

Does increased racial diversity lead to a more diverse collection of thoughts,
ideas, and opinions on campus?: A study of racial diversity and students'
viewpoints

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Abstract

This study examined three research questions: (1) Do viewpoints that are meaningful to higher education differ by racial groupings? (2) Do campuses that are more racially diverse have a broader collection of viewpoints held by students? (3) Do the long-term trends of students' collective viewpoints vary by the level of racial diversity on campus? These questions were examined using a national sample of over 5,000 students from 93 four-year institutions, who were surveyed in the fall of 1994 and again in 1998. The results of this study revealed significant differences in viewpoints at the point of college entry between racial groupings on a variety of pressing contemporary issues. Although individuals of any given racial category hold the full range of opinions, as a group, average viewpoints differ between racial groups. These differences are educationally relevant because they affect the collection of thoughts, ideas, and opinions of the student body. Overall, the variance of students' collective viewpoints tends to be greatest in the most racially diverse campuses, followed by somewhat diverse, then least diverse campuses. These findings suggest that more racially diverse campuses have a much higher likelihood of exposing their students to a broader range of viewpoints on academically relevant issues. The educational implications and potential benefits of racial diversity are discussed.

Does increased racial diversity lead to a more diverse collection of thoughts, ideas, and opinions on campus?: A study of racial diversity and students' viewpoints

Race-conscious efforts in higher education that were initially carried out to remedy past discrimination and to open the doors of opportunity have recently experienced major setbacks. In several states, the public and the courts have found post-secondary institutions' interest in diversity insufficiently compelling to justify considerations of race in the admissions process. California and Washington State voters, for example, passed separate ballot initiatives that basically banned all race-conscious practices and policies. In Hopwood v. Texas [78 F.3d. 932 (5th Cir. 1996)], a suit brought by four white applicants who were denied admission to the University of Texas Law School, the Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit in 1996 held that the law school's use of race-based criteria as one of many factors to admit students was unlawful. Similar cases challenging the degree to which race can and should be taken into account have also been filed in Georgia, Maryland, Michigan, Virginia, and elsewhere.

Presently, the legal foundation for the policies that have permitted the integration of highly selective universities and professional schools has rested on the Supreme Court's decision regarding a case filed over two decades ago by a white student who was denied admissions to the University of California, Davis medical school. The general outcome of this 1978 case, Regents of the University

of California v. Bakke [438 U.S. 265, (1978)] was that the Supreme Court prohibited racial quotas but allowed race to be used as a "plus factor" to ensure a diverse student body. Although the 1978 Bakke ruling did not view remedying the present effects of past discrimination as a compelling justification for affirmative action programs, Justice Lewis Powell who wrote the controlling opinion, recognized the medical school's interest in providing the educational benefits of a diverse student body as a permissible basis for the consideration of race in admitting students (Chang, Witt, Jones, & Hakuta, in press). Explaining this decision, Powell stated that the First Amendment allows a university the freedom to make its own judgments as to education, which includes the selection of its student body. He argued that the attainment of a diverse student body broadens the range of viewpoints held by the student body and subsequently allows a university to provide for students an atmosphere that is "conducive to speculation, experiment and creation" [438 U.S.]. This type of atmosphere, he believed, enhances the training of the student body and better equips the institution's graduates. Because such goals are essential to the quality of higher education, Powell concluded that race-conscious admissions practices when narrowly tailored serve a compelling educational interest.

The Fifth District Court of Appeals, however, rejected this opinion in the 1996 Hopwood v. State of Texas ruling [76 F3d 932 at 945], in part because they charged that the "use of race, in and of itself, to choose students simply achieves a

student body that looks different" and little else (U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, 1996). Unlike the Bakke decision, the Fifth Circuit Court held that the use of race in admitting students "is no more rational on its own terms than would be choices based upon the physical size or blood type of applicants..." (cited in Shaw, 2000; p. A72). Assertions that race is a "reasonable proxy" for viewpoint or intellectual diversity, Greve (1999) argues, are "D.O.A in any court in the United States" (p. B7). As it stands, there appears to be considerable confusion, at least in the courts, about the significance of race and its relevance to education.¹

Although a growing body of research (see Chang, in press and Milem, 2000) suggest that establishing a racially diverse student body adds value to students' learning and educational experiences, Powell's fundamental supposition is still largely based on educational insights and philosophic premises than on empirical evidence. In the Tracy v. Board of Regents of the University of Georgia [59 F.Supp.2d 1314 (S.D.Ga. 1999)] decision, Judge B. Avant Edenfield, of the District Court of the Southern District of Georgia, dismissed a case of a student challenging the university's admissions policies, but then admonished advocates of diversity for failing "to meaningfully show how [diversity] actually fosters educational benefits" (cited in Orfield & Whitla, 1999). While existing

¹ Although Justice Powell's educational rationale for diversity in the Bakke ruling was rejected in the Hopwood decision, his opinion has not been overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court and still remains the law of the land.

research has documented an array of positive educational outcomes associated with racial diversity, the unique attributes of a racially diverse student body are poorly understood. Perhaps for this reason, it is unclear how diversity might reasonably foster educational benefits. To understand better the unique attributes associated with racial diversity and their educational relevance in higher education, a set of statistical analyses was conducted on a longitudinal data set collected by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Research Background

Several empirical studies have shown that a racially diverse student body can potentially be an effective educational tool. Students who attend more racially diverse institutions have more opportunities to interact with other undergraduate students of different racial backgrounds and to be exposed to diverse ideas and information. These experiences contribute in unique and significant ways to students' educational experiences and learning.

In a study drawing primarily from longitudinal data collected to increase understanding of the impact of racial/ethnic diversity at the University of Michigan on all groups of Michigan undergraduates, Gurin (1999) examined the impact of cross-racial interaction and exposure to diverse ideas and information on students' "active thinking." Using a longitudinal multivariate design, Gurin found that students, particularly white students, who reported higher levels of

exposure to diversity (ideas and people), were significantly more likely to show growth in their “active thinking processes,” or increases in measures of “complex thinking” and “social/historical thinking.” Students who reported greater exposure to diversity were also more likely to report higher levels of “intellectual engagement” and motivation. These and other findings from her study lead Gurin to conclude that exposing students both to a racially diverse student body and to diverse ideas and information are “essential to fulfilling higher education’s mission to enhance learning” (p.147).

Diversity efforts have also been linked to improving students’ intellectual and social self-concept. To investigate the educational implications of a racially diverse student body, Chang (1999) analyzed a national longitudinal database and statistically controlled for salient factors. He found that both socializing with someone of another racial group and discussing racial/ethnic issues had a significant positive effect on students’ intellectual and social self-concept, college satisfaction, and chances of graduating in four years. What is also noteworthy about this study is that Chang found, among other things, that a racially diverse student body had a direct positive effect on the individual student’s likelihood of both socializing with someone of a different racial group and discussing racial issues. Given these empirically established connections, Chang reasons that when there is a diverse student body, the environment enhances the chances that students will socialize across racial groups and discuss racial issues. The more

diverse the student body, the more conducive the environment is to these multicultural/diversity-oriented practices and student behaviors. In turn, these experiential characteristics of a racially diverse campus can have a positive impact on the college satisfaction, retention, and intellectual and social self-confidence of all students. Chang's study also affirms the educational value of the peer group. The powerful influence of students' interpersonal interactions with peers on their learning is well established, and the student peer group is considered by many to be one of the most powerful educational resources in higher education (Astin, 1993b; Kuh, 1995; Milem, 1994; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1996).

Other studies have also found educational benefits associated with interacting across racial lines. In a longitudinal study of white and African American students who entered 28 selective colleges and universities in the fall of 1976 and the fall of 1989, Bowen and Bok (1998) found that white students who knew well two or more black students were much more satisfied with the whole of their college experience than were those with fewer interactions. In another study of 1,800 law students at Harvard University and University of Michigan, Orfield and Whitley (1999) examined survey data collected by the Gallup Organization. The results show that 90 percent of law students indicated that their exposure to racial and ethnic diversity at law school enhanced their learning and thinking in fundamental ways. Nearly two-thirds of the students reported that a

racially diverse environment improved in-class discussions. Additionally, the majority of students also reported that discussions with students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds significantly affected their views of the U.S. criminal justice system, civil rights and conditions in various social and economic institutions. According to Orfield and Whitley, these and other survey findings in their study indicate that students who attend two of the most highly selective law schools in the nation, experience and value the educational benefits that emanate from exposure to racial and ethnic diversity.

The above studies suggest that providing students with the opportunity to have sustained and meaningful encounters with someone of another race is educationally relevant. Other findings show that those educational benefits are enhanced when colleges and universities are committed to and intentional about the learning associated with racial diversity. For example, several studies show that a wide range of diversity initiatives have a positive impact on improving racial understanding and enhancing cultural awareness. Most notably, Astin (1993a) found that emphasizing “multiculturalism” through ethnic studies courses, cultural awareness workshops, cross-racial socialization, and discussing racial issues to name just a few, is associated with widespread beneficial effects on a student's academic and personal development. These diversity-oriented activities and experiences have the strongest positive effect on two learning outcomes: commitment to racial understanding and level of cultural awareness.

Based on these and other findings, Astin concluded that an institutional commitment to diversity through multiple activities that provide students with curricular and extracurricular opportunities to confront racial issues is a sound educational value because it improves students' cognitive and affective development. Astin's findings have been consistently confirmed by other studies. Villalpando (1994), for example, found a similar relationship between college satisfaction and the extent to which faculty included racially/ethnically diverse materials in their courses.

Milem (1994) also found similar effects demonstrated by diversity initiatives on both white males and white females. Specifically, Milem found that both white men and white women who engaged in more frequent discussions of racial or ethnic issues, who socialized with someone from another race, who enrolled in ethnic studies courses, or who attended racial awareness workshops were more likely to show increased commitment to the goal of helping to promote racial understanding. Similarly, Pascarella et al. (1996) found positive effects associated with diversity initiatives on students' orientation toward racial and cultural diversity. Controlling for relevant precollege and environmental characteristics in a multivariate design, they found that two diversity-related initiatives, participation in a cultural awareness workshop and a nondiscriminatory environment as perceived by students, both had significant positive effects on end-of-first-year openness to diversity and intellectual

challenge. In another study that used a representative sample of 17 colleges and universities in 10 states and statistically controlled for salient factors, Springer, Palmer, Terenzini, Pascarella, and Nora (1996) found that white students who participated in racial or cultural awareness workshops reported both greater interaction with diverse people and more interest in learning about people from different cultures.

In summary, a growing body of research has documented the educational benefits related to racial diversity and its related initiatives. Although these studies show the many potential positive outcomes, they do not make clear the actual attributes unique to a racially diverse student body that reasonably foster educational benefits. In other words, why would racial diversity, particularly in the classroom, affect the ways topics are discussed and subsequently enhance the learning and thinking of law students, as reported in the Orfield and Whitley (1999) study? What is unique about interacting and socializing with students of different racial backgrounds that enhances students' self-concept, satisfaction with college, and active thinking, as reported by Bowen and Bok (1998), Chang (1999), and Gurin (1999)? According to Justice Powell, bringing together racially diverse individuals broadens the range of experiences, outlooks, and ideas. This type of atmosphere, he believed, encourages speculation, experimenting, and creativity and thus enhances the education of the student body and better equips the institution's graduates. Powell's argument, as noted earlier, was rejected by the

Fifth District Court of Appeals in the 1996 Hopwood ruling, in part because the appeals court charged that the "use of race, in and of itself, to choose students simply achieves a student body that looks different" and little else. Unfortunately, there is a vacuum of empirical evidence that either support or refute one of the two competing claims. Indeed, Judge Edenfield noted in his 1999 Tracy v. Board of Regents of the UGA decision [at 1321-1323] that there is no reliable evidence that "an increase in racial diversity ... leads to a more diverse collection of thoughts, ideas and opinions on campus" (cited in Orfield & Whitla, 1999).

Research Method

To inform this critical debate concerning race-conscious admissions in higher education, this study examined three research questions: (1) Do viewpoints that are meaningful to higher education differ by racial groupings? (2) Do campuses that are more racially diverse have a broader collection of viewpoints held by students? (3) Do the long-term trends of students' collective viewpoints vary by the level of racial diversity on campus? Do outlooks become more or less varied over time? In short, the basic purpose of this study was to examine whether significant differences actually exist between racial groups and how it might be meaningful to undergraduate students' learning and educational experiences.

Data Source

The primary source of data for this study came from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) database of college students. CIRP is a continuing program of data collection and research that is sponsored by the American Council on Education and the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA). The database is designed to assess the impact of college on students. The CIRP data used in this study included information drawn from two surveys: the 1994 Student Information Form (SIF) and the 1998 Follow-Up Survey (FUS).

The SIF was administered during orientation programs and in the first few weeks of fall classes in 1994 to college freshmen attending a national sample of baccalaureate-granting colleges and universities. This survey included information on students' personal and demographic characteristics, high school experiences, expectations about college, as well as values, attitudes, life goals, self-concepts, and career aspirations. Responses for the annual freshman report were received from 230,331 first-time, full-time freshmen at 419 four-year colleges and universities (see Astin, Korn, Sax, & Mahoney, 1994 for a copy of the survey and a description of the sampling procedure).

Four years later in the fall of 1998, the FUS was sent to the home addresses of a sample of the 1994 SIF respondents. To provide a posttest for items on the SIF, the FUS repeated SIF questions on values, attitudes, life goals, self-concepts, and career aspirations. Additionally, this follow-up survey asked

students to reflect about their collegiate experience and their perceptions of college (see Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000 for a copy of the survey and a description of the sampling procedures). The final longitudinal sample used in this study included responses from approximately 5,326 students who attended one of 93 four-year institutions.

Also included in the database was information obtained from the U.S. Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Data System (IPEDS). Of particular interest to this study were the 1997 enrollment figures for African American, Asian American, Latino, and white undergraduate students by institution. This information was merged with the SIF and FUS datasets.

Variables/Analyses

Ten questions that targeted important contemporary social, political, or economic issues, which are also believed to be relevant to undergraduate education, were selected as dependent measures. One of the ten questions asked students, "How would you characterize your political views?" Students responded to the question on a 5-point scale (1 = Far Right, 2 = Conservative, 3 = Middle-of-the -road, 4 = Liberal, 5 = Far Left). The other nine questions queried student viewpoints about particular topics and issues (see Table 1). Two of the questions specifically referred to race-related issues (racial discrimination & racist speech), whereas the other questions targeted other contemporary issues that students would likely discuss while in college. Students responded to these nine

questions on a 4-point scale (1 = Disagree Strongly to 4 = Agree Strongly). All ten questions were surveyed in 1994 and again in 1998.

Insert Table 1 about here

The two independent variables of interest for this study were students' race (self-identified) and the level of racial diversity of the undergraduate population on students' respective campuses. To examine whether race might serve as a proxy for viewpoints, between group comparisons were conducted using cross-tabs, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) or Kruskal Wallis analyses where appropriate. These analyses were limited to students who identified their racial background as either African American (n=331), Latino (n=172), Asian American (n=251), or white (n=4382).

To measure the level of racial diversity on students' respective campuses, the 1997 IPEDS enrollment figures for African American, Asian American, Latino, and white undergraduate students of the 93 institutions in the sample were merged with the student data. The percentage of white student enrollment was used to sort the students into three groups; those who were enrolled in (1) the most racially diverse, (2) somewhat diverse, and (3) least diverse campuses.²

² Students who attended HBC&Us, tribal colleges, and Hispanic serving institutions were not included in these analyses because the institutional history of these institutions, especially as it pertains to educational access, and their admissions practices are significantly different from

Because group variances would eventually be compared, it was necessary to sort students evenly across the three groups without compromising the distinctiveness of the racial composition of each group. Thus, those students who were enrolled in institutions where the enrollment of white students was less than 83 percent of the total enrollment were assigned to the high diversity group (n=1483); those who attended campuses where the white student enrollment was between 83 percent and 91 percent were assigned to the medium diversity group (n=1877), and lastly those in institutions with white student enrollments greater than 91 percent of the total enrollment were assigned to the low diversity group (n=1778).

As expected, the criteria used to sort students yielded three groups with distinctively different levels of racial diversity. Both the average undergraduate racial composition of the campuses those students attended (institutional level) and the racial composition of each group (student level) reflected three distinct ordinal levels of racial diversity. For the "high diversity" group, students attended institutions that were on the average, 7.3 percent African American, 9.4 percent Asian Americans, 5.5 percent Latinos, and 76.8 percent white. The actual breakdown of the group was 15.4 percent African American, 10 percent Asian Americans, 5.5 percent Latinos, and 69.1 percent white. Students in the "medium diversity" group attended institutions where the student body were on the average

traditionally white institutions. Moreover, including these students would alter the three levels of diversity in a way that would render them to be less racially distinct.

composed of 5.2 percent African American, 3.8 percent Asian Americans, 3.2 percent Latinos, and 87.4 percent white. The racial composition of this group mirrored the institutions where the students were enrolled; 3.4 percent African American, 4.1 percent Asian Americans, 3.3 percent Latinos, and 89.3 percent white. Lastly, students in the "low diversity" group attended institutions with student bodies that were on the average composed of 3 percent African American, 1.6 percent Asian Americans, 1.2 percent Latinos, and 94 percent white. This group was slightly more homogeneous than the institutions where the students were enrolled; 1.5 percent African American, 1.1 percent Asian Americans, 1.5 percent Latinos, and 95.9 percent white.

To test whether more racially diverse student bodies have a more diverse collection of viewpoints, the variance of viewpoints for each dependent measure was compared across the three groups using the Levene test of homogeneity of variances. The variance was selected for these analyses because it indicates the spread of scores in a distribution. The more spread out the scores, the larger the variance or the more diverse the collection of viewpoints. By contrast, the more similar the viewpoints within a group, the smaller the variance.

Limitations

Several limitations of this study should be considered when interpreting the results. As with most studies of college students, the subjects were neither randomly selected nor randomly assigned to different groups. This common

limitation in higher education research simply reflects the nature of college choice and admissions. Although mechanisms were built into the data collection to procure a nationally representative sample of students, the sample is still not totally risk free of internal or external biases. Typically, higher education researchers statistically control for a broad range of salient factors to offset these biases. This is especially important for those examining college impact on student outcomes.

This study, however, is not a college impact study even though longitudinal data were utilized. The purpose of the analyses was not to investigate how increased racial diversity might affect students' educational experiences as other studies have previously done (Bowen & Bok, 1998; Chang, 1999; Gurin, 1999; Orfield & Whitley, 1999), but to examine whether there are differences between racial groups and between students enrolled in institutions with differing levels of racial diversity. Accordingly, this study used designs with strength in testing between group differences and for some cases, with ability to handle significant differences between group variances. Accounting for the latter was particularly important for comparisons between racial groups because of sample size disparities. The designs used in this study, however, do not control for student background characteristics, institutional factors (besides racial diversity), and student experiences that are typically accounted for in college impact studies. It is unclear if and how those other factors might affect the

dependent measures and examining these effects would be an important area for future studies. One factor that has received widespread attention is students' social class. This factor was not examined in this study largely because the primary point of contention, at least in the courts, is whether race is educationally relevant. Students' social class has also entered into this debate as an alternative to using race in admissions and has been shown both to intersect with race (Trent et al., in press; Wilson, 1987) and to be distinct from it (Kane, Forthcoming; Karabel, 1998). While further investigation concerning social class and other high stakes categories is critical, these analyses are beyond the scope of this study.

Results

Table 2 reports the means and standard deviations by race, for each 1994 freshman viewpoint measure. Larger numbers, except for the political orientation item, signify stronger degrees of agreement. For example, African Americans ($m = 2.93$) on average agreed more strongly with the statement that the government was not protecting consumers than did students of other racial groups. For the political orientation item, smaller numbers reflect a more conservative orientation. Table 2 shows that Asian Americans viewed themselves to be the most politically conservative ($m = 3.03$), followed closely by white students ($m = 3.06$).

Insert Table 2 about here

Are these differences statistically significant? To examine this, a series of one-way ANOVAs and Kruskal-Wallis tests were conducted.³ The purpose of these analyses was not to examine the extent to which specific groups of students differed from each other, but to examine whether there are general differences between racial groups on their viewpoints regarding social, political, and economic issues. When the group variances on a particular item were not homogeneous (Levene statistic < .01), Kruskal-Wallis tests (non-parametric) were used to compare between group differences.⁴ Cross-tabulation analyses were also conducted to describe any differences. Table 3 shows the one-way ANOVA results and Table 4 reports the Kruskal-Wallis findings.

Insert Table 3 about here

Insert Table 4 about here

³ Because of sample size differences, particularly the large numbers of white students and differences in variance between groups on some questions, higher level statistical analyses to control for additional variables were not conducted.

⁴ Thus, post-hoc tests were not conducted. Given the current debates and the shifting racial landscape, such details are less pressing than examining more generally whether there are racial differences in student viewpoints.

The results show consistent and significant differences between racial groups on 1994 entering freshmen viewpoints regarding various social, political, and economic issues. Because variances differed significantly on some items and consequently, group means could not be compared for all of the items, results from cross-tabulation analyses are reported below to describe more generally the findings in Tables 3 and 4.⁵

As the results of the one-way ANOVA revealed (see Table 3), the mean responses of the four racial groups differed significantly ($p < .005$) on five questions. Although few (22.5%) entering freshman in 1994 either agreed somewhat or strongly that the "death penalty should be abolished," African American (26.5%) and Latino students (27.2%) were more likely to agree with this statement than did Asian American (19.8%) or white students (22.2%). Most students (82.3%), by contrast, agreed that "employers should be allowed to require drug testing of employees or job applicants," but there were differences across racial groups. African American students (86.8%) were the most likely to agree with this statement, followed by whites (82.2%), Asian Americans (81.9%), and Latinos (78.1%) respectively. More than half of the entering freshmen (68.1%) agreed that "wealthy people should pay a larger share of taxes than they do now." African American students were by far the most likely to agree with

⁵ Cross-tabulation results are typically reported prior to higher-level statistical analyses and add a different dimension to reporting the findings. Reporting it here instead is especially helpful

this statement; 77.4 percent either agreed somewhat or strongly, whereas 68.8 percent of Latinos, 67.7 percent of whites, and 64.5 percent of Asian Americans agreed with the same statement. Students were generally split about whether "colleges should prohibit racist/sexist speech on campus," with 57 percent overall either agreeing somewhat or strongly with this. Not surprisingly, there were discrepancies by race on this issue. Most African American and Asian American students, 67 and 60.7 percent respectively, agreed with prohibiting racist/sexist speech on campus, compared to 56.8 percent of Latino and 56.3 percent of white students. Lastly, the results of the one-way ANOVA showed significant differences between racial groups on their political orientation. A larger percentage of African Americans (39.9%) and Latinos (39.9%) identified their political orientation as being either liberal or far left, as compared to Asian Americans (30.8%) and whites (30.1%) who identified themselves in the same way.

The results of the Kruskal-Wallis Test (see Table 4) also revealed significant differences ($p < .005$) between racial groups on all of the five questions tested. Once again, it is helpful to refer to cross-tabulation results to illustrate these differences. While 66.7 percent of all 1994 entering freshmen either agreed somewhat or strongly that the "Federal government is not doing

because Kruskal-Wallis tests, which essentially treats the dependent variable at the ordinal-level, were conducted on some of the dependent variables to examine group differences.

enough to protect the consumer from faulty goods and services," African American students were by far the most likely to agree with this statement. Comparatively, 77.9 percent African American, 66.3 percent white, 63.3 percent Latino/a, and 59.8 percent Asian American students agreed. More than three times as many African American students (17.2%) compared to white students (4.8%) agreed strongly with this statement. By contrast, African American students (21.8%) were the least likely to agree that the "Federal government should raise taxes to reduce the deficit." Entering white (31.9%) and Asian American (30.7%) students were the most likely to agree with this same statement, followed by Latino/a students (29.2%). Overall, only 31.1 percent of all students agreed with raising taxes to reduce the deficit.

Conversely, an overwhelming proportion of the students (72%) agreed that "there is too much concern in the courts for the rights of criminals." White students (73.1%) were much more likely than other students (63.7% Latinos, 63.9% African Americans, & 68.4% Asian Americans) to agree with this statement. In general, few (31.3%) objected to the statement that "a national health care plan is needed to cover everybody's medical costs." Almost all entering African American students (88.3%) agreed with this statement, compared to 74.8 percent of Asian American, 74.8 percent of Latino/a, and 66.6 percent of white students. Nearly twice as many African American students (48%) as white students (24.3%) agreed strongly with establishing a national healthcare plan.

Although very few students agreed that "racial discrimination is no longer a major problem in America," there were, however, racial disparities. White (12.6%) and Asian American students (8.8%) were more than twice as likely as African American students (3.8%) to agree with this statement, with only 5.8% of Latino students who agreed.

The above findings consistently show that there are significant differences between racial groups on viewpoints regarding important contemporary issues. These between group differences, however, should be interpreted with care because the finding can easily be misconstrued as racial stereotypes. Although the results demonstrate that there are statistical differences between racial groups, at the same time they refute stereotypic assumptions by showing that groups are actually more alike than they are different. To illustrate this and other points, distributions of students' responses by racial groups on two items are graphed below. These two graphs represent well the range of distributions across all items.

Figure 1 depicts the distribution of students' identification of their political orientation by race. Because of sample size disparities, percentages instead of raw numbers are used here so that more appropriate normative comparisons can be made. The one-way ANOVA results, as discussed earlier, revealed significant differences between racial groups on political orientation. Figure 1 shows that while there are significant differences between racial groups, there is at the same

time significant overlap regarding students' political orientation. For all racial groups, most students view themselves politically as "middle of the road." Thus, despite the statistical differences, there is also a great deal of common ground. The graph also shows that the full range of perspectives is represented within each group. In other words, while Latinos are more than three times as likely to view themselves as being on the "liberal" rather than "conservative" end of the political spectrum, it should not be overlooked that there are Latinos who view themselves as either "conservative" or "far right." Because of this, it is obviously wrong if not altogether dangerous to assume that all individuals of any particular racial group share a common viewpoint. If anything, the best prediction of political orientation for an individual of any race is "middle of the road." This does not, however, imply that race is irrelevant for establishing a diversity of viewpoints.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Figure 2 illustrates more dramatically how accounting for race affects the distribution of viewpoints. The graph depicts the distribution of students' degree of agreement by race with the statement that "a national health care plan is needed to cover everybody's medical costs." The distributions for African American and white students are particularly noteworthy. While the general shapes of the two curves are similar, the beginning and ending points of each are noticeably

different. White students are more than three times as likely as African American students to hold a "disagree strongly" opinion on this matter and twice as likely to "disagree somewhat." Comparatively, African American students are twice as likely as white students to hold an "agree strongly" opinion. Given these different group trends, it stands to reason that the inclusion of more African American students in a predominately white student body will likely alter the distribution of viewpoints, particularly at the two ends of the distribution. Thus, even though race does not predict with any great precision an individual's viewpoint, at the group level, accounting for students' racial background may well affect the total distribution of viewpoints on a college campus.

Insert Figure 2 about here

To examine further whether increased racial diversity does indeed lead to a more diverse collection of views and perspectives, a comparison of variances of viewpoints was conducted on students who attended campuses with either a "low," "medium" or "high" level of racial diversity. These labels also reflected the actual composition of these three groups. Table 5 shows the results of those analyses. The Levene Statistic, shown in the last column of the table, reports whether the variances of the three groups are statistically homogeneous.

Asterisks note those statements whereby the variances of viewpoints between the three groups are not homogeneous but instead differ significantly ($p < .01$).

Insert Table 5 about here

As reported in Table 5, the variances between the three groups differ significantly on seven of the ten questions tested. The variance of students' viewpoints increased with greater racial diversity on questions concerning whether (1) the government was doing enough to protect consumers, (2) the government should raise taxes to reduce the deficit, (3) there was too much concern for the rights of criminals, and (4) colleges should prohibit racist/sexist speech. Similarly, students' political orientation was the most varied for the high diversity group, followed by the medium diverse, and lastly the mostly white group. Thus, for these five questions, students who attended the most diverse institutions, which also happened to be the most racially diverse group, had the most diverse collection of viewpoints. The variances between groups on the questions concerning whether the wealthy should pay more taxes and whether a national health care plan is needed were also significant. For these two questions, students who attended campuses with the most racial diversity, which was also the most racially diverse group, again exhibited the most variance in viewpoints. Unlike the previous set of questions, however, those students who attended the

least diverse campuses had more variation in their responses on these two questions than those in the medium diversity group.

There were no differences between the three groups on three questions. However, for two of them, whether the death penalty should be abolished and whether employees should require drug testing, the trend was similar to the first set of findings -- as diversity increased so did the variation of viewpoints. The same trend was not exhibited for the question regarding whether racial discrimination was still a problem. For this question, the variances of the high and low diversity groups were nearly identical.⁶ Curiously, students who were enrolled in the most racially diverse campuses had more common opinions about this topic ($s^2 = .551$) than any other topic except consumer protection ($s^2 = .467$).

What happens to the collection of students' viewpoints at these different types of institutions over time? Do their collective viewpoints become more or less diverse? To examine this, students' responses to identical questions on the 1998 Follow-up Survey (FUS) were analyzed. Table 6 shows the changes in variance from 1994 to 1998 for each item by level of racial diversity.

Insert Table 6 about here

⁶ Similar variances do not, however, indicate that group averages on any particular question are likewise the same. The average group response may in fact be significantly different.

There are several noteworthy patterns of change reported in Table 6. First, those students who were enrolled in the most homogeneous institutions as a group tended to become even more homogeneous in their viewpoints over time. This is evidenced by the fact that on seven of the ten questions, the variance of viewpoints actually decreased in four years. Also, on the least diverse campuses, there was on average a slight movement toward greater homogenization of viewpoints (-.019). Comparatively, the trend was nearly identical for students enrolled in "medium" and "high" diversity campuses. For these two groups, the direction of the changes mirrored each other, becoming more varied on six of the ten items. On average, the change in variance of viewpoints for students who attended the most diverse campuses (-.001) was negligible, whereas the viewpoints of those who attended somewhat diverse institutions (.021) became slightly more varied after four years. In general, these analyses suggest that the overall trend of students' collective viewpoints is to become slightly more homogeneous on the least racially diverse campuses, slightly more varied on the somewhat diverse campuses, and to remain at about the same level of variance on the most diverse campuses. What this set of analyses does not show is how varying levels of campus racial diversity might affect students' viewpoints differently over time -- an important question for future studies to address.

Discussion

The results of this study reveal that accounting for race to admit students achieves more than a student body that "looks different." At the point of college entry, there are significant differences in viewpoints between racial groups on a variety of pressing contemporary issues. Although individuals of any given race hold the full range of opinions, as a group, average viewpoints differ from each other. There are statistically significant racial differences regarding opinions about the death penalty, consumer protection, health care, drug testing, taxation, free speech, criminal rights, and the prevalence of discrimination. These racial group differences appear to be educationally relevant because they affect the collection of thoughts, ideas, and opinions of the student body. Overall, the variance of students' collective viewpoints tends to be greatest in the most racially diverse campuses, followed by somewhat diverse, then least diverse campuses. These findings suggest that students who attend more racially diverse campuses have a much higher likelihood of being exposed to a broader range of viewpoints on academically relevant issues. Perhaps for this reason, a racially diverse student body has been shown in previous studies (Bowen & Bok, 1998; Chang, 1999; Gurin, 1999; Orfield & Whitley, 1999) to have a positive impact on students' educational experiences and learning.

That individuals of different racial groups at times have strikingly different perspectives and opinions is regularly reported in popular press. For example, according to a recent Pentagon study (Associated Press, 1999), white

service members were much more likely than their African American or Latino counterparts to believe that investigations into acts of racial antipathy were thorough. Two of the many findings of a poll conducted by the Los Angeles Times in April of 1997, five years after the Rodney King verdict triggered widespread civil unrest, were that African Americans and Latinos were much more likely than whites and Asian Americans to report that the economic opportunity was not good in the city and that incidents of police brutality occurred regularly (Merl, 1997). Differences in perspective between racial groups have also been documented on college campuses. Researchers at the University of Michigan, for example, found that white students were more likely than other students to agree that colleges and universities do not have a primary responsibility to correct racial injustice and that the current focus on "multiculturalism" in schools undermines the nation's common ties (Lopez, Holliman, & Peng, 1995). While this is only a small sampling of the many polls and studies that have documented differences in viewpoints between racial groups, it suggests that such differences extend beyond college freshmen and the issues addressed in this study.

Perhaps these differences in viewpoints can be attributed in part to the significance of race in American society. This too has been documented with regularity in the social science literature. For example, some studies show that residential segregation has not yet been rooted out of American urban life. While

Farley and Frey (1992) found that there have been modest declines in residential segregation rates among blacks and whites in some areas, the rates continue to be high especially in northern U.S. They also reported that from 1980-1990, segregation increased slightly for Latinos and for Asian Americans, although these segregation rates were still lower than for blacks. Surely a number of factors (including self-selection) contribute to residential segregation, yet Lawson, Komar, and Rose (1998) report that blacks and Latinos regularly face substantial discrimination when they try to buy or rent a home. Indeed, analyzing data collected from the 1990 General Social Survey (an independently drawn sample of English-speaking persons 18 years of age or over, living within the United States), Herring and Amisshah (1997) found that nearly 40 percent of "Western" and "Eastern European" Americans were opposed to living in a neighborhood in which half the residents were blacks, and over 40 percent of them were opposed to living under the same conditions with Latinos.

Besides residential segregation, the persistence of racial discrimination, despite serious attempts to address it, is likely to play an incisive role in shaping one's views and opinions. Amnesty International (1998) recently reported that African Americans are still three times less likely to be employed than whites with similar qualifications and are also more likely to be confined in inner-city ghettos where poverty, crime, overcrowding and poor housing conspire to deprive them of opportunity. African Americans are also twice as likely as whites to be

unemployed and their median family income in 1990 was only 57 percent of the income for whites and 54 percent of that for Asian American families (Loewan, 1998). Moreover, Amnesty International report that compared to whites, African Americans and more recently, Latinos are imprisoned at a significantly higher rate and are more likely to experience police brutality and abuse. Similar concerns about the lack of racial neutrality in our nation's criminal justice system have also been raised about immigration related policy-making. According to Shinagawa (1996), the enactment of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act in 1996, which prevent immigrants (including asylum-seekers) from challenging abusive practices and policies of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), are disproportionately more likely to negatively affect Asians and Latinos -- the two fastest growing immigrant groups in the U.S.

The extent to which race matters in shaping life opportunities and experiences, however, is still highly contested (D'Souza, 1991; Hacker, 1992; Steele, 1990; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 1997; West, 1993; Wilson, 1978). Whether shaped by the actual or perceived significance of race, the findings of this study clearly show that students of different racial backgrounds have on the average, different viewpoints regarding important social, political, and economic issues. For this reason, attaining a racially diverse student body has educationally compelling implications. On more racially diverse campuses, the student body does not only have more varied political orientation, but also have a broader range

of opinions about taxation, consumer protection, criminal rights, free speech, and healthcare. These topics are by no means trivial, but are commonly addressed in undergraduate coursework. Subsequently, more racially diverse campuses increase the likelihood of exposing students to different viewpoints when these important contemporary issues are raised in classrooms, dormitories, dining commons, or other parts of campus life.

By contrast, the findings also suggest that if the same issues were raised on nearly all white campuses, the classroom or dormitory discussions there would be qualitatively different from those that take place on racially diverse campuses. Perhaps because students who attend almost exclusively white colleges are less likely to be exposed to different viewpoints, what tends to occur over time in these settings is that the students' collective viewpoints become even more homogeneous, as the findings indicate. Curiously, the collective viewpoints of students who attended the most racially diverse campuses, while their outlooks may have changed after four years, did not become more varied. The stability of the average variance for this group may suggest that racially diverse campuses do not necessarily exacerbate greater differentiation of opinions among students. Instead, the greater variability and sometimes contentious competing perspectives often associated with racially diverse campuses can be largely explained by the variability of students' viewpoints before they even enroll in college. However,

this phenomenon, commonly called "balkanization" or "racial clustering," can not be determined conclusively here but deserves more empirical attention.

Another policy related implication emerging from the findings is that having only a small token representation will not maximize students' exposure to different viewpoints and outlooks. Because individuals of any racial group hold the full range of viewpoints, only when there is a "critical mass" or significant numbers of those underrepresented students do differences at the group level become educationally significant. Indeed, students attending campuses with high levels of racial diversity had the most diverse viewpoints on all but one of the ten questions tested. Even though there are racial group differences, having a critical mass of students of all groups also enable students to challenge their racial stereotypes by increasing the likelihood that they will be exposed to the full range of viewpoints held by individuals of any given racial group.

The results of this study correspond well with Justice Powell's claim that attaining greater diversity broadens the range of viewpoints held by the student body. According to him, these differences in viewpoints are meaningful for higher education because they stimulate a more robust exchange of ideas, which encourages greater speculation, experimenting, and creativity. A number of empirical studies cited earlier have already shown that exposure to a racially diverse environment add value to individual student's educational experiences and learning. This study helps to clarify how diversity may actually foster those

benefits by identifying several attributes that are unique to racially diverse student bodies. Ironically, the educational benefits associated with racial diversity are products of the real or perceived significance of race in American society, which inevitably shape individual viewpoints. According to Blauner (1994), the languages of race in America signify separate systems of understanding about social reality and which incorporate different views of the centrality of race and racism to American's very existence, past and present. Because racial differences at the group level continue to be meaningful and perhaps even intractable, the opportunity to learn from and with students of different races is educationally compelling and relevant.

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Table 1

Measures of Student Viewpoints

Subjects indicated their degree of agreement with each of the following items:

The Federal government is not doing enough to protect the consumer from faulty goods and services.

The Federal government should raise taxes to reduce the deficit.

There is too much concern in the courts for the rights of criminals.

The death penalty should be abolished.

Employers should be allowed to require drug testing of employees or job applicants.

A national health care plan is needed to cover everybody's medical costs.

Racial discrimination is no longer a major problem in America.

Wealthy people should pay a larger share of taxes than they do now.

Colleges should prohibit racist/sexist speech on campus.

Items were coded as a 4-point scale: 1 = Disagree Strongly to 4 = Agree Strongly.

Table 2

Mean and Standard Deviation of Viewpoints by Race

Items	African American (n 331)	Asian American (n 251)	Latino/a (n 172)	White (n 4382)
Government not doing enough to protect consumers	2.93 (.67)	2.62 (.68)	2.64 (.68)	2.67 (.63)
Government should raise taxes	1.94 (.77)	2.17 (.76)	2.08 (.82)	2.13 (.82)
Too much concern for the rights of criminals	2.80 (.96)	2.91 (.83)	2.81 (.83)	2.99 (.89)
Death penalty should be abolished	2.04 (.97)	1.86 (.93)	2.02 (1.02)	1.86 (.98)
Require drug testing	3.35 (.80)	3.15 (.80)	3.15 (.83)	3.17 (.83)
National health care plan is needed	3.33 (.77)	2.94 (.88)	3.02 (.95)	2.77 (.97)
Racial discrimination no longer a problem	1.23 (.58)	1.54 (.68)	1.51 (.70)	1.71 (.74)
Wealthy should pay more taxes	3.09 (.88)	2.80 (.95)	2.91 (.92)	2.84 (.94)
Prohibit racist/sexist speech	2.93 (1.04)	2.77 (.96)	2.71 (1.05)	2.64 (.98)
Political Orientation	3.32 (.72)	3.03 (.80)	3.28 (.71)	3.06 (.80)

larger numbers indicate stronger degree of agreement

Table 3

One-way ANOVA grouped by Race

Items	df	Mean Square	F	Level of Sig.
Abolish Death penalty				
Between Groups	3	4.531	4.751	.003
Within Groups	5021	.954		
Total	5024			
Require drug testing				
Between Groups	3	3.403	5.007	.002
Within Groups	5054	.68		
Total	5057			
Wealthy should pay more taxes				
Between Groups	3	6.52	7.409	.000
Within Groups	5038	.880		
Total	5041			
Prohibit racist/ sexist speech				
Between Groups	3	8.906	9.106	.000
Within Groups	5037	.978		
Total	5040			
Political Orientation				
Between Groups	3	8.380	13.359	.000
Within Groups	4914	.627		
Total	4917			

Table 4

Kruskal-Wallis Test grouped by Race

Items	df	Chi-Square	Asymp. Sig.
Government not protecting consumers	3	49.418	.000
Government should raise taxes	3	18.119	.000
Too much concern for the rights of criminals	3	22.366	.000
National health care plan is needed	3	120.469	.000
Racial discrimination no longer a problem	3	186.203	.000

Table 5

Variance of Viewpoints by Level of Racial Diversity

Items	Low Diversity	Medium Diversity	High Diversity	Levene Statistic
Government not doing enough to protect consumers	.364 (n=1744)	.390 (n=1842)	.467 (n=1452)	32.366** (df=2, 5035)
Government should raise taxes	.608 (n=1740)	.689 (n=1845)	.694 (n=1454)	21.395** (df=2, 5036)
Too much concern for the rights of criminals	.755 (n=1750)	.776 (n=1844)	.813 (n=1454)	5.11* (df=2, 5045)
Death penalty should be abolished	.866 (n=1741)	.956 (n=1838)	1.051 (n=1449)	1.642 (df=2, 5025)
Require drug testing	.665 (n=1748)	.676 (n=1860)	.726 (n=1450)	.165 (df=2, 5055)
National health care plan is needed	.955 (n=1738)	.872 (n=1841)	.965 (n=1453)	10.451** (df=2, 5029)
Racial discrimination no longer a problem	.552 (n=1752)	.524 (n=1861)	.551 (n=1465)	1.327 (df=2, 5075)
Wealthy should pay more taxes	.891 (n=1743)	.828 (n=1844)	.938 (n=1455)	8.686** (df=2, 5039)
Prohibit racist/sexist speech	.946 (n=1742)	.976 (n=1848)	.995 (n=1450)	5.188* (df=2, 5037)
Political Orientation	.595 (n=1708)	.604 (n=1798)	.724 (n=1412)	32.961** (df=2, 5025)

*p < .01

**p < .001

Table 6

Changes in the Variance of Viewpoints between 1994 and 1998 by Level ofRacial Diversity

Item	Low Diversity	Medium Diversity	High Diversity
Government not doing enough to protect consumers	0.063	0.063	0.016
Government should raise taxes	-0.113	-0.151	-0.127
Too much concern for the rights of criminals	-0.069	-0.004	-0.048
Death penalty should be abolished	0.093	0.088	0.142
Require drug testing	-0.026	0.092	0.05
National health care plan is needed	-0.129	-0.028	-0.029
Racial discrimination no longer a problem	-0.027	0.013	0.001
Wealthy should pay more taxes	-0.033	0.066	0.015
Prohibit racist/sexist speech	-0.001	-0.01	-0.057
Political Orientation	0.055	0.084	0.031
<u>Average Change:</u>	-0.019	0.021	-0.001

Figure 1

Political Orientation by Race

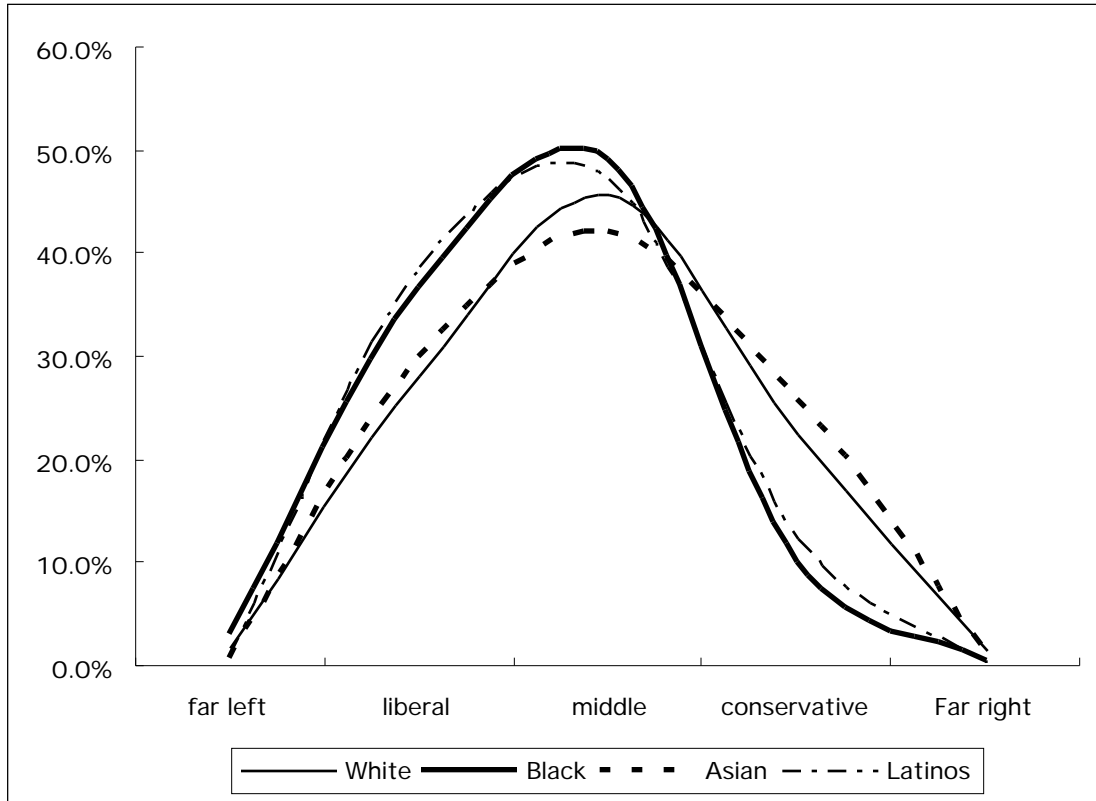


Figure 2

Opinion on the Need for a National Health Care Plan by Race

