

Chapter 5

Delineating Challenges and Opportunities for HBCUs: Why Continued Diversification Is a Competitive Strategy

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ABSTRACT

There has been a recent push on a majority of American campuses to become more diverse in all aspects of their everyday life. For this reason, several institutions have to rethink how they approach the subject of diversity. Educational institutions, including historically Black institutions, must bridge socio-economic, racial and other differences if they are to thrive in a higher education environment that is continually becoming more competitive as demographics shift. This chapter illustrates how changing demographics, the benefits of continued diversification, and the value that is continuously being placed on diversity should influence positive change and shape the character and institutional climate of historically Black institutions. The chapter underscores the need for HBCUs to create cultural climates in which all students are recruited, appreciated and valued regardless of their racial or socio-economic backgrounds as a strategy to achieve competitiveness.

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BACKGROUND

Recent census reports (2011) in the United States show that the country is becoming racially and ethnically diverse more than ever before. As these changes occur, institutions of higher education must rethink how they are getting students ready to live and work in a society that is increasingly becoming multicultural and multiracial. Institutions are now charged with the task of preparing students to live and function in a much more diverse society than ever before (Pike & Kuh, 2006). One of the ways that will enable institutions to play this role effectively is by providing students the opportunity to engage with diverse others while they are enrolled. Among the many ways this can be addressed is through a racially heterogeneous student body and putting in place programs that will support and meet the needs of students drawn from different backgrounds. Although the discussion on diversity has mainly focused almost exclusively on non-minority serving institutions, a large number of students – 16 percent, are enrolled at minority serving institutions, where there has been less emphasis on diversifying these institutions (Lynch, 2013). A review of most of the literature on the benefits of heterogeneous racial environments in higher education reveals that minority serving institutions are excluded. While there has been increased scholarship in recent years on diversity in higher education, most of this research has failed to include minority serving institutions in its analyses.

Little has been written on racial diversity at minority serving institution, even at a time when diversity and its benefits has been addressed for other institutions. There are important differences that make the environments of PWIs and HBCUs different. However, the current debate is mainly concentrated on what goes on at PWIs. Therefore, by focusing on HBCUs, important analysis can be made about the impact of diversity on different post-secondary organizations including those serving minorities. Focusing on HBCUs may also broaden the research on diversity in post-secondary education. Furthermore, scholars that have looked at diversity have for most part addressed this subject as it relates to race and college admission. However, diversity is also be a policy issue. According to Gurin et al., (2002), diversity should be encouraged in all facets of higher education. HBCUs represent a large sector of higher education responsible for producing minority graduates who end up serving in important leadership positions within a largely and increasingly diverse society. This makes it all the more important to understand how creating a much more diverse and inclusive environment for these graduates can impact the rest of society which they later become part of. Being proactive and responsive to the needs of a changing population is important for minority serving institutions.

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