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The Quest for Diversity in Higher Education

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By: Andrew Phillips

Abstract

An increasing number of American institutions of higher education now include some mention of "diversity" in their mission statements. A survey of the research literature on higher education also reveals the cultural pervasiveness of this topic. But the exact meaning of diversity is often unclear, and its proper application is frequently debated. Broadly understood, diversity is a concept that can encompass a range of ideals, intentions, programs, outcomes, proportions, curricula, and many other elements. Many institutions now have entire departments devoted to diversity, and it has become something of an imperative in higher education. This literature review will attempt to condense the ongoing national conversation about diversity into a clear and concise summary of current conditions and prevailing perspectives. The author's intention is to add clarity to the conversation, helping to explain the extensive focus on diversity that permeates the institutional culture of higher education in contemporary American society.

Introduction

This literature review was conducted to provide clarity about the extensive focus on diversity that permeates the institutional culture of higher education in contemporary American society (though diversity is by no means limited to this arena). Even a cursory glance at the literature reveals how pervasive this topic has become, though its meaning is often nebulous, and its proper application is frequently debated. If mission statements are any indication, institutes of higher education (which I will collectively call universities) now overwhelmingly value diversity. A recent survey of 80 university mission statements revealed that 75 percent mentioned diversity, though the ways in which it was depicted varied widely, as the definitions of diversity can be as unique as the institutions wielding the term (NASFAA 2014). Broadly understood, diversity is a concept that can encompass ideals, intentions, programs, outcomes, proportions, curricula, and many other elements. This review will attempt to condense the national conversation over diversity into a clear and comprehensible summary of current conditions and prevailing perspectives. Because no single review can fully cover such an extensive topic, this work will be limited to (1) describing how diversity manifests within the cultures and policies of American universities – how it is conceived, justified, and applied – and (2) describing the rise of a diversity imperative (diversity as a primary mission), exploring its ramifications and some opposing viewpoints regarding its direction.

Defining Diversity

What exactly is diversity? To begin, we must formulate a working definition for this elusive topic. The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) defines diversity as "the variety created in any society (and within any individual) by the presence of different points of view and ways of making meaning which generally flow from the influence of different cultural and religious heritages, from the differences in how we socialize women and men, and from the differences that emerge from

class, age, and developed ability" (Swain, 2013). In other words, diversity represents a spectrum of variation in people regarding all of the innate and sociocultural differences that shape their perspectives and lived experiences. The dimensions of diversity include gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, nationality, age, ability, class, religion, language, culture, ideas, structures, and values, among other possibilities. For universities, diversity often appears in one of four categories: diversity in representation, diversity in climate and intergroup relations, diversity in curriculum and scholarship, and diversity in institutional values and structures (Swain 2013). Proportional, relational, curricular, and structural diversity are four expansive categories that can have a variety of impacts on administrators, faculty, and students, as well as on the structure, mission, pedagogy, culture, content, and policy of institutions.

Diversity is also commonly associated with the concept of multiculturalism, defined as "developing a state of being in which an individual feels comfortable and communicates effectively with people from any culture, in any situation, because she or he has developed the necessary knowledge to do so" (Talbot, 2003). Diversity is an essential component of multiculturalism, but multiculturalism extends even further, as it seeks to promote the valuing of diversity through understanding and extolling the contributions and perspectives of diverse peoples. Ortiz (2013) emphasizes the "commitment to recruit, retain, reward and promote a heterogeneous mix of productive, motivated and committed workers" as additional rationale. Both diversity and multiculturalism have become important forces in higher education, and many scholars use the term diversity interchangeably with multiculturalism and its valuing of diverse populations and contributions (Krishnamurthi 2003; Ross 2014). This paper is not a survey of broader multiculturalism, so I will focus on the concept of diversity. However, it is important to understand that the idea of multiculturalism, and the vision of a multicultural society, adds gravity to diversity efforts and establishes the conditions for what I have termed the diversity imperative.

Ortiz (2013) describes the diversity initiative in our culture as the "efforts of colleges and universities to move from the rhetoric of inclusion to the practice of equity." Owen (2009) expands this idea by arguing that diversity has two common meanings in higher education. The "diversity of difference" understands diversity simply as the presence and valuing of differences, while "diversity for equity" implies a further concern, oriented toward social justice, for making universities more inclusive and equitable – or being concerned with "the difference that differences make" (Owen 2009). And while both of these depictions are true of present circumstances, the literature suggests the current diversity climate to be even stronger than this. If we recall how many universities have included diversity in their mission statement, the use of 'initiative' as a modifier seems inadequate. I use the phrase diversity imperative to signify the aggregate presence of all diversity initiatives and grand designs, though the focus here will be on higher education. This modifier better represents the way diversity has become a primary driving force, woven into the very fabric of the university.

A Brief History

So how did we get here? For decades now, universities have confronted the issue of diversity, and how it should be implemented in policy and practice. But this struggle didn't originate on campuses; it sprang from larger social transformations that occurred during the Civil Rights Movement – the culmination of over a century of efforts spent addressing the longstanding problem of race in America. Following the civil rights era, which was largely concerned with racial integration and equal opportunity, a new diversity era shifted focus to "achieving integration proportional to population, enhancing protection for and providing advantages to marginalized groups, and establishing connections between diverse groups and a curriculum that supports a full spectrum of experiences and viewpoints" (Swain 2013). The new battlegrounds for integration and equality became the workplace and the school. This

transition was a long process, one that involved a variety of legislative acts, judicial decisions, executive orders, and other legal and cultural milestones.

There are several landmark events that can represent the genesis of the nascent diversity imperative in universities. In *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954), the Supreme Court declared state laws establishing separate public schools for black and white students to be unconstitutional. Then, Congress enacted the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Public Law No. 88-352, 78 Stat. 241), which prohibited discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin; unequal application of voter registration requirements; and racial segregation in schools, employment, or public accommodations. These government actions represent the most commonly cited origins, but hundreds of years of inequality in America would require much more than a single court decision or legislative act to eradicate. President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society agenda also advanced the diversity imperative. In 1965, Johnson signed Executive Order 11246 "mandating government contractors to 'take affirmative action' in all aspects of hiring and employing minorities," which would set the stage for university affirmative action policies (Ortiz 2013). In addition, Congress passed the Higher Education Act of 1965 to "strengthen the educational resources of our colleges and universities and to provide financial assistance for students in post-secondary education," which enhanced federal involvement in higher education (Ortiz 2013). But the most influential moment for higher education was the passage of the Higher Education Amendments of 1972 (Public Law No. 92-318, 86 Stat. 235), especially the most prominent subsection, Title IX, which prohibited discrimination on the basis of sex in educational institutions receiving federal aid. Both affirmative action and Title IX warrant further consideration, in order to understand the development of the diversity imperative.

Affirmative action began as an executive order mandating equal opportunity for minority populations, but it soon became evident that in order to achieve equal opportunity, society would need

to overcome a history of discrimination and segregation that produced unequal starting points. This involved granting special consideration to historically excluded groups, primarily racial minorities and women, in order to counteract the preserved advantages of the dominant social group, white males. As affirmative action policies were developed and implemented, disputes began over whether equal opportunity necessitated specific quotas or merely targeted goals. The controversy soon spilled over into university admissions policies and resulted in a series of court cases pitting the desire for affirmative action against claims of reverse discrimination. Ortiz (2013) traces a case history and points to *Regents of University of California v. Bakke (1978), Gratz v. Bollinger (2003),* and *Grutter v. Bollinger (2003)* as the most crucial Supreme Court decisions on affirmative action in admissions. In *Bakke*, the court ruled that quota systems were unconstitutional and violated equal protection under the 14th Amendment, but that race could be considered as one factor in admissions (Ortiz 2013). In *Gratz*, the court ruled that using a predetermined point system to achieve desired results was also unconstitutional (Ortiz 2013). But in *Grutter*, the court held that using race-conscious admissions processes that favor underrepresented minority groups, but that also accounted for other factors, was permissible due to a compelling interest to reach a diverse critical mass (Ortiz 2013). Through decades of court cases, the U.S. Supreme Court introduced five criteria that would be used to review university admissions policies: individualized consideration for each applicant; the absence of a quota system; serious consideration of race-neutral alternatives; lack of harm to members of other racial groups; and time limitations on the program (Ortiz 2013). In its *Bakke* opinion, the Court expressed hope that "25 years from now, the use of racial preferences would no longer be necessary to further the interest approved today" (Ortiz 2013). Considering that the *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard (2018)* case over admissions policies has now reached the Supreme Court, it appears to be taking much longer than 25 years to end this debate (Jung 2018).

Title IX may offer the clearest example of how the momentum of the civil rights era generated the expansion of an American civil rights state and the rise of the diversity imperative in higher education. Melnick (2018) describes the story of Title IX as "a long series of federal rules, interpretations, clarifications, negotiated agreements, and court decisions that slowly extended the reach of federal mandate." The law began with a simple premise, that "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subject to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance" (Melnick 2018). But this vague description was later expanded by the practice of institutional leapfrogging, with "courts and agencies each taking a step beyond the other, expanding regulation without seeming to innovate" (Melnick 2018). The Department of Education (DoE) published periodic clarifications and interpretations to Title IX, mostly in the form of Dear Colleague Letters (DCLs), which they insisted were not new rules, but instead, represented non-binding guidance documents. The courts then issued rulings on these documents when they heard litigation cases about alleged violations, which then became precedent. The whole process has been unique in bypassing both the legislative process and the standard rulemaking procedures of the Administrative Procedures Act (APA), which usually requires a public notice-and-comment phase and a presidential signature to enact new policies (Melnick 2018). In addition, the intended enforcement mechanism provided by Title IX, the withdrawal of federal funds, has never been used. Instead, the courts agreed that an implied right of private action empowered individuals to bring cases directly against universities, which allowed the DoE to use the threat of litigation to pressure universities to reach binding agreements. A later split with the courts made the threat of extensive and costly public investigations the new primary tool for pressuring university compliance, and the basis for these investigations was often the same "non-legally binding" documents issued prior. However, under the leadership of Betsy DeVos, the Education Department has stated that it will end the practice of rule by letter, though the impact of this is yet to be seen (Melnick 2018).

Seeing how Title IX has come to be enforced, some suggest that more than just circumstance drove this outcome. According to this line of reasoning, the DoE opted not to withdraw funding because this would have been a one-time penalty that entirely removed them from a position of control and diminished their ability to intervene in a university's affairs. Instead, strategies of litigation and investigation may have been preferable, since they allow for more effective oversight by means of ongoing intervention and recurring punishment. In any case, the sum of these historical changes supplied the framework for a diversity imperative to deal with segregation, discrimination, and integration. But guidance and policy alone would not be enough. The decentralized structure of universities necessitated the addition of an expansive diversity bureaucracy in order to track, assess, and enforce compliance. Furthermore, the framing of diversity issues in terms of rights, what Harvard Law Professor Mary Ann Glendon calls "rights talk," tends to discourage the exploration of costs, trade-offs, incentives, alternatives, consequences, and compromise, and encourage thinking in terms of moral absolutes (Melnick 2018). "Rights talk" locks in policies and delegitimizes opposition. Coupled with an expansion of rights, the notion of progress has assisted the transition from the civil rights era's focus on eliminating intentional discrimination to the modern diversity era's imperative to emphasize proportional results.

Justifications and Motivations

Why does the diversity imperative receive such overwhelming support in higher education? Beyond the power of "rights talk," and our historical trajectory toward equality, there must be additional reasons that make this phenomenon so compelling. In recent decades, the issue of diversity has moved from a peripheral position to become a central concern of universities. Facilitating this transition has been a range of policies and programs "specifically aimed at increasing the numbers of persons that represent diverse populations, and improving the climate that would sustain this diverse

population" (Brown 2004). The changing demographics of students, a globalized economy, an increasingly diverse workforce, and the need for an inclusive education environment are frequently cited reasons that universities have an impetus to enshrine diversity within their mission (Krishnamurthi 2003). Researchers have reported a host of other motives for promoting diversity as well. Inclusion of diverse content can broaden perspectives, or reveal those that have been traditionally overlooked. Diversity can help students with personal identity formation and bolster their creativity, self-awareness, empathy, and ethical capacity. Highlighting matters of difference can advance student understanding about issues of racism, sexism, oppression, and privilege. Diverse conditions on campus can prepare students to succeed in a diverse world. Understanding how others think, feel, and experience the world can lead to individual growth and intellectual maturity. Identifying and challenging systems of power and privilege can combat societal injustice. These are but a few examples from a prodigious stock (Harvey 2011; Clarke 2012; Swain 2013; et al), but most justifications tend to fall into one of two categories: economic or sociopolitical. On the economic side, various arguments frame diversity as a direct force for economic growth, creativity, and innovation; a multiplier of workforce potential and solidarity; a requirement for participation in a globalized economy; and even a booster of productivity and average earnings (Clark 2012; Ottaviano 2005). On the sociopolitical side, the arguments tend to emphasize diversity as a corrective mechanism for historic injustice; a way to uphold our laws and ideals; a democratizing force; a multiplier of national potential and solidarity; and the only way to truly provide equal opportunity (Epple 2008; Ross 2014).

The DoE's goal is "to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access" in order to "achieve the goal of preparing all of the nation's students to be great citizens of the world and to compete in a global environment" (DoE 2016). To accomplish this, the DoE urges universities to create diverse and welcoming campuses that not only attract and admit students from various backgrounds, but also

support and retain these students once on campus. This assumes that simply providing policies of blanket non-discrimination or multicultural tolerance is insufficient to overcome pre-existing inequities (DoE 2016). The diversity imperative insists upon active mechanisms to effect lasting change. Since educational attainment and economic outcomes have been inextricably linked in American society, universities have become a primary component of this imperative.

Many of the barriers to higher education are well-documented: "the leaky pipeline; the highly unequal K-12 feeder system; the lack of information about college costs; spotty counseling and weak college-going cultures at under-resourced schools; and soaring college costs" (Tienda 2013). Pervasive educational inequities and opportunity gaps drive universities to not only offer equal opportunity to disadvantaged groups, but also to provide institutional support for their recruitment, retention, and success. There has been some success over time. Diversity initiatives are credited with decreasing income disparities for minorities, as college graduates (average income of $60,000 for Blacks and Hispanics) earn far more than non-graduates (average income of $30,000 for the same), and improving social mobility (the unemployment rate for college graduates is half the national average, or 2.5 percent) (DoE 2016). A study of racial and ethnic disparities revealed improvements in graduation rates as well (Bachelor's degree attainment among Hispanics increased from 9-20 percent since 1974, and from 6-13 percent among Blacks since 1964), but these numbers still lag far behind White and Asian populations (DoE 2016). However, because gaps in college opportunity and social mobility are also influenced by student experiences before graduating from high school, much remains beyond the reach of university efforts. Minorities, low-income, and first-generation college students share many of the same negative childhood and educational experiences, such as racial and economic segregation in schools and neighborhoods, greater levels of stress, less familiarity with the skills and information necessary for success, and less access to advanced coursework and preparatory counseling. Other problems include the decreasing participation of minorities at multiple points along the higher

education pipeline (application, admission, enrollment, persistence, and completion), lower minority enrollment in colleges, a large gap between minorities' financial aid and their actual needs, and completion rates of about 20 percent for Black and Hispanic students (DoE 2016). Universities are well aware of the challenges, and this awareness drives their efforts.

These types of justifications address one side of the equation, that of the affirmative action element of diversity concerned with the recruitment, retention, and economic success of minorities. But there are other motivations that address issues related to "the increasing demographic heterogeneity of the U.S. population and the pressure that globalization places on universities to prepare students to engage and compete in an increasingly interconnected and dynamic world" (Swain 2013). This is the cultural aspect of the diversity imperative that is less concerned with who gets in and succeeds, and more concerned with the formative aspects of diversity immersion and the molding of multicultural citizens. "Diversity may be viewed as a problem or an opportunity, as a social obligation or a mechanism by which to boost national competitiveness, as an individual value, or a collective responsibility. The underlying motivation directs the scope and priorities of response" (Swain 2013). The original focus on equal opportunity has grown from a policy of desegregation and of removing overt discrimination, to one of active integration and achieving proportional outcomes. Now, the imperative extends further. Exploring the stated goals of university policies can help grasp the ramifications of the current initiatives, because "the motivations and purposes for diversity education policies frame the nature and scope of program design and implementation" (Swain 2013).

In a survey of literature from 300 universities, Swain (2013) has identified two dominant discourses, *market* and *harmony*, as well as three alternate discourses, *social change*, *conflict*, and *disciplinary challenge*, that inform diversity policy. *Market* discourse emphasizes material value and economic benefits for diversity, at both the individual and societal levels, and reflects a broader

neoliberal ideology within higher education that justifies policy based on marketplace rationale.

Harmony discourse emphasizes improving the learning process and environment and facilitating the

amicable embrace of new perspectives, reflecting a globalist, multicultural ideology that justifies policy

through progressive and moral rationale. The dominant discourses in diversity policy tend toward

enhancing student or community effectiveness within the sociopolitical status quo, while the less

common, alternate discourses represent policies that seek to subvert it. These focus on challenging

social assumptions and injustices (*social change*), using constructive friction to manage internal conflict

as students grapple with the messages of diversity (*conflict*), and questioning the social construction and

dominant narratives of disciplinary thought (*disciplinary challenge*). The dominant discourses represent

uncontroversial, supportive policies within diverse communities, while the alternate discourses reveal

some inherent conflict within the debate surrounding diversity (Swain 2013).

As a whole, "the dominant discourses produce images of students consuming diversity content

in order to achieve social and economic ends" (Swain 2013). Under dominant discourses, the role of

students is one of passive consumption, rather than critical engagement, each being positioned as "a

manageable receptacle for diversity knowledge;" while the alternate discourses position students as

"change agents," equipped to improve society rather than simply succeed in it (Swain 2013). These

justifications tend to put more emphasis on global studies, teamwork skills, and intercultural knowledge,

which means that courses in Western civilization and English literature are being replaced with a more

broadly defined, global education. The impact of this shift is significant because it diverts the imperative

from tackling individual cases of overt discrimination to the systematic cultivation of global citizens,

which involves vastly different means and ends. Similar to the reframing of alcoholism from an

individual moral deficiency to an issue of public health, this approach can change available societal

responses and restructure institutional priorities. The transition from a focus on equal opportunity and

historical oppression to a focus on enhancing educational effectiveness and preparing students to

become global citizens is often obscured by the rhetoric of politicized mainstream debate. However, it leads to a major point of contention that lies at the heart of the diversity debate: a distinct bifurcation of the diversity imperative that will be addressed in the coming sections.

Implementing the Diversity Imperative

What are universities actually doing in the name of diversity and why? The simple answer is, a whole lot, and for myriad reasons. While no two universities wield diversity policy in exactly the same manner, there are some common trends that offer clarity to the situation. To start with, Ofori (2000) offers four broad categories to relate how universities apply diversity in principle: neutrality, similarity, diversity, and "diversimilarity." Neutrality pays little attention to either similarity or difference, often overlooking the importance of cultural experience; similarity emphasizes how cultures are alike rather than how they differ, which tends to overstate common grounds; diversity reverses this by emphasizing difference over similarity, which can obscure common ground; and "diversimilarity" tries to treat cultural differences and similarities equally and in appropriate measure, to better reflect the complexities of the real world. Universities can apply any of these paradigms, alone or in combination, to the way in which they conceptually view diversity, which then informs their practices.

The DoE (2016) has published a comprehensive list of what they consider to be evidence-based best practices regarding diversity, drawing upon the experiences of universities. They recommend that most universities apply a combination of the following five approaches to advance the diversity imperative. First, they should make an institutional commitment to promoting diversity and inclusion by incorporating diversity into their core mission, formulating strategic plans to establish priorities and ensure adequate resource allocation, and developing the capacity to collect data and track progress. Second, diversity should be integrated into every facet of the university – the student body, faculty, curriculum, and pedagogy – to foster inclusiveness by ensuring that students see themselves reflected in

their environment. Third, emphasis should be place on outreach and recruitment by developing relationships with prospective students, providing support to K-12 pipelines in the local community, and offering ongoing and targeted assistance during each critical step – preparing for tests, applying for admission, and securing financial aid. Fourth, support services should continue after enrollment and include strategic course placement to mitigate remedial needs, individual mentorship and coaching, and first-year experience programs to increase success and retention. Fifth, and most broadly, universities should create an inclusive climate, which can entail programs to increase cultural competency, campus climate assessments, mandatory training and coursework in diversity, cultural and emotional support systems, student participation in decisions about campus climate and diversity, and extra financial assistance for the most disadvantaged.

Such sweeping guidance concerning the diversity imperative can elicit endless efforts in an expanding apparatus. It is understandable to assist populations deemed underrepresented or disadvantaged in both their entry and success in higher education. But combining the concept of a population needing protection with the language of constructing a climate can cause a strategic shift from assisting target groups to policing the actions of non-target groups. This produces a certain tension between the most vocal advocates for diversity and those that resist the imperative. The pro-diversity crowd tends to adhere to the blank slate view of human nature, blaming deficiencies on sociocultural factors and the dominance of oppressive groups, while the opposition tends to adhere to the fallen view of human nature, where blame should be attributed to individual bad actors. In many ways, this tension is because diversity has been gradually evolving from a mechanism of correction to one of reformation. Melnick (2018) offers an example of this trend by describing the shift from tort-based responses to attempts at transforming university culture by using Title IX in conjunction with a larger diversity bureaucracy. This development can be seen in the expansion of how the DoE defines sexual harassment, which has grown to include not only traditional forms of sexual assault and harassment, such as

unwanted touching and intentional verbal conduct, but also "sexual comments, jokes or gestures,"

"spreading sexual rumors," "rating students on sexual activity or performance," "sex stereotyping," or

"creating e-mails or websites of a sexual nature" (Melnick 2018). The scope of the rules has also

expanded to the degree that to violate Title IX, harassment need not "be directed at a specific target,"

"involve repeated incidents," or be motivated by an "intent to harm" (Melnick 2018). These guidelines

exhibit how Title IX enforcement can be used to police the cultural environment of a university, and

even intrude upon free speech in some cases. (How harassment came to be classified as discrimination,

as well as issues regarding intellectual freedom and free speech, are beyond the scope of this paper.)

Diversity efforts under Title IX now require not only extensive mandatory training for faculty,

students, administrators, law enforcement, athletes, coaches, fraternities, and sororities, but also insist

that schools have methods to verify that the training was effective, to conduct annual climate checks,

and to adhere to best practices that their increasingly powerful Title IX coordinators have issued. After

the inclusion of gender issues and bathroom rules to the agenda, Title IX has been fully "transformed

from a law designed to prevent schools from establishing educational practices that exclude or

disadvantage female students to a far more sweeping effort to eliminate all forms of sex stereotyping …

training students, faculty, and staff to change the way they think about sex differences, about femininity

and masculinity, about what constitutes appropriate sexual conduct, and about whether sexual

differences have any basis in nature rather than convention" (Melnick 2018). Title IX enforcement now

requires schools to take immediate action to eliminate, prevent the recurrence of, and address the

effects of "hostile environments," while the DoE continually lowers the threshold to what constitutes a

hostile environment to a degree that ensures no school can avoid the mandate.

Title IX is a fitting microcosm for the tension of the diversity imperative. Just as Title IX shifted

from ending exclusionary practices to correcting public stereotypes, the concept of diversity has also

shifted from providing equal opportunity to inculcating dogmatic ideas. The end result, mentioned at

the close of the prior section, has been a schism within the diversity imperative, between what I call

diversity as composition and *diversity as curriculum*. Both of these concepts are alive and well within the

diversity imperative, but they are quite different, and it is the latter that tends to provoke the most

vigorous opposition.

Diversity as Composition

Diversity as composition refers to the branch of the diversity imperative primarily focused on

providing equal opportunity and access for minority groups, the desired ends being representation

proportional to population, and includes methods of improving recruitment, retention, and completion.

This branch has become less focused on women, the original beneficiaries of early diversity efforts like

Title IX, because they have now surpassed parity in enrollment (and are often over-represented,

proportionally). The remaining concerns for women, such as preventing sexual assault, now align with

the curriculum branch. This section will discuss the current state of diversity as composition and its

controversies.

Epple (2008) found that minority students pay lower tuition and attend higher-quality schools

because of affirmative action, even though quota systems have been declared unconstitutional and race

can only be considered a factor in a prescribed manner. He also observed that a ban on affirmative

action and the adoption of race-blind admissions policies would lead to a decline of minority

representation in universities (Epple 2018). Due to remaining inequities, there are many arguments for

the continued use of affirmative action, some of which have been discussed: the economic benefits for

minorities, rectification of past injustices, promotion of cross-racial understanding and elimination of

stereotypes, and acclimation of students to an increasingly diverse society. Ghosh (2012) suggests that

preferential admissions policies are fiercely debated because higher education now leads to substantial

differences in life chances but has historically been the domain of elites. Affirmative action, aimed at equity and fairness, not only upsets the status quo but also brings in to question the matter of standards. One common argument against affirmative action in higher education is that "excellence is often posited in opposition to equality" (Ghosh 2012), but significant empirical evidence indicates that the two are actually compatible (Bowen & Bok 1998). Differences in preparedness, interests, aptitude, and ability do not necessarily detract from excellence, because definitions of excellence can be diverse and can stand for more than merely the opposite of mediocrity. The meaning of excellence cannot be fixed because cultures and people have multiple perspectives and ways of knowing, doing, believing, and valuing. Standards are of utmost importance, but definitions of excellence should reflect plurality and not just the norms of those in power.

There are also other dilemmas in developing diversity, and the challenges in the path toward creating and maintaining a diverse student body can be numerous. Misra (2006) has identified several problems, including: the lack of social infrastructure on campus to support diversity goals, the "tokenization" of minority students and the gossip about them, the difficulty faced by those who prefer to date within their own race, unique financial obstacles such as sending money to relatives, the decreased usefulness and appropriateness of survival skills that worked well in prior environments, the lack of diverse role models, and the tendency for students to worry if their skin color is a factor in every situation. Wong (2018) notes that race-conscious policies may incentivize students to distort their identities in order to fit whichever profile they think reviewers will find appealing. This can become problematic when it involves over- or under-emphasizing this background in an effort to seem more appealing, or even widespread subterfuge by people who can afford to hire consultants to help them game the system (Wong 2018).

Affirmative action also increases achievement pressure as greater numbers of students become focused on the most selective universities, rather than hundreds of comparable options, even if they are not prepared to succeed in them. A study in the *Journal of Higher Education* revealed that nearly half of all "Tier 1" schools look at student context in addition to merit, while less that a quarter of "Tier 3" schools do the same (Wong 2018). Race-conscious policies are absent in the vast majority of universities, many of which worry more about salvaging declining enrollment than about which "articulate, awe-inspiring, accolade-bearing savant to choose from a sea of applications" (Wong 2018). A byproduct of this is that schools accepting fewer than half of all applicants account for 19 percent of American universities, but 37 percent of all applications (Wong 2018). Lower-tier universities that primarily serve their local populations are projected to see enrollment drop by 11 percent over the next decade, while elite universities could see demand rise by as much as 14 percent (Wong 2018).

Finally, affirmative action may even be harming certain groups of people it claims to help. As mentioned before, Students for Fair Admissions recently accused Harvard University of unfairly considering race in the admissions process, arguing that it makes Asian-American applicants meet a higher bar. They offer as evidence consistent percentages that imply a quota, academic performance disproportionate to acceptance, and improperly weighted personal scores compared to other ethnic groups (Jung 2018). Harvard insists that it fairly rates applicants across four categories – academics, athletics, extracurricular activities, and personal factors – and that the plaintiffs are not considering other factors like essays, letters of recommendation, public service, or the need to confront adversity (Jung 2018). The key difference between the Harvard case and prior affirmative action cases is that this is the first to allege that affirmative action hurts minority applicants. The ruling is still pending, but will add to lengthy precedent when it arrives.

In 2016, Gallup found that 60 percent of American adults generally favor affirmative action programs for racial minorities; but 70 percent also felt that college applicants should be judged solely on merit, and that race and ethnicity should not be considered, even if that means fewer minority student admissions (Rozen 2018). Findings like this suggest that Americans broadly support the idea of affirmative action but oppose preferential treatment, and that it is not unusual for Americans to support a general policy but disagree on its specific application. Though even as multiple barriers and controversies persist, there has been significant progress in the racial diversification of college campuses. This is largely the result of civil rights momentum, contests at the ballot box and in the courts, and America's shifting demographic landscape. The value that universities continue to place on diversity as composition is evident in their legal defense of race-sensitive admissions as a strategy to broaden access for underrepresented groups. But affirmative action remains on trial both in the court of public opinion and in the Supreme Court. There are also deeper questions over whether the pedagogic benefits of diversity are being realized and whether diversity has resulted in inclusion – the "organizational strategies and practices that promote meaningful social and academic interactions among persons and groups who differ in their experiences, their views, and their traits" (Tienda 2003). There is strong evidence that diversity promotes innovation, problem-solving, and new ways of thinking in firms, but much less showing how diversity fosters campus integration, despite the claim that it does. Tienda (2003) explains that "Enrollment of underrepresented groups is but a pragmatic first step toward the broader social goal of inclusion. Presence on campus neither guarantees integration into campus life, nor does it lead to realization of the pedagogic benefits of diversity. The mission of higher education is not to align the representation of the citizenry with its student populations, but rather to foster integration in order to reap pedagogic benefits." This line of reasoning begets the second branch of the diversity imperative, the one concerned with educating students in how to actually *be* diverse, and to embrace its importance.

Diversity as Curriculum

Diversity as curriculum refers to the branch of the diversity imperative primarily focused on weaving diversity into the purpose and pedagogy of the university. Beyond simply providing diverse perspectives, this branch pursues diversity dogma – providing correct ways of thinking about and valuing all aspects of diversity. This is accomplished by implementing diversity curricular requirements; mandatory trainings for students, faculty, and staff; and first-year experience programs. Diversity as curriculum is "much more than simply the achievement of an adequate representation among staff and the student body, but a more encompassing conceptualization of diversity and the impetus for meaningful actions; ones that move beyond surface solutions that do not disturb the underlying assumptions and perceptions that define the status quo" (Brown 2004). Many argue that diversity cannot be left to providence, that instead "it has to be actively pursued, put in place and constantly analyzed, nurtured, and supported during and after implementation" (Brown 2004). Diversity is not a singular event; it is a process that begins with the initial inclusion of persons from different groups, but demands structures that support and facilitate the retention of these persons by giving them a sense of belonging, as well as methods that instruct a culture to embrace and exalt diversity. Diversity as curriculum provides not only a way to offer diverse perspectives and subvert dominant norms, but also an opportunity to reform culture and socially engineer a particular vision for a proper society. Because universities are tasked with preparing the intelligentsia and future leaders of society, their output informs every discipline and influences every social layer.

Krishnamurthi (2003) describes three forms that diversity as curriculum can take: *additive* places some multicultural options in the curriculum; *integrative* makes multiculturalism a fixed subsection of curricular requirements; and *transformative* positions multiculturalism as the central curricular tenet. In any form, diversity as curriculum seeks to provide a comprehensive, accurate, intellectually honest view

of reality; prepare students to function in a multicultural society; and better meet a diverse set of learning needs. Ross (2014) presents a collection of evidence indicating that when interactions among diverse students are facilitated through programmatic and curricular interventions, those experiences are associated with positive cognitive and democratic outcomes. The research also suggests that enrollment in courses that focus on diversity can reduce levels of intolerance and bias. On campus, students often do not voluntarily interact with those who are significantly different from themselves, so actions to facilitate diverse student contact and encourage democratic citizenship skills are framed as aspects of a social justice education – one that involves processes of teaching and learning that are directed at helping students engage in critical reflection on dehumanizing sociopolitical conditions and actions they can take to alter those conditions. Diversity as curriculum is a pedagogical approach to facilitate connections between diversity and an "always incomplete, always in-the-making process of working toward democratization, that continues to morph as more diverse perspectives are included" (Ross 2014).

As curriculum is central to the way in which a university understands and executes its institutional mission, the intentional inclusion of diversity into curriculum begs the following question: What is the purpose of the university as reflected in its mission? In exploring "the societal meanings and intents, the discursive positioning, of diversity objectives in curriculum," Swain (2013) uncovered the following themes: equal opportunity, student development, social justice, and curricular transformation. The curricular expression of diversity is important because the impact of higher education extends far beyond the walls of the ivory tower; the university has become a force that directs societal understanding and collective values. Offering a post-structural defense, Swain (2013) argues that diversity is an "ideal arena for engaging in open questions about ways of knowing, ways of communicating, and the social dynamics at work" in a rapidly changing society. For those who agree, diversity as curriculum becomes "a mode of questioning dominant epistemologies and resisting

oppressive discursive and power structures" (Swain 2013). However, because of the structural challenges posed by the status quo, what may actually occur is that when diversity is included as core curriculum, instead of offering the chance to critically examine knowledge, it often becomes an opportunity to replace one piece of unexamined material with another (albeit more diverse) one. This results in "an emphasis on civility and an avoidance of issues of social constructions and power differentials," and so "diversity education becomes merely a celebration of difference, with dominant norms and systems of oppression left unexamined" (Swain 2013).

The postmodernist view galvanizes much of the conflict surrounding the diversity as curriculum agenda. Classicist defenders of Western civilization resist these changes and fight to preserve what they believe to be valuable epistemological traditions and discursive structures. The debate over diversity as curriculum often serves as proxy for the larger debate over the purpose of higher education itself, which is whether it should be instructional and truth-seeking or formative and justice-seeking. This discourse is an epistemological and ontological conflict between dramatically different ideologies, prodded by the perception of a postmodern assault on traditional Western thought. Mac Donald (2018) is one of the most vocal critics of diversity as curriculum (and diversity initiatives in general) and views it as a toxic idea derived from identity politics and politicized scholarship, one that undermines humanistic values, fuels intolerance, and widens cultural divisions. This view claims that diversity as curriculum redefines humans by skin color, gender, and sexual preference, and then frames the status quo as inherently oppressive (Mac Donald 2018). Furthermore, the diversity bureaucracy denounces meritocratic standards as discriminatory, enforces quotas (formal or not), and teaches students to view themselves as perpetual victims – "creating a nation of narrowed minds, primed for grievance" because when "taught to believe that they are at existential threat from circumambient bias, students conflate nonconforming ideas with hate speech, and hate speech with life-threatening conduct that should be punished, censored, and repelled with force if necessary" (Mac Donald 2018). Schlesinger (1998) argues

that this mentality can create a "cult of ethnicity," which then generates the perception of a "nation of minorities" and their spokesmen, who are less interested in uniting with the majority for the common good than in declaring their resistance to an oppressive, white, patriarchal, racist, sexist, classist society. This dynamic creates the illusion that membership in an ethnic group is the basic American experience. For example, a number of universities, such as Dartmouth, now require courses in ethnic studies but not in humanities or Western civilization (Schlesinger 1998).

Diversity dissidents, like Mac Donald, argue for the rejection of a diversity imperative that uses moral claims to perpetuate social engineering, and advocate for the return of the classic liberal pursuits of open-minded inquiry and free expression. They maintain that in contrast to real diversity, the advocates for diversity as curriculum claim to be interested in difference, but seek only to confirm their own worldview or the political imperatives of the moment. Instead of diversity, they believe the purpose of higher education should be to transmit the knowledge of the past, and eventually to create new knowledge. Critical thinking is also viewed as a misperception about the purpose of education, which results in the abdication of the duty to perform the primary function – the transmission of knowledge – including the "intellectual trajectory that led to the rule of law and the West's astounding prosperity" (Mac Donald 2018). Despite the sophisticated postmodern claim that there is no neutral knowledge, there does in fact exist "a bedrock of core facts and ideas that precede any later revisionist interpretation" (Mac Donald 2018). Seeing postmodern assumptions (that humans live in a web of lies and illusions about the world, and that all language carries hidden meaning that either subverts or reinforces power) unfold in the context of the modern university makes critics wonder whether diversity as curriculum is camouflage for an ongoing intellectual conflict between classical and postmodern thinkers for the soul of the university.

Tierney (2018) adds a final critique, regarding the co-curricular, that serves to compliment the other mainstream arguments against diversity as curriculum. The largest co-curricular has become first-year experience programs, which have spread to almost 90 percent of American universities. This program is mandatory for incoming freshmen, and typically includes reading assignments, lectures, discussion groups, seminars, courses, exercises, field trips, local activism, or other options. The courses, often led by administrators without formal credentials, operate outside of the regular curriculum and create a co-curriculum for diversity and inclusion efforts. Co-curricular professionals can wield great influence over the students, despite not being faculty, because they are the first to reach them. Critics charge that "you may have come to study computer science or literature or biochemistry, but first you'll have to learn about social justice, environmental sustainability, gender pronouns, and microaggressions," and "you may have been planning to succeed by hard work, but first you'll have to acknowledge your privilege or discover your victimhood" (Tierney 2018). Some professors are also unhappy with the results of this type of training. They claim that students are primed to complain about imagined slights, report their teachers for discussing unsafe topics, and protest against visiting speakers with dissenting views. Others resent diverting time and money to a non-scholarly co-curriculum that seems to keep expanding. But for university administrators, the appeal of first-year programs is their promise to keep freshmen happy and comfortable enough to stay enrolled. This is because attrition hurts not only the budget, but also a university's ranking, which is partly based on first-year retention rates.

Concluding Thoughts

As Americans, we live in an increasingly diverse and inclusive society. It is natural that our universities should come to reflect our communities. But should institutions compel certain beliefs about diversity? Should universities themselves strive to socially engineer a proportionally diverse

population and ensure the cultivation and competitiveness of global citizens through an emphasis on identity and equal outcomes? Or should universities promote the transmission of established knowledge, rooted in culture and tradition, to enrich the individual and allow for intellectual exploration under policies of strict non-discrimination, merit-based competition, and unequal outcomes? Most Americans agree that we should provide equal opportunity in education, but the debate continues over how this ideal should be practically applied. There is deep division over the control of curriculum and the purpose of the university. One side is trying to produce a generation of enlightened adults with a better grasp of physical reality and metaphysical truth, while the other believes they should be shaping a community of global citizens and social justice advocates in order to reform American culture. The argument will likely continue for some time, but it is clear that universities are blessed to largely maintain their autonomy. This allows them to pursue their agendas as they see fit. Prudence must be exercised when we apply the power of the state to this delicate balance. Natural diversity (without design) and a diverse ideal (designed and uniform), can both be valid desires, but neither can claim to be the ultimate good. A strong measure of institutional discretion remains necessary and prudent, allowing for the continuation of value pluralism and true diversity.

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