



## Why Racial Diversity Must be a Priority

by Dr. Charles Taylor

*The purpose of this article is to help campus leaders understand why promoting racial diversity is essential to their institution's long-term survival.*

### Campuses ignore the Changing Demographics at their own Peril

The ALANA (African, Latino, Asian and Native American) population is on the rise, while the white population is on the decline. The major reason for this decline is the low-white birth rate and the aging white population. As you can see from Table 1, it takes at least two children per female for an ethnic group to replace itself. The white population is now well below its replacement level. That means there are more deaths than births. Unless there is massive cloning of the white population, people of color will be the new majority in the U.S., in less than 40 years from now.

**Table 1**

**Fertility Rates**

➤ White	1.8 children/female*
➤ Black	2.1 children/female
➤ Hispanic	2.5 children/female

\*below the replacement rate

Source: Bachu, A. & O'Connell (2001, Oct.) US Census Bureau Current Population Reports – Fertility of American Women: June 2000 [Online] Available: [www.census.gov/prod/2001pubs/p20-543rv.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/2001pubs/p20-543rv.pdf)

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As a result there is no way that most colleges can continue recruiting the way that they have always done and expect to survive in the long run. Colleges and universities must start preparing for these changing demographics. That's why a starting point must be to at least acknowledge that this population shift is a significant issue that requires our full attention. Table 2 shows in stark terms the effect of this change over the past 30 years. This trend is expected to continue throughout the 21st century and beyond.



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**Table 2.** *Percentage distribution of students enrolled in degree-granting institutions, by race/ethnicity: Selected years, fall 1976 through fall 2009. Does not include international students.*

Race/Ethnicity	1980	1990	2000	2004	2008	2009
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
White	81.4	77.6	68.3	66.1	63.3	62.3
Black	9.2	9.0	11.3	12.5	13.5	14.3
Hispanic	3.9	5.7	9.5	10.5	11.9	12.5
Asian/Pacific Islander	2.4	4.1	6.4	6.4	6.8	6.5
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.7	0.7	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2011). Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=98>

Changing demographics and shifts in attendance patterns pose new challenges for college campuses in the United States. Anderson (2003) indicates that between 1976 and 1999 the number of minorities enrolled in higher educational institutions increased by 137 percent. Furthermore, the number of students of color rose by 2.3 million which is twice as much as the increase in the number of white students.

If colleges ignore these numbers then they put their future at risk. If they fail to respond aggressively to the ALANA student market, they not only limit their future enrollment, they in effect reduce it. I don't mean to just put a dollar figure on this, but the lack of a critical mass of ALANA students is costing institutions of higher education millions of dollars annually. These are revenues that could be used for new programs, higher salaries and increased educational opportunities. Clearly there is an economic case for racial diversity.

When you look past the dollars, if colleges do nothing, they forfeit their credibility and influence in minority communities and parents of color will send their kids elsewhere to be educated. Perhaps of equal concern, if colleges don't embrace diversity as a top priority, is that they'll disadvantage their white students by not preparing them for the real world they will live and work in.

## Plan for Resistance

Everyone won't believe that diversity is in his or her best interest. Among the commonly cited reasons for opposing diversity include hiring quotas, reverse discrimination, divisiveness due to emphasis on differences; lowering of standards and so on. While the list of opposing diversity runs the gamut from the seemingly reasonable to the ridiculous, all



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these explanations share a common trait. Each is a fearful response to change. When people perceive diversity as a threat, they often react with denial, dread, hostility and cynicism.

We must recognize that diversity does not appeal to everyone at the same time, in the same way. But unless we are prepared to give up entirely on diversity we must address this backlash and be prepared to challenge the negative attitudes and myths. Seeing resistance as failure has stalled many diversity efforts that were on the right track. Leadership must be committed to diversity strategies because they are necessary for institutional survival; and must then work with employees to change—not work to keep them satisfied with an inequitable system.

Perhaps one way to do that is to agree on a set of themes as we go forward. I like these that were developed by Marilyn Loden in her book, *Implementing Diversity*.

- We want to create an environment where everyone is respected and included.
- We want to leverage our diversity for competitive advantage.
- Accomplishing our diversity goals will require changing some assumptions, practices and beliefs as an organization.
- These changes will not happen quickly or be done recklessly but they will happen steadily and be both visible and measurable.
- As our culture evolves, we will need to work together to make our diversity work for all of us.

(Loden, 1995)

If colleges can agree on such themes then they will have taken an important step on the road to organizational change; but it's just that- a step. To create a "culture of inclusive excellence," educational leaders must consider how their campus environments can adapt to meet the needs of today's highly diverse entering students, rather than beginning with the assumption that it's only diverse students & staff who must change and are expected to assimilate into the existing environment.

## Racial Diversity Benefits Everyone

Campus leaders have to do a better job of convincing people that diversity benefits everyone. As educators we've got to help our students and staff not only prepare for but embrace that change. We can no longer run away or move away from each other. So no



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matter where you're at on the political spectrum, we've got to find a way to come to grips with diversity.

Ultimately diversity and inclusion are about social justice and challenging the status quo. It speaks to our politics as well as our core values. Our changing demographics ensure that as a nation we'll never be the same again. Hurtado (2006) lists numerous ways in which diversity benefits college campuses. Studies have linked campus diversity to more novel ways of thinking, as students are forced to navigate through unfamiliar territory. Furthermore, Hurtado contends that colleges not only produce educated students, but also citizens. In order to promote democratic values and support for diversity among students, there is a need to promote such values on campus.

## Conclusion

In order to truly understand the virtues of diversity, we need to evaluate the goals of the educational system in a much broader fashion. While education has been linked to improved socioeconomic status, at the end of the day it has a greater purpose, of making individuals into better human beings, who can co-exist and establish a more tolerant, and inclusive society.

The United States is, and as research has shown, will continue to be a multicultural society. If any one segment of that society lags behind another just because of membership in a demographic group, then there is a need for structural changes that would ensure equal access for everyone. A diverse college campus, and furthermore an inclusive one, is the first step in teaching our future leaders how to create a more inclusive society.

The famous sociologist Emile Durkheim, posited very famously in his work in 1911 titled 'Education, it's nature and role' that it is through education that the individual being is turned into a social being. Without diverse campuses, how can we prepare social beings that would be able to function effectively in a diverse society?

If we are to create diverse and inclusive campuses we must plant the seeds now so that someday diversity and inclusion are just taken for granted. Our campuses must play a key role in making that day possible.

## References

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