel supported, and this will increase their performance. Black students reported feeling more satisfied with their experience at HBCUs than at institutions that are predominantly White.

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However, there is a way for predominately White institutions to make diverse students feel more supported and welcomed. There is a major issue of representation within higher education itself. There is a need for more diversity in the system, with institutions needing to have more diverse faculty and staff. Multicultural training can help overall communication, but more representation in the system can help students feel as if someone understands their experiences and they will feel more supported. Mentorships can encourage diverse students to seek individual relationships with professors and instructors, which can provide diverse students more opportunities to work directly in their field of interests or to obtain research positions. This feeling of support can also come from student organizations that can connect students that share some identities, such as race or socioeconomic status. There is strength in numbers, and students will perform better if they are able to experience college through their own cultural filters.

Financial aid programs, such as the Florida Bright Futures, provide diverse students with the opportunities to mitigate the issue of financial responsibility, and as Hu & St. John mention in their article, relieving financial responsibility can allow for students to focus on academia, which can help to increase retention, as well as completion. Increasing support for students can include financial aid, mentorships, student organizations, and representation in faculty and staff within higher education. It is important to continue and study how these factors influence diverse students, and what else can be done to help diverse students further. HBCUs report higher student satisfaction for Black students, because of this sense of belonging. However, what can be done for other students? What more can be done for Black students to ensure that this sense of community and support happens at predominantly White institutions? There is also a lack of research and understanding of how to support diverse students that are not Black, Hispanic or Asia. This includes American Indian/Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander

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students. There need to be more research done concerning these student populations, whom may benefit from these recommendations, or may not. To understand how diverse students want to be supported, there must be interviews, focus groups, or studies done surrounding success of diverse students, and we should learn how to level the field for these students.

### **Conclusion**

We cannot ignore the disadvantages that are placed on diverse students. We punish diverse students by placing them in an education system that has been developed and created in favor of White students. The average student is changing, and it is the responsibility of the institutions to accommodate their policies, procedures, and standards to meet these changes. We must acknowledge the racism that exists in higher education, whether it be intentional or unintentional. It is time to accurately represent these populations in our curriculum, and it is time to learn how to communicate effectively across cultures. It is our responsibility to take the time to teach ourselves and our students how to understand different cultures, and to ensure that our education system reflects those same changes. We need more representation in our higher education system, and we need to ensure that our diverse students are no longer placed at a disadvantage because of a system that we created. We have the chance to change it, and these discussions need to happen. These recommendations are not the only solutions, as the factors mentioned in this paper are not the only sources of struggles for diverse students. However, this is one step in the direction of closing the enrollment and completion gaps that exist because of our prejudice. This can be the beginning of a new era in higher education, and this is just the beginning of that conversation.

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