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Discrimination and Bias, Underrepresentation, and Sense of Belonging on Campus

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In recent years, American cities and college campuses experienced protests over outrage and a sense of injustice ignited by events where Black youth were shot and killed by authorities. While these events capture national attention, researchers have identified more subtle and pervasive forms of discrimination and bias in education and work environments.¹ College campuses, as microcosms of society, are not immune from these issues. Campus racial climate models indicate an interrelationship between racial/ethnic composition of the campus, perceptions of the campus as hostile or welcoming, and cross-racial interaction on campus that influence educational outcomes.² Research has established the educational value of frequent and quality interactions across race/ethnicity for both racial/ethnic minority and majority students. Positive interactions resulted in desirable outcomes, while negative interactions with diverse peers resulted in lower scores on many academic and democratic outcomes.³ Given recent sociohistorical events, it is important to understand the context for negative interactions.

The central question we address is whether distinctions in the college composition of Blacks, Latina/os, and Native Americans are associated with rates of discrimination and bias on campus. In a previous HERI brief, we concluded low representation of these groups is detrimental to campus climate and subsequent par-

ticipation in a diverse workforce.⁴ We extend this research to show the relationship between students' discrimination and bias experiences among African American and Latina/o college students averaged across six years of national data collection and students' sense of belonging on campus, a key antecedent to retention in college.

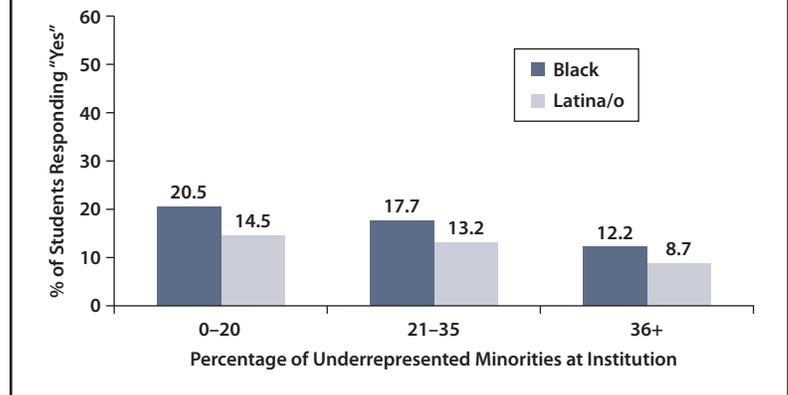
The data for this brief come from the experiences of 8,887 underrepresented minority (URM) students who attended 58 four-year campuses that took part in the Diverse Learning Environments (DLE) survey between 2010 and 2015. The DLE is a national survey designed to assist campuses in evaluating their campus climate, institutional practices, and student outcomes.⁵ The sample includes 24 public and 34 private four-year institutions that vary in terms of URM enrollment, including public campuses in Texas and California that no longer use race in admissions decisions. In order to track change from the previous research brief, the data are focused on institutions where African Americans are not the largest minority group. A larger dataset (82 campuses) was also used to specifically illustrate Latina/o student patterns of discrimination and bias experiences. The same cutoffs for URM representation were used to categorize campuses into low (less than 20%), moderate (21–35%), and high representation (36% and above) as in previous research.⁶

It is important to note that current Supreme Court cases involve challenges regarding the consideration of race/ethnicity as one of many factors in admission to institutions with low and moderate URM underrepresentation.⁷ We include the most diverse institutions because they help to illustrate that discrimination and bias do not completely disappear from the college landscape and that representation is a necessary but insufficient condition in improving intergroup relations in college and beyond.

Although there are few datasets to monitor campus climate, a recent study of FBI data on reported hate crimes at 418 colleges corroborates data obtained from college student surveys. Researchers found colleges that “were more successful in being able to admit and enroll Black and Latino students reported fewer hate crimes per year.”⁸ However, these institutional reports to federal agencies depend on individual reports to campus authorities. DLE data indicate that, on average, only 12.6% of all students reported a discrimination or harassment incident to a campus authority. Figure 1 indicates the percentage of African American and Latina/o students reporting incidents to campus authorities relative to URM representation on campus. Approximately one in five African American students (20.5%) and 14.5% of Latina/os stated that they reported a bias incident to a campus authority on campuses with low URM representation. By contrast, reports of incidents are significantly lower for both African American (12.2%) and Latina/o groups (8.7%) at the most diverse institutions.

Many URM students experience discrimination and bias, but most incidents go unreported. The survey data show, when asked specifically about types of bias and discrimination, substantially higher percentages of African American and Latina/o students experienced both overt and subtle forms of discrimination. For example, Figure 2 shows 62.3% of Latina/o students reported personally experiencing discriminatory verbal

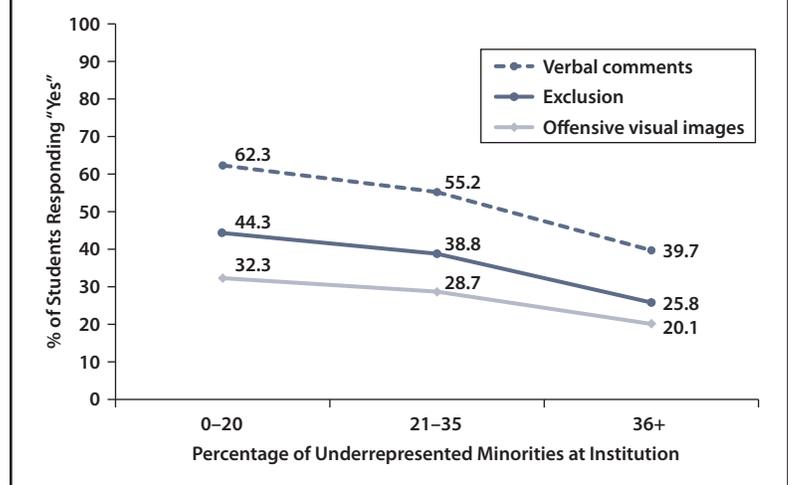
Figure 1. Reported an Incident of Discrimination to a Campus Authority (% of Students Responding “Yes”)



comments, 44.3% felt excluded from events and activities, and almost one-third (32.3%) reported visually offensive images on campuses with low URM representation. The general pattern shows significant declines in forms of bias on campuses that achieved moderate to high URM diversity. Still, over half (55.2%) of Latina/os experience offensive verbal comments on moderately diverse campuses and 39.7% report them on the most diverse campuses. Approximately 38% report feelings of exclusion at moderately diverse institutions and one-quarter experience exclusion at the most diverse institutions.

While discrimination and bias patterns mirror those reported in the 2012 brief for Latina/o students, a new pattern emerged since that year for African American students attending campuses that

Figure 2. Percent of Latina/o Students Experiencing Different Types of Discrimination and Bias



participated in the DLE. Figure 3 shows that during the time period covered by this report, Black students were more likely to report discrimination and bias at moderately diverse institutions: 68.7% reported being the target of verbal comments, 48.1% reported feeling excluded from events or activities, and 38.8% reported seeing offensive visual images. This differs from the pattern found in 2012, where Black students reported the highest levels of discrimination and bias at low URM diversity institutions.⁹ In both cases, however, significantly lower discrimination and bias continue to be reported by African Americans in the most diverse institutions.

Why is discrimination and bias up at moderately diverse institutions among African American students? There have been a series of events beginning with Trayvon Martin's death in 2012, the exoneration of the defendant in the Martin case in 2013, and subsequent killing of Black youth by police in 2014 and 2015 in Ferguson, MO, and Baltimore, MD, among others. This timeframe also coincides with public discussion and Supreme Court hearings of affirmative action cases (*Fisher v. University of Texas*; *Schuette v. Coalition to Defend Affirmative Action*).¹⁰ In this challenging racial context, some campuses have had to manage campus protests and deal more proactively

with racial issues. Low URM institutions in the more recent DLE survey administrations may have developed such campus responses. It will be important to reexamine the climate for African American students in the next few years to determine if the new pattern is an effect of the socio-historical period.

There are consequences of a hostile racial climate for underrepresented groups in all contexts. Research has established that experiences of discrimination negatively affect sense of belonging and retention, even among the most high-achieving Black and Latina/o students.¹¹ The negative relationship between discrimination and sense of belonging is strongest among Black ($r = -.43$) and Latina/o ($r = -.29$) students attending campuses with low URM diversity. Figure 4 shows the correlation between discrimination and sense of belonging decreases significantly as URM representation increases from low ($r = -.33$) to moderate ($r = -.18$) and it levels off at the most diverse institutions ($r = -.15$).¹² This suggests that moderately diverse institutions can have a significant impact in diminishing the effects of discrimination on students' sense of belonging and retention, but this requires attention to recruiting and retaining URM students as well as improving intergroup relations on campus.

Figure 3. Percent of Black Students Experiencing Different Types of Discrimination and Bias

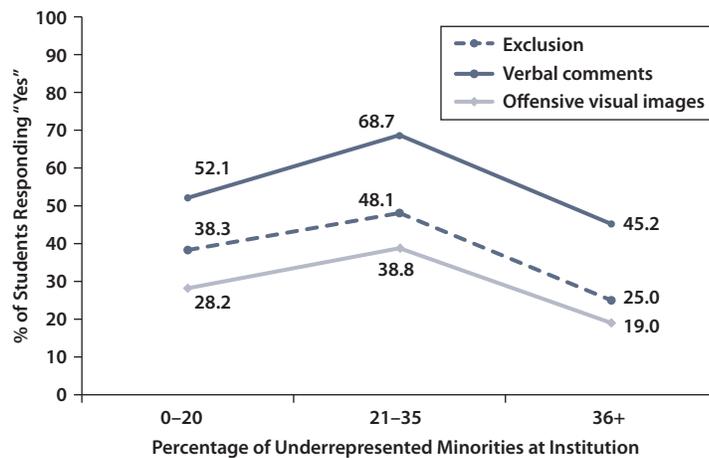
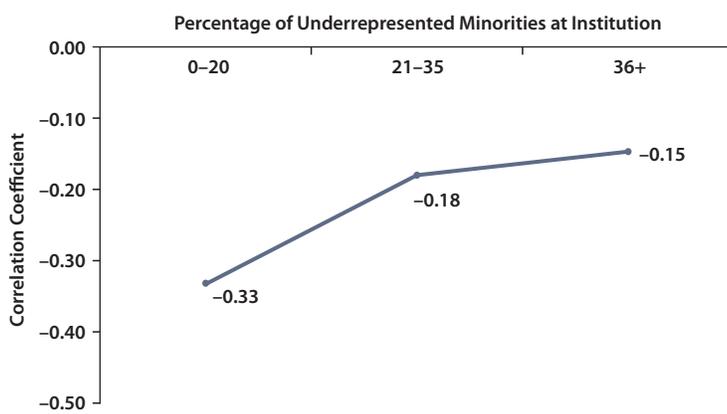


Figure 4. Correlation Between Discrimination/Bias and Sense of Belonging



CONCLUSION

Reducing discrimination and bias incidents and their psychological impact among African Americans and Latina/os is possible when improved URM representation is achieved. Some may suggest the solution may be for more Blacks and Latina/os to attend campuses where they are already highly represented and experience a more hospitable climate, but this increases segregation in higher education—many of the most diverse campuses are under-resourced and already producing a large share of degrees among URM groups for the nation.¹³ This also would not help achieve national goals in increasing degree attainment, which is vital to the economy and to closing large wealth disparities between White, Black and Latina/o groups in society.¹⁴ Instead, we suggest the solution is to ensure that campuses build inclusive, diverse learning environments and actively create the conditions for student success in all contexts.

Many campuses have begun to realize the benefits of diverse learning environments by working to improve intergroup relations on campus, acknowledging that some degree of discrimination and bias on campus is likely to occur when individuals are unfamiliar with the cultures, backgrounds, and worldviews of others. Campuses must work to ensure representation as a first step and employ proactive strategies to ensure students are educated in and with diversity, and that faculty and staff are skilled to facilitate learning across difference. Race still matters, and students need opportunities to learn about and experience diversity in college if higher education is to advance the social progress of diverse communities and produce diverse leaders for the nation.

NOTES

1. Kang, J., & Lane, K. (2010). Seeing through colorblindness: Implicit bias and the law. *UCLA Law Review*, 58, 465; Sue, D. W. (2010). *Microaggressions in everyday life*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons; Steele, C. M. (2010). *Whistling Vivaldi; How stereotypes affect us and what we do*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
2. Hurtado, S., Alvarez, C. L., Guillermo-Wann, C., Cuellar, M., & Arellano, L. (2012). A model for diverse learning environments: The scholarship on creating and assessing conditions for student success. In J. C. Smart & M. B. Paulsen (Eds.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research*, 27, 41–122.
3. Bowman, N. (2010). College diversity experiences and cognitive development: A meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research*, 80(1), 4–33. Garces, L. M. & Jayakumar, U. M. (2014). Dynamic diversity: Toward a contextual understanding of critical mass. *Educational Researcher*, 43(3), 115–124; see negative interaction effects in Hurtado, S. (2005). The next generation of diversity and intergroup relations research. *Journal of Social Issues*, 61(3), 595–610.
4. Hurtado, S., & Ruiz, A. (2012). *The climate for underrepresented groups and diversity on campus*. Los Angeles, CA: Higher Education Research Institute.
5. Survey methodology: The annual DLE survey is administered at the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA. The DLE was designed to provide insight into students' campus life experiences by assessing campus climate, practices, and outcomes focused on retention and skills for a multicultural society. Institutions were selected in the first year based on IPEDS data indicating differences in student diversity, retention data, and information from websites on campus diversity efforts. In the five subsequent years, institutions registered to participate as part of an ongoing national survey administration. Data were collected between December 2009 and June 2015, resulting in 58 four-year institutions across the United States that varied in compositional diversity, including both broad-access and selective institutions. Of the 38,068 respondents to the discrimination items, this report is based primarily on the responses of 1,308 Black students and 7,579 Latina/os on these campuses. A larger data set of 82 campuses (31 public and 51 private four-year) and 8,509 Latina/o students was also used to illustrate Latina/o-specific patterns. Discrimination and bias survey items were originally on a five-point scale and all "seldom, sometimes, often," and "very often" responses were recoded as "Yes."
6. Hurtado, S., & Ruiz, A. (2012). *The climate for underrepresented groups and diversity on campus*. Los Angeles, CA: Higher Education Research Institute; Kanter, R. M. (1977). Some effects of proportions on group life: Skewed sex ratios and responses to token women. *American Journal of Sociology*, 82, 965–989.
7. *Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin*, 570 U. S. (2013); *Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin* 981 U.S. (2015).
8. Stotzer, R. L., & Hossellman, E. (2012). Hate crimes on campus: Racial/ethnic diversity and campus safety. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 27(4), 644–661.
9. Hurtado, S., & Ruiz, A. (2012). *The climate for underrepresented groups and diversity on campus*. Los Angeles, CA: Higher Education Research Institute.

10. The University of Texas has a moderately diverse URM enrollment of 22%.
11. Chang, M. J., Eagan, M. K., Lin, M. H., & Hurtado, S. (2011). Considering the impact of racial stigmas and science identity: Persistence among biomedical and behavioral science aspirants. *Journal of Higher Education*, 82(5), 564–596; Hurtado, S. & Carter, D. F. (1997). Effects of college transition and perceptions of campus racial climate on Latinos' sense of belonging. *Sociology of Education*, 70(4), 324–345; Locks, A. M., Hurtado, S., Bowman, N., & Oseguera, L. (2008). Extending notions of campus climate and diversity to students' transition to college. *Review of Higher Education*, 31(3), 257–285.
12. Correlation differences were tested using Fisher's z transformation, significant differences were detected between low and moderately diverse institutions and between low and highly diverse institutions ($p < .001$).
13. Núñez, A-M., Hurtado, S., & Calderón Galdeano, E. (Eds) (2015). *Hispanic-serving institutions: Advancing research and transformative practice*. New York: Routledge. Gasman, M., Baez, B., & Turner, C.S.V. (2008). *Understanding minority serving institutions*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
14. Kochhar, R., Fry, R., & Taylor, P. (2011). Twenty-to-one: Wealth gaps rise to record highs between Whites, Blacks, Hispanics. *Pew Social and Demographic Trends*. Washington, D.C. Pew Research Center.

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The Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) is based in the Graduate School of Education & Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. The Institute serves as an interdisciplinary center for research, evaluation, information, policy studies, and research training in postsecondary education.



The Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) is administered by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA. CIRP is the oldest and most established study of American higher education, consisting of data on more than 15 million students from some 1,900 colleges and universities. CIRP continues to advance understanding of student learning and development in college through numerous books and publications and is the most comprehensive source of information on college students.

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