

# Chapter 62

## Promoting the Representation of Historically Disadvantaged Students: What Educational Leaders Need to Know

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter highlights the importance of diversity, provides an overview of the historical plight that minorities suffered during the formation of the American history, describes the policies that aim at expanding educational opportunities for socially and economically disadvantaged groups, and presents a conceptual framework that guides educational leaders towards creating inclusive campuses. Also, it reports the findings of an empirical investigation that elicited minority students' views regarding the factors that enhance their persistence. Findings from this study could be of primary importance for university administrators and policymakers trying to enhance diversity on campus. The chapter ends with conclusions and recommendations for research and future practice.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Promoting the representation of socially and economically disadvantaged students has been a major goal for universities in the United States for roughly 50 years. Despite the numerous attempts to create diverse learning environments, research indicates that higher education institutions have failed to create inclusive learning environments conducive to minority students' success (Karkouti, 2016a). The United States of America has always been regarded as the land of opportunities where all people equally share

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the benefits of its democratic society (Aguirre & Martinez, 2003; Lewis, 2004). However, racial and ethnic minorities still suffer the deleterious effects of structural racism that promotes oppression and increases social disparity (Lewis, 2004; Stout, Archie, Cross, & Carman, 2018). In the higher education arena, minority students view postsecondary education as a means for social mobility and strive for degree programs to pursue successful career tracks, enhance their employment opportunities, and remain competitive in the 21st century global marketplace (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). In an effort to bridge the gap between the privileged majority and the underprivileged minority through education, the Obama administration launched the *Race to the Top* initiative in 2009 that aimed at educating all of the U.S. population and increasing the number of Americans with college degrees by at least 60% (Ewell, 2011). This ambitious initiative seems to be ineffective because the gap in bachelor's degree attainment between Whites and Hispanics has increased by 10% and between Whites and Blacks by 6%, between the years of 1975 and 2010 (Aud et al., 2011).

In addition to higher education inequity, research indicates that pay gaps still exist despite efforts to reduce racial, ethnic, and gender disparities (Cascio, 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2016; Wilson, Butler, Butler, & Johnson, 2018). In 2014, the average annual earnings for White Americans holding bachelor's degrees exceeded their Black counterparts by 24.8% and their Hispanic peers by 25.9% (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). This socioeconomic inequity is the product of racism that is deeply rooted in the formation of the American history affecting all types of organizations including institutions of higher learning (Karkouti, 2016a).

## **HISTORICAL PLIGHT: TIMELINE**

Access to postsecondary education has always been considered as a key pathway for social mobility and the gateway to advancing the socioeconomic status of underprivileged communities (Karkouti, 2016a; Price & Wohlford, 2005; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Nevertheless, this social mobility has been hampered for minority students who have been historically disadvantaged in postsecondary education (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009). During Civil War, Black students were virtually excluded from higher education and were not allowed to enroll in colleges and universities from 1636 until the 1830s due to government restrictions that furthered institutional racism (Anderson, 2002). Minority students were also denied access to schools because they were viewed as slaves and intellectually inferior from their White peers.

During the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, intellectual and political figures in America and Europe regarded themselves as the creators of human civilization who possess the highest levels of intelligence (Anderson, 2002). More specifically, modern civilized nations were considered as the product of White intellectual superiority who intensified discrimination against African Americans on the grounds of innate intellectual inferiority (Adams, 1995). The same argument also applied against Hispanics in the 1840s and Chinese in the 1850s (McClain, 1994). In conclusion, racism was deeply rooted in the formation of the U.S. history, affecting all types of organizations, including institutions of higher learning.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Southern state governments resisted the education of people of color by enacting laws and statutes that prevented them from attending universities and restricted them to inferior elementary schooling. Similarly, Northern states embraced institutionalized racism and achieved similar results to that of their Southern counterparts regardless of law and legislation differences (Anderson, 2002).

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