The Benefits of Diversity

What the Research Tells Us

By Daryl G. Smith and Natalie B. Schonfeld

In recent years there has been much research on diversity and its impact on students.
The authors have done a comprehensive review and here is what they learned

Discussions about diversity in higher education today are filled with contradiction and paradox. Legal challenges and ballot initiatives in California and other locations all threaten the growing commitment to diversity in higher education. Yet in more and more arenas, the importance of diversity is highlighted. A 1998 national opinion poll sponsored by the Ford Foundation's Campus Diversity Initiative shows that over 90 percent of the public believe that diversity is important and that higher education has an important role in fostering it. Moreover, the corporate, service, and nonprofit sectors of our society express an urgent need for employees who are prepared to work in diverse environments and recognize the resulting benefits to the workplace of increased critical thinking and creativity skills. In addition, important relationships linking diver-

sity and the future of democracy are being noted and fostered explicitly. A number of international meetings of delegates, including educators, policymakers, and researchers from India, South Africa, and the United States have been held over the last five years, sponsored by the Ford Foundation. Two reports—*Diversity, Democracy, and Higher Education: A View from Three Nations* by Edgar F. Beckham and *To Form a More Perfect Union: Campus Diversity Initiatives* by Caryn McTighe Musil and colleagues—have been issued from these meetings. Although the cultural and geographic context in each of the countries varies widely, these meetings have illuminated the ways in which the issues of diversity, social justice, and higher education are profoundly linked to the survival and well-being of democracy. They have also demonstrated the overlap in themes and issues of concern in the three countries, including the centrality of

Diversity remains an important imperative for the United States, and it is one in which higher education has an important role. Our campuses are laboratories for diversity issues that continue to evolve over time.

access and the important roles of curriculum, scholarship, faculty development, and links between higher education and the community.

Diversity remains an important imperative for the United States, its cities, and its communities, and it is one in which higher education has an important role. Our campuses are laboratories for diversity issues that continue to evolve over time. As diversity efforts in higher education have come under greater scrutiny and continue to grow, the need to ascertain the impact of diversity initiatives and the value of diverse populations on our campuses has also grown.

Fortunately, in recent years there has been much research into diversity and its impact on students—research that addresses this need by moving the discussion about the benefits of diversity beyond intuitive conclusions to include quantitatively and qualitatively based findings. Much of this research is summarized in a 1997 report entitled *Diversity Works: The Emerging Picture of How Students Benefit,* by Daryl Smith and her colleagues, a team of researchers from the Claremont Graduate University (CGU). They reviewed hundreds of studies and concluded that research consistently shows that institutional and structural initiatives in the name of diversity have numerous educational and social benefits for students. These findings are now amplified by a second review of research, completed by Daryl Smith and her colleagues at CGU this past year. This review, tentatively titled *What Difference Does Human Diversity Make in Higher Education?*, has explicitly focused on the impact of the presence of diverse persons (some-

times known as representational or structural diversity) on the nature, overall functioning, and associated outcomes of higher education settings. This latter review begins to highlight the positive effects of diversity on both student learning and institutional effectiveness. Investigations into the benefits of diversity have the potential to further our understanding of the dimensions of diversity and their impact on our campuses. They also have the potential to instigate stronger, expanded, and more concerted diversity efforts on our campuses that can be linked to the needs and well-being of society.

In order that we may more fully understand just how diversity matters and what university administrators can do so that our institutions benefit from diversity, we try to summarize the findings of research in this area in relation to four dimensions of diversity: (1) access and success of underrepresented students, (2) campus climate and intergroup relations, (3) education and scholarship, and (4) institutional viability. These dimensions are critically linked to one another and to the diversity of people involved. In our examination of these four dimensions, we find it both exciting and reassuring to note that institutional activities and efforts in these areas, when intentionally planned and done well, have significant positive outcomes. These outcomes are relevant for underrepresented students, students who represent other kinds of diversity, students in general, the institution, and society.

ACCESS AND SUCCESS

THE DIVERSITY DISCUSSION has traditionally been focused on issues of the access and success of students from underrepresented racial and ethnic backgrounds and, in specified areas, of white women students. It is from this commitment to increasing access and equity in higher education that many diversity initiatives have sprung. The research here shows that such efforts do increase educational access and equity for underrepresented students. Important themes for student success emerge from a broad range of research

Daryl G. Smith is professor of education and psychology at Claremont Graduate University. She is the author of numerous publications on diversity in higher education. For twenty-five years she was a college administrator in student affairs, planning, and institutional research. She can be reached at Daryl.Smith@cgu.edu

Natalie B. Schonfeld is programs coordinator in housing at the University of California, Irvine, and a doctoral student in higher education at Claremont Graduate University. She can be reached at nschonfe@uci.edu.

The impact of opportunities for interaction between and among student groups cannot be underestimated.

in this area. As Daryl Smith and her colleagues note in their 1997 review, institutional characteristics such as high expectations, belief in students' capacities, models of success, institutional mission, and a link between the value of education and service to larger communities contribute to success and mitigate the impact of limited educational preparation where that is a factor. A careful reading of the research summarized in Smith and colleagues' review also suggests clearly, though often indirectly, that having sufficient diversity among people— students, staff, and faculty—has a number of important implications. The numbers of diverse people, or more specifically the presence of a critical mass of diverse people, create greater opportunities for social support, role models, and mentoring. Having diversity in the population creates greater opportunities for individuals to be seen as individuals, thus breaking down stereotypes. In addition, greater diversity in numbers suggests that the institution is committed to diversity— something that proves important in creating an inclusive climate. Although the research shows that numbers alone are insufficient, the presence of a critical mass of diverse people benefits institutions through formation of informal support systems that can serve to complement and enhance the structures and initiatives of the institution.

There is also mounting evidence of the beneficial impact of student involvement in population-specific services and resources, such as ethnic residential theme houses, support centers, and academic departments. In fact, participation in such services appears to contribute to increased satisfaction, retention, and civic responsibility despite the popular critique that these services have a negative effect on the development of community on campus.

CAMPUS CLIMATE AND INTERGROUP RELATIONS

FOR ABOUT TWENTY YEARS, campus climate has been an important theme. Conversations about campus climate engage numerous issues related to gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, physical ability, and religion. Efforts to enhance access and equity on

college campuses through diversity initiatives have numerous implications for campus climate. Indeed, a perception among students that the institution is committed to diversity increases positive perceptions of the climate of the campus. As Sylvia Hurtado noted in her analysis of the research on campus racial climate, students attending desegregated institutions have fewer stereotypes and are less fearful in interracial settings; when they socialize across race and discuss racial and ethnic issues, they are more likely to express greater satisfaction with the college setting and feel better about themselves. Hurtado also notes that such perceptions are linked to positive outcomes such as increased student retention.

The impact of opportunities for interaction between and among student groups cannot be underestimated. Not only has the research found this to be desired by virtually all students, such opportunities for interaction produce clear increases in understanding and decreases in prejudiced attitudes while also positively affecting academic success and long-term attitudes and behaviors. Carolyn Scalera reports in her study of student facilitators in a diversity program that facilitators' participation led to a greater awareness both of self and others, affected career choices, and resulted in increased efforts to address issues of oppression and prejudice. An important finding from years of research is that the conditions under which positive group interactions take place include institutional support, equal status, common goals, and an opportunity for participants to be seen as individuals. Pettigrew and Tropp's recent meta-analysis of hundreds of recent studies on interactions among groups and intergroup contact theory highlights the power of these conditions to reduce prejudice and discrimination. Their analysis particularly cites the importance of these approaches in issues involving race relations and attitudes toward gays and lesbians.

Results of recent research suggest the importance of striking a balance between development of a unified identity among community members, through activities such as campus traditions and rituals, and acknowledgment of the differences between members, through the development and existence of ethnic organizations and support networks. Ideally, there

needs to be sufficient diversity on campuses so that the diversity within groups can be seen and engaged. It is important to emphasize that the desirability of promoting intergroup interaction on the campus is not in conflict with the variety of ethnic and other support groups on campus. Indeed, sometimes the very existence of ethnic groups on campus provides a basis for alliances across campus ethnic groups and provides people with a base of support from which to become more actively engaged in the college setting. The notion that the presence of ethnic-specific organizations and services leads to balkanization on our college campuses, that students who belong to ethnic-specific groups choose to isolate themselves from the campus, or that their participation in these groups hampers their involvement with the campus and other groups is not supported by research.

It is interesting that perceptions about balkanization and self-segregation are shared by many students, even when the evidence suggests that students are often part of diverse networks. In his dissertation on "The Impact of Friendship Groups in a Multicultural University," Anthony Antonio found that although the students he surveyed perceived the campus to be segregated, their friendship groups tended to be racially and ethnically mixed. It appears that students see ethnic clusters but do not see the increasingly diverse peer groups that are emerging of which they are a part. It may also be that students on our campuses are reflecting some disappointment with the campuses' inability to capitalize fully on the potential created by increasing diversity on campus. These findings underscore the fact that individuals, groups, and institutions thrive under campus conditions that acknowledge multiple affiliations and identities and facilitate their engagement.

For white students, experience with diversity and especially interaction with those from different backgrounds is also linked to important positive outcomes, including satisfaction, openness to others, and, as we shall see later, important cognitive and learning outcomes. Indeed, the research suggests that it is often white students who have the most limited intergroup experiences and that homogeneous experiences for these students (such as participation in Greek letter organizations) have a negative impact on educational outcomes. In his study of Greek letter organizations, Mitchell Chang found that students who participate in Greek letter organizations are less likely to be involved in activities that encourage social and political change.

EDUCATION AND SCHOLARSHIP

AS A GROWING BODY of research demonstrates, when colleges and universities are serious about including diversity in the curriculum and the classroom ,there are definite educational benefits. Not only does this academic engagement have a positive impact on attitudes toward racial issues, but it also deepens opportunities to interact with those who are different, enhances cognitive development, and results in increased overall satisfaction and involvement with the institution. Studies on cognitive development show that critical thinking, problem-solving capacities, and cognitive complexity increase for all students exposed to diversity on the campus and in the classroom. A wonderful set of studies done by Patricia Gurin at the University of Michigan demonstrate these relationships quite powerfully. Gurin notes in "New Research on the Benefits of Diversity in College and Beyond: An Empirical Analysis" that students in environments that are structurally and curricularly diverse develop more complex and critical thinking skills and actually learn more. In their studies published jointly by the American Council on Education (ACE) and the American Association of University Presidents (AAUP) on the impact of diversity in college classrooms, Roxanne Harvey Gudeman, Patricia Marin, and Geoffrey Maruyama and Jos Moreno also found that the presence of diverse students enhances the educational experience of all students, leading to the broadening of perspectives, increased exposure to alternative viewpoints, and more complex discussions and analysis. Research findings continue to emerge, providing depth and understanding on this important topic. These results appear to develop precisely because students are exposed to multiple points of view on issues that matter and that

The notion that the presence of ethnic-specific organizations and services leads to balkanization on our college campuses is not supported by research.

Studies on cognitive development show that critical thinking, problem-solving capacities, and cognitive complexity increase for all students exposed to diversity on the campus and in the classroom.

have some emotional significance. In addition, our review reveals important links between experiences with diversity and increased commitment to civic engagement, democratic outcomes, community participation during and after college, the likelihood of having diverse friendship groups, and the act of living in less segregated communities after college.

As our campus population becomes more diverse, greater importance is given to engaging issues of diversity in education. Growing evidence supports the notion that faculty diversity (especially in race and gender) is linked to curricular change; the inclusion of issues of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation in the educational process; diversification of scholarship and pedagogical perspectives; and increased support for diverse students. The presence of diversity in the student body ensures opportunities for intergroup interactions among all students and supportive environments for subgroups of students. The visible presence of diversity in leadership at all levels contributes to positive perceptions about institutional commitment and climate.

INSTITUTIONAL VIABILITY

ALTHOUGH much of the thrust of diversity efforts over the past years has focused on improving the education and climate for a variety of student populations who have been marginalized in higher education, it is becoming increasingly clear that diversity has an important and central role to play in the viability and vitality of our campuses. That is, much like technology, diversity is a central issue that must be addressed. Although the potential exists for increased diversity to bring conflict, diversity efforts, when undertaken conscientiously, open the way for greater engagement of issues, increased satisfaction with the campus, greater academic success, and increased cognitive functioning. Our review of research on the impact of diversity on students suggests that increasing diversity leads to the possibility of an enriched and engaging academic environment, where greater learning and skill development is possible.

Research on diversity in higher education, which has focused mostly on student learning, is consistent with research done on organizations. Diversity in decision making at all levels of an institution, when done under the conditions described previously (institutional support, equal status, common goals), is more likely to yield greater creativity, complexity, and problem-solving capacities. Moreover, research on diversity in the workplace shows that diverse work settings are related to increased employee satisfaction and work group performance. In addition, institutions that have diversity at all levels are more likely to have the kind of cross-cultural competence that will position them well in today's society—just as institutions with technological competence are more viable today. The increased demands by all sectors of the society that higher education produce culturally competent individuals capable of thriving in today's diverse environment help highlight the important benefits and potential of diversity in our colleges and universities. We are just now beginning to see some evidence of the link between campus diversity, particular structural diversity, and increasing attractiveness for admissions, fundraising, career opportunities, and community relations. At the institutional level, diversity has the potential to build the capacity of colleges and universities to function, link to diverse constituencies, and build credibility in diverse communities.

Finally, the benefits of diversity in higher education for society and for increased capacity of individuals and institutions to benefit from pluralism in society have been documented. For example, the economic benefit to society and individuals from higher education is clear and has impacts for many indicators of societal well-being. The democratic outcomes hold important implications for the creation of a just, equitable, and participatory society. Indeed, to envision college and university campuses in the twenty-first century is to envision campuses that function in a pluralistic society, that educate students for that society, and that engage through scholarship and participation the issues of that society. In these ways our institutions will be increasingly attractive and credible to individuals, policymakers, and the country as a whole.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

THE RESEARCH profiled in this article has important implications for campus practice.

Campuses must be intentional in their efforts to manage and address issues of diversity if they are to achieve the educational benefits of diversity in all its manifestations. Indeed, one cannot take diversity for granted. Campuses have the ability to set up the conditions under which significant benefits to the campus, its individuals, and society can be achieved. Intergroup relations theories provide colleges and universities with a blueprint for developing programs and initiatives that will allow the benefits of diversity to be garnered by all members of the community. Such programs and initiatives must provide regular and long-term opportunities for dialogue and interaction across racial and ethnic groups for all students, faculty, and staff, regardless of their own ethnic or racial background. A number of campuses—among them the University of Michigan and Arizona State University—have developed such programs. Consider how your institution intentionally addresses and acknowledges issues of diversity. How does your college or university facilitates intergroup communication and interaction? Are such efforts supported at an institutional level; are they founded on the conditions of equal status and shared goals? Numerous resources for campuses on this and other topics can be found on Diversity Web.

Developing and acknowledging our faculty's, staff's, and students' multiplicity of identities—for example, race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and religion—and the complexity of those identities, is critical and will facilitate community in ways that bring dynamism and richness to the campus. Such a strategy is *not* in conflict with community when community is also developed intentionally. Institutions must recognize that students lead multiple lives beyond the boundaries of the institution that affect their experience on campus and their relations with peers and other community members. In what ways do campus acknowledge the multiplicity of identities and affiliations of our students, staff, and faculty? Evaluate the degree to which your institution intentionally or otherwise values certain identities or affiliations over others and how this may impede constituents' investment and involvement on your and other campuses.

Faculty engagement with issues of diversity—particularly educational and scholarly issues—is required. When we consider diversity beyond the social interactions we observe on our campuses and explore how the presence of diversity enhances thinking skills, exposes people to diverse viewpoints, and prompts reexamination of academic and scholarly topics and areas of inquiry, we find that faculties are excited and eager to participate in bringing diversity into the classroom. Hence, putting diversity at the heart of the educational enterprise, for purposes related to the mission of the institution and its educational goals, will generate more engagement. Diversity opens the way for meaningful discussions on a wide range of topics, including the necessary conditions for learning and an assessment of those elements or pedagogical practices most conducive to learning and intellectual development among students. In opening the way for these conversations, diversity also has the potential to facilitate greater collaboration and interdependence between student affairs and academic affairs as they collectively address these issues and their implications.

The most successful efforts at managing and enhancing the benefits of diversity invite boundary crossing—between disciplines, student affairs and academic affairs, the institution and local communities. Such links have been hard to achieve in the past. Today, the urgency of some of the issues brought to light by diversity efforts, along with the increasing diversity of the student body, administration, and faculty, make this linking more and more possible. Institutions need to involve corporations and businesses in ways that go beyond fundraising efforts so that all can garner the benefits of diversity. Evaluate the

Our review reveals important links between experiences with diversity and increased commitment to civic engagement, democratic outcomes, and community participation.

degree to which your campus adequately prepares students for the realities of living and working in a diverse community. What efforts could be made to ensure that you are adequately preparing students to live in a multicultural society? Who needs to be involved in preparing students to be culturally competent members of the larger society?

Success with diversity in all its dimensions requires institutional commitment. Similarly, institutional efforts that combine high expectations and belief in the capacity to succeed are critical for student success. In thinking about educating students for a diverse society, we must understand that few of us—faculty, staff, or students—have lived and worked in the kinds of diversity now present in society. Just as we view the role of technology as transformational and constantly in flux, we must also view the role of diversity in a similar way. Achieving diversity will require planning, focus, and resources. In addition, we must recognize that achieving diversity and successfully negotiating and engaging the associated issues will require time and patience.

We have to recognize that students from different groups and backgrounds will have varied responses to diversity. In particular, what works for students in "subordinate" positions may not work in the same way for students in more "dominant" positions. Indeed, although research clearly shows that diversity produces numerous cognitive, social, intellectual, and developmental benefits for our campuses, it is also clear that in some cases the impact of diversity is asymmetrical. The effects of diversity, while generally positive, may function differently depending on whether the issues relate to race, class, gender, or sexual orientation. The most striking example of this is the important positive role of ethnic support groups for students of color and the emerging negative findings for white students in homogeneous groups. In this case, having access to homogeneous environments within the campus environment functions differently. Therefore, it is important for campuses to understand that similar strategies often result in differential impacts depending on the position of a particular group in the institution. For underrepresented students, doing away with ethnic-specific support efforts for the sake of "community" is likely to undermine campus diversity efforts; the same cannot be said when we talk about white students.

Moreover, for underrepresented students, faculty, and staff, diversity facilitates positive feelings about the campus and leads to increased persistence, involvement,

and academic success. In essence, the benefits of diversity for those in the minority are that it positively influences their likelihood of succeeding, whether this means staying at the institution as an employee or student or contributing to the overall purpose of the institution by graduating, producing research, being an effective teacher, or being involved in other ways with the life of the campus. For majority students, faculty, and staff, the benefits of diversity are equally valuable, though quite distinct in their nature involving, for example, increased opportunities for exposure to a greater spectrum of perspectives, opinions, and scholarship. As our campuses increase in diversity, these latter benefits accrue to everyone, since few in our society have been exposed to the pluralism now present on so many of our campuses.

Research being done throughout the country suggests that a much more profound level of institutional evaluation of diversity initiatives is required. Without evaluation, it is difficult to mark progress and intensify efforts to ensure that the students we retain are also satisfied and intellectually engaged in the campus community. As institutional leaders, we need to spend more time evaluating our efforts and their impact in the short term as well as the long term. The research on diversity makes clear that these changes take time; we need to be patient and continually assess the degree to which our efforts are making an impact on our students and the campus community as a whole.

DIVERSITY does not cause problems. Rather, it highlights many issues that have been around for a long time—whether they involve the challenges of working across disciplines and boundaries or the matter of high expectations and student success. The imperative of diversity amid changing demographics provides a profound impetus for change. There can be no doubt that the presence of diversity on our campuses has the potential to challenge some of the underlying assumptions of our institutions in ways that can improve quality and effectiveness. Diversity requires that we consider the conditions under which learning takes place, how physical structures and their location reflect institutional values, the criteria for the identification of talent at all levels, whose interests are reflected in decision making, how we support (or don't support) new scholarship and curricular change, and the fundamental mission of the institution. These considerations are opportunities to build more effective learning institutions—opportunities catalyzed by diversity on our campuses.

NOTES

Antonio, A. L. "The Impact of Friendship Groups in a Multicultural University." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1998.

Beckham, E. F. (ed.). *Diversity, Democracy, and Higher Education: A View from Three Nations.* Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2000.

Gudeman, R. H. "College Missions, Faculty Teaching, and Student Outcomes." In *Does Diversity Make a Difference? Three Research Studies on Diversity in College Classrooms.* Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education and American Association of University Professors, 2000.

Gurin, P. "New Research on the Benefits of Diversity in College and Beyond: An Empirical Analysis." *Diversity Digest,* 1999, *3*(3). [http://www.inform.umd.edu/DiversityWeb/Digest].

Hurtado, S., Milem, J. F., Clayton-Pedersen, A. R., and Allen, W. R. "Enhancing Campus Climates for Racial/Ethnic Diversity: Educational Policy and Practice." *Review of Higher Education,* 1998, *21,* 279–302.

Marin, P. "The Educational Possibility of Multi-Racial/Multi-Ethnic College Classrooms." In *Does Diversity Make a Difference? Three Research Studies on Diversity in College Classrooms.* Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education and American Association of University Professors, 2000.

Maruyama, G., and Moreno, J. F. "University Faculty Views about the Value of Diversity on Campus and in the Classroom." In *Does Diversity Make a Difference? Three Research Studies on Diversity in College Classrooms.* Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education and American Association of University Professors, 2000.

Musil, C. M., Garcia, M., Hudguns, C. A., Nettles, M. T., Sedlacek, W. E., and Smith, D. G. *To Form A More Perfect Union: Campus Diversity Initiatives.* Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 1999.

Pettigrew, T. F., and Tropp, L. R. "Does Intergroup Contact Reduce Prejudices? Recent Meta-Analytic Findings." In S. Oskamp (ed.), *Reducing Prejudice and Discrimination.* Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum, 2000.

Scalera, C. V. "What Happens Next? Examining the Long-Term Impact of Diversity Education." *Diversity Digest,* Fall 1999, 10–11.

Smith, D. G, Gerbick, G. L., Figueroa, M. A., Watkins, G. H., Levitan, T., and others. *Diversity Works: The Emerging Picture of How Students Benefit.* Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 1997.

Smith, D. G., Gerbick, G. L., Schonfeld, N. B., de la Rosa, M. L., Keeton, R. G., and others. *What Difference Does Human Diversity Make in Higher Education?: An Annotated Bibliography.* Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities, forthcoming.

OTHER RESOURCES

Brewer, M. B. "Reducing Prejudice Through Cross Categorization: Effects of Multiple Social Identities." In S. Oskamp (ed.), *Reducing Prejudice and Discrimination.* Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum, 2000.

Cloete, N., Muller, J., Makgoba, M. W., and Ekong, D. (eds.). *Knowledge, Identity, and Curriculum Transformation in South Africa.* Cape Town, South Africa: Maskew Miller Longman, 1997.

Cross, M., Cloete, N., Beckham, E. F., Harper, A., Inidresan, J., and Musil, C. (eds.). *Diversity and Unity: The Role of Higher Education in Building Democracy.* Cape Town, South Africa: Maskew Miller Longman, 1999.

Cross, M., Mikwanazi-Twala, Z., and Klein, G. (eds.) *Dealing with Diversity in South African Education.* Kenwyn, South Africa: Juta, 1998.

Diversity Digest, a newsletter published by the American Association of Colleges and Universities.

Diversity Web (http://diversityweb.org).

Sandler, B. *The Chilly Climate for Women.* Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 1983.

Smith, D. G. "Strategic Evaluation: An Imperative for the Future of Campus Diversity." In M. Cross, N. Cloete, E. F. Beckham, A. Harper, J. Indiresan, and C. Musil, (eds.), *Diversity and Unity: The Role of Higher Education in Building Democracy.* Cape Town, South Africa: Maskew Miller Longman, 1999**.**