
FROM ELATION TO UNCERTAINTY: PREPARING FOR THE AFTERMATH OF THE GRUTTER V. BOLLINGER DECISION

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Introduction

Following the 2003 Supreme Court decision (*Grutter v. Bollinger*) that strengthened the legal and constitutional standing of race-conscious admissions policies, many colleges and universities are contemplating how to enact this legislation within their own institutions. Yet the Supreme Court has provided paradoxical guidance on how to apply affirmative action policies. For example, the *Grutter v. Bollinger* decision has confirmed the validity of race-centered decisions as a component of the overall admissions review process. However, the *Gratz v. Bollinger* decision clearly eliminates the use of broadly defined, points-based evaluation criteria for admission assessments. To fully understand the Supreme Court's position on affirmative action, it is important to assess both cases collectively, as though they represent a single decision.

The fundamental disposition of the *Grutter v. Bollinger* decision echoes the findings of a longitudinal study conducted by former higher education administrators Bowen and Bok (1998), who concluded that "race-neutral standards would produce troubling results in the proportion of African American students in higher education" (p. 2). However, from our standpoint, in the public discourse about affirmative action in higher education there have been two clear omissions. First, there has been a virtual absence of discussion of empirical data that demonstrates the impact, or lack thereof, of college and university diversity efforts. Second, there has been virtually no use of conceptual or theoretical models to guide the public debate.

This paper examines the relevant data on the completion rates for doctoral degrees among African Americans and their relationship to minority faculty hiring, summarizes a conceptual model that links theory with measurable educational outcomes, and provides a guiding framework for future empirical studies of the achievement of African Americans in graduate school, particularly those in doctoral programs.

Data on Doctoral Degrees Awarded

In considering the connection between the status of the historically disadvantaged in the U.S. and the number of Ph.D.s produced, two issues need to be examined further. First, better data must be provided vis-à-vis the relationship between recruitment, retention and graduation of African-American Ph.D.s and the growth in the numbers of Black faculty. Second, the importance of mentoring for the successful completion of the doctoral degree needs to be emphasized (Bowen & Rudenstine 1992; Stamps & Tribble, 1995).

National data show that during the 2000-2001 academic year the 416 universities in the United States that conferred research doctorates awarded 40,744 doctoral degrees. Of this total, 26,435 were awarded to U.S. citizens, but only about 6% (1,604) of the total domestic doctoral degrees were awarded to African Americans; of these, roughly 35% were awarded to men, compared to approximately 65% awarded to women. Overall, for Black doctoral students the largest number of doctoral degrees was awarded in Education (Hoffer et al., 2002). To give an historical perspective to the trend in the completion of doctoral degrees among Black Americans, the data show that since 1975, when 3.8% of the doctoral degrees earned by American citizens were awarded to blacks, there has been only a modest increase (to 6%) in the number of doctoral degrees awarded to African Americans (Hoffer et al., 2002). Although descriptive data are useful for identifying trends in the completion of doctoral degrees among African Americans, they are nonetheless limited since there has not been a strong link between a theoretical rationale and the outcomes of diversity efforts in graduate education (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002). Orfield (2001) has reasonably argued that good research requires good theory to help decide what relationships should be measured and how the results can be interpreted and their meaning explained.

Little empirical research has explored whether there is indeed a direct link between diversity and positive educational outcomes (Chang, 2001). Most educators view a diverse student body as an important educational resource, arguing that diversity creates a richer environment for learning (Rudenstine, 1996). In support of this principle, Supreme Court Justice O'Connor, arguing for the majority in the Grutter case, suggested that diversity has the potential to enrich everyone's education. Further, she argued that enrolling a "critical mass" of underrepresented minority students contributes to the character of a university.

A Conceptual Framework

Gurin and associates (2002) provide a useful conceptual model for assessing the impact of diversity efforts on educational outcomes, which separates educational outcomes into two focus areas: a) learning outcomes and b) democracy outcomes.

Learning outcomes include active thinking skills, intellectual engagement and motivation, and a variety of academic skills. Democracy outcomes are comprised of perspective taking, citizenship engagement, racial and cultural understanding and judgment of the compatibility of different groups in a democracy. Further, Gurin and associates have suggested that higher education might expose students to racial and ethnic diversity in several ways: *Structural diversity* is the numerical representation of diverse groups; *informal interactional diversity* is the frequency and quality of intergroup interaction; and *classroom diversity* is the experience wherein students learn about diverse people and gain experience with diverse peers in the classroom.

The major components of this conceptual framework are 1) a curriculum and environment that leads to active thinking and intellectual engagement concerning racial ethnic distinctions; 2) the interruption of “mindless” or automatic thinking processes that are the result of previous learning; 3) the use of cognitive-development theories to minimize mindlessness so that individuals can develop notions of disequilibrium, discontinuity and discrepancy; and 4) the acceptance that difference and democracy are compatible.

Common conceptions of democracy do not treat difference as being compatible with unity (Saxonhouse, 1992; Pitkin & Shumer, 1982; Piaget, 1965). Yet achieving this compatibility is possible. In order to accomplish this, Gurin and colleagues propose that several key components must be represented: a) the presence of diverse others, b) equality among peers, and c) discussion according to rules of civil discourse.

In an empirical test of this conceptual framework, Gurin and associates concluded that informal interactional diversity (the frequency and quality of intergroup interaction) was influential for all groups and more influential than classroom diversity. Further, they found support for their hypothesis of a positive relationship between diversity experiences and educational outcomes.

There is much debate over what constitutes a racially diverse student population. Many argue that diversity has been achieved when there are more non-whites, than whites on campus. However, this notion fails to measure heterogeneity and thus fails to address the educational rationale for maintaining race-conscious admissions practices — namely that diversity enriches education because students learn most from those who have very different life experiences from their own (Chang, 2001).

Mentoring

Research shows that Black doctoral students’ relationships with faculty in higher education institutions are regarded as the most important aspect of their graduate experience (Farmer, 2003). Several studies have shown mentoring to be a significant

predictor of success among Black doctoral candidates (Blackwell, 1983; Faison, 1996; Adams, 1992). Completion of a graduate program depends on sensitive and demanding mentorship and the development of intellectual peer support during the program. Although most Ph.D. candidates need careful advising, this is especially important for Black doctoral students. During their graduate student tenure many demands are placed on Black Ph.D. candidates in their teaching of undergraduates. For example, undergraduates of color seek out these candidates as advisers and role models and often these candidates are asked to represent their peers or their program, as recruiters, for instance. It is important for candidates to maintain focus and not be asked to do too much teaching or related service. Developing this discipline and focus during graduate school is essential as well for their survival as young professors (Warner, 2001). Helping graduate students to develop this discipline and focus should be one of the key roles of a faculty mentor of Black doctoral students.

Data on Black Faculty

An important dimension of the efforts of higher education institutions to achieve greater racial and ethnic diversity is the extent to which the faculty ranks are also becoming more racially and ethnically diverse. Contrary to public perceptions and in spite of 30 years of affirmative action, data on faculty diversity indicates the profile of American faculty, especially at preeminent universities, remains largely white and male (Trower & Chait, 2002; Hoffler et al., 2002).

Data show that at every level, minority faculty members are proportionally fewer in number. In 1989, 8% of full-professors were faculty of color. As of 1997, the proportion had increased to 11%. In 1989, 14% of assistant professors were faculty of color, compared to 17% in 1997. When we look specifically at African Americans, the proportion of black faculty at predominately white institutions today is approximately 2.3%, virtually the same as in 1979 (Trower & Chait, 2002). Astin (1982) has characterized this dearth of faculty of color as a supply-side or “pipeline problem,” in which not only must adequate numbers of potential candidates enroll in graduate programs, but they must also complete their programs and exhibit excellence in their professions (Smith & Davidson, 1992). However, if increases in faculty of color were simply a supply-side problem, then surely one would expect that 30 years of affirmative action would have borne more fruit. Rather than being considered solely as a supply-side problem, emphasis must be placed on the institutional environment, because even a more plentiful pipeline would today still empty into an institutional landscape that faculty of color too often experience as uninviting, unaccommodating, and unappealing. Consequently, many otherwise qualified candidates forego graduate school altogether, some withdraw mid-stream, and others, who have completed their doctoral degrees, choose alternative careers (Trower & Chait, 2002). The lack of Black faculty has ramifications with respect to role models, which are critically important and an influential factor in choosing

academic careers (Brown, 1994; Davis, Ginorio, Hollenshead, Lazarus, & Rayman, 1994; Rosser, 1995).

Conclusions

One of the limitations of the empirical studies and theoretical framework that we have reviewed in this article is that their focus has been principally on undergraduate admissions and educational outcomes. The conceptual model would be enhanced by the inclusion of a paradigm for assessing the impact of learning and democracy outcomes on minority undergraduate graduation rates, transition to and completion of doctoral degree programs, and minority faculty hiring. Future studies should more thoroughly examine the factors associated with successful recruitment and retention of African American graduate students, particularly at the doctoral level.

It is imperative that higher education institutions continue to find ways to establish supportive environments in which disequilibrium, difference and democracy can flourish. Increased interaction among diverse peers and support of faculty and students in managing conflict surrounding these seemingly disparate philosophies would help achieve the integration of this assortment of perspectives.

We chose the terms “elation” and “uncertainty” as key notions for the title of this paper because we are elated over the *Grutter v. Bollinger* Supreme Court decision and the efforts of many colleges and universities to achieve diversity. Yet, at the same time, we are uncertain in that, despite the best efforts of colleges and universities, few answers are given for the questions that linger regarding the sincerity of effort and commitment to the recruitment and retention of minorities in graduate education, particularly in doctoral programs. It is our hope that this paper inspires greater commitment to campus diversity and provides a foundation for improving the data to track time to degree and subsequent faculty appointments of African-American Ph.D.s.

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