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Can Higher Education Transition to Serve Diversity, Equity, Justice, and Inclusion Missions Without Sacrificing Fiscal Standing?

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ABSTRACT

There is social and collaborative value in a diverse student body, faculty, and staff. Despite this, universities are slow to establish evidence-based fiscal initiatives to increase representation and retention. We review inequitable financial practices in American higher education, including in endowments, tuition and annual giving, athletics, and research and innovation. We discuss fiscal initiatives that promote diversity, equity, justice, and inclusion (DEJI) while maintaining or increasing return on investment. Historical inequities are discussed in the context of institutional standards and methods of restructuring for DEJI success. A case-study of two Very High Research Activity Institutions in Alabama is used to demonstrate areas of improvement. Restructuring for an equitable, fiscally responsible, sustainable university system is feasible but requires changes to current standards.

Keywords: diversity, equity, inclusion; recruitment and retention; university administration; university economics; university restructuring

The present article highlights the structural inequities built into university microeconomies in the United States and considers how these institutions can revitalize diversity, equity, justice, and inclusion (DEJI) missions by restructuring these funds. Diversity is operationally defined in the present article as representation

of individuals that have been historically and/or are currently excluded in academia because of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, ability, or other identities. The positive economic impacts of increased diversity have been widely studied, and in higher education, diversity has been shown to have direct positive impacts on students, faculty, and staff. Universities rely on endowments, tuition and annual giving, athletics, and research innovations to meet their financial needs, but may not consider how the inclusion of individuals from historically/currently underrepresented identities can directly and indirectly impact university fiscal standing. This article reviews current inequities in these four subcategories of higher education funding and demonstrates how sources of university revenue can be restructured to promote diversity, generally benefit institutions, and maintain or increase return on investment and fiscal standing.

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS LITERATURE AND DISCUSSION OF RELATIONSHIPS, GAPS AND DISAGREEMENTS

DEJI is good for economies: increasing the ethnic diversity of a metropolitan area, for example, tends to increase the wages and home values of its residents. In the United States, increasing the share of foreign-born residents by 25% maps to a 14.5% mean increase in the wages of U.S-born residents (Ottaviano & Peri, 2006); a similar relationship has been found in Europe (Bellini et al., 2013). Conversely, exclusion of diversity can stifle economic growth. Peterson and Mann (2020) estimated that between 2000-2020, racism against Black Americans – as realized through prejudicial lending, wage gaps, and segregated education – cost the U.S. economy $16 trillion in lost earnings and unrealized business revenue. They estimate that if these gaps were closed, $5 trillion would be added to the U.S. gross domestic product (GDP) in only five years (Peterson & Mann, 2020). Similarly, there is a dearth of representation in patents attributed to women and people of color. Improved access to patents across gender and racial lines is estimated to increase GDP per capita by up to 4.4% (Cook & Yang, 2017). By addressing inequity in higher education, colleges and universities can reduce persistent educational disparities, improve their own fiscal standing, and contribute positively to the American economy.

Students at more diverse schools tend to develop sharper critical thinking skills, are more at ease in multicultural milieus, and are better prepared to participate in modern, global economies (Adams & Welsch, 1995). More specifically, diversity in higher education tends to leave students with more positive attitudes towards people who are not like them (Milem, 2003). Diversity also has a positive effect on individual futures. Daniel et al. (2001) analyzed data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth and found that racial diversity has a positive effect on future earnings of both historically/currently excluded (HE) and non-HE groups. In a similar study, Wolfe and Fletcher (2013) analyzed data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health and found that diversity had a significant positive effect on earnings. More concretely, increasing the diversity of an institution by one standard deviation is correlated to a 5% increase in expected earnings. This is corroborated by Orfield (2001) in which students from more diverse schools tend to go on to higher paying jobs. Conversely, a lack of diversity in higher education cultivates prejudice

(Massey, 2004). For example, White students from racially segregated schools tend to prefer and pursue same-race social networks, workplaces, and neighborhoods (Braddock & Gonzalez, 2010).

Diversity also benefits individual faculty, especially women and those from HE groups; increasing diversity reduces gendered and race-based divisions of labor, thereby increasing faculty equity (Carrigan et al., 2011; Casad et al., 2020). Faculty from HE groups also benefit from institutional diversity through more effective faculty mentoring and commonality with mentors (Campbell & Campbell, 2007). Thus, representation is especially valuable for those who make faculty diverse. It gives faculty from HE backgrounds a more equitable opportunity to be productive teachers and researchers, and of advancing in their careers at the same rate as their White male colleagues.

Diversity benefits institutions by helping them to provide higher quality instruction and mentoring services to their students and faculty. A meta-analysis by Stahl et al. (2010) found that by and large, diversity increases a group's ability to solve problems creatively. Given that much of the interworking of higher education is accomplished by collaboration, how teams function depends strongly on the diversity of the members (Cox & Blake, 2011; McLeod et al., 1996). Institutions with large employee bases also benefit from diversity initiatives directly by reducing turnover and absenteeism while introducing new viewpoints and increasing job satisfaction for HE coworkers (Cox & Blake, 1991; Seifert & Umbach, 2008). Despite these positive outcomes at institutions and universities, the implementation of diversity initiatives at Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) is slow-going in the United States.

Universities have several methods to balance their fiscal needs; however, DEJI-focused initiatives of funding agencies, changing donor demographics, and an era of racial reckoning mean that universities serve to financially benefit from implementing and improving diversity, equity, justice, and inclusion (DEJI) initiatives to an extent not currently realized. These initiatives could benefit the institution's fiscal standing, create inclusive campus cultures, and improve current recruitment and retention efforts. For example, in the United States, public funding of universities is at its lowest since 1994 and universities are compensating for that decrease with tuition hikes (Whitford, 2020). This tactic disproportionately affects students from HE backgrounds thereby decreasing the impacts of the DEJI efforts who are being made at these institutions, reducing cost-eligible student populations, and decreasing equitability on campus. As an appeal to universities, we offer a discussion of the fiscal inequities at universities and suggest avenues to balance financial needs while improving DEJI outcomes. We argue that recent social trends may allow institutions to use DEJI efforts as a focal point to reevaluate university finances and meet operational budget requirements despite expected decreases in public funding (Whitford, 2020).

In this article, we discuss four ways universities in the United States receive income as outlined by Bienen (2012). These include: 1) endowments, 2) tuition and annual giving programs, 3) athletics, and 4) research and subsequent innovation sales. We elaborate on current inequities and evidence-backed alternative fiscal practices for each income stream. We conclude with case studies of two Very High Research

Activity PWIs, Auburn University (AU) and University of Alabama (UA) between 2019-2020. In the case study, we discuss challenges to diversity, equity, justice, and inclusion at these universities as a result of current fiscal prioritization and consider future fiscal directions.

Endowments

There is significant stratification of endowments that occur across racial and socioeconomic lines. Nichols and Santos (2016) demonstrated that university endowments often serve to make high-income universities, and their affluent alumni, even wealthier. Median per student expenditures at universities with endowments over $500 million are more than 14-times those of universities with smaller endowments ($137,000 versus $9,600). Such disparities in per-student expenditures have been linked to inequalities in labor market outcomes and lifetime earnings of students (Bound & Turner, 2007). In principle, increasing the spending rate of endowments to just 5% could increase access to higher education by offsetting tuition costs for students from low-income or HE backgrounds (Nichols & Santos, 2016). The 5% standard has been encouraged since the mid-1990s (Frey, 2002). Since then, some universities that were analyzed by Nichols and Santos (2016) have set 5% as their minima while others provide a goal-range from ~3.5%-5%. With an increased endowment spending rate, returns on unrestricted funds can be directed toward DEJI-centered scholarships, campus-wide cultural competency, and mentorship programs (Waldeck, 2008).

Data from the National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO) shows that the top 100 universities by endowment size averaged 54% endowment growth between 2011-2021 with an average spending rate at just 4.6% (National Association of College and University Business Officers [NACUBO], 2022). Interestingly, during this time period, the average spending rate decreased by 0.3-0.8% (from 5-5.2%) at universities with ≥$101 million endowments. Contrastingly, spending rates increased by 0.4-0.6% (to 4.1-5%) at universities with ≤$100 million (National Association of College and University Business Officers [NACUBO], 2022. High endowment schools are limiting available resources that could be used to recruit and retain students from HE backgrounds, leaving lower-endowment schools to pick up the slack at a greater proportional cost. Conti-Brown (2011) describes financial decisions which aim to preserve endowment size as a choice made to build prestige and promote competition between peer universities rather than support students from low-income and HE backgrounds. The universities that are reducing their endowment spending rate could prioritize DEJI programming by setting 5% as their minimum standard spending rate. The additional funds generated could be used to reduce tuition costs, promote a culture of inclusion on campus, and fund equity-centered programming.

Universities may refrain from endowment spending due to fears of lost status associated with slower endowment growth. However, data since 2013 demonstrate that endowment growth rate is reduced by only one year of growth after 10 years when spending is set at 4% compared to 5% rate. Nichols and Santos (2016) estimated the number of students who could be supported by financial aid at top endowment

universities if they increased their spending rates to 5%. We reviewed endowment growth at these universities for 2019-2020 using the same list originally generated by Nichols and Santos (2016). They analyzed 67 universities with >$500 million endowments, 32 with ≥5% and 35 with 2.48-4.97% spending rates, respectively. Of the 32 universities with a >5% spending rate in 2013, 24 readily reported this data in their annual 2020 fiscal reports. Within that subset, 11 had spending rates of 4-5% in 2020 and one had a <4% rate. The remaining 12 universities still report a spending rate >5%. The average percent growth (±standard deviation) in endowment for the universities with ≥5% spending rate was 76±30% while 4-5% was 85±49% (data collected from university websites). Only Yeshiva University (≥5%) reported a decrease in endowment size. University spending models typically anticipate endowment growth at ~7-8% per year (American Council on Education, 2021). This demonstrates that it is fiscally possible for universities to utilize an endowment spending rate of ≥5% while continuing to grow their endowments. Universities that commit to a >5% endowment spending rate can make funds available to recruit and retain students from historically excluded groups and demonstrate a tangible commitment to DEJI.

Frey (2002) discussed higher endowment spending rates, social and fiscal responsibility, and factors that may contribute to underspent endowments. Frey argued that endowment spending rate at or above real return (7+%) may be a more socially responsible course of action. Matching endowment spending and growth rates can promote equity by funding DEJI initiatives. In contrast, a focus on endowment growth primarily benefits administrators (Frey, 2002). For example, university presidential pay and institutional prestige are both correlated to total endowment size. At the time of Frey's analysis, a 5% spending rate was considered standard; this rate was incidentally set in 1969 by the Ford Foundation. Unfortunately, since 2002, endowment spending rates have trended down at the wealthiest universities, furthering the inequities addressed by Frey (2002). To address the historical inequalities of endowments, universities at any endowment level could set a spending minimum of 5% and use generated funds to support HE and low-income students. The universities with the largest endowments could aim to match spending and growth rates. For example, in 2013 if Harvard University had a spending rate of just 5%, the institution could have supported more than 350 additional students with financial aid (Nichols & Santos, 2016). If spending rates matched growth rates, an institution could provide even more funding to create an inclusive and diverse campus. The funds generated from the increased spending rate can be used to support evidence based DEJI best practices that meet the institutional needs. Examples of programming include focused recruitment and retention initiatives, scholarships, mentorship programs, and cultural-competency and support centers. Financial restructuring to endowments can make funds available to improve student outcomes and DEJI missions.

Tuition and Annual Giving Programs

Tuition and annual giving are inextricably combined. Tuition increases reduce enrollment, retention, and diversity (Allen & Wolniak, 2019; Hemelt & Marcotte,

2011). It is estimated that for every $100 increase in tuition cost, enrollment decreases by >0.23% and this effect strengthens at Very High Research Activity institutions (Hemelt & Marcotte, 2011). Tuition increases are also positively correlated with homogeneity on campuses and decrease the above-described positive student outcomes from diverse peer cohorts (Allen & Wolniak, 2019). Universities undermine their own efforts towards stated DEJI goals each time they raise tuition. However, despite the cited generalized and modelled metrics, studies have not parsed out how university demographics change immediately following tuition increases.

Minority-serving institutions (MSIs), which intentionally keep tuition down and avoid pricing their students out of the market, may serve as a model for reducing or maintaining tuition costs (Coupet & Barnum, 2010; Cunningham et al., 2014). Almost half of MSI-enrolled students rely on a combination of Pell grants and student loans; and, because of minimal resources, these institutions typically cannot offer significant institutional aid to their students. These institutions are valuable producers of bachelor's degree holders of color and use minimal funding to support and graduate students, a practice called graduation efficiency (John & Stage, 2014). Maintaining low tuition has allowed MSIs to continue providing higher education access to HE groups when it is not readily available at PWIs (see Boland et al., 2017 for examples of access). As PWIs receive more funding per student, utilizing MSIs as model institutions could help to optimize graduation efficiency of all students, especially those from HE backgrounds.

Although tuition hikes are often described as unavoidable, they limit access and may serve to reduce the long-term fiscal standing of a university. Cheslock and Gianneschi (2008) describe diminishing returns from tuition hikes as they reach a ceiling in student demand. The COVID-19 pandemic showed universities what this might look like. Fall undergraduate enrollment dropped nearly 8% between 2019-2021 (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center [NSCRC], 2021). Many universities offered tuition discounts for the 2020-2021 academic year with hybrid learning continuing into 2021-2022. Changes to university tuition are expected to continue long-term (McCreary, 2021). Many universities faced severe financial shortfalls during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. The financial decisions that universities made prior to the pandemic, specifically reliance on tuition, likely contributed to these shortfalls. Tuition is an inherently enrollment-dependent revenue stream and therefore risky (Startz, 2021). However, the financial decisions and changes to strategic planning that occurred during the pandemic improved university profits in the following year. Many universities reported a higher-than-normal endowment growth rate in 2021 ($\bar{x}$=35%) as compared to the standard rate of 7-8% (National Association of College and University Business Officers [NACUBO], 2022). The change in university fiscal policies in reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in considerable growth that requires further investigation to determine how similar restructuring can be made sustainable and improve equity in higher education.

Students with merit-based and mixed loan-grant packages are more likely to graduate and monetarily give back to their alma mater in the first eight years following graduation than students who fund their education entirely with loans. This holds true even if grants/scholarships only support part of their educational cost and the remainder is funded through loans (Marr et al., 2005; Olbrecht et al., 2016). In

contrast to tuition hikes, donation initiatives before and after graduation offer an avenue through which universities can increase funds without negatively impacting DEJI outcomes. Important predictors of annual giving are post-graduation salaries and student experience (Gasman, 2010; Weerts & Ronca, 2009). Additionally, Communities of Color are more likely to give charitably than White communities; Black households give an average of 25% more than white families despite wage-gaps (Kellogg Foundation, 2012). A redesign of annual giving programming can improve the financial outcomes for these respective institutions through increased donations.

Although research has categorized likely and unlikely donors, the majority of these data do not account for alumni demographics aside from gender (see Lara & Johnson, 2014; McDearmon & Shirley, 2009 for examples). However, for both PWI and MSI institutions, changing the approach to alumni giving initiatives could provide an avenue to long-term fiscal stability and limit the need for additional tuition increases. Strategies for annual giving programs should include improving student experience for those from HE backgrounds, communication targeted toward future alumni, establishing bonds between faculty and students/alumni, and reaching out to older female alumni (Sun et al., 2007). Currently, most PWIs cannot offer an inclusive campus and campus experiences for non-White students are extremely poor (Karkouti, 2016). The student experience can be improved at these institutions by creating cultural competency and mentorship programs. Active DEJI efforts require cultural centers as well as decentralized initiatives across campus to improve overall student experience (Jones et al., 2002). With additional DEJI focus, universities can create a fiscal balance between alumni donations and tuition costs.

Under current common practice, tuition and annual giving tactics are suboptimal for the long-term fiscal health of universities and the inclusion of students from HE groups. Tuition increases are a key source of inequity in higher education, with students from historically excluded backgrounds being squeezed out of the market by the additional costs. As a more equitable alternative, increasing evidence-backed efforts toward annual giving programs can create a culture of inclusion on campus. By creating a culture of inclusion and reducing tuition costs, universities increase chances of receiving alumni donations. By following evidence-based methods for affordable tuition and successful donation programming, universities can make sound budgetary decisions with a focus on inclusion. This will have long-term impacts on student retention and graduation success.

Athletics

Athletics, especially football and basketball, can provide significant sources of income for higher education institutions in the United States, particularly those institutions with top performing sports teams. For institutions with football teams that are in the Football Bowl Subdivision of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division-I, winning games increases revenue through athletic donations, enhanced academic reputation, increased number of applicants, reduced acceptance rates, and raised average incoming SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) scores (Anderson, 2017). Successful sports teams have a significant effect on alumni donations although

distinctions between athletic donations and academic donations are rarely accounted for (Baade & Sundberg, 1996; Baumer & Zimbalist, 2019). The phenomenon of universities seeing an increase in undergraduate applications correlated with prominent athletes and athletic programs is so common it has been dubbed the "Flutie Effect," named after a star quarterback at Boston College (McEvoy, 2006). Not only do applicant numbers increase, but sports success increases applications from students with higher SAT scores and from out-of-state (Pope & Pope, 2009). In contrast to these supportive correlations, Baumer & Zimbalist (2019) argue that limited datasets and effect sizes which positively correlate university success with their sports programs are insufficient and inconclusive at best. Successful sports programs may have the potential to provide revenue and positively affect ranking and may serve as a recruitment mechanism for students from historically excluded backgrounds, but additional data are needed to confirm these correlations.

Improved reputation, both academically and athletically, of institutions with successful athletic programs can benefit students from HE groups. Black students are more likely to be influenced in their selection of universities with successful sports programs than other students (Pope & Pope, 2009). Similarly, Black students at more selective institutions are several times more likely to earn advanced degrees (Bok et al., 1998). More selective institutions also have higher student expenditure rates (e.g., financial aid packages) which support student retention (Bound et al., 2010; Bound & Turner, 2007). Likewise, all students benefit from interacting with high-achieving peers (Sacerdote, 2001; Zimmerman, 2003; Stinebrickner & Stinebrickner, 2006). As a result, athletic programs can serve as a mechanism to recruit HE students and benefit the institutional budget – however, athletic programs do not necessarily create direct revenue and can present other significant equity challenges (Baumer & Zimbalist, 2019; NCAA, 2021a).

If not accompanied by appropriate funding of support and retention measures for students/athletes from HE backgrounds, using athletics as a recruitment mechanism can become exploitative and oppose DEJI goals. Retention of students from HE backgrounds is influenced by institutional characteristics such as racial and ethnic composition, selectivity, and geography – and selective institutions may present additional barriers to success (Lundy-Wagner et al., 2013). For example, Simiyu (2012) and Komanduri and Roebuck (2015), describe how stereotypes, both internalized and from social pressure, play significant roles in HE student-athlete success, especially at PWIs. Therefore, as an institution improves its academic and athletic reputation, it must consider how to best serve athletes as both students and employees of the university - and especially those from HE backgrounds (Horton, 2015). Campus or athletic program climate impacts student success through feelings of disrespect, perception of discrimination, and lack of diversity in leadership (Rankin et al., 2016). Students who self-identify as people of color, women, and/or LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual/Ally, and other identities) and those at smaller (NCAA Division II and III) universities were negatively impacted, both academically and athletically, by poor inclusivity climate (Rankin et al., 2016). Programs such as cultural centers on campus, mentorship programs between faculty and student-athletes, specific academic advising to monitor and improve academic success, and regular DEJI

training for coaches and staff can improve climate and subsequently student-athlete retention (Bimper, 2017; Horton, 2015; Rankin et al., 2016).

Athletics can generate significant income for universities, but this can come at the cost of exploiting students from HE backgrounds without due retention support. Demographic reports by the NCAA Southeastern Conference in 2020 showed that 56% of affiliated football players were Black. This is much greater than the general population at these universities (e.g., 5% at Auburn University, 2021). Disproportional recruitment reinforces inaccurate stereotypes of Black students having physical skills as opposed to intellectual merit (Komanduri & Roebuck, 2015; Simiyu, 2012). Of those HE individuals who are recruited and retained through graduation as athletes, few find careers in sports beyond that of high school coaching and have limited options outside of sports (Komanduri & Roebuck, 2015). One study investigated trends over a ten-year period at one NCAA Division 1 institution and found that the majority of graduates came from a single degree program which had one of the lowest minimum grade point average requirements on campus (Fountain & Finley, 2011). This is corroborated by Kulics et al. (2015) which identified social pressures toward specific degree paths for student-athletes. An article by Gilbert (2016) looked at long-term negative impacts such as exploitation through student labor, medical repercussions, and limited educational advancement and compared them to the profits made for universities from college athletics. These practices continue a method of exploitation of HE student-athletes even in light of changing compensation rules.

In the 2021 case *NCAA v. Alston*, the Supreme Court decided that limitations on educational compensation cannot be enforced by the NCAA and shortly afterward the NCAA removed additional restrictions that had barred student-athletes from remuneration through sponsorships, endorsements, and appearances (Dixon, 2021; Grasko, 2021). This has created a mechanism of compensation that universities can use to create a more equitable system for student-athletes from HE groups. With the NCAA changes, the financial benefits that are potentially reaped from successful athletic programs through donations and status can now be shared with the student-athletes who create the success. This could be achieved through the *College Athletes Bill of Rights*, which calls for medical compensation, removing barriers to transferring universities, creating an external review board, and transparency from the university on total income, athlete expectations, and time-spent per week in athletic-related activities. The *College Athletes Bill of Rights* has been introduced in the U.S. senate but not yet approved as of the writing of this article. Until this, or similar legislation, is passed universities can equitably respond to the *NCAA vs. Alston* ruling by integrating these rules at the institutional level. These policies can more equitably support student-athletes and reduce exploitative practices.

Research and Innovation

Research and innovation are the final mechanism of income emphasized in Bienen (2012). This includes federal and non-governmental funding, patents, and selling of intellectual property. DEJI initiatives are integral to research and innovation because funding sources, especially federal agencies, are emphasizing broadening

participation programming as a stipulation of awards. Universities stand to increase their success in grant funding and to improve the number and quality of patents by creating inclusive campus environments.

Institutions that actively provide research opportunities to undergraduates from HE groups increase the likelihood of recruitment and retention into STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) graduate programs. Institutions that employ STEM Intervention Programs (SIPs) aimed at recruiting undergraduate minority students can obtain funding through external sources such as corporate, state, and federal grant funding (Rincon & George-Jackson, 2014). These initiatives can create on-campus cultural change through bridge programs, residential learning communities, mentorship intervention, or a combination of these. A university must commit to these as programs rather than treating them as add-ons by committing *hard* money to the initiatives and then seeking secondary support funds through *soft* money such as federal grants or corporate campaigns (as opposed to relying entirely on grant acquisitions). Approximately one-third of SIPs receive funding from industry and over half are supported by federal grants (Rincon & George-Jackson 2014). Universities that commit to SIPs and support them internally have an opportunity to build on them financially and continue to improve DEJI programming.

Institutional diversity also increases the likelihood of receiving federal research funding (Horta et al. 2008). Funding agencies such as the National Science Foundation (NSF), United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), and National Institutes of Health (NIH) have enacted strong financial incentives to diversify the science workforce and more diverse institutions are better positioned to acquire those funds. In addition to national efforts to enhance diversity in STEM, there are opportunities for inter-institutional partnerships which enhance diversity and can provide additional sources of revenue to universities through research funding. Partnerships between HBCUs and PWIs with the goal of increasing persistence of students from HE groups have been successful (Whittaker & Montgomery, 2012). An ongoing national project between MSIs and PWIs in engineering since 2013 has resulted in multiple successful federal grants demonstrating the value of creating such collaborative programs (Connor et al., 2021). Consortiums like this can also be self-sustaining and grow to incorporate more institutions thereby building sources of research and additional start-up funding (Cullers et al., 2017). Universities stand to create new innovation outcomes and generate funding through federal grants by creating multi-university consortiums that benefit all involved.

In addition to partnerships and grant funding, including individuals from historically excluded groups as student-researchers may have long-term economic benefits. Cook (2020) describes the innovation gap as a lack of women and people of color as executives, patent-holders, and inventors and the strain this puts on the U.S. economy. This gap is correlated to degree-holder discrepancies in higher education, with science and engineering doctorates in 2014 hovering at just ~40% and ~3.5% for women and Black graduates, respectively (Cook, 2020). Based on her experiences at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Selvidge (2014) suggests that sexism, racism, and the financial resources required to avoid sexual harassment (e.g., changing housing situations) decrease graduation retention of women and students of color. *Hard* funding of appropriate trainings, administrative interventions, and

cultural and mentorship support programs can change campus culture and help reduce the innovation gap. As a secondary benefit, improving inclusion in STEM fields should improve student experience and subsequently increase alumni donations. This demonstrates that DEJI initiatives can serve to increase funding opportunities while also supporting students from HE backgrounds.

CASE STUDY OF TWO ALABAMA UNIVERSITIES

In this section, we illustrate what these kinds of changes might look like in two specific, real-world cases, Auburn University (AU) and the University of Alabama (UA). Data presented throughout this section were gathered from the respective university websites unless otherwise cited. These universities were selected because of author familiarity and their location in the American southeast, where the history of slavery has had the most lasting and negative impacts and may illuminate subtle but important phenomena. The case studies illustrate how similarly situated institutions can restructure current fiscal practices in favor of active recruitment of students from HE backgrounds and university-wide programming to retain students once enrolled. Although this may seem costly at first, the evidence above demonstrates that this can be a successful model. We have demonstrated how increasing endowment spending rates to provide financial aid does not necessarily reduce funds, tuition decreases can be supplemented by improved annual giving outcomes, athletics programs can be restructured to compensate student-athletes while maintaining the status of the institution, and collaborative multi-institutional research programs between MSIs and PWIs can increase federal grant funding. We emphasize ways that AU and UA can utilize these principles to create sustainable financial outcomes while increasing diversity on campus, in hopes that other institutions seek similar opportunities.

While both universities have already initiated projects like those suggested above, such as *hard* money funded DEJI initiatives and cultural centers, the literature supports additional programming for improved campus climate and graduate retention of students from HE backgrounds (Rincon & George-Jackson, 2016). The University of Alabama currently maintains a LGBTQIA+ safety center and an intercultural diversity center; Auburn University supports a cross-cultural center. However, neither university promotes decentralized cultural centers outside of these programs. In 2016, AU conducted a campus climate survey; this report showed that the climate was perceived as less effective at fostering diversity as compared to a survey taken in 2003. A replication of this survey is currently on-going in 2022. University of Alabama has not reported previous climate surveys but is set to complete one in 2022. Evaluating the university climate on an ongoing basis (i.e., annually) and providing decentralized cultural centers for specific units across these large institutions would demonstrate an improved commitment to DEJI.

Similarly, while both universities have existing mentorship programs aimed at supporting HE students, both also provide opportunity for improvement. There are nine mentorship programs at UA, but only one pairs university employees with students while the others pair student mentors and student mentees; AU has three peer-to-peer mentorship programs, and a newly-formed program pairs industry

professionals with students. Although peer mentoring can be extremely effective in providing students with a support system, student-faculty relationships especially with faculty with similar identities, may be more effective in improving campus climate and retention (Blooms & Davis, 2017). Additionally, paired mentorship programs are typically college specific and are not present in every college. This may disproportionately impact students from HE backgrounds depending on their major. Professional and industry focused degree programs (e.g., business and engineering) contain the majority of mentorship programs. Students in STEM fields, except for engineering, are less likely to have access to peer-to-peer or faculty-student mentorship programs.

Auburn University has nine college-level endowed scholarship opportunities with a focus on broadening participation, however at the time of writing they were all specific to professional degrees (e.g., nursing, pharmacy). There is not much research comparing scholarship opportunities by degree sought - however, much of the available literature on this topic focuses on professional degree paths (e.g., medicine and its subfields). Considering that mentorship and scholarship opportunities at AU are focused on professional degrees, recruitment and retention of students into basic STEM fields may be challenging. University of Alabama has predominately merit-based scholarships, which are typically awarded to privileged students (Heller, 2003). Additional funds generated by restructuring of endowments and annual giving programs could be utilized to create scholarship opportunities for students from HE backgrounds, regardless of major or high school grade point average. It is worth noting that in 2021, Auburn University committed additional funds towards needs-based and HE focused scholarships and financial aid, which may change their scholarship figures for the class of 2025 (Mealins, 2021).

Endowments

Endowments are limited in that they can be restricted by the donor to certain university projects. At AU and UA in 2020 the restricted expendable net increases were $75.9 mil and $19.4 mil, whereas the unrestricted net positions increased by only $6.7 mil and $13.3 mil, respectively. Restricted expendable net values include net appreciation of endowment funds; because these funds are restricted, they can only be used for their originally intended purpose. However, Waldeck (2008) explains that universities actually have significant say in how these funds are appropriated as part of discussions with potential donors. These additional unrestricted funds would be available to support decentralized cultural centers, faculty-student mentorship programs, and improve campus climate.

In addition to changing how endowments are allocated at the time of donation, increasing spending rates allows for additional funds for financial assistance. In 2020, scholarships and grants only constituted 2.8% and 3.4% of total operating funds at AU and UA, respectively (alumni associations provide separate funding for student scholarships that is not accounted for here). By increasing the endowment spending rate to 5%, currently 4% at AU and 4.5% at UA, these universities could increase available funds to improve graduation retention through need-based and diversity focused scholarship aid. At their current endowment sizes and respective 4-year

Alabama-resident tuition costs, AU and UA could fully support the tuition of 440 and 245 students, respectively, by setting a 5% spending rate. This aid would likely increase the number of Alabama residents attending the institutions.

Tuition and Annual Giving

Jaquette et al. (2016) and Jaquette and Curs (2015) discuss how universities in states with low university appropriations are more likely to seek out non-resident (high paying) students. This disproportionately squeezes out in-state students, especially those from low-income or historically excluded backgrounds. The Fall 2021 non-resident enrollment was 46.2%, and 42.1% for Auburn University (AU) and University of Alabama (UA), respectively. This means that nearly half of the students enrolled for the class of 2025 at these Alabama state universities are not from the state of Alabama. Disproportionate recruiting of non-resident students is undoubtedly tied to Alabama's per student education appropriations per FTE (full-time equivalent) only increasing by 6.8% since 1980 (HECA inflation adjusted; State Higher Education Finance, 2021). In the same time period, student enrollment has more than doubled at both institutions. Disproportionate recruitment has likely contributed to the university demographics (81% and 78% White at UA and AU, respectively) not being reflective of the state's population (69% White; Census QuickFacts, 2019). This leaves Alabama's high school graduates from low-income and historically excluded backgrounds seeking alternative options.

In the 2020 fiscal year, 40% of Auburn University and 47% of University of Alabama's revenue was dependent on tuition and fees. Since 2011, the cost of attendance has increased 35.66% at University of Alabama and 43.02% at Auburn University. Both universities publish high numbers of students who receive grant or scholarship aid (53.11% and 57.89% at AU and UA, respectively). However, between 2012-2020, the percentage of Pell recipients – those who display exceptional financial need as defined by the United States Department of Education – averaged 15.25% at AU and 18.9% at UA (College Tuition Compare, 2021). In comparison, 40.3% of undergraduate students were Pell-eligible across Alabama during those years (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2020a). This indicates that although scholarship and grant aid are offered, there is a socioeconomic barrier at these institutions. These barriers could be reduced by increasing the amount of need-based scholarship aid through restructured finances.

Not only are scholarships and grants at these institutions not well-targeted to students in financial need, the average amount of aid received has decreased at both universities since 2011 even without accounting for inflation (College Tuition Compare, 2021). Increases in tuition without accompanying aid likely favor non-resident students to the disadvantage of resident students, especially those from HE groups. This was demonstrated during the near-doubling (43.02%) of tuition cost at AU between 2011-2021, which accompanied a 2% reduction in Black student enrollment (now just 5%). This reduction in Black enrollment occurred while overall percent enrollment increased by 19% (data analyzed from College Tuition Compare, 2021). In comparison, UA increased tuition by 8% less than AU during this period and was able to increase Latinx enrollment by 3% (now at 5%) while Black

enrollment remained steady at 11%. Before the pandemic (2018-2019), >32% of Alabama's K-12 students identified as Black and ~9% Latinx. Black, Latinx, American Indian (Indigenous), Asian, and White high school student graduation rates in the state are >87% (Alabama Department of Education; 2021; NCES, 2021b). Despite this, students from HE backgrounds from Alabama are not proportionately represented at the two focal universities. While both universities have diversity offices, the institutional fiscal choices are prioritizing tuition increases over a diverse student body.

Tuition increases without accompanying scholarship dollars can also decrease retention as student loans become barriers to graduation. According to the NCES (2021c), the Auburn University, 6-year graduation rate of HE students (Black, Indigenous, and Latinx) enrolled in the cohort of 2014 (end date: 2022) was 7.3% lower than White students. University of Alabama was 10% lower. In comparison, the two public 4-year HBCUs in the state have higher retention rates of students of color than White students (Alabama A&M University: 31.25% and Alabama State University: 7.25% higher). These HBCUs support >80% of their students with grants or scholarships and >70% are partially funded by Pell grants (College Tuition Compare, 2021). Students from HE backgrounds are being adequately supported both financially and with inclusive climate at these HBCUs and are graduating at comparable rates to their White peers. This discrepancy in graduation rates demonstrates a need for improved financial practices that support HE students at AU and UA.

Auburn University and University of Alabama have demonstrated need for improved financial practices to recruit, support, and retain HE students through tuition cost considerations. Current inequitable financial practices and significant tuition increases without accompanying financial aid serve to reduce retention as reflected in current graduation data. Changes in tuition structure are therefore a key strategy in improving retention and subsequent alumni giving.

Athletics

Demographic reports by the NCAA Southeastern Conference in 2020 showed that 56% of affiliated football players were Black (NCAA, 2021b). This is likely the case for AU and UA and illustrates the significantly greater percentage of Black students affiliated with athletics as compared to the general student body (5.3% and 11.2% at AU and UA, respectively). This suggests disproportionate recruitment of students of color, particularly Black students, for athletics rather than academics. Recruitment of students purely for athletics poses more risk to students of color as compared to their White peers. Students of color typically rely more heavily on supplemental funds from athletic scholarships. When this access is dependent on physical skills, injury or heavy course-loads can become barriers to graduation. Selecting course-loads that do not conflict with athletic schedules can lead to students pursuing low-placement rate degree programs which reduce first-year destination success (Fountain & Finley, 2011; Kulics et al., 2015). This recruitment method also contributes to inaccurate stereotypes of Black students having athletic ability rather than intellectual merit. Future programming could put equal weight on successful retention of non-athlete

students from HE backgrounds as well as supporting student-athletes academically to improve equity at AU and UA.

Depending on how universities respond, strain on HE student-athletes may be compounded by the new changes to NCAA compensation rules. These rules may put additional stress on student-athletes to perform in the classroom, in athletics, and in marketing. As an example of potential additive strain, student-athletes who receive need-based aid and choose to utilize their name, image, or likeness (NIL), risk losing this assistance if the additional income changes their needs-status. This strategy will disproportionately impact HE student-athletes who rely on multiple avenues of financial support and limit their ability to pursue external funding through sponsorships. Although additional income sponsorships may be a boon to student-athletes at first, it puts additional financial reliance on athletic success and physical condition. Both universities also state that they will offer marketing and entrepreneurship training to their student-athletes but this is in addition to their other responsibilities. The NCAA rules, if responded to appropriately, can offer a mechanism to adequately support student-athletes through scholarship and direct compensation without punitive removal of financial aid. To do so, universities may consider offering athletic scholarships that fund 4 years of education, regardless of changes to student-athlete status. Future analysis will be needed to determine the full impact of the changes to NCAA student-athlete rules on retention of students of color and their first-year destination success.

Research and Innovation

University of Alabama and Auburn University systems both rank in the top 200 U.S. universities for research and development funding (National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics [NCSES], 2021). Alabama is identified as an EPSCoR (Established Program to Stimulate Competitive Research) state by the National Science Foundation. The EPSCoR program funds K-12 STEM outreach to increase recruitment of students into STEM fields and stimulate research and development in the state (ALEPSCoR, 2021). Through EPSCoR, AU and UA can establish and fund outreach programs that improve K-12 learning outcomes and recruit students from HE backgrounds to their institutions.

As Very High Research Activity Institutions, meeting and exceeding broadening participation goals put forth by federal funding agencies is to the universities' advantage. Federal granting agencies have assigned significant resources to broadening participation; the United States Department of Agriculture recently committed $25 million towards equity in agriculture and in 2018 the National Science Foundation embedded efforts across all directorates and into the strategic plan (USDA, 2021; NSF, 2019). For these reasons, universities such as AU and UA should be highlighting broadening participation as a means to accrue more grant funding while supporting students from historically excluded backgrounds.

CONCLUSION

The four primary sources of revenue for universities—endowments and related investment funds, tuition and alumni giving, athletics, and research and innovation—require internal structural change to create equitable educational environments. We suggest that universities can create considerable long-term positive outcomes for their graduates and their financial performance by implementing strong, evidence-backed, diversity, equity, justice, and inclusion initiatives. These include i) restructuring and redistributing endowment funds to counteract tuition increases, ii) increasing in-state student recruitment, particularly of individuals from HE backgrounds, iii) developing university-wide and decentralized programming to improve belongingness of students from HE backgrounds, iv) designing research-based targeted donation requests to alumni, v) modifying athletic recruitment, compensation, and degree pressures, vi) exploring equity-forward ways of implementing the new NCAA policy changes', and vii) funding DEJI programs institutionally and through grants. This article serves as an appeal to universities to restructure their current fiscal practices to allow for improved recruitment and retention of students as well as provide a culture of inclusion for faculty and staff.

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THE RED AND BLUE EFFECT: PREDICTING NEW INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS BY 2016 U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION OUTCOMES

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ABSTRACT

For the first time in U.S. higher education history, new international student enrollment at four-year U.S. institutions declined for the second consecutive academic year in 2017-2018. Many studies have investigated why international students choose to pursue U.S. higher education. However, scant research has explored how U.S. politics affects the number of new international students studying in the U.S. We explore whether there was a "red effect" (Republican counties) or a "blue effect" (Democratic counties) experiencing declines in international student enrollment. Using institutional-level fixed effects approaches, new international student enrollment declined at many institutions in Republican-voting counties, while new international student enrollment remained steady or increased at institutions in Democratic-voting counties. Implications for research, practice, and international education are addressed.

Keywords: international students, enrollment, politics, 2016 US presidential election, Trump, Clinton

During the 2017-2018 academic year, United States (U.S.) institutions higher education experienced a unique, international student phenomenon for the first time. Since the mid-1970s, international student enrollment in U.S. institutions has maintained a steady and upward trajectory, as fewer than 200,000 international students were enrolled in U.S institutions in 1975 compared to over one million international students in 2019 (Israel & Batalova, 2021). However, after years of steady gains, new international student enrollment in U.S. institutions fell 3% in 2016, 7% in 2017, and 1% in 2018 and 2019 (Institute for International Education, 2020; Israel & Batalova, 2021).

Educational researchers, policy makers, and members of the U.S. press have hypothesized that these consecutive years of enrollment decline could be owed to more stringent Visa application policies for international students pursuing higher education in the U.S. or a strong U.S. dollar which has resulted in relatively higher U.S. tuition prices for international students (Cooper, 2018; Redden, 2018; Torbati, 2018). For instance, in 2016, a typical international student studying as an undergraduate in a U.S. institution has paid $23,500 per academic year in tuition and fees, over three times as much as the average U.S. citizen paid (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022).

However, several researchers have suggested that results from the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election—and a real or perceived anti-immigration sentiment in the United States—may be influencing where international students choose to study (Johnson, 2018; Pottie-Sherman, 2018), going as far as writing headlines that read, "Is the Trump Effect Scaring Away Prospective International Students?" (Patel, 2018, para. 1). Without specifically naming the person or people responsible for the decline in new international student enrollment, President of George Mason University Ángel Cabrera said, "While other countries work hard to attract international students, we are managing to send a message that talented foreigners are not welcome here, just when we most need them" (Anderson & Svrluga, 2018, para. 5). Inversely, Caroline Casagrande, the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Academic Programs in the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, argued, "It's quite frankly unwarranted

to say it's [the decline in new international student enrollment] completely the results of a political environment," (Anderson & Svrluga, 2018, para. 13).

Whether there exists a real or perceived anti-immigration sentiment in the United States is a topic for current and future political debate, especially as that sentiment relates to international higher education (Cooper, 2018; Redden, 2018). Instead, the study at hand seeks to quantify whether Cabrera or Casagrande's assertions are accurate. Since the 2000 Presidential Election in the U.S., the Republican party has been associated with the color red, and the Democratic party with the color blue. Research related to Cabrera's concerns has emerged (Johnson, 208; Pottie-Sherman, 2018), suggesting that anti-immigration sentiment from former President Trump may have influenced international student enrollment patterns and post-graduation decisions, possibly producing a "red effect," with international students in the United States potentially avoiding institutions in "red" or Republican-voting areas. In short, this study will answer a simple question related to decline in new international student enrollment in U.S. institutions of higher education: Is there a red or blue effect as it relates to international student enrollment in U.S. institutions of higher education?

Using a fixed effects approach at the county-level, this study uses panel data to answer two primary research questions: 1.) Did new international student enrollment (measured in fall first-time undergraduate international student enrollment) decline in Republican-voting counties after the 2016 U.S. President Election? and 2.) Did new international student enrollment increase in Democratic-voting counties after the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election? Answering these questions may inform the international education and political science research communities regarding the impact of a presidential election on international higher education, specifically in a United States context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

For decades, research as investigated why international students choose to pursue higher education in another country (Chen, 2008; Cubillo et al., 2006; Darby, 2015; Gatfield & Chen, 2006; Maringe & Carter, 2007; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Wilkins, Balakrishnan, & Huisman, 2012). However, relatively few studies of international student choice have addressed the political climate—real or perceived—of the institution's country as a deciding factor of international student choice.

Early work in the field suggested the strength of the economy in a student's home country may influence a student to pursue higher education outside of one's country; however, the primary factor was an excess demand for higher education in developing countries (Lee & Tan, 1984). McMahon (1992) supported these findings, arguing for a push and pull model of international student choice. Of push factors, McMahon (1992) reasoned a home country's economic strength, the level of involvement of the home country in the global economy, and the availability of higher education opportunities in one's home country were most often determinants of international student choice. Of pull factors, McMahon (1992) suggested international students were often drawn to countries with a larger economy than their home country, while international students also preferred studying in countries with economic and/or political ties to one's home country. However, McMahon's (1992) work posited a country's political ties to one's home country as a pull factor, meaning a positive relationship between countries will pull international students toward a certain country. McMahon's (1992) work did not suggest that political relationships between countries could be a push factor, deterring international students from choosing a specific country in which to pursue higher education.

Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) expanded upon McMahon's (1992) work to develop a "push and pull" model of international student choice (p. 82). Surveying prospective international students from Indonesia, Taiwan, and China, Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) discovered that "the level of knowledge a student has of the host country" (p. 84) was a strong pull factor influencing international students from all three countries. Other pull factors included "the importance of recommendations from friends and relatives" (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002, p. 85) and "the importance of cost issues" including "social cost" (p. 86). Specific to "social cost," Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) learned prospective international students considered levels of "crime and safety or racial discrimination" as pull factors, as well as the "presence of an established population of international students in the selected host country" (p. 86). However, nowhere in their findings did Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) uncover any political factors that could influence an international student's decision, partially because their study frames push and pull factors as factors pushing students *away* from their country and factors *pulling* students toward a country. Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) did not frame any push factors which may be *pushing* students *away* from a host country.

In a meta-analysis of international student choice research, Cubillo et al. (2006) posited an international student choice model which included five main strands of international student influence: "personal reasons," "institution

image," "programme evaluation," "city effect," and "country image effect" (p. 107). Regarding a host country's "image effect," Cubillo et al. (2006) urged that a country's "cultural distance," "social reputation," and "immigration procedures" all influence international student choice (p. 108). However, Cubillo et al. (2006) reasoned that "Country image effect (country-of-origin) refers to the picture, the reputation, [and] the stereotype that consumers attach to products or services of a specific country" (p. 109), but the researchers did not elaborate on this definition to include a discussion of a country's political climate. Furthermore, of a host country's "city effect" (p. 107), Cubillo et al. (2006) argued "The city represents the environment in which the service will be produced and consumed," while "...the students' perception about the destination city will influence the decision process as well as the country image" (p. 109). Again, the researchers did not elaborate on this definition to include a discussion of a country's political climate.

Other studies have explored international student choice of specific countries, including Canada (Chen, 2008), the United Kingdom (Maringe & Carter, 2008), and the United Arab Emirates (Wilkins et al., 2012), as well as specific U.S. institutions such as California State University at San Bernardino (Darby, 2015) have discovered findings like that of Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) and Cubillo et al. (2006). However, few studies of international education in the United States have directly addressed the U.S. political climate and whether national-level leadership specifically influences international student choice to study in the United States.

First, Lee et al.'s (2006) analysis of U.S. higher education in the aftermath of 9/11 suggested that the U.S. government's policies and practices related to national security may have unduly targeted international students, positioning these students as threats to United States. Yet, Lee et al.'s (2006) study was not an empirical study using quantitative or qualitative international student data, instead reflecting upon how U.S. higher education has considered international students both socially and economically valuable to the United States in general. However, Johnson's (2018) qualitative study of international students studying at the University of North Dakota unearthed substantial student concerns over Trump-era immigration policies. After interviewing 42 international students (20 undergraduates and 22 graduate students), Johnson (2018) learned that most international students felt uneasy and anxious about Trump's attitudes toward international students, with international students expressing serious concerns about whether they could freely travel back and forth from their home country while studying in the United States. Moreover, international student activists shared that Trump's anti-immigration rhetoric influenced their decision to withdraw from political protesting and related activities, as well as made students feel as if their professional career would be threatened if they stayed in the United States under a Trump presidency. In all, although students did many benefits from studying in the U.S., most international students felt as if their livelihood was being threatened by Trump's words and actions.

Similarly, Pottie-Sherman (2018) interviewed 18 recently graduated international students from an institution in Ohio, finding that international graduates felt considerable anxiety surrounding Trump's travel ban and their likelihood of facilitating immigration to the United States for family members. As a result, many international graduates were considering adjusting their plans for staying in and contributing to the United States, instead weighing options for living elsewhere.

As a result, putting a spin on Mazzarol and Soutar's (2002) "pull and pull" model of international student choice (p. 82), this study explores whether the U.S. political climate has been a push factor, meaning the climate has pushed away new international students, hinted at by emerging research (Johnson, 2018; Pottie-Sherman, 2018). As a result, to fill the gap in the research and address an important topic in international education in the United States, this study will explore whether the results of a divisive 2016 U.S. Presidential Election affected new international student enrollment in the years after the election.

METHODS

The following sections will detail how the researchers identified data sources, selected analytic methods, and addressed the limitations of the study. Data is available upon request from the authors.

Conceptualizing the Study and Appropriate Data Sources

This study sought to explore relationships between how U.S. counties voted in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election and subsequent international student enrollment in U.S. institutions of higher education in those counties. As a result, to analyze new international student enrollment as it relates to 2016 voting outcomes, the research team needed to engage with two different data sources.

First, the team collected 2016 U.S. Presidential Election results at the county level from the Congressional Quarterly Press Voting and Election Collection (CQ Press, 2019). Even though little education research has from other disciplines have used Congressional Quarterly data in quantitative studies focused on U.S. consumer investment tendencies (Jens, 2017) and telecommunications research (Martin & Yurukoglu, 2017). The research team used a binary coding strategy to code each county as Hillary R. Clinton (Clinton)-voting (0) or Donald J. Trump (Trump)-voting (1).

The research team collected longitudinal institution-level data (Fall 2013 to Fall 2017) from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), specifically IPEDS' Fall Enrollment Survey. This data included the number of fall first-time undergraduate international students, abbreviated in this study as "new international students." After downloading these two datasets from two different sources, the research team merged the county-level U.S. Presidential Election results with new international student enrollment data. This procedure produced a five-year panel dataset that included each institution's fall new international student enrollment and whether these institutions are located in Clinton-voting counties or Trump-voting counties in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election. By adopting this approach, the research team was able to articulate international student enrollment change over time, especially before, during, and after the years of the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election.

Analytical Approach

Given the need to analyze a longitudinal dataset while examining institution-level characteristics over this longitudinal period, a fixed effects model of regression analysis (Cooper & Hedges, 1993) approach was appropriate. Cooper and Hedges (1993), experts in the field of research methods and quantitative analyses, reasoned that fixed effects models are appropriate for panel (longitudinal) datasets that require a fixing of certain characteristics. For the purposes of this study, we have fixed effects in the form of institutions of higher education—these institutions themselves did not change their physical location and must be kept fixed in the model, while adding other characteristics to the model that did change over time, such as new international student enrollment numbers. For these reasons and the purpose of our study, Cooper and Hedges' (1993) notion of the fixed effects model was appropriate for data analysis.

To test whether there was change in new international student enrollment in Clinton- and Trump-voting counties before and after 2016 U.S. Presidential Election, the research team employed the following institutional-level fixed-effects model:

$$Y_{it} = \beta_1 2013_t + \beta_2 2014_t + \beta_3 2016_t + \beta_4 2017_t + \alpha_i + \varepsilon_{it.} \quad (1)$$

The outcome variable of interest—Y_{it}–represents an institution i's first-time undergraduate international enrollment. 2013_t, 2014_t, 2016_t, and 2017_t represent time dummy variables that capture change in the first-time undergraduate international enrollment over that time period. The team used 2015 as reference group to examine the change before and after 2016 U.S. Presidential Election, included in table notes. Institutional fixed effects (α_i) takes into account all time-varying and time invariant institutional characteristics within the institutions. ε_{it} is the error term. The research team employed two different models for institutions that are located in Clinton-voting counties and Trump-voting counties, allowing the researchers to explore whether voting outcomes influenced new international student enrollment after 2016.

As the research team sought to understand new international student enrollment change over the time, employing fixed effects models enabled the team to predict relationships in new international student enrollment over the time within each institution of higher education. This approach recognizes that each U.S. institution has their own unique institutional characteristics in terms of enrolling international students (e.g., community colleges versus research universities). By using institutional fixed-effects models, the research team controlled for unobserved variables (time varying and time-invariant variables) that are related to international enrollment within each institution, providing a comprehensive overview of how voting outcomes may influence new international student enrollment.

Descriptive statistics include a historical overview of new international student enrollment in Clinton- and Trump-voting counties across all time-invariant institutional characteristics in this study (Tables 1 and 2). This study's fixed effects models predict new international student enrollment by Clinton-voting counties versus Trump-voting counties (Table 3), by institutional sector (public, private non-profit, and private for-profit; Table 4), institutional type (four-year and less-than-four-year; Table 5), geographic location (town/rural, suburban, and urban; Table 6), and Carnegie classification in Clinton-voting counties versus Trump-voting counties (Tables 7 and 8). By adopting this analytic approach, the team was able to compare institutions with similar time-invariant institutional

characteristics, possibly informing the international education community of how time-invariant characteristics may influence new international student enrollment depending on voting outcomes.

Limitations

With all quantitative studies, this study is limited by the analytic approach. This study employed fixed effects models (Cooper & Hedges, 1993) to articulate the change in new international student enrollment over time considering a county's 2016 U.S. Presidential Election result. This study does not consider time-variant institutional characteristics alongside time-invariant characteristics to explore whether a change in out-of-state tuition or institutional endowment may have influenced new international student enrollment after the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election. As a result, future research could expand upon this study and develop an analytic model which encompasses time-varying and time-invariant characteristics across a longer time period.

In addition, educational policy researchers could investigate how county- and state-level immigration and international student policies affect new international student enrollment at U.S. institutions of higher education, possibly providing a more lucid articulation of why new international student enrollment has declined in the U.S. over the 2016-2017 through 2019-2020 academic years (Institute for International Education, 2020).

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

A historical analysis of new international student enrollment by Clinton- and Trump-voting counties can be found in Figure 1.

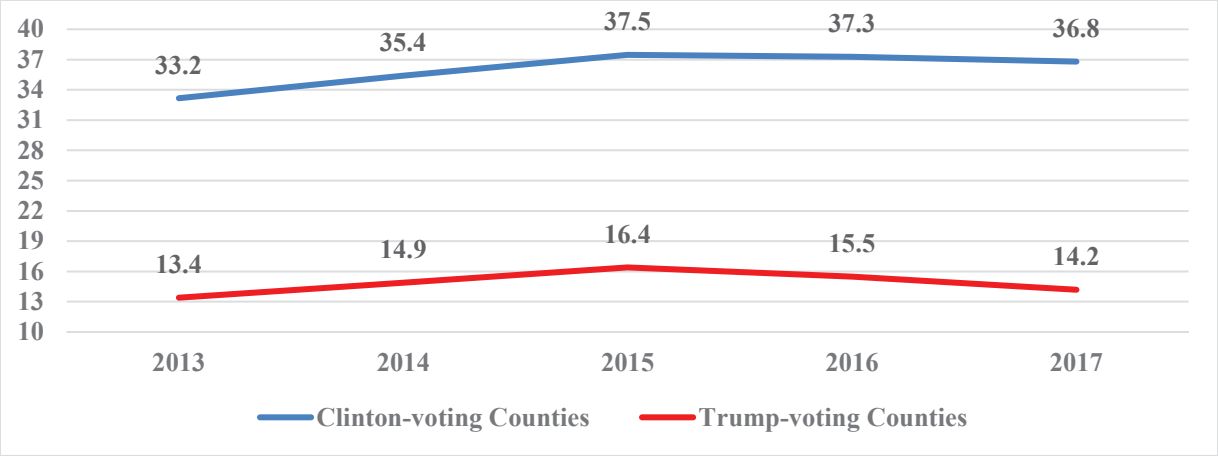

Figure 1: Average New International Student Enrollment per Institution by Clinton- and Trump-Voting Counties in 2016 U.S. Presidential Election, 2013-2017

Figure 1 illustrates that new international student enrollment has been higher at institutions in Clinton-voting counties since 2013, as 33.2 new international students enrolled per institution in Clinton-voting counties in 2013 compared to 13.4 new international students per institution in Trump-voting counties in 2013. Across both 2016 U.S. Presidential candidates, new international student enrollment per institution peaked in 2015, with institutions in Clinton-voting counties enrolling an average of 37.5 new international students and institutions in Trump-voting counties enrolling an average of 16.4 new international students. New international student enrollment also declined in consecutive years at institutions in both Clinton- and Trump-voting counties, as an average of 36.8 new international students enrolled at institutions in Clinton-voting counties in 2017, whereas an average of 14.2 new international students enrolled at institutions in Trump-voting counties in 2017. A historical analysis of new international student enrollment by Clinton-voting counties and time-invariant institutional characteristics can be found in Table 1.

Table 1: A Historical Analysis of New International Student Enrollment by Institutions Within 2016 Hillary Clinton-Voting Counties

	2013			2014			2015			2016			2017
	Mean	% Change	N*	Mean	% Change	N*	Mean	% Change	N*	Mean	% Change	N*	Mean	% Change	N*
Total	33.2	-	1983	35.4	6.6%	1974	37.5	5.9%	1980	37.3	-0.5%	1966	36.8	-1.3%	1937
Baccalaureate	17.8	-	1427	19.0	6.7%	1419	20.3	6.8%	1423	19.3	-5.0%	1411	19.0	-1.6%	1388
Master's	23.7	-	348	24.7	4.2%	347	24.9	0.8%	349	24.9	0.0%	347	24.5	-1.6%	341
Doctoral	40.1	-	55	44.9	11.9%	55	47.2	5.1%	55	49.3	4.5%	55	44.1	-10.5%	55
Research, High	92.7	-	57	98.0	5.7%	57	105.5	7.7%	57	97.1	-8.0%	57	98.4	1.3%	57
Research, Very High	256.1	-	96	274.2	7.1%	96	291.9	6.5%	96	304.0	4.1%	96	297.1	-2.3%	96
Urban	43.0	-	1146	46.3	7.7%	1140	48.5	4.8%	1147	47.5	-2.0%	1146	46.5	-2.1%	1127
Suburban	21.9	-	670	22.8	4.1%	668	25.0	9.6%	669	25.9	3.6%	658	26.2	1.2%	650
Town/Rural	11.2	-	167	11.4	1.8%	166	11.3	-0.9%	164	11.2	-0.9%	162	11.3	0.9%	160
Public	67.2	-	656	71.3	6.1%	658	76.1	6.7%	658	74.4	-2.2%	660	71.1	-4.4%	660
Non-profit	28.4	-	705	30.8	8.5%	695	31.4	1.9%	708	31.9	1.6%	699	32.7	2.5%	695
For-profit	2.7	-	622	2.5	-7.4%	621	3.1	24.0%	614	3.1	0.0%	607	2.8	-9.7%	582
Four-year	41.6	-	1160	44.7	7.5%	1160	46.9	4.9%	1169	49.0	4.5%	1179	48.4	-1.2%	1176
Less Than Four-Year	21.3	-	823	22.1	3.8%	814	23.9	8.1%	811	19.7	-17.6%	787	18.9	-4.1%	761

*Note: N is the number of institutions of higher education in Clinton-voting counties, while the mean is the average number of international students enrolled in each institution within those Clinton-voting counties.

Table 2: A Historical Analysis of New International Student Enrollment by Institutions Within 2016 Donald Trump-Voting Counties

	2013			2014			2015			2016			2017		
	Mean	% Change	N*	Mean	% Change	N	Mean	% Change	N	Mean	% Change	N	Mean	% Change	N
Total	13.4	-	1530	14.9	11.2%	1531	16.4	10.1%	1529	15.5	-5.5%	1521	14.2	-8.4%	1514
Baccalaureate	7.3	-	1179	8.4	15.1%	1179	9.6	14.3%	1178	9.2	-4.2%	1170	9	-2.2%	1165
Master's	18.6	-	280	19.9	7.0%	281	23	15.6%	280	21	-8.7%	280	17.9	-14.8%	278
Doctoral	46	-	23	43.1	-6.3%	23	38.3	-11.1%	23	35.3	-7.8%	23	29.9	-15.3%	23
Research, High	79.1	-	38	86.8	9.7%	38	85.7	-1.3%	38	83.5	-2.6%	38	70.9	-15.1%	38
Research, Very High	257.5	-	10	302.3	17.4%	10	319	5.5%	10	285.4	-10.5%	10	261.3	-8.4%	10
Urban	18.4	-	489	21	14.1%	489	23.5	11.9%	489	23.8	1.3%	487	21.4	-10.1%	481
Suburban	16.2	-	281	18.1	11.7%	282	18	-0.6%	281	14.2	-21.1%	279	13.7	-3.5%	281
Town/Rural	9.1	-	760	9.8	7.7%	760	11.3	15.3%	759	10.6	-6.2%	755	9.8	-7.5%	752
Public	16.2	-	838	18.4	13.6%	837	20.9	13.6%	838	19.5	-6.7%	836	17.3	-11.3%	837
Non-profit	13.6	-	497	14.6	7.4%	498	14.7	0.7%	501	14.2	-3.4%	496	13.6	-4.2%	500
For-profit	0.7	-	195	0.6	-14.3%	196	1.3	116.7%	190	1.1	-15.4%	189	1.3	18.2%	177
Four-year	19.5	-	870	21.4	9.7%	874	22.5	5.1%	877	21.3	-5.3%	885	19.4	-8.9%	885
Less Than Four-Year	5.4	-	660	6.2	14.8%	657	8.3	33.9%	652	7.4	-10.8%	636	7	-5.4%	629

*Note: N is the number of institutions of higher education in Trump-voting counties, while the mean is the average number of international students enrolled in each institution within those Trump-voting counties.

Over time, new international student enrollment in Clinton-voting counties has been highest in Carnegie-classified very high research institutions, urban institutions, four-year institutions, and public institutions. From 2013-2014, the largest new international student percentage increase in Clinton-voting counties occurred at doctoral institutions (11.9% increase), while for-profit enrollment decreased (-7.4%). From 2014-2015, the largest new international student percentage increase in Clinton-voting counties occurred at for-profit institutions (24.0% increase), while enrollment at institutions in town/rural settings decreased (-0.9%). From 2015-2016, new international student enrollment decreased at many institution types in Clinton-voting counties, with the largest decreases occurring at less-than-four-year institutions (-17.6%) and Carnegie-classified high research institutions (-8.0%). During the same time period, new international student enrollment had its highest increase at four-year institutions in Clinton-voting counties (4.5%). Finally, from 2016-2017, new international student enrollment decreased the most in Clinton-voting counties at Carnegie-classified doctoral institutions (-10.5%) and for-profit institutions (-9.7%). During the same time period, new international student enrollment in Clinton-voting counties increased at non-profit institutions (2.5%).

A historical analysis of new international student by Trump-voting counties and time-invariant institutional characteristics can be found in Table 2.

Over time, new international student enrollment in Trump-voting counties has been highest in Carnegie-classified very high research institutions, urban institutions, four-year institutions, and public institutions. From 2013-2014, the largest new international student percentage increase in Trump-voting counties occurred at Carnegie-classified very high research institutions (17.4%) and less-than-four-year institutions (14.8%), while enrollment at Carnegie-classified doctoral institutions decreased (-6.3%). From 2014-2015, the largest new international student percentage increase in Trump-voting counties occurred at for-profit institutions (116.7% increase) and less-than-four-year institutions (33.9%), while enrollment at Carnegie-classified doctoral institutions decreased (-11.1%). From 2015-2016, new international student enrollment decreased at many institution types in Trump-voting counties, with the largest decreases occurring at suburban institutions (-21.1%) and for-profit institutions (-15.4%). During the same time period, new international student enrollment only increased at urban institutions in Trump-voting counties (1.3%). Finally, from 2016-2017, new international student enrollment decreased the most in Trump-voting counties at Carnegie-classified master's (-14.8%), doctoral (-15.3%), high research institutions (-15.1%), and very high research institutions (-8.4%). There were also double-digit percentage decreases at public (-11.3%) and urban (-10.1%) institutions in Trump-voting counties. During the same time period, new international student enrollment in Trump-voting counties only increased at non-profit institutions (18.2%).

Fixed Effects Models

A fixed effects model predicting first-time international undergraduate enrollment by Clinton- and Trump-voting counties can be found in Table 3.

Table 3: Fixed Effects Model Predicting New International Student Enrollment by Clinton- And Trump-Voting Counties

Variables	(Model 1) Clinton	(Model 2) Trump
Year (control=2015)		
2013	-4.225***	-3.062***
	(0.789)	(0.696)
2014	-2.121*	-1.502*
	(0.675)	(0.476)
2016	-0.450	-1.033*
	(0.581)	(0.461)
2017	-1.465*	-2.385***
	(0.708)	(0.583)
Constant	37.671***	16.476***
	(0.363)	(0.382)
Observations	9,840	7,625
R-squared	0.005	0.007
Number of institutions	2,016	1,544

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.001, * p<0.01, * p<0.05

Results in Table 3 suggest a statistically significant decrease in new international student enrollment in 2017 at institutions located in Clinton-voting counties compared to 2015, the years before, during, and after the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election. On average, institutions in Clinton-voting counties experienced a statistically significant decrease in new international students, enrolling 1.465 fewer new international students in 2017 than in 2015 (p<0.05). To a greater degree, there has been a statistically significant decrease in new international student enrollment in 2017 at institutions located in Trump-voting counties compared to 2015. On average, institutions in Trump-voting counties experienced a statistically significant decrease in new international students, enrolling 2.385 fewer new international students in 2017 than in 2015 (p<0.00).

Fixed effects model predicting new international student enrollment by Clinton- and Trump-voting counties in public, private non-profit and private for-profit U.S. institutions can be found in Table 4.

Table 4: Fixed Effects Model Predicting New International Student Enrollment by Clinton- And Trump-Voting Counties, by Institution Type

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Variable	**Clinton, Public**	**Trump, Public**	**Clinton, Non-profit**	**Trump, Non-profit**	**Clinton, For-profit**	**Trump, For-profit**
Year						
2013	-9.077***	-4.697***	-3.065***	-1.269	-0.345	-0.548
	(2.183)	(1.137)	(0.760)	(0.881)	(0.344)	(0.835)
2014	-4.726*	-2.477***	-1.034*	-0.159	-0.560*	-0.708
	(1.935)	(0.741)	(0.477)	(0.684)	(0.261)	(0.841)
2016	-1.460	-1.428	0.106	-0.685	-0.023	-0.202
	(1.629)	(0.769)	(0.526)	(0.552)	(0.224)	(0.243)
2017	-4.719*	-3.642***	0.690	-1.126	-0.440	-0.062
	(1.917)	(0.945)	(0.700)	(0.710)	(0.364)	(0.945)
Constant	76.029***	20.916***	31.680***	14.779***	3.108***	1.311*
	(1.026)	(0.621)	(0.294)	(0.479)	(0.148)	(0.552)
Observations	3,292	4,186	3,502	2,492	3,046	947
R-squared	0.008	0.011	0.011	0.003	0.002	0.003
Number of Institutions	660	840	727	513	638	199

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.001, * p<0.01, * p<0.05; the year 2015 used as control.

Results in Table 4 suggest a statistically significant decrease in new international student enrollment in 2017 at public institutions located in both Clinton- and Trump-voting counties compared to 2015. On average, public institutions in Clinton-voting counties experienced a statistically significant decrease in new international students, enrolling 4.719 fewer new international students in 2017 than in 2015 (p<0.05). On average, public institutions in Trump-voting counties experienced a statistically significant decrease in new international students, enrolling 3.642 fewer new international students in 2017 than in 2015 (p<0.001). There has been no statistically significant change in new international student enrollment in private non-profit and for-profit institutions in both Clinton- and Trump-voting counties in 2017 compared to 2015.

Fixed effects model predicting new international student enrollment by Clinton- and Trump-voting counties in four- and less-than-four-year U.S. institutions can be found in Table 5.

Table 5: A Historical Analysis of New International Student Enrollment by Institutions Within Fixed Effects Model Predicting New International Student Enrollment by Clinton- and Trump-Voting Counties, by Institution Type

Variables	Clinton, Four-year	Trump, Four-year	Clinton, Less Than Four-Year	Trump, Less Than Four-Year
Year				
2013	-5.579***	-3.182***	-2.369*	-2.940*
	(1.105)	(0.814)	(1.115)	(1.217)
2014	-2.420*	-1.111	-1.721	-2.039*
	(0.800)	(0.640)	(1.186)	(0.715)
2016	1.031	-1.196	-2.453*	-0.888
	(0.799)	(0.644)	(0.832)	(0.647)
2017	0.107	-3.177***	-3.563***	-1.387*
	(0.977)	(0.892)	(0.985)	(0.642)
Constant	47.480***	22.541***	23.237***	8.291***
	(0.494)	(0.497)	(0.528)	(0.600)
Observations	5,844	4,391	3,996	3,234
R-squared	0.011	0.009	0.003	0.007
Number of Institutions	1,232	902	841	670

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.001, * p<0.01, * p<0.05; the year 2015 was used as control.

Results in Table 5 reveal significant new international enrollment declines in four-year and less-than-four-year institutions located in Trump-voting counties. On average, four-year institutions in Trump-voting counties experienced a statistically significant decrease in new international student enrollment, enrolling 3.177 fewer new international students in 2017 than in 2015 (p<0.001). Similarly, less-than-four-year institutions located in Trump-voting counties also experienced a statistically significant decrease in new international student enrollment, enrolling 1.387 fewer new international students in 2017 than in 2015 (p<0.05).

Similarly, less-than-four-year institutions in Clinton-voting counties also experienced statistically significant declines in new international student enrollment in 2017 compared to 2015 (p<0.001). However, four-year institutions in Clinton-voting counties experienced an increase in new international student enrollment in 2016 and 2017 compared to 2015. It is not, however, indistinguishable from zero.

Fixed effects models predicting new international student enrollment by Clinton- and Trump-voting counties in 2016 U.S. Presidential Election in urban, suburban, and town/rural locations can be found in Table 6.

Table 6: Fixed Effects Model Predicting New International Student Enrollment by Clinton- and Trump-Voting Counties, by Institution Location

Variables	Clinton, Urban	Trump, Urban	Clinton, Suburban	Trump, Suburban	Clinton, Town/ Rural	Trump, Town/ Rural
Year						
2013	-5.641***	-5.076*	-2.789*	-2.037*	-0.481	-2.151*
	(1.249)	(1.809)	(0.941)	(0.920)	(0.591)	(0.707)
2014	-2.498*	-2.474*	-2.000*	0.143	-0.209	-1.484*
	(1.073)	(1.153)	(0.778)	(0.529)	(0.576)	(0.573)
2016	-1.503	-1.658	1.322	-0.477	-0.101	-0.574
	(0.906)	(1.220)	(0.740)	(0.498)	(0.492)	(0.397)
2017	-3.274*	-4.365*	1.351	-0.896	0.124	-1.392*
	(1.036)	(1.533)	(1.127)	(0.645)	(0.801)	(0.531)
Constant	48.932***	24.333***	24.774***	16.721***	11.429***	11.225***
	(0.582)	(0.990)	(0.396)	(0.317)	(0.320)	(0.394)
Observations	5,706	2,435	3,315	1,404	819	3,786
R-squared	0.005	0.010	0.009	0.009	0.001	0.008
Number of Institutions	1,182	503	704	296	170	767

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.001, * p<0.01, * p<0.05; the year 2015 used as control.

Results in Table 6 reveal significant new international enrollment declines at institutions in urban locations in both Clinton and Trump-voting counties. On average, urban institutions in Clinton-voting counties enrolled 3.274 fewer new international students in 2017 than in 2015 (p<0.05). Similarly, urban institutions in Trump-voting counties also enrolled 4.365 fewer new international students in 2017 than in 2015 (p<0.05).

Similarly, town/rural institutions in Trump-voting counties also experienced statistically significant declines in new international student enrollment in 2017 compared to 2015 (p<0.05). However, town/rural institutions in Clinton-voting counties experienced an increase in new international student enrollment in 2017 compared to 2015. It is not, however, indistinguishable from zero.

Fixed effects models predicting new international student enrollment by Clinton- and Trump-voting counties in 2016 U.S. Presidential Election and Carnegie Basic 2005/2010 Classification at the bachelor's and master's level can be found in Table 7.

Table 7: Fixed Effects Model Predicting New International Student Enrollment by Clinton- and Trump-Voting Counties, by Carnegie-Classified Bachelor's and Master's Institutions

Variables	Clinton, Bachelor's	Trump, Bachelor's	Clinton, Master's	Trump, Master's
Year				
2013	-2.340***	-2.356*	-1.249	-4.329*
	(0.682)	(0.757)	(0.921)	(1.331)
2014	-1.288	-1.216*	-0.253	-3.020*
	(0.704)	(0.476)	(0.702)	(1.194)
2016	-1.183*	-0.465	-0.062	-1.921
	(0.523)	(0.407)	(0.969)	(1.213)
2017	-1.787*	-0.699	-0.912	-5.248***
	(0.633)	(0.440)	(0.859)	(1.431)
Constant	20.395***	9.681***	25.029***	22.978***
	(0.324)	(0.383)	(0.469)	(0.863)
Observations	7,068	5,871	1,732	1,399
R-squared	0.002	0.006	0.002	0.020
Number of Institutions	1,456	1,192	352	281

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.001, * p<0.01, * p<0.05; the year 2015 was used as control.

Results in Table 7 reveal significant new international enrollment declines in bachelor's institutions in Clinton-voting counties. On average, bachelor's institutions in Clinton-voting counties experienced a statistically significant decrease in new international student enrollment, enrolling 1.183 fewer new international students in 2016 and 1.787 fewer in 2017 than in 2015 (p<0.05). Master's institutions in Clinton-voting counties did not experience a statistically significant decline in new international students in the years 2016 and 2017. However, master's institutions in Trump-voting counties experienced a statistically significant decline in new international student enrollment, enrolling 5.248 fewer new international students in 2017 compared to 2015 (p<0.001).

Fixed effects models predicting new international student enrollment by Clinton- and Trump-voting counties in 2016 U.S. Presidential Election and Carnegie Basic 2005/2010 Classification at the doctoral, high research, and very high research levels can be found in Table 8.

Table 8: Fixed Effects Model Predicting New International Student Enrollment by Clinton- and Trump-Voting Counties, by Carnegie-Classified Doctoral, High Research, and Very High Research Institutions

Variables	Clinton, Doctoral	Trump, Doctoral	Clinton, High	Trump, High	Clinton, Very High	Trump, Very High
Year						
2013	-7.073*	7.696	-12.807*	-6.658	-35.802*	-61.500
	(2.955)	(6.625)	(5.934)	(6.061)	(11.152)	(32.604)
2014	-2.255	4.783	-7.526*	1.053	-17.740*	-16.700
	(2.247)	(4.596)	(2.855)	(5.691)	(8.439)	(23.149)
2016	2.109	-3.000	-8.439*	-2.237	12.042	-33.600
	(2.984)	(2.593)	(3.437)	(5.647)	(7.901)	(33.039)
2017	-3.091	-8.435*	-7.105	-14.842*	5.167	-57.700
	(3.296)	(3.447)	(4.321)	(6.095)	(10.115)	(55.800)
Constant	47.182***	38.304***	105.491***	85.737***	291.927***	319.000***
	(1.272)	(2.233)	(1.811)	(1.967)	(5.294)	(26.837)
Observations	275	115	285	190	480	50
R-squared	0.034	0.115	0.026	0.038	0.068	0.132
Number of Institutions	55	23	57	38	96	10

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.001, * p<0.01, * p<0.05; the year 2015 was used as control.

Results in Table 8 reveal a significant new international enrollment decline at doctoral institutions in Trump-voting counties. On average, doctoral institutions in Trump-voting counties experienced a statistically significant decrease in new international student enrollment, enrolling 8.435 fewer new international students in 2017 than in 2015 (p<0.05). Similarly, high research institutions located in Trump-voting counties also experienced a statistically significant decrease in new international student enrollment, enrolling 14.842 fewer new international students in 2017 than in 2015 (p<0.05).

Although doctoral and high research institutions in Clinton-voting counties experienced a decline in new international student enrollment in 2017, these results were not statistically significant. In addition, although not statistically significant, very high research institutions in Clinton-voting counties experienced an average increase of 5.167 new international students in 2017 compared to 2015, whereas very high research institutions in Trump-voting counties experienced an average decrease of 57.7 new international students in 2017 compared to 2015.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Prior research had not addressed how U.S. politics may influence how prospective international students view the United States as a potential host country for their higher education. This study's findings suggest the results of the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election may have influenced where new international students chose to enroll for the 2017-2018 academic year.

The descriptive statistics (Tables 1 and 2) and the fixed effects models reveal that U.S. higher education has experienced significant declines in new international student enrollment after the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election. However, Table 3's fixed effects model suggests institutions in Trump-voting counties have experienced a greater and statistically significant decline that institutions in Clinton-voting counties have not experienced. In fact, only public institutions (Table 4), less-than-four-year institutions (Table 5), and bachelor's institutions (Table 7) in Trump-voting counties have fared better considering new international student enrollment than the same institutions in Clinton-voting counties (Tables 4 and 5).

Otherwise, four-year institutions (Table 5), urban institutions (Table 6), town/rural institutions (Table 6), master's institutions (Table 7), doctoral institutions (Table 8), and high research institutions (Table 8) in Trump-voting counties have experienced statistically significant declines in new international student enrollment that institutions in Clinton-voting counties have not experienced. As a result, this study's findings inform the international education community in a variety of ways.

First, international education researchers must investigate what prospective international students know—and do not know—about the political history and voting tendencies of the area in which their host institution is located. This study did not employ qualitative methods to understand what factors led international students to enroll in certain institutions as some prior studies have (Johnson, 2018; Pottie-Sherman, 2018). From the data in this study, there is no way of knowing whether new international students were aware of the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election outcomes by county and chose not to enroll at certain institutions in Trump-voting counties. However, future research should explore how changes in executive leadership and/or national and local election outcomes influences how prospective international students explore host institutions and make enrollment decisions, building upon prior work (Johnson, 2018; Pottie-Sherman, 2018).

Furthermore, results from this study suggest some institutions were able to attract new international students regardless of the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election outcome. For instance, although high research institutions did experience declines in new international student enrollment in both Clinton and Trump counties, these declines were not statistically significant. In fact, in 2017, there was an increase in new international student enrollment at very high research institutions in Clinton-voting counties (Table 8). Similarly, suburban institutions in both Clinton- and Trump-voting counties have not experienced statistically significant declines in new international student enrollment since 2015. Researchers should investigate why these institutions were better able to maintain their influx of new international students despite a real or perceived anti-immigration sentiment in the United States, spearheaded by President Trump (Patel, 2018; Redden, 2018; Torbati, 2018).

As a result, data suggest that Patel's (2018) hypothetical "Trump effect" (para. 1) on new international student enrollment may not be hypothetical but empirical in nature. As previously stated, Caroline Casagrande, the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Academic Programs in the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, argued, "It's quite frankly unwarranted to say it's [the decline in new international student enrollment] completely the results of a political environment," (Anderson & Svrluga, 2018, para. 13). This study argues otherwise. From here, U.S. institutions seeking to continue the diversification of their student body and to continue contributing to an ever-globalized society must take action to mitigate any effects produced by anti-immigration or anti-international executive leadership in the United States.

Articulating international student choice, Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) provided a push and pull framework of what pushes international students away from their home countries and pulls them toward a host country. Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) discovered that "the level of knowledge a student has of the host country" (p. 84) was a strong pull factor influencing international students from all three countries. Unless prospective international students dramatically change their enrollment habits in future years, it seems U.S. politics may be pushing international students away from the United States, thus pushing the United States further away from the rest of the world.

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"UNDESERVED" GRADES OR "UNDERSERVED" STUDENTS? FACULTY ANXIETIES AND ERODING STANDARDS IN THE CORPORATE UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Unsustainable student debt and a precarious labor market continue to raise public doubts over the value of a college degree. Observers note decades of grade inflation, eroding confidence in academic standards. Yet little attention has been paid to the perceptions of professors themselves. This report fills the gap by surveying 223 tenured professors in U.S. public universities. We query faculty on sensitive questions central to debate over academic standards. Results show a substantial fraction of professors affirms the serious problems of grade inflation and declining standards. Moreover, political orientation is the best predictor of where faculty stand on these delicate questions. We close by encouraging viewpoint diversity in higher education and greater self-awareness among liberal faculty of our collective biases.

Keywords: faculty survey, corporatization, student entitlement, grade inflation, academic standards

Higher education has seen better days. As student debt approaches two trillion dollars, universities in the United States face greater scrutiny than ever before. Coupled with an ever-uncertain economic landscape, the national conversation over "diploma mills" (Ezell, 2020, p. 47) and "worthless degrees" (Quintana, 2019, para. 6) has reached a fever pitch. Indeed, every year we see a slew of new books addressing the fiscal, ideological, and civic implications of a university system in crisis (Bennet & Wilezol, 2013; Childress, 2019; Craig, 2018; Ginsberg, 2011; Nussbaum, 2016). The attacks on higher education cut across the political spectrum, from the baneful impacts of corporatization (e.g., Donoghue, 2018; Giroux, 2014; Schrecker, 2010) to claims of leftwing indoctrination (e.g., Ellis, 2021; Mac Donald, 2018; Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020). It is fair to say that few observers look to the future of higher education with optimism.

Arguably the most disturbing criticism of the institution is that it is failing in its central mission of educating students (Arum & Roksa, 2011; Côté & Allahar, 2011; 2007; Lindsay, 2014; Rojstaczer, 2016). Critics highlight a number of intersecting forces eroding academic standards, including severe financial constraints on universities as they scramble to attract and retain students, and an influx of more and more students either ill-prepared or unsuited for the rigors of university course work. The result has been decades of grade inflation, exacerbated by a culture of entitlement among students expecting high grades while putting in less and less work.

The reality of grade inflation or compression has been widely discussed (Denning et al., 2021; Johnson, 2006; Lindsay, 2014; Rojstaczer, 2016; Rojstaczer & Healy, 2012), especially at elite institutions (e.g., Clarida & Fandos, 2013; Ferdman, 2013; Schrager, 2013). We will address the roots of the problem below, noting here that given the diverse demands on faculty's time, especially the distinctive rewards tied to research, academic rigor in the classroom all too often takes a back seat. The result, in Kuh's (2003) words, is a "disengagement compact," (p. 28) where faculty "pretend to teach" and students "pretend to learn" (Collier, 2013, n.p.). The data on student disengagement confirms Kuh's view on the student's end (Burke et al., 2016; Côté & Allahar, 2007).

Despite the flurry of diagnoses of universities' ills, little attention has been paid to the perceptions of professors themselves. Research that taps faculty attitudes tends to focus on particular case studies or problems (such as grade inflation or online instruction), without aspiring to a bird's-eye view of faculty appraisals of higher education (e.g., Castillo, 2017; Lederman, 2019; Schroeder, 2016; Willis, 2017). We aim to do so in this report and center it around the following ideas: 1) Do professors perceive a decline in standards within the academy? If so, do they attribute it to such forces as corporatization, student entitlement, or increasing numbers of ill-equipped students? 2) Do faculty reveal their own participation in grade inflation or the reduction of rigor in their courses over the years? 3) Are professors optimistic or disillusioned about current conditions and future prospects for higher education? Which variables (discipline, gender, political orientation) might be associated with variation in their views?

We should stress that as an exploratory survey, our empirical aims are modest. We do reveal our anxiety about the facts on the ground – pressures we fear are gradually undermining academic standards. Yet apart from our perhaps distinctive

interpretation of these trends, we make no novel empirical claims about underlying causes. Nor are we hypothesis testing in any strict sense. Our method is to draw liberally from the higher education literature, attentive to conflicting claims and concerns that may bear on faculty's perceptions of academic standards.

Our report is inspired by our research team's prior surveys on scholarly debates within particular disciplines, including anthropology, economics, and sociology (Horowitz et al., 2018a; Horowitz & Hughes, 2018b; Horowitz et al., 2019). In those studies, we discovered that professors' political identity best predicts where they stand on controversies within their fields. Hence, we suspected here that political identity would be the most significant predictor of faculty's views of higher education controversies – a hunch borne out in the data, as we discuss below.

In any event, before turning to the survey, it is useful to take a deeper dive into the literature to provide context for our chosen questions. As we will see, the political fault lines of the debate over higher education crises could hardly be clearer.

THE "BROKE-WOKE-STROKE" CONVERGENCE

Examining a wide range of literature on higher education, we are struck by sustained attention to three intersecting forces. For ease of discussion, we dub these forces the "broke-woke-stroke" (BWS) convergence.[1] We identify the concepts here for fuller discussion below:

1) *Broke*. [2] This term captures the most prevalent diagnosis of higher education's woes today: severe revenue deficits as colleges compete to attract and retain students. State cutbacks in education since the 1980s, and consequent steadily rising tuition, have spurred increasingly unsustainable student debt. With rising for-profit competitors, and lower-cost online alternatives, universities have responded by deepening their commitment to business principles (i.e., corporatization). Associated trends include the rise in adjunct instruction and erosion of tenure, an amenities "arms race" to attract students, and increased evaluation (i.e., survival or elimination) of programs based on student enrollments. The anticipated demographic cliff and plunge in first-year student enrollments by mid-decade may already be expediting these processes.

2) *Woke.* [3] This term captures a cultural trend, at least since the early 2010s, of heightened awareness and advocacy around racial and gender injustices in society. In the higher education context, the term is used as a pejorative by mostly conservative critics, who denounce what they see as a radical campus climate inimical to the values of meritocracy, free speech, and colorblindness. Critics highlight instances of *cancel culture,* where speakers have been censored or

[1] Though perhaps cheeky, we find the heuristic value of this rhyming phrase especially helpful for recall of the trends affecting higher ed.

[2] For literature on "broke" themes, see, e.g., Childress (2019); Craig (2018); Donoghue (2018); Carey (2016); Giroux (2014); Williams (2012); Schrecker (2010).

[3] For literature on "woke" themes, see, e.g., Ellis (2021); Herman (2021); Saad (2020); Murray (2019); Mac Donald (2018).

professionally harmed for taking positions contrary to prevailing leftwing sentiment. Among such taboo positions is the minimization or denial of White supremacy, acknowledgment, or pride in uniquely positive contributions of Western civilization, or the claim that racial/ethnic disparities in educational or other outcomes can be attributed to group differences in culture, behavior, or ability.

3) *Stroke*. [4] This term loosely captures generational changes associated with the perception of heightened student entitlement and fragility. Here, faculty may feel compelled to stroke the egos, as it were, of students they view as increasingly likely to push back for higher grades, and others too vulnerable for stringent appraisals of their work. Associated cultural underpinnings include helicopter and overindulgent parenting ("everyone's a winner"); an accompanying victimization culture (with attendant emphases on microaggressions, trigger warnings, and safe spaces); a spirit of educational romanticism, where all students are deemed capable of academic success with enough support provided; and a consumerist ethos where good grades are expected as a return on students' financial investment, whatever their objective performance.

These brief sketches by no means comprise the myriad threads of an expansive discussion on higher education. Nor are there fine boundaries between these trends, as they overlap and reciprocally reinforce each other. Yet the point we wish to stress – and here we put our cards on the table regarding our principal concern in the survey – *this triad of forces in no way fosters institutional incentives to uphold academic standards*. In fact, we worry that this elective affinity is cultivating a campus ethos outright antithetical to rigor [5].

We recognize, of course, that faculty reading this may not share our concern or perceive an erosion in standards. Perhaps our pessimism is unfounded. Hence, this report. We aim to invite wider conversation on these matters by empirically informing, albeit via a modest survey, richer self-understanding of our diverse views as a professoriate.

It should be noted that our pessimism is anchored in part in our shared experience in academia (78 years among us, at 11 different institutions), reinforced by our read of the literature above. Rojstaczer and colleagues' (2016) work demonstrates a spike in college grades in the sixties and a steady increase since the eighties, with the number of A grades going up 5-6 percentage points per decade. As Lindsay (2014) points out, A grades are now the most common grade assigned in college courses, at 43 percent, compared to 15 percent in the 1960s. We share these authors' skepticism about attributing such grade inflation to students' improved preparation or mastery of college material. If anything, we are inclined to agree with Côté and Allahar's (2011) sobering assessment of the corporate university, explaining the problem in terms of

[4] For literature on "stroke" themes, see, e.g., Lukianoff and Haidt (2019); Campbell and Manning (2018); Twenge (2017; 2014); Zarra (2019); Murray (2008).

[5] Culling the phrase from Goethe, the sociologist Max Weber conceptualized elective affinities as historically contingent conjunctures where partially autonomous ideal and material forces mutually reinforce each other in socially consequential ways.

financial exigency and the "democratization" of higher education. (p. 11). Although they focus principally on Canada, the *college-for-all* creed in the United States implies particular relevance here. If this view is correct, the material factor ("broke") is likely the main driver of grade inflation, as cash-strapped universities tap an ever-larger market of students expected to go to college, whatever their preparation or intellectual readiness.

We cannot emphasize enough that our view is fundamentally structural, not agential. We suspect few *villains* behind the scenes, whether bloated administrators bent on exploiting adjuncts, or pampered professors lowering standards to evade hard work. Indeed, the threat to standards today strikes us as a problem of incentives, anchored in contemporary political-economy and culture. If financial pressures on universities incentivize contingent hiring (and, perhaps, relaxed admissions standards), might such pressures bear on faculty who know their bread is buttered by plump course enrollments and satisfied student-consumers? Indeed, the current *consumer model* of higher education has coincided with the use of teacher evaluations by students increasingly anxious (reasonably so) about their mounting debt and future employment. In this context, Rojstaczer (2016) notes, students expect good grades because "the customer is always right." Intellectual rigor declines, he adds, as professors are "compelled" to "water down" their courses (para. 40).

The situation is especially distressing as we have experienced numerous situations over the years where a *moral* case could be made for passing students through. Encountering students with serious reading and writing deficits in their final year, for example, invites a Hobson's choice of perpetuating relaxed standards or forcing students to incur further debt and delay. Compassion for students' financial circumstances is only natural (and heightened, to be sure, during the pandemic). Add to this the "woke-stroke" cultural forces mentioned above, and we do not see strong enticements for rigor. For instance, low grades or drop-out rates for disadvantaged students, especially students of color, are becoming increasingly politicized. Universities are noticing disparities in student outcomes, which are often attributed to systemic racism or implicit biases. To cite an example, in a 2020 statement titled "Enacting an Anti-Racist Agenda," the President of Brooklyn College stresses a commitment to addressing the "structural obstacles" faced by students of color, with funds for "professional development" of faculty with the "highest racial disparities in outcomes and the highest D/F/W rates" (Brooklyn College, 2020, para. 7). In a highly publicized case, a Georgetown University law professor, Sandra Sellers, was fired after accidentally recording a Zoom call with a colleague where she discussed grading. Students protested after hearing Sellers inartfully state "I end up having this angst every semester that a lot of my lower ones are Blacks — happens almost every semester. And it's like, 'Oh, come on.' You know? You get some really good ones. But there are also usually some that are just plain at the bottom. It drives me crazy" (as cited in Barnes, 2021, para. 4).

We cite these cases not to endorse or denounce them, but to highlight that the racially sensitive climate in universities today may be an additional factor contributing to grading pressure. We are less concerned about occasional instances that gain national attention than the everyday normative atmosphere from which such cases arise. It is unsurprising in this atmosphere to see budding challenges to the very

notion of academic rigor. Writing in The Chronicle, for instance, Jack and Sathy (2021) – in an essay titled "It's time to cancel the word, 'rigor'" – advocate for more structured course assignments and "inclusive teaching" methods. The authors cite literature on the "hidden curriculum" that "privileges" those with "high academic literacy." Apparently, it may not be "fair or valid" to hold students to such "normative expectations" as "reading," "arriving to class on time," "participating in discussion," or using "standard English" (Boston University, 2021). [6]

In sum, might pressure on program enrollments, increasing numbers of ill-equipped students, compassion for the economically disadvantaged, fear of pushback by entitled students or charges of bias for grading disparities, and the need for positive teaching evaluations, all conspire to a lowering of standards? Any of these factors viewed in isolation may seem insignificant. But we worry that the BWS convergence has germinated slowly over the years, imparting a tacit or taken-for-granted lowering of academic expectations.

Let us turn now to our survey to explore whether faculty across the country share these concerns.

METHODS

Sample Selection and Survey

Our operating principle as we selected our sample was to approximate as closely as possible the typical higher education experience in the United States. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), there are 3982 degree-granting colleges and universities in the U.S., with far more students enrolled in public than in private institutions. Indeed, in 2019-2020, there were 13 million undergraduate students enrolled in public institutions, 2.8 million in private nonprofit institutions, and 758,600 students in for-profit institutions (NCES, 2021). With these facts in mind, we limited our sample to large, public universities with at least 10,000 enrolled students. We chose universities of "average" selectivity as well (between a 50-80 percent acceptance rate), with a common demographic profile. Hence, we excluded institutions with student bodies more than 80 percent White or another single ethnicity.

Given widespread alarm today regarding students' alleged deficits in writing and math, we chose to survey faculty in the departments of English and mathematics. We added sociology as well to have programs across the hard and soft sciences and humanities. Given our interest in professors' potentially changing perceptions throughout their careers, we targeted faculty at the associate and full ranks, as tenure track faculty have a narrower time horizon. We recognize, of course, the limits to generalizability of our sample. And we certainly encourage investigation of faculty attitudes across a wider range of fields and institutions, including at elite universities, community colleges, and for-profit institutions.

[6] See Randall, 2021 for a biting counterpoint to Jack and Sathy.

To select our schools, we employed the NCES College Navigator (https://nces.ed.gov/college navigator/). We grouped the country into four geographical regions (New England/Mideast, Great Lakes/Plains, Southeast/Southwest, Rocky Mountains/Far West), randomly selecting ten universities from each region that fit our criteria, for a total of 40 universities. Accessing publicly available departmental websites, and eliminating repeating, returned, or unverifiable emails, we sent the survey to 2344 professors. After an initial email and follow-up in Fall 2021, we received a total of 223 usable surveys, for about a 10 percent response rate. [7]

Substantively, we organized the questions around three broad thematic categories: 1) academic standards and dilemmas; 2) role demands and morale; and 3) diversity, meritocracy, and mission. Table 1 lists the survey items. Table 2 provides the sample characteristics.

Table 1: Survey Items

ID	Category
Academic Standards and Dilemmas (ASD)	
ASD1	Grade inflation is a serious problem in higher education today.
ASD2	Academic standards have declined in undergraduate education in recent years.
ASD3	Student pushback regarding grades has increased in recent years.
ASD4	Universities on the whole are succeeding in enhancing students' skills/competencies
ASD5	The corporatization of higher education is a serious problem.
ASD6	I suspect that students are studying just as many hours today as they did when I first began teaching.
ASD7	Too many students are admitted to university today who are not intellectually suited.
ASD8	I would not be surprised if there are some functionally illiterate students graduating from my university.
ASD9	Grade inflation has reflected in part an overall improvement in the preparedness or abilities of students.
ASD10	Encouragement of a four-year degree to all students, whatever their ability or preparedness, has played some role in the erosion of standards in higher education.
ASD11	Faculty know where their bread is buttered. Grade inflation is largely due to the need to keep their programs financially viable.

[7] We informed respondents that the survey is anonymous (with IP addresses not saved on SurveyMonkey) and that they may skip any questions or exit the survey at any time. The controversial nature of the questionnaire likely contributed to our modest response rate. We infer this based on a host of unfriendly comments by respondents (discussed below), as well as the 74 entrants who exited the survey without answering a single question. Bearing this in mind, we suspect some self-selection bias in favor of sympathizers to the survey's themes, though we are unable to verify.

Table 1 (continued)

ASD12 The watering down of courses in recent years is doing a disservice to more academically gifted students.

Role Demands and Morale (RDM)

RDM1 As student teacher evaluations more often measure a professor's popularity or ease than rigor, they should not be used as a metric in tenure and promotion decisions.

RDM2 Whatever their imperfections, student teaching evaluations are an appropriate metric for faculty tenure and promotion decisions.

RDM3 I find myself watching what I say on campus (i.e., self-censoring) more and more in recent years.

RDM4 Concerns about "cancel culture" or the erosion of faculty members' free speech are overblown.

RDM5 Over time, faculty involvement in assessment practices (i.e., recurrent discussions over learning outcomes, closing the loop) enhances student learning.

RDM6 The assessment movement in higher education is misguided.

RDM7 Over the years I have found myself playing a more emotionally supportive (if not therapeutic) role with students.

RDM8 Faculty should in no way be held responsible for students in their classes who are unmotivated to learn the material they are teaching.

RDM9 I routinely give grades that are higher than I believe students merit.

RDM10 I inflate grades at least in part because I don't want to lose enrollment in my courses.

RDM11 I inflate grades at least in part because I want to avoid the headaches associated with student pushback.

RDM12 I feel pressure from the administration or my department to inflate grades.

RDM13 I have reduced the difficulty or demands of my courses over the years.

RDM14 I have felt frustrated by colleagues who routinely give A's to their students.

RDM15 I have never worried about the distribution of grades in my courses by race/ethnicity.

RDM16 I'm sensitive to students' different learning styles when developing course assignments.

RDM17 It's demoralizing to participate in a declining-standards credential mill, but my livelihood depends on it.

RDM18 The fulfillment I experience in my role as professor has declined over the years.

RDM19 I at least sometimes feel that a four-year liberal arts degree today is a grift.

RDM20 I am optimistic about the future of higher education.

Table 1 (continued)

Diversity, Meritocracy, and Mission (DMM)	
DMM1	Due to differential treatment in college, such as implicit or explicit biases, marginalized students of color often have to perform stronger academically than more privileged students to earn the same grades.
DMM2	Racial/ethnic disparities in students' academic performance are due in no small part to systemic racism within universities.
DMM3	I wouldn't be surprised if marginalized students of color tend to be graded more leniently than more privileged students in university today.
DMM4	I worry that the laudable goal of reducing racial disparities in student outcomes is undermining expectations regarding math competency in college.
DMM5	Given the importance of affirming diverse cultural backgrounds or learning styles, student competence in conventional English should not be factored significantly into their grades for written work.
DMM6	The underrepresentation of minority faculty in universities today is largely due to (often subtle) processes of discrimination in the hiring and tenure processes.
DMM7	The underrepresentation of minority faculty in universities today is largely due to a lack of enough qualified applicants, not discrimination in the hiring or tenure processes.
DMM8	I support the increased emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives on campus in recent years.
DMM9	Virtually all students admitted with serious academic deficits can excel in a challenging curricular environment with sufficient academic and university support.
DMM10	The elimination of standardized testing for admission to college is a positive development.
DMM11	Standardized tests, such as the SAT, are culturally discriminatory, if not racist.
DMM12	In the interest of students' mental health, we should move toward eliminating grades altogether.
DMM13	Students should be tested earlier to assess whether they are better suited for a vocational rather than a four-year university path.
DMM14	Academic programs should be assessed for their marketability, and if necessary eliminated, if students complete their degrees with few to no viable job opportunities.
DMM15	The civic mission of the university – to foster students' capacity to participate robustly in our democracy – is at least as important as the university's mission to purvey viable job skills.
DMM16	Regardless of job prospects or what the market values, we should as a society collectively pay for broadly accessible and inexpensive four-year college opportunities for all.

Table 2: Sample Characteristics

TOTAL	Respondents N=223	Percent 100
Gender		
Female	74	35
Male	135	65
Age		
30-45	57	28
46-61	95	47
62+	50	25
Discipline		
English	99	45
Mathematics	64	29
Sociology	55	25
Academic Rank		
Associate Professor	82	38
Professor	132	62
Political Orientation		
Radical	26	12
Liberal	130	61
Moderate	46	21
Conservative	9	4
Libertarian	4	2

Note: Table leaves out a modest number of missing cases across categories

Respondents were asked Likert-type items, i.e., whether they "strongly agree," "agree," "neither agree nor disagree," "disagree," or "strongly disagree" with the 48 statements. As formulating questions on controversial matters often invites objections, we provided comment boxes under each item. Note that there are several items where we "presume the premise" (ASD10, ASD12, RDM10, RDM11, RDM17) to aid readability, given the survey's length (i.e., to avoid repeated breaks such as "If YES, please respond to questions x^{i}, x^{ii}; If NO…"). And one item in particular (RDM17) was viewed by some respondents as unduly loaded. Given our interest in faculty morale, we occasionally use the same charged language ("declining-standards credential mill") that appears in current commentary over higher education. The related term, "diploma mill," for example, appears over half a million times in a Google search.

We are cognizant, of course, that our questions reflect our own necessarily partial standpoints. And we did strive, when possible, to frame statements affirmatively from different sides of the controversy. We hope, in any event, that the striking patterns in the data prove useful as we contemplate, as a professoriate, the changes deeply impacting our profession and society broadly.

FINDINGS

Table 3 reports descriptive statistics of the sample as a whole. As space prevents us from attending to every item, we will focus on central survey themes and takeaways.

Table 3: Distribution of Responses

Survey Item	Item Descriptions	N	Percent Agree/ Disagree*
Academic Standards and Dilemmas			
ASD1	Grade inflation is a serious problem in higher education	220	48/21
ASD2	Academic standards have declined in recent years	220	47/27
ASD3	Student pushback regarding grades has increased	221	37/29
ASD4	Universities are succeeding in enhancing skills	220	63/19
ASD5	Corporatization of higher education is a serious problem	221	79/08
ASD6	Students are studying just as many hours today	220	34/40
ASD7	Too many students are not intellectually suited	220	38/40
ASD8	Some functionally illiterate students are graduating	220	40/47
ASD9	Grade inflation reflects improvement in student preparedness	218	10/58
ASD10	Encouraging four-year degree plays role in eroding standards	217	49/31
ASD11	Grade inflation due to need to keep programs financially viable	217	33/41
ASD12	Watering down courses does disservice to gifted students	214	49/33
Role Demands and Morale			
RDM1	Student evaluations should not be used for tenure and promotion	217	56/21
RDM2	Student evaluations are appropriate metric for tenure	216	30/55
RDM3	I self-censor on campus more and more in recent years	217	59/27
RDM4	Concerns over “cancel culture” and free speech are overblown	217	33/46

Table 3 (continued)

RDM5	Assessment practices enhance student learning	216	45/29
RDM6	Assessment movement is misguided	214	56/15
RDM7	I am playing a more emotionally supportive role with students	218	59/16
RDM8	Faculty not responsible for unmotivated students	217	46/31
RDM9	I routinely give grades higher than students merit	217	37/46
RDM10	I inflate grades because I don't want to lose enrollment	215	12/76
RDM11	I inflate grades to avoid student pushback	216	30/57
RDM12	I feel pressure by department or administration to inflate grades	217	22/58
RDM13	I have reduced the difficulty of my courses over the years	217	33/45
RDM14	I have felt frustrated by colleagues who routinely give A's	216	31/45
RDM15	I have never worried about grade distribution by race/ethnicity	216	49/39
RDM16	I am sensitive to students' different learning styles	217	65/21
RDM17	Demoralizing participating in declining-standards credential mill	213	30/43
RDM18	The fulfillment I experience as professor has declined	215	34/53
RDM19	I sometimes feel liberal arts degree is a grift	214	23/57
RDM20	I am optimistic about the future of higher education	215	24/45
Diversity, Meritocracy, and Mission			
DMM1	Due to biases, students of color have to perform stronger	212	34/44
DMM2	Racial/ethnic disparities due to systemic racism	212	46/31
DMM3	Students of color tend to be graded more leniently	210	23/52
DMM4	Reducing racial disparities undermining expectations in math	211	23/41
DMM5	Conventional English should not be significant factor in grading	206	10/75

Table 3 (continued)

DMM6	Minority underrepresentation due to discrimination	212	46/41
DMM7	Minority underrepresentation due to lack of qualified candidates	211	49/32
DMM8	I support equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives	213	77/12
DMM9	Virtually all students with academic deficits can excel with support	213	47/35
DMM10	Elimination of standardized testing is a positive development	212	51/30
DMM11	Standardized tests are cultural discriminatory, if not racist	213	44/28
DMM12	For students' mental health, we should move away from grades	213	13/65
DMM13	Students should be tested earlier for vocational or university path	211	33/46
DMM14	Programs should be eliminated if few to no job opportunities	213	09/81
DMM15	Civic mission of university as important as job skills	212	85/07
DMM16	Regardless of market, society should pay for affordable college	212	75/13

First, although there are a few areas of strong consensus, respondents are generally mixed in their positions across the large majority of questions. On only 21 items, for example, do we see a majority of professors agree. Moreover, on half of the items, more than a fifth mark "neither agree nor disagree," suggesting appreciable ambivalence on these matters.

What strikes us as telling, however, is that despite the sensitivity of the questions, substantial fractions of the professoriate affirm the serious problems of grade inflation and eroding standards, as well as their role in them. Here are some highlights:

- 48% agree that grade inflation is a serious problem vs. 21% who disagree (ASD1)
- 47% agree that academic standards have declined vs. 27% who disagree (ASD2)
- Only 10% affirm that grade inflation reflects improvement in students' abilities or preparedness (ASD9)
- 37% admit to routinely inflating grades (RDM9)
- 33% admit to reducing the rigor of their courses over the years (RDM13)
- 30% agree that they are "demoralized" participating in a "declining-standards credential mill" (RDM17)
- 23% admit to sometimes feeling the four-year liberal arts degree is a "grift" (RDM19)

These findings suggest that we (the authors) are not alone in our worries about the direction of higher education. Of course, the import of the numbers is debatable. A more upbeat observer might emphasize the majorities of faculty who do *not* divulge a reduction in rigor or view the university as a credential mill. And in an instance of majority agreement, 63% of faculty affirm that universities are succeeding in enhancing students' skills and competencies (ASD4).

Turning to the factors that may contribute to eroding standards, we see discernable recognition of BWS forces among faculty:

- Fully 79% agree that "corporatization" is a serious problem in higher education vs. only 8% who disagree (ASD5)
- 49% affirm that encouraging a four-year degree to all has played a role in declining academic standards (ASD10)
- 38% agree that too many students in university are not intellectually suited (ASD7)
- 40% do not suspect that students are studying as much as they did in the past (ASD6)
- 37% agree that student pushback on grades has increased in recent years (ASD3)
- 59% affirm playing a more emotionally supportive (if not therapeutic) role with students over the years (RDM7)
- 56% believe that student evaluations should not be used for tenure and promotion decisions (RDM1)

In only one of the seven items above is there a (slight) plurality of faculty in disagreement (ASD7, 40%). Hence, although we tend to see pluralities rather than majorities on several of the items, there is substantial evidence that professors perceive declining standards and attribute it in no small part to BWS trends.

We will supplement the quantitative findings with attention to professors' comments in the discussion below. But let us turn first to the variation in the data.

PROFS AND PATTERNS

Tables 4, 5, and 6 report responses by academic discipline, gender, and political orientation. These descriptive tables are helpful in providing baselines with regard to where the various groupings stand on the survey items. Reading them in tandem with our regression models in Tables 7, 8, and 9 captures the meaning and statistical significance of the salient patterns.

Table 4: Distribution of Responses by Academic Programs

Survey Item	Item Descriptions	N	English (% agree/ disagree)	Math (% agree/ disagree)	Sociology (% agree/ disagree)
Academic Standards and Dilemmas					
ASD1	Grade inflation is a serious problem in higher education	217	40/31	53/16	56/09
ASD2	Academic standards have declined in recent years	217	38/42	59/16	48/13
ASD3	Student pushback regarding grades has increased	218	39/32	31/27	36/35
ASD4	Universities are succeeding in enhancing skills	217	68/21	56/19	67/16
ASD5	Corporatization of higher education is a serious problem	218	91/03	66/14	75/11
ASD6	Students are studying just as many hours today	217	36/37	36/36	31/49
ASD7	Too many students are not intellectually suited	217	31/54	53/22	33/36
ASD8	Some functionally illiterate students are graduating	217	36/51	45/39	43/48
ASD9	Grade inflation reflects improvement in student preparedness	215	11/50	12/58	05/75
ASD10	Encouraging four-year degree plays role in eroding standards	214	35/45	65/13	55/27
ASD11	Grade inflation due to need to keep programs financially viable	214	31/49	39/24	31/46
ASD12	Watering down courses does disservice to gifted students	211	37/46	67/21	49/25

Table 4 (continued)

Role Demands and Morale					
RDM1	Student evaluations should not be used for tenure and promotion	214	57/21	59/17	51/25
RDM2	Student evaluations are appropriate metric for tenure	213	24/60	37/42	29/51
RDM3	I self-censor on campus more and more in recent years	214	60/29	56/16	60/36
RDM4	Concerns over "cancel culture" and free speech are overblown	214	42/41	23/53	29/44
RDM5	Assessment practices enhance student learning	213	46/32	41/21	44/35
RDM6	Assessment movement is misguided	211	60/16	50/08	56/22
RDM7	I am playing a more emotionally supportive role with students	215	63/15	53/17	60/16
RDM8	Faculty not responsible for unmotivated students	214	46/33	62/19	29/40
RDM9	I routinely give grades higher than students merit	214	33/52	34/47	49/33
RDM10	I inflate grades because I don't want to lose enrollment	212	10/76	13/76	16/76
RDM11	I inflate grades to avoid student pushback	213	25/58	25/60	44/49
RDM12	I feel pressure by department or administration to inflate grades	214	16/74	38/50	16/78
RDM12	I feel pressure by department or administration to inflate grades	214	16/74	38/50	16/78
RDM13	I have reduced the difficulty of my courses over the years	214	37/47	47/41	49/44
RDM14	I have felt frustrated by colleagues who routinely give A's	213	32/49	38/33	24/50

Table 4 (continued)

RDM15	I have never worried about grade distribution by race/ethnicity	213	39/48	70/19	44/44
RDM16	I am sensitive to students' different learning styles	214	75/13	42/33	75/22
RDM17	Demoralizing participating in declining-standards credential mill	210	27/51	36/39	30/41
RDM18	The fulfillment I experience as professor has declined	212	33/59	30/52	42/42
RDM19	I sometimes feel liberal arts degree is a grift	211	19/67	35/37	19/60
RDM20	I am optimistic about the future of higher education	212	21/51	29/37	24/47
Diversity, Meritocracy, and Mission					
DMM1	Due to biases, students of color have to perform stronger	209	45/29	11/66	40/45
DMM2	Racial/ethnic disparities due to systemic racism	209	60/17	20/51	49/33
DMM3	Students of color tend to be graded more leniently	207	14/63	35/38	26/54
DMM4	Reducing racial disparities undermining expectations in math	208	10/43	48/34	19/46
DMM5	Conventional English should not be significant factor in grading	203	14/74	07/69	06/80
DMM6	Minority underrepresentation due to discrimination	209	60/29	22/57	47/44
DMM7	Minority underrepresentation due to lack of qualified candidates	208	31/44	68/15	56/31

Table 4 (continued)

DMM8	I support equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives	210	87/05	64/23	73/13
DMM9	Virtually all students with deficits can excel with support	210	60/24	30/51	47/35
DMM10	Elimination of standardized testing is a positive development	209	65/21	28/44	54/28
DMM11	Standardized tests are cultural discriminatory, if not racist	210	70/15	26/46	56/27
DMM12	For students' mental health, we should move away from grades	210	19/52	05/82	15/67
DMM13	Students should be tested for vocational or university path	208	27/50	47/37	28/48
DMM14	Programs should be eliminated if few to no job opportunities	210	04/89	16/69	11/80
DMM15	Civic mission of university as important as job skills	209	95/01	64/18	91/04
DMM16	Regardless of market, society should pay for affordable college	209	87/06	56/21	76/17

Note: Percentages rounded and collapsed Agree/Strongly Agree and Disagree/ Strongly Disagree

Table 5: Distribution of Responses by Gender

Survey Item	Item descriptions	N	Women (% agree/ disagree)	Men (% agree/ disagree)
Academic Standards and Dilemmas				
ASD1	Grade inflation is a serious problem in higher education	208	41/24	40/21
ASD2	Academic standards have declined in recent years	208	35/43	50/20
ASD3	Student pushback regarding grades has increased	209	41/28	35/30
ASD4	Universities are succeeding in enhancing skills	208	66/16	64/18
ASD5	Corporatization of higher education is a serious problem	209	91/05	74/10
ASD6	Students are studying just as many hours today	208	38/35	35/40
ASD7	Too many students are not intellectually suited	208	30/59	41/33
ASD8	Some functionally illiterate students are graduating	208	35/52	42/46
ASD9	Grade inflation reflects improvement in student preparedness	206	11/60	09/56
ASD10	Encouraging four-year degree plays role in eroding standards	205	38/43	55/27
ASD11	Grade inflation due to need to keep programs financially viable	206	27/53	35/38
ASD12	Watering down courses does disservice to gifted students	202	33/44	54/29
Role Demands and Morale				
RDM1	Student evaluations should not be used for tenure and promotion	205	59/20	53/23
RDM2	Student evaluations are appropriate metric for tenure	205	20/65	34/47
RDM3	I self-censor on campus more and more in recent years	205	54/32	61/25
RDM4	Concerns over “cancel culture” and free speech are overblown	205	37/47	33/46
RDM5	Assessment practices enhance student learning	204	51/30	40/30

Table 5 (continued)

RDM6	Assessment movement is misguided	202	57/16	53/16
RDM7	I am playing a more emotionally supportive role with students	206	76/12	50/18
RDM8	Faculty not responsible for unmotivated students	205	28/39	53/29
RDM9	I routinely give grades higher than students merit	205	36/51	38/44
RDM10	I inflate grades because I don't want to lose enrollment	204	06/85	15/73
RDM11	I inflate grades to avoid student pushback	205	32/58	27/58
RDM12	I feel pressure by department or administration to inflate grades	205	21/74	22/69
RDM13	I have reduced the difficulty of my courses over the years	205	37/51	44/42
RDM14	I have felt frustrated by colleagues who routinely give A's	204	32/49	31/44
RDM15	I have never worried about grade distribution by race/ethnicity	204	41/48	52/36
RDM16	I am sensitive to students' different learning styles	205	88/05	53/30
RDM17	Demoralizing participating in declining-standards credential mill	202	29/47	28/46
RDM18	The fulfillment I experience as professor has declined	203	33/56	32/52
RDM19	I sometimes feel liberal arts degree is a grift	202	19/64	23/55
RDM20	I am optimistic about the future of higher education	204	27/47	23/44
Diversity, Meritocracy, and Mission				
DMM1	Due to biases, students of color have to perform stronger	200	56/22	23/53
DMM2	Racial/ethnic disparities due to systemic racism	200	69/11	34/41

Table 5 (continued)

DMM3	Students of color tend to be graded more leniently	199	05/75	32/40
DMM4	Reducing racial disparities undermining expectations in math	199	11/52	28/36
DMM5	Conventional English should not be significant factor in grading	195	18/66	06/80
DMM6	Minority underrepresentation due to discrimination	200	77/14	31/54
DMM7	Minority underrepresentation due to lack of qualified candidates	199	25/57	60/19
DMM8	I support equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives	201	95/03	68/17
DMM9	Virtually all students with academic deficits can excel with support	201	66/22	39/41
DMM10	Elimination of standardized testing is a positive development	200	67/15	45/38
DMM11	Standardized tests are cultural discriminatory, if not racist	201	79/07	41/38
DMM12	For students' mental health, we should move away from grades	201	22/48	10/74
DMM13	Students should be tested earlier for vocational or university path	199	23/55	37/43
DMM14	Programs should be eliminated if few to no job opportunities	201	01/92	12/77
DMM15	Civic mission of university as important as job skills	200	95/00	81/09
DMM16	Regardless of market, society should pay for affordable college	200	88/03	69/18

Note: Percentages rounded and collapsed Agree/Strongly Agree and Disagree/ Strongly Disagree

Table 6: Distribution of Responses by Political Orientation

Survey Item	Item Descriptions	N	Radical (% agree/ disagree)	Liberal (% agree/ disagree)	Moderate (% agree/ disagree)
Academic Standards and Dilemmas					
ASD1	Grade inflation is a serious problem in higher education	201	31/31	49/22	50/13
ASD2	Academic standards have declined in recent years	201	35/31	40/32	65/15
ASD3	Student pushback regarding grades has increased	202	35/38	38/29	37/22
ASD4	Universities are succeeding in enhancing skills	201	50/23	75/15	47/24
ASD5	Corporatization of higher education is a serious problem	202	100/0	82/06	63/20
ASD6	Students are studying just as many hours today	201	35/38	36/36	24/52
ASD7	Too many students are not intellectually suited	201	23/62	31/46	52/24
ASD8	Some functionally illiterate students are graduating	201	46/46	36/50	46/43
ASD9	Grade inflation reflects improvement in student preparedness	199	00/54	09/59	15/59
ASD10	Encouraging four-year degree plays role in eroding standards	198	31/54	44/34	67/17
ASD11	Grade inflation due to need to keep programs financially viable	198	27/54	30/45	42/33
ASD12	Watering down courses does disservice to gifted students	195	38/44	39/40	71/16

Table 6 (continued)

Role Demands and Morale					
RDM1	Student evaluations should not be used for tenure and promotion	198	50/27	55/20	61/20
RDM2	Student evaluations are appropriate metric for tenure	197	39/46	27/60	31/42
RDM3	I self-censor on campus more and more in recent years	198	42/38	60/31	63/15
RDM4	Concerns over "cancel culture" and free speech are overblown	198	42/27	40/43	22/48
RDM5	Assessment practices enhance student learning	197	31/38	50/30	39/26
RDM6	Assessment movement is misguided	196	77/12	52/17	47/16
RDM7	I am playing a more emotionally supportive role with students	199	69/23	57/17	72.07
RDM8	Faculty not responsible for unmotivated students	198	38/50	38/32	65/24
RDM9	I routinely give grades higher than students merit	198	31/62	39/46	41/33
RDM10	I inflate grades because I don't want to lose enrollment	197	04/76	12/78	15/74
RDM11	I inflate grades to avoid student pushback	198	15/77	33/56	35/48
RDM12	I feel pressure by department or administration to inflate grades	198	15/77	19/73	30/50
RDM13	I have reduced the difficulty of my courses over the years	198	35/58	37/48	59/28
RDM14	I have felt frustrated by colleagues who routinely give A's	197	24/56	29/50	37/33

Table 6 (continued)

RDM15	I have never worried about grade distribution by race/ethnicity	197	35/46	41/49	67/17
RDM16	I am sensitive to students' different learning styles	198	85/15	71/18	46/25
RDM17	Demoralizing participating in declining-standards credential mill	195	24/48	28/48	40/34
RDM18	The fulfillment I experience as professor has declined	198	35/42	33/57	43/41
RDM19	I sometimes feel liberal arts degree is a grift	196	08/67	17/65	37/43
RDM20	I am optimistic about the future of higher education	197	35/50	22/45	24/38
Diversity, Meritocracy, and Mission					
DMM1	Due to biases, students of color have to perform stronger	194	62/27	39/36	11/61
DMM2	Racial/ethnic disparities due to systemic racism	194	66/15	54/24	20/43
DMM3	Students of color tend to be graded more leniently	192	08/68	17/60	35/33
DMM4	Reducing racial disparities undermining expectations in math	193	04/71	15/42	36/25
DMM5	Conventional English should not be significant factor in grading	188	22/70	07/75	07/77
DMM6	Minority underrepresentation due to discrimination	195	58/35	56/30	23/59
DMM7	Minority underrepresentation due to lack of qualified candidates	194	31/46	42/37	61/20
DMM8	I support equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives	196	88/04	88/05	53/24

Table 6 (continued)

DMM9	Virtually all students with deficits can excel with support	196	73/15	51/31	29/51
DMM10	Elimination of standardized testing is a positive development	195	72/16	61/22	29/53
DMM11	Standardized tests are cultural discriminatory, if not racist	196	77/15	62/18	33/47
DMM12	For students' mental health, we should move away from grades	196	38/54	11/62	11/71
DMM13	Students should be tested for vocational or university path	194	08/81	26/49	56/27
DMM14	Programs should be eliminated if few to no job opportunities	196	04/96	06/85	11/73
DMM15	Civic mission of university as important as job skills	195	100/00	92/03	69/29
DMM16	Regardless of market, society should pay for affordable college	195	100/00	85/07	51/22

Note: Percentages rounded and collapsed Agree/Strongly Agree and Disagree/ Strongly Disagree

Table 7: OLS Regression Results: Academic Standards and Dilemmas

	Unstandardized Coefficients[1, 2]							
	Program		*Gender*	*Political Affiliation*				
DV	Eng.	Soc.	Female	Radical	Liberal	Moderate	R^2	N
ASD1	-.162	.340	.018	-.578	-.224	.090	.060	218
ASD2	-.268	.183	-.236	-.402	-.356	.116	.096	218
ASD3	.082	.150	.104	-.233	-.059	.205	.015	219
ASD4	-.087	-.066	-.039	.305	.610*	.176	.047	218
ASD5	.467	-.104	.141	.582*	-.008	-.351	.157	219
ASD6	-.225	-.424*	.046	.255	.183	-.292	.035	218
ASD7	-.174	.079	-.294	-1.349**	-.881**	-.419	.122	218
ASD8	-.175	.009	.033	-.135	-.423	-.138	.023	218
ASD9	.158	-.291	-.073	-.121	.007	-.001	.046	216
ASD10	-.448*	.074	-.283	-1.168**	-.676*	-.302	.159	215
ASD11	-.158	-.113	-.172	-.513	-.407	-.008	.052	215
ASD12	-.348	.126	-.289	-.789*	-.675*	.058	.154	212

Note: 1) Intercept terms are not shown. 2) Significance tests are one-tailed (* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$)

Table 8: OLS Regression Results: Role Demands and Morale

	Unstandardized Coefficients[1, 2]						R^2	N
	Program		*Gender*	*Political Affiliation*				
DV	Eng.	Soc.	Female	Radical	Liberal	Moderate		
RDM1	.045	-.121	.126	-.071	-.001	.208	.013	215
RDM2	-.324	-.191	-.344*	.221	-.025	.148	.060	214
RDM3	.265	.136	-.277	-1.267**	-.866**	-.500	.062	215
RDM4	.085	-.226	-.029	1.715**	1.517**	.953**	.126	215
RDM5	-.068	-.150	.159	-.249	.001	-.131	.014	214
RDM6	.087	-.165	.003	.526	-.061	-.045	.035	212
RDM7	.193	.127	.585**	.254	.062	.634*	.111	216
RDM8	.049	-.262	-.456**	-.640*	-.386	-.112	.085	215
RDM9	.165	.546*	-.097	-.362	-.054	.300	.043	215
RDM10	.070	.066	-.322*	-.102	.091	.104	.023	213
RDM11	.180	.579*	-.075	-.281	.373	.602*	.063	214
RDM12	-.573**	-.542*	.115	.045	-.028	.332	.065	215
RDM13	.253	.486*	-.028	-.588	-.346	.250	.040	215
RDM14	-.122	-.223	.150	-.482	-.499	-.204	.029	214
RDM15	-.257	-.194	.034	-1.042**	-.967**	-.272	.114	214
RDM16	.400*	.211	.687**	.443	.126	.103	.170	215
RDM17	-.155	.109	.164	-.052	-.172	.312	.031	211
RDM18	.138	.463	.003	.189	-.007	.550	.037	213
RDM19	-.426*	-.474*	.102	-1.218**	-1.184**	-.732*	.137	212
RDM20	-.392*	-.195	.006	.478	.438	.337	.030	213

Note: 1) Intercept terms are not shown. 2) Significance tests are one-tailed (* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$).

Table 9: OLS Regression Results: Diversity, Meritocracy, and Mission

	Unstandardized Coefficients[1, 2]							
	Program		*Gender*	*Political Affiliation*				
DV	Eng.	Soc.	Female	Radical	Liberal	Moderate	R^2	N
DMM1	.294	.164	.750**	1.025**	.540*	.146	.215	210
DMM2	.412*	.132	.779**	1.337**	.916**	.607*	.243	210
DMM3	-.410	-.108	-.688**	-.861**	-.436	-.043	.173	208
DMM4	-.121	-.085	-.285*	-1.767**	-1.140**	-.672*	.189	209
DMM5	-.164	-.281	.453**	.107	-.047	-.003	.055	204
DMM6	.210	-.088	1.080**	1.265**	.927**	.484	.278	210
DMM7	-.161	.295	-.902**	-1.498**	-1.027**	-.721*	.253	209
DMM8	.059	-.257	.660**	1.604**	1.269**	.533*	.288	211
DMM9	.258	-.076	.348*	.996**	.334	.014	.115	211
DMM10	.346	.008	.403*	1.628**	1.226**	.436	.213	210
DMM11	.360	.024	.756**	1.693**	1.207**	.766*	.278	211
DMM12	.334*	.089	.673**	1.405**	.729**	.655*	.227	211
DMM13	.015	.161	-.147	-1.991**	-1.201**	-.430	.180	209
DMM14	-.321*	.123	-.280*	-1.329**	-.978**	-.730**	.190	211
DMM15	.752**	.453**	.147	.984**	.646**	.467*	.277	210
DMM16	.325*	-.144	.225	2.495**	1.893**	1.189**	.378	210

Note: 1) Intercept terms are not shown. 2) Significance tests are one-tailed (* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$).

Reviewing the tables, particularly the regression results, we see that gender and (especially) political identity are highly significant predictors of faculty's views across a range of questions. There is comparatively little variation by academic discipline, apart from a few notable items (RDM12, RDM19, DMM15). Math professors are significantly more likely than their English and sociology peers to acknowledge pressure to inflate grades, and to sometimes feel the liberal arts degree is a grift. However, math professors are significantly less likely than their colleagues to view the university's civic mission as important as its mission to purvey job skills, although a solid majority (64%) does so (Table 4, DMM15).

When we turn to gender, we see more pronounced significance. Indeed, women vary significantly from men in our sample on 18 survey items, including in 13 of the 16 diversity, meritocracy, and mission items. As we will address the diversity questions below, let us draw attention to a few of the more conspicuous role demand items in Tables 5 and 8. It is interesting that although a majority of faculty reject teaching evaluations as an appropriate metric for tenure decisions, female professors are significantly more likely than their male counterparts to do so (RDM2). Women's longstanding experience of gender bias in teaching evaluations (e.g., Flaherty 2019) may be relevant here. [8] Notice as well that women are significantly more likely to affirm playing a more emotionally supportive role with students over the years, as well expressing sensitivity to students' different learning styles (RDM7, RDM16). Male faculty are much less likely than their female colleagues to hold themselves potentially responsible for students in class who are unmotivated to learn (RDM8).

Turning to political orientation, we see the most striking findings of the survey. Before diving in, we should note that our survey corroborates the widespread observation of liberal predominance in higher education (see Magness, 2020 for an overview). Indeed, as indicated in Table 1, 73% of our sample self-identifies as radical/liberal, 21% as moderate, and only 6% as conservative/ libertarian. [9] What is remarkable about the political orientation results is that we find significance in 27 of the 48 items across the three survey themes. All but one item is significant in the diversity, meritocracy, and mission category. Moreover, the sizes of the coefficients are almost uniformly and appreciably larger than those for gender or academic program.

Notice, in this context, the typical *stairway* pattern of results. As we move from right to left, away from their outlying conservative colleagues, we see that the

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[8] We were admonished by a couple of respondents for not including gender bias in our formulation of item RDM1 (i.e., in addition to the framing of teaching evaluations as measures of "popularity" or "ease").

[9] Due to their sparse representation, we combine conservatives and libertarians as the reference group in the political orientation models.

responses of moderates, liberals, and radicals tend to be linear and grow in significance. Consider, for example, RDM4, whether concerns over cancel culture or faculty's free speech are overblown. Here we see in Table 6 that 22% of moderate professors agree that such concerns are overblown, in contrast to 40% of liberals and 42% of radicals. Note the significance of these findings in the regression models in Table 9. Observe as well that there are nine items where the moderates do not differ significantly from the conservatives/libertarians, while the liberals and radicals do. Together, these findings plainly demonstrate the key role of political orientation in our findings. That is, political identity turns out to be by far the best predictor of where professors stand on these controversial survey items.

DISCUSSION: THE POLITICS OF HIGHER EDUCATION CONTROVERSIES

Visions and Values in Tension

In order to make sense of our provocative findings, we beg the readers' indulgence as we wax speculative on what we see as the role of ideology and emotion in higher education controversies. We will be completely transparent about our own standpoint on these matters, aware that our views may appear as wrongheaded and even offensive to some. This is unavoidable. If our pessimistic prognosis about university standards is accurate, we feel compelled to prompt this difficult conversation as part of a broader call for a necessary (if unlikely) policy response to current challenges.

Let us start by drawing attention to various illustrations of the stairway pattern of results that we allude to above. Here we'll highlight the descriptive results in Table 6, but we encourage readers to review the regression models as well, as they confirm the robust statistical significance of the findings.

- ASD4: 23% percent of radical professors, 31% percent of liberals, and 52% of moderates affirm that too many students are admitted to university today who are not intellectually suited;
- ASD10: 31% of radicals, 44% of liberals, and 67% of moderates agree that encouraging a four-year degree to all students, whatever their ability or preparedness, has played some role in the erosion of standards in higher education;
- ASD12: 38% of radicals, 39% of liberals, and 71% of moderates agree that the watering down of courses in recent years is doing a disservice to more academically gifted students;
- DMM1: 62% of radicals, 39% of liberals, and 11% of moderates affirm that due to differential treatment in college, marginalized students of color often have to perform stronger academically than more privileged students to earn the same grades;
- DMM2: 66% of radicals, 54% of liberals, and 20% of moderates agree that racial/ethnic disparities in academic performance are due in no small part to systemic racism;

- DMM9: 73% of radicals, 51% of liberals, and 29% of moderates agree that virtually all students admitted with serious academic deficits can excel in a challenging curricular environment with sufficient academic and university support;
- DMM11: 77% of radicals, 62% of liberals, and 33% of moderates affirm that standardized tests, such as the SAT, are culturally discriminatory, if not racist.

We select these items because they capture nicely the sharp contrast in visions. Why, for example, are moderate professors significantly more likely than their liberal/left peers to recognize students' intellectual deficits, or to view the massification of higher education as a reason for declining academic standards? Why are moderates less likely to affirm that systemic racism within universities plays a part in racial/ethnic disparities in academic performance? And why are liberals much less worried about the impact that the watering down of courses may have on academically gifted students?

To address these questions adequately would nudge us onto the contentious terrain of political psychology. We have unpacked relevant arguments in prior research on scholarly controversies (Horowitz et al., 2019; Horowitz et al., 2018a), hence we will not do so in depth here. We will note, however, that from the standpoint of political psychology, basic moral sensibilities that animate the liberal/left are strong feelings of care and fairness toward the vulnerable. The bleeding-heart stereotype holds, indeed, more than a kernel of truth. Yet contrary to the egalitarian protectiveness of the left, those further to the right tend to conform more readily to hierarchical relationships and resonate more with the sensibilities of order, certainty, and tough love. Political psychologists observe that conservatives tend to perceive a more dangerous world than liberals, one where laggards or free riders should receive their just deserts, lest they weaken the group. (For relevant literature in political psychology, see, e.g., Haidt 2012; Hetherington & Weiler, 2018; Jost et al., 2003; Skitka & Tetlock 1993).

We cannot delve further into the psychological texture of the left/right divide. But we must stress that if we are correct about the erosion of academic rigor, and its BWS underpinnings, we are not optimistic about a political response by the professoriate that could gain traction beyond liberal-minded allies. The difficulty, as we have argued elsewhere (Horowitz et al., 2018a), is that liberal-left intellectuals not only feel compassion for vulnerable groups, but often "sacralize" them in a way that hinders objective appraisals of their circumstances. Indeed, the left's instincts to protect the vulnerable manifest in narratives of marginalization, systemic racism, microaggressions, and more that insulate lower-performing students from accountability for their outcomes. Note that the boundaries of these narratives are both intellectual and moral. Empirical claims that attribute responsibility to otherwise *underserved* students, or even acknowledge differences in their ability or effort, are often policed out of campus discussion. The problem is exacerbated by the

overwhelming predominance of liberals among the faculty ranks, which reinforces an echo chamber of shared assumptions, rarely interrogated or openly contested. [10]

Consider the following message we received from a plainly indignant respondent:

> In the spirit of collegiality and the expectation of unbiased sociological research, I began to take your survey. I stopped about halfway through because I found the questions to be biased and leading. I am shocked they were approved by your IRB. Terms like "not intellectually suited," "functionally illiterate," and "not prepared for college" are all euphemisms for students hailing from communities of colors and lower socioeconomic classes. The phrasing of your questions betrays your own views on the "controversies" facing higher ed. I would expect a much higher level of objectivity from a tenured professor in sociology at Seton Hall University.

This respondent was hardly alone in their unfriendly reaction to the questionnaire. Though we received many more positive comments, we found that questions bearing on students' intellectual abilities, or a potential link between student performance and declining academic standards, were outright incendiary to some. To wit, consider these responses to ASD7 ("Too many students are admitted to university today who are not intellectually suited") and ASD10 ("Encouragement of a four-year degree to all students, whatever their ability or preparedness, has played some role in the erosion of standards in higher education"):

- What kind of university? In the context of my university, I find the question pretty offensive to be honest.
- This right-wing talking point might just as well be rephrased to say, "Too many poor kids and students of color are admitted to university today who are threatening the hierarchy we want to preserve."
- If underprepared rich kids can make up 41% of the white student body at Harvard and still manage to graduate, I'm going to need some actual proof that a hard-working Black kid from a blue-collar neighborhood is somehow eroding standards in higher education.
- Outrageously high "standards" reflect an elitist view of higher ed that has kept minoritized students (racial, ethnic, first-gen, low SES) from climbing the social ladder.
- This way of thinking is a cancer on our society's moral character.

[10] We were pleased to receive 1369 comments across the substantive survey items. Trivial grammar edits are occasionally made for readability. It is important to add that while we cite respondents in the ensuring discussion, comments were optional throughout the survey. We cannot, therefore, make claims to generalizability, though the mixed nature of the comments mirrors the variation in our results.

Such deeply moralizing language and charges of elitism were not uncommon among a substantial fraction of respondents. We must emphasize that a minority of respondents articulated such views. And again, as comments were optional, we are hesitant to speculate at how prevalent these sensibilities may be among the professoriate nationwide. We can say, however, that a solid subset expressed such beliefs. Given the possibility of self-selection bias among respondents (and the aforementioned 74 who exited the survey without responding to a single question), we fear such views may be even more widespread than our survey results suggest.

Why do we *fear* the prevalence of such views? Aren't the professors above simply expressing compassion toward disadvantaged students who have just as much a right to attend college as rich, White kids? Moreover, isn't the claim that there are too many students in college today who are not "intellectually suited" merely a justification for a class and race hierarchy that we (perhaps furtively) "want to preserve," as the respondent above asserts?

Putting aside that we are left/liberals ourselves (the lead author identifies as Marxist humanist and the latter as communitarian and social democratic, respectively), we oppose these views on both substantive and, in fact, political grounds. We will address the knotty political problem below, but our substantive objection could not be plainer: *we oppose such views because they are not true*. Identifying people as intellectually suited or not for college is not an intrinsically elitist, classist, or (worse) racist idea. Abilities vary in scholastics as they do in music, art, and athletics. As universities admit a higher percentage of college-age students each decade (NCES, 2017), simply assuming a normal distribution of intellectual ability ensures that there will be increased representation of students on both tails of the bell curve. Nor is it elitist to surmise that increased numbers of lower-performing students in the classroom might erode expectations for all students, prompting a decline in course rigor. Are the third of faculty in our sample who openly admit to reducing rigor over the years (Table 3, RDM13) classist or racist for doing so?

Regrettably, many professors' deeply egalitarian sentiments derail an honest conversation on these matters in a (perhaps unconscious) impulse to protect vulnerable students. The result is all manner of unrealistic claims. We know, of course, that progressives have long chafed at the implications (if not the existence) of natural differences in intellectual ability. Resistance to the notion has taken many forms, such as the belief that intelligence is too multifaceted for any general factor (*g*) to exist; that standardized tests simply measure people's ability to take the tests; that standardized tests do not predict college success; or that students' academic performance is determined strictly by their socioeconomic background. We cannot lay out a challenge to these claims here, apart from noting decades of research contradicting them. (For overviews on intelligence research, see, e.g., Deary, 2020; Haier, 2017; Mackintosh, 2011; Ritchie, 2015; Warne, 2020).

Consider these responses to ASD12 ("The watering down of courses in recent years is doing a disservice to more academically gifted students"):

- The premise of this question is repulsively elitist.
- I do not know what "watering down of courses" means.

- So-called "academically gifted" students have plenty of "advanced" opportunities for special learning in higher education today.
- I recognize the statement as code for a racist and possibly sexist meritocratic stance. There are still plenty of honors programs, advanced courses, and other academic opportunities for students who are more academically accomplished.
- I don't accept the wording of this question, which displays bias. I'm stopping here.

Notice how the respondents interpret the question through a narrowly normative lens. They appear trigger-ready to morally condemn the item, while dismissing the empirical possibility that more academically gifted students *could actually be impacted* by the erosion of course rigor. Throughout the comments, we repeatedly hear the view stated above that the stronger students have honors programs, advanced courses, and the like to excel. Maybe. Another possibility is that they set their sights lower, in comparative satisfaction vis-à-vis their classmates. It is hard to imagine, in any event, that even the brightest students would actively seek more demanding content than a course actually requires. These concerns were hardly voiced. Although most comments reveal doubt that course rigor has declined, several echo the respondent above by indicating that they do not know what the "watering down" of courses means. This strikes us as perhaps willfully obtuse. How is the meaning of the phrase in doubt? We received comparable revelations of "ignorance" on other items (e.g.): "I may ask what we consider, "intellectually suited" (ASD7); "I am not sure what is meant by 'standards'" (ASD10); "I don't know what constitute 'serious academic deficits'" (DMM9). It appears that some respondents, emotively committed to the well-being of the most disadvantaged students, are simply loath to acknowledge intellectual differences or any possible costs to reducing course rigor.

Resistance to the very notion of intellectual ability dovetails with conservative criticism of "educational romanticism" (Murray 2008, p. 6). This is the idea that students of below average intellectual ability can be lifted up to average or even superior competency by effective teachers and adequate university support. We aimed to tap this sentiment in DMM9 ("Virtually all students admitted with serious academic deficits can excel in a challenging curricular environment with sufficient academic and university support"). A solid plurality (47%) of respondents agrees with the view vs. over a third (35%) who disagrees. Notice again the contrast by political orientation, with 29% of moderates, 51% of liberals, and 73% of radicals agreeing. We will not dwell on the statement beyond expressing considerable surprise that so many faculty affirm it. Our (perhaps old school?) view is that our pedagogy does not make students any smarter. To be sure, we teach students techniques, expose them to rich and diverse information, and the like. Yet in the end, at best, we inspire them to reach their highest potential. We do not determine that potential.

We suspect the same wishful compassion prompts many professors to perceive admissions tests as biased. In a rare majority consensus, 51% of faculty believes the elimination of such tests is a positive development, while a plurality (44%) views them as discriminatory, if not racist (DMM10, DMM11). Again, we can only stress here the relevant psychometric consensus that the latter claim is untrue. Such tests

have been honed for decades to eliminate bias. Moreover, the persistently higher average scores of Asians over Whites is hard to square with the notion that such tests are tailored to White European cultural identity and language or are reflections of "White supremacy." Warne (2020) makes the important point that the fact that admissions tests are unbiased does not mean they are necessarily "fair." Given entrenched racial/ethnic disparities in test performance, strong arguments can and have been made that the value of diversity outweighs the value of academic merit alone. Our point is that these are two legitimate values in tension in higher education debate. Our hope is that reflection on the moral sensibilities that animate us as liberal faculty will help foster receptiveness to those with whom we disagree. Righteous dismissals or inaccurate claims about intellectual ability or standardized tests undermine the wider social trust and consensus we need to confront current crises.

We now turn to a few of the most delicate survey items on diversity. Again, we see solid subsets or even pluralities of faculty taking positions that strike us as highly implausible. Recall that 46% of faculty agrees that "racial/ethnic disparities in students' academic performance are due in no small part to systemic racism within universities" (Table 6, DMM2); and 34% agrees that "due to differential treatment in college, such as implicit or explicit biases, marginalized students of color often have to perform stronger academically than more privileged students to earn the same grades" (Table 6, DMM1). Numerous respondents treated these statements as basically settled science. "This is a known fact, not an opinion;" "This has been proven through various studies;" etc. Tellingly, neither of these questions prompted accusations of "bias" in our formulations, despite numerous charges of such on other items. Observe responses when we reverse the question framing in DMM3 ("I wouldn't be surprised if marginalized students of color tend to be graded more leniently than more privileged students in university today"):

- This is bordering on overt racism.
- **MYTH AND RIGHT-WING BIAS** [boldface theirs]
- I work at a highly diverse public university proud of serving minority communities, so my [disagreement] is colored by that.

Such responses suggest that the frequent accusations of survey bias we received are not ultimately about question wording, but, rather, respondents' moral opposition to the positions asserted. It is precisely because of the intense moralization of these matters that we are skeptical that faculty might come to a coherent and unified voice against the corporatization of the university (more on this below). To state our view on this issue baldly, we find it inconceivable that minority students today have to work harder than White students for the same grades, due to the conscious or implicit biases of professors. Universities are, after all, among the most liberal institutions in the United States. Given the BWS convergence, and particularly the racially sensitive cultural context, we are inclined to agree with those respondents who suspect (if anything) that any biases would work the other way.

We share company, hence, with the 50 or so professors in our sample who would not be surprised if marginalized students of color were graded more leniently at their universities (DMM3). Indeed, we would ask readers to ponder the following peculiarity: The suggestion that overwhelmingly liberal faculty often grade students of color more strictly due to prejudice hardly raises an eyebrow. Yet the idea that such faculty might grade them more leniently due to sensitivity is met with outrage or charges of racism.

To preempt any confusion on this combustible issue, we attribute racial disparities in student performance to upstream factors that profoundly impact students long before they enter the university gates. Established sociological variables strike us as key: historically inherited poverty, joblessness, housing and neighborhood insecurity, cumulative stressors, overcrowded schools, and broken families. Wider societal racism matters as well, but again, we discount its relevance in university settings. In this light, we strongly disagree with the spirit, but appreciate the honesty, of the respondent above who reveals that their disagreement with DMM3 is influenced by their "diverse" university's pride in "serving minority communities." Whether or not some group of students is being graded by faculty on a different standard than other students is an *empirical* question. We must strive not to hold our empirical assessments hostage to even our most virtuous emotions. But again, we appreciate the respondent's sincerity, as they at least recognize how their sympathy for vulnerable students shapes their judgment on the matter.

If we step back and reflect, we see equivocation in left discourse on these issues. On the one hand, we hear, accurately in our view, how the structural conditions cited above (poverty, joblessness, crime, institutional racism, etc.) conspire to profound disadvantage (if not sustained trauma) for marginalized communities. Yet in the next breath we hear, "There are just as many qualified candidates by race and class across professional positions in the economy." In debate over disparate outcomes, somehow the structural traumas disappear or have no impact on people's capacity to cultivate their competitive talents in the market.

In our view, the same sociological variables we cite above account for the underrepresentation of minority faculty in universities. Yet here we see discernable ambivalence among respondents on items DMM6 ("The underrepresentation of minority faculty in universities today is largely due to (often subtle) processes of discrimination in the hiring and tenure processes"), and DMM7 ("The underrepresentation of minority faculty in universities today is largely due to a lack of enough qualified applicants, not discrimination in the hiring or tenure processes"). Notice in Table 3 that pluralities of respondents agree with both items (46% and 49%, respectively), despite the fact that the statements make contradictory claims. We make this point not to *call out* our faculty colleagues for inconsistency. We aim, rather, to highlight what are likely to be the same emotive dynamics at play that we saw in the questions discussed above. The sensitive ideological climate today promotes what we see as the dubious view that universities' current practices are "systemically racist" (Museus et al., 2015, p. 49) or that the "pipeline" argument – that there are often not enough qualified candidates of color – is simply a "racist trope" (McDonald, 2021, p. 7). We will not elaborate further on this. Suffice to say that in our many years in higher education, we have served on myriad search

committees. None of us can recall a single committee that didn't value diversity a great deal or would not have relished hiring someone from a disadvantaged background. We should note that we were encouraged by respondents' comments, as the vast majority (around 90%) concurred with the pipeline view (DMM7). We wonder in this light if some who marked agreement with DMM6 (that minority faculty underrepresentation is largely due to discrimination) may have done so unreflexively, in alignment with taken-for-granted progressive presumptions.

CONCLUSION

Toward a Civic Transformation of the Corporate University

We will close by highlighting the takeaways of our report in connection with the daunting political challenges ahead. First, we hope readers interpret criticism of our liberal/left colleagues in the spirit in which it is intended. Indeed, we share a moral vision kindred to the most progressive of our respondents:

- There should be no test of "intellectual suitability" for admission to college.
- A university education is not a prize to be limited to a handful of lucky winners but a resource which should be freely available to all.

We wholly concur that this is how our university system *should* be. We should have publicly funded higher education, as we had in the post-war decades, where places like Berkeley or CUNY were essentially free. We can only imagine the impact a return to public financing would have on the climate of academic rigor. It would be liberating to know that rigorously grading or even failing students wouldn't exacerbate their already unsustainable debt or threaten our academic programs by the perverse metric of our *failing* to graduate them. *But political-economic circumstances have changed dramatically.* The shift from public support to the student-debt-financed regime, coupled with universities' drive to attract and retain students at all costs, suggests the need for serious self-interrogation about the product students are buying and the economic landscape they are inheriting. If our anxiety about gradually eroding standards turns out to be true (akin to the proverbial frog in boiling water), then the product sold could lose even its signaling function of student competence and grit.

Given current pressures, we sympathize with those who inflate grades or compassionately promote otherwise failing students. However, we cannot lose sight of students' mounting debt burden. Are we genuinely serving students by passing them through if they lack basic literacy or analytic skills? Will the work world be as *compassionate*? Although we cannot know from our survey how widespread the phenomenon actually is, it is concerning that 40% of respondents believe their university is graduating some "functionally illiterate" students (ASD8). Most of the comments affirm this (e.g., "I have had many;" "I am SURE this is the case;" etc.). Again, we understand the context. As a respondent notes, echoing our survey's themes, "Many professors are passing students merely to survive. I often see graduate

students in humanities courses who have been admitted with extremely poor writing and reading skills. They are also unable to take criticism." [11]

We perceive, hence, deeply structural problems in our contemporary economy and society. To advocate for state reinvestment and a national commitment to higher education as a *civic good* appears quixotic today. But it is taken for granted in other advanced economies and has appeared on the platforms of major presidential candidates in the United States. We are heartened that this is the one area in our survey that prompts overwhelming consensus. Eighty-five percent of respondents agrees that the university's civic mission is at least as important as purveying job skills (DMM15); and 75% affirms that regardless of what the market values, we as society should pay for four-year college for all (DMM16). Solid majorities of even politically moderate professors concur.

We suggest, in closing, that this is the foundation upon which faculty must be united to address the crises of higher education. We face severe ecological and socioeconomic problems today, not least the threats of climate change and a (senescent?) capitalist economy increasingly automating away well-paid employment even outside the already hyper-robotized manufacturing sector. We staunchly reject, in this light, conservative calls for vocationalizing college or dismantling the liberal arts or programs deemed "unmarketable." [12] Contemporary challenges make it imperative to have as civically informed and cultivated a citizenry as possible. Part of that civic education must be a commitment to building trust across ideological lines. Even putting aside the turmoil of the pandemic, it is alarming to face such perilous challenges when indicators of trust in each other and in our social institutions are at record lows (Brenan, 2021; Rainie, 2019).

Any hope to foster the collective will for a transformation of the corporate university requires coalition building across the political divide. The broader public must buy in, quite literally, to not just the market value but the *civic* value of a college degree. We cannot make that case by eroding standards or diminishing the traditional values of hard work and merit. We suspect that conservatives exaggerate the harms of cancel culture or wokeism in society. Yet we do ourselves little favor as liberals if we mischaracterize or moralize elementary facts about intellectual ability, standardized tests, or the alleged intractability of "White supremacy" in our universities or other institutions.

We hope, in sum, that our findings prompt awareness and action within the academy and without regarding the forces threatening the legitimacy of the college degree. In addition to self-interrogation of our predominantly liberal biases, we encourage faculty to support organizations, such as Heterodox Academy, that promote viewpoint diversity in higher education. Of course, more conservative voices

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[11] Unsurprisingly, we encountered occasional offense as well: "This item is almost an insult to students and reflects deeply problematic prevailing misconceptions about students and about the nature and purposes of higher education."

[12] Lest we be misinterpreted, we are of course not demeaning the value and dignity of vocational training and related employment roles.

will have their own biases and partial standpoints as well. Yet their virtual absence in higher education today suggests we are far from even approaching ideological parity.

We need college graduates prepared to confront formidable political and intellectual challenges ahead. Universities' commitment to the values of civic trust and academic excellence are indispensable in that regard. Whatever the errors in this report, we hope it inspires hard and honest conversations essential to that task.

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#WhiteAndWoke: Racial Consciousness in White Undergraduate Students

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological qualitative study used White racial consciousness theory to conceptualize racial attitude orientation and a novel asynchronous semi-structured interview protocol to explore how White undergraduate students contextualize their experiences with diversity on campus and institutional inclusion efforts. Findings indicate that White students feel marginalized by current White privilege pedagogy approaches to diversity and inclusion and struggle to differentiate their own racial locations within Whiteness. They expressed superficial concepts about White privilege which they conflated with their own racial identity. Implications for practice and future research are provided for higher education diversity and inclusion practitioners to better engage White undergraduate students in campus diversity efforts to achieve institutional goals of inclusivity.

Keywords: diversity, inclusion, White racial consciousness, racial awareness, Whiteness, White supremacy

Racial diversity in the United States is continuously blurring White hegemonies in which Students of Color now comprise a significant proportion of undergraduate and graduate students. This causes sentiments of dispossession for many White students, who feel their positionalities have been disrupted or displaced in favor of affirmative action or other educational equity programs (Ashlee et al., 2020). Additionally, increases in racial diversity on college campuses can cause irrational fears of losing

the societal privileges and power that many White students are accustomed to as members of the majority population (Karkouti, 2016; Spanierman et al., 2012).

Moreover, existing P-20 pipelines isolate and stratify students along racial and social class lines which limits the exposure of White students to racial diversity. This lack of exposure leaves White students inexperienced at navigating the diverse environments across their P-20 educational experiences in which they are expected to participate. This has implications for the ways in which they interact with diverse Persons of Color after they graduate and assume a professional career (Ashlee et al., 2020; Carr & Caskie, 2010; Clark et al., 2012). Historical systems of White supremacy inoculate and reinforce White privilege, immunity, and comfort (Sasso, 2019). White supremacy seeks to reproduce itself and reinforce power or dominance (Cabrera, 2018; Leonardo, 2009). Higher education contains many elements of White supremacy culture such as a sense of urgency, defensiveness, productivity, perfectionism, and fear of open conflict (Jones & Okun, 2001; Sasso et al., 2022). Identifying these constructs of Whiteness and White supremacy is challenging because this is the dominant constructed culture and epistemology in which there is little incentive for individuals with privilege to deconstruct systems from which they benefit (Cabrera et al., 2016; Kezar et al., 2008).

The current structure of the education system in America does not adequately prepare White students to engage in diverse environments (Ashlee et al., 2020). Yet, it is an expectation that they do so successfully in college and later in the workplace and society (Sasso, 2019). College leaders identify educational preparation for successful engagement in a diverse society to be an important goal of higher education (Carr & Caskie, 2010; Clark et al., 2012; Tevis et al., 2022). There are some institutional efforts to develop students culturally to help prepare them to engage in a diverse society, but they come at the expense of Students of Color (Boatright-Horowitz et al., 2013; Sasso et al., 2022, 2023). The current paradigm of White privilege pedagogy allows White students to facilitate an enlightenment narrative and engage in virtue signaling (Foste, 2020a). This is often applied with the term *woke* or "invested in addressing social justice" (Sobande, 2019, p. 1). White students self-label as *woke* as a branding process, often positioning themselves using social media hashtags such as *#WhiteAndWoke*, which allows them to appear supportive of Persons of Color or other social movements (Ashlee et al, 2020; Sobande, 2019).

Accapadi (2007) noted additional context making about power systems and identity for our students and their relationships with student affairs professionals is needed: "it is our job to understand not only context for survival, but also the circumstance" (p. 208). Thus, it is critical for higher education leaders and practitioners to understand how White students are developing as culturally competent students and to understand the institutional factors immunizing or obstructing them (Harris et al., 2019). Little extant research explores the cognitive structural ways in which White undergraduate students form racial attitudes.

Therefore, to address this research gap and inform practice, the researchers for this phenomenological qualitative study sought to explore the complexities and nuances of how White undergraduate students describe their development of White racial consciousness. A greater understanding of the individual construction of White racial consciousness may inform new ways to disrupt White supremacy and provide

additional context for student affairs professionals to unpack Whiteness and identity with their students. The researchers used Rowe et al.'s (1994) White racial consciousness (WRC) theoretical model to conceptualize how White students explore and understand Whiteness and to inform the methodology of the current study.

Conceptual Framework

White racial consciousness (WRC) theory by Rowe et al. (1994) was integrated into the study to help conceptualize the interview guide and axial coding during data analysis. This theory supported the design of questions used in the semi-structured interview guide to explore how students engage with their racial locations and forms of Whiteness. In the current study, racial consciousness is also integrated into the study as a conceptual framework to examine Whiteness and White racial consciousness. Whiteness is defined as an epistemology of ignorance in which White persons lack an understanding about their own Whiteness and positionality or racial locations in this system (Mills, 1997). They perpetuate unconscious or conscious forms of Whiteness which may reproduce White supremacy (Harris et al., 2019).

White racial consciousness theory is not an identity theory, but rather one that classifies the racial attitudes that White people hold towards People of Color (Rowe et al., 1994). Within WRC, two primary constructs of racial attitude types, *racial acceptance* and *racial justice*, describe one's racial attitude orientation (LaFleur et al., 2002). Racial acceptance is a bimodal construct consisting of two attitude types, integrative and dominative, which exist at opposite ends of the construct. The integrative attitude type is expressed as comfort with minorities and the dominative attitude type focuses on the negative attitudes that White persons hold against racial/ethnic minorities. According to LaFleur et al. (2002) these two types "should be viewed as opposite sides of the same coin" (p. 30).

The racial justice construct is also comprised of two attitude types, reactive and conflictive. Individuals with reactive attitudes reflect that White persons benefit from unearned advantages characteristic of the status quo. Alternatively, those with a conflictive attitude type do not support overt discrimination of Persons of Color, but they believe that efforts to support racial minorities are discriminatory against White persons. Perspectives on racial acceptance and racial justice comprise one's racial attitude orientation (LaFleur et al., 2002; Rowe et al., 1994).

Racial attitude orientation is developed similarly to other attitudes through observational learning and, like other attitudes, is subject to change due to situational influences (LaFleur et al., 2002; Rowe et al., 1994). The ability for racial attitude orientation to change because of situational influences supports the use of this model for this study, which describes how students explore racial consciousness in their university setting through sharing their lived experiences of navigating diverse environments and situations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The researchers center extant research in this brief literature review to better describe White undergraduate identity development and Whiteness. We distinguish Whiteness

from White racial identity because they are two distinct concepts. Whiteness is a racial discourse and system (Cabrera, 2018, 2019; Leonardo, 2009). White racial identity is associated with *White persons* in which their inoculation in the system of Whiteness obscures their individual identity (Leonardo, 2009; Sasso et al., 2023). The researchers in this study approach Whiteness as a racial identity and systems concept.

Whiteness

Whiteness is a cultural discourse and system that lacks intersectionality and immunizes White undergraduates within privileged actions and forms of social class (Cabrera, 2018, 2019). Cabrera (2018) argues that Crenshaw's (1989) concept of intersectionality is absent from Whiteness since it lacks marginalization or oppression. Student affairs professionals often mistake intersectionality from a system of interconnected domains of oppression with an identity construct, as distinguished by Cabrera (2018) and Harris and Patton (2018). These more complicated nuances of understanding race are also uncommon for White persons who participate in Whiteness because this allows them to engage in White agility. This is when White people change to an individual identity in an effort to deflect talks about race and racism because it makes them uncomfortable (Cabrera, 2019). There are some other White people who distinguish themselves with a *good and evil* dichotomy in their attempts to avoid discussions about race (Foste, 2020a).

Further discourses about Whiteness often lack context about White immunity, which explains how White identities are immune to differential racial treatment (Cabrera et al., 2017a; 2017b). This concept of White immunity evolved from thinking about White privilege (McIntosh, 1989) and incorporates colorblind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Edwards, 2017). Colorblind racism, also known as color-evasiveness is a kind of racism in which White individuals profess not to see race and avoid discussing racial problems (Applebaum, 2010; Annamma et al., 2017; Edwards, 2017). These are built into White supremacy which is the system of racial oppression that favors institutional involvement and engagement with White students and is often reinforced on college campuses (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Feagin, 2006; Omi & Winant, 2015).

Centering White student formation of a positive White racial identity sustains Whiteness at the cost of subverting racist systems, especially when they do not feel obligated to educate their White peers (Foste, 2020b). Any challenges to this hegemony foster feelings of disenfranchisement among White students, who believe they are unable to assert their privilege and, as a result, externalize responsibility (Harris et al., 2019; Sasso, 2019). White students are typically unable to identify their racial position within the system of White supremacy and engaged in behind-the-scenes racism (Foste & Jones, 2020).

White Undergraduates

White students with White immunity dismiss racism, see racist activities as harmless, underestimate levels of racism and racial tensions, and are socialized in racially homogeneous communities in which they encounter little racial conflicts (Cabrera,

2012; 2014b; 2014c; Chesler et al., 2003; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Reason & Evans, 2007). This affords White students the opportunity to dwell in a condition of relative ignorance known as racial arrested development (Cabrera et al., 2016).

Many White students perceive themselves to be "good Whites" who distinguish themselves from other students by asserting that their university is inclusive and supports ideas of racial harmony which is known as the enlightenment narrative (Foste, 2019, p. 245). They participated in racial narcissism in order to feel they had better racial exposure and a deeper grasp of racial issues owing to their leadership positions (Foste, 2020a). White student leaders also often exhibit "White knight" attitudes in which they see other Students of Color as immature and have paternalistic notions about wanting to *rescue* them (Trepagnier, 2006). It is possible for White student leaders to assert ownership over Students of Color, which is a manifestation of Whiteness as property (Cabrera, 2011; Gusa, 2010; Harris et al., 2019).

Because they have received particular inclusion instruction or claim to have varied acquaintances, *good White* students consider themselves to be more racially conscious than other White peers (Foste, 2020a). In order to escape the accusation of racism, they often claim that they are *woke* (Foste & Jones, 2020). However, they consistently contradict their own knowledge with racially insensitive remarks (Foste & Jones, 2020).

This enlightenment narrative has been propagated by student affairs professionals who have mostly employed McIntosh's (1989) White privilege pedagogy to educate about identity and advise White students about race (Ashlee et al., 2020). White privilege pedagogy aims to help students see their particular advantages within a wider system of Whiteness yet allows them to think they are achieving a shift (Margolin, 2014). This is inadequate for student socialization and may boost White immunity such that Whiteness continues to proliferate in higher education (Ashlee et al., 2020).

White students also engage in public and private displays of bigotry (Ashlee et al., 2020). The idea of frontstage and backstage racism relates to the behavior of White people in the presence of People of Color (Picca & Feagin, 2007). When Students of Color are present, White student leaders will avoid discussing race or claim post-racial attitudes, yet when they are away, they will discuss race and use racial epithets (Picca & Feagin, 2007). White students participate in racial humor as the most prevalent manifestation of backstage racism, but do not describe these activities as racist (Cabrera, 2014a; Joyce & Cawthon, 2017). In mostly White environments, White students might often portray themselves as victims of racial diversity on campus (Cabrera, 2014b; 2014c). This justifies anti-racial minority ideas and postracial logics (Cabrera & Corces-Zimmerman, 2017). These campus environments continue to accommodate White racial comfort, which inoculates White student advantages (Cabrera et al., 2016; Gusa, 2010). Indulging or accommodating these types of privilege fosters racial stagnation (Cabrera et al., 2016).

METHOD

This was a descriptive phenomenological qualitative study which followed the research design of similar previous studies which included the use of a 10-phase coding process (Cabrera, 2012; 2016; Hatch, 2002; Foste, 2019, 2020; Sasso et al., 2022). Descriptive phenomenology centers participants experiences and voices, which allow the researcher(s) to understand how these perceptions and experiences relate to the phenomenon being studied (Giorgi, 2009). This method allows for exploration of a small group of participants' lived experiences to search for patterns and identify the essence of their experiences to place emphasis on the words expressed by the participants and not their own interpretations (Giorgi, 2009). This study was guided by one primary research question: How do White undergraduate students describe their exploration of racial consciousness?

Research Site and Participants

A purposive sampling method was used to recruit participants through email to construct a homogenous sample of White undergraduate students (n = 8). No gatekeepers were used to reduce sampling bias (Patton, 2015). The inclusion criteria for this study were for students to identify as White, full-time undergraduate students with active college enrollment, and within the ages of 18 to 22.

Using White racial consciousness theory as the conceptual framework, participants needed no prior experiences with race, class, or diversity as the researchers sought to understand the meanings participants ascribed to their experiences as a consequence of privileged and marginalized social constructions of Whiteness (Cabrera, 2016). All the participants were given individual pseudonyms to protect confidentiality (see Table 1).

Table 1: Participant Profiles

Pseudonym	Gender	Year in School	Hometown Type	Campus Housing	Major
William	Male	First Year	Suburban	Off-campus	Art
Victoria	Female	Sophomore	Suburban	On-campus	Business
Mary	Female	Sophomore	Urban	On-campus	Business
Jessica	Female	Sophomore	Rural	Off-campus	Health Science
Henry	Male	Sophomore	Rural	Off-campus	Business
Justin	Male	Sophomore	Rural	Off-campus	Criminal Justice
Rebecca	Female	Sophomore	Rural	On-campus	Health Science
Samantha	Female	Junior	Rural	Off-campus	Music

In congruence with phenomenology, participants must have experience with the phenomenon being studied (Jones et al., 2014). Thus, a predominantly White institution (PWI) in the Midwest was selected as the research site. This selected research site is classified as a Doctoral/Professional institution of more than 10,000 undergraduate students and more than 73 percent White. The largest diverse populations include Black and Asian with represented by less than ten percent for each identity. Most of the White students originate from small rural communities or a large suburban area.

Positionality

Foste (2020b) suggested a process of reflexivity when engaging in research examining systems of Whiteness and identities. Therefore, the primary researcher engaged in a process of considering their own positionality in relation to the participants in this study to avoid complicity, invalidate racist beliefs, and avoid cultivating White comfort as suggested by Foste (2020b). A constructivist stance was employed to explore how participants made meaning of their lived experiences (Stage & Manning, 2016). The researchers consider Whiteness through intersecting identities of race, gender, and social class. The researchers also acknowledge the privilege and power held due to their identities and the responsibility to advocate for social justice.

The researchers identify as cisgender and heterosexual with different racial identities. The lead researcher is an African-American female and works in the field of diversity and inclusion within higher education, and the second researcher identities as mixed-heritage Latino male. Given that systems of Whiteness constantly reinforce dehumanization of Persons of Color, we acknowledge our respective positionalities which inform our perspectives to require us to continually deconstruct internalized hegemonies and reconstruct new ways of being that promote justice and liberation for college students.

Data Collection

This study used a researcher-designed semi-structured interview guide which was informed by previous research including the Oklahoma racial attitudes scale (ORAS) (LaFleur et al., 2002; Rowe et al., 1994) and the psychosocial cost of racism to Whites scale (PCRW; Spanierman & Heppner, 2004). Interview questions inquired about the students' thoughts on racial awareness, cultural experiences, privilege, and exploration of Whiteness in college such as "In what ways do you feel that being White gives you advantages and privileges in society, if any" or "In what ways do you feel that being White gives you advantages and privileges in society, if any."

Due to the sensitive nature and racial context of this study, the researchers used an asynchronous interview protocol to allow unedited or unfiltered participant responses which allowed participants the opportunity to honestly reflect and respond thoughtfully to the interview questions (Nehls, 2013; Sasso & Phelps, 2021). Interview questions were distributed to participants in the first email communication and instructed them to submit a minimum of a one paragraph response to each

question. Participants exceeded this expectation and responses were mostly around 250-500 words for each question. There were typically 3-5 extended exchanges between the researchers and the participants in which they added additional expanded responses to questions.

Each interview lasted approximately one week. Multiple emails were also exchanged during each interview for clarification of meaning of responses and complexity for in-depth answers. A specific number of interviews was not established, rather an emergent approach was facilitated, and interviews continued until a point of saturation was reached which was determined by data satisfaction or redundancy (Jones et al., 2014). An informed consent agreement and a demographic sheet were distributed to participants. All interview transcripts automatically were transcribed and compiled through an asynchronous interview protocol and prepared for data analysis (Nehls, 2013).

Data Analysis

In congruence with descriptive phenomenology, interpretive relativist ontology paradigm was used for data analysis. The interpretive paradigm posits that reality cannot be separate from previous and existing knowledge, and the researchers' positionalities are inherent across all phases of the research process (Angen, 2000). Relativist ontology holds that reality as we know it is subjectively constructed through socially and experientially developed understandings and meanings such as through Whiteness (Angen, 2000). Interpretive approaches rely on naturalistic methods such as interviewing in which data is negotiated through dialogue of the interview process (Patton, 2015).

The researchers followed Hatch's (2002) outline for inductive analysis in phenomenological research which outlines ten phases for analyzing data and identifying themes. Using White racial consciousness theory, the researchers identified domains through each of the racial attitudes (Phase 1), and axial codes assigned through these domains to describe various cognitive constructs of the theory (Phase 2). Then, the researchers reread the data to identify and code relationships between the axial codes (Phase 3). Framing the data within White racial consciousness theory classified the experiences of the participants within the context of the racial attitude orientation they revealed.

Deviant (non-examples) were located to determine those data that did not fit within previously identified relationships (Phase 4). This process of searching for non-examples allowed the researchers to identify new themes in the data (Hatch, 2002). Once the theoretical domains were established, the researchers analyzed the domains and ensured they were named appropriately (Phase 5). Patterns were then identified for potential themes within the participant stories (Phase 6; Hatch, 2002; Saldaña, 2021). Coding mapping was used to develop a master outline of relationships among the theoretical domains (Phase 7) and selected excerpts from data to support the elements of the outline (Phase 8) (Hatch, 2002; Saldaña, 2021).

The researchers interpreted the themes that emerged from the participants' stories and examined whether or not the identified themes fit within the context of WRC (Phase 9). While reviewing the data, the researchers discovered that even though the

individual themes did not fit within the model domains, the stories of the participants may fit within the various attitudinal categories identified by the model. The researcher then assessed the stories of the participants according to the theoretical model (WRC) and interwove the previously identified themes (Phase 10). The researchers continuously reflected on their subjectivities to remain aware of how they influence data analysis through several trustworthiness strategies.

Trustworthiness

To meet trustworthiness criteria in this research, the researchers addressed the standards of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as defined by Jones et al. (2014). Credibility involves the "use of others to confirm findings" (Jones et al., 2014, p. 37). During the first phase data analysis, the researchers employed member checking and presented participants with their interview transcripts and early review. Participants examined statements for flaws but did not request clarification. Second, transferability was achieved by supplying lengthy and detailed quotations, allowing readers to participate in their own interpretation of their interactions.

Third, dependability was met by keeping an audit log of research activities and documents (Jones et al., 2014). Lastly, confirmability was used to "tie findings with data and analysis" through keeping a reflexive journal and using a student affairs/higher education researcher as an external auditor to validate the themes (Jones et al., 2014, p. 37). The external auditor examined the veracity of the themes, and the researchers accepted necessary feedback. The auditor and journal allowed noting of any inconsistencies between what was said and the effect on the participant which was used during phase four (Foste, 2020b).

FINDINGS

Only one of the participants lived in an urban environment, but they all expressed that the college experience is one of the first environments in which they actively engaged with a diverse population as many of their pre-college and living environments lacked racial diversity or were segregated. Participants possessed similar backgrounds and varied in their perceptions of the need for racial exploration, the impact of racial experiences, and their value of campus inclusion efforts. Some participants appreciated and were excited about their new opportunity to learn and live differently than before attending college, while others expressed frustration and internal conflict as they attempted to navigate through diverse experiences.

Diversity Is Good for Me

Racial acceptance was the degree to which participants were aware of and accepted their racial status. Many of the students described living and learning in a diverse environment with a strong focus on inclusion as a new experience, and racial exploration was explained within the context of exposure to other racial identities. For these students, the lack of diverse experiences prior to college helped increase

curiosity and engagement once on campus as expressed by Victoria. "I was excited to learn more about the culture when I arrived… I am also hoping to attend more events for cultural groups around campus."

Some students noted the new environment enriched their college experience and cultural competence. Mary shared how experiences in college supported her exploration of her White racial identity, "my work-study environment has also been an encouragement to my exploration of being a member of the White race simply by getting to know people who are not White." and facilitated dialogues to further explore concepts of identity and inclusivity. Samantha reflected on the impact of entering into a diverse collegiate environment "Being in college has provided opportunities for me to reach out and make friends with those of Asian race/ethnicity and learn about their cultures."

Despite coming from different residential backgrounds, Mary and Rebecca both shared that their experiences prior to college had been homogenous in nature, with limited interaction with diverse populations. Rebecca reflected positively about her experience acclimating to her new college environment, "I learned a lot in that first semester about different races but the biggest thing I gained that semester was the ability to be comfortable in asking questions about other races and cultures." Some participants expressed feelings of comfort with other Students of Color which can be described as an integrative racial attituded, but they were still concerned about institutional foci on diversity efforts. They felt that institutional diversity efforts often reduced their access or capacity to interact with other Students of Color.

White students with integrative racial attitudes discussed race as a process of extracting cultural competence from Students of Color. Their perspectives were not shared within a context of the ways in which it increased their own White racial conscious, but rather how they owned this cultural competence as property. Conversely, only Jessica noted this by suggesting, "the biggest thing that I have picked up on is that before anyone should try to learn or understand other people, they need to learn and understand things that [make] them who they are."

Conflating Whiteness

Many of the participants in this study expressed a lack of support in exploring their Whiteness. Thus, they positioned themselves within the conflictive and reactive domains of White racial consciousness. Complicated by notions of racial justice on their campus, the students struggled to see how their lived experiences fit within the institution because of the focus on diversity or inclusion. However, the students struggled to differentiate their own White identity and Whiteness from concepts about privilege. Mary shared her perspective, "To me recognizing [W]hiteness is just another way of recognizing privilege. You are recognizing that you are [W]hite and because of that you are able to have and do things that those who are not [W]hite cannot have or do."

Students recognized that racial awareness is necessary to understand the systematic advantages and disadvantages experienced by members of society which would position them with reactive attitudes. They offered awareness of unearned privileges and benefits of Whiteness as a characteristic of their status quo. However,

many of the participants in this study expressed a lack of support in exploring their racial identity and were only able to express an understanding of White privilege, rather than White identities. Mary shared her understanding of privilege, and the impact she believes it has on her life:

> Being [W]hite gives me so many advantages and privileges in society, there are so many that I am aware of as well as many that I am probably not aware of. One of the largest ways being [W]hite gives me advantages and privileges is in Americas *[sic]* legal system, and particularly our criminal [justice] system. One example is that being [W]hite in most cases means I am able to be pulled over by a police officer because a light was out[,] or I forgot to use my turn signal and get away with a warning.

While Mary expressed a level of understanding of privilege, she continued to share that she did not feel the college environment helped her explore her White identity. Justin shared that several diversity town-halls and in-class workshops assisted him with his understanding of privilege stating, "Since I am a White male[,] I realize that I have certain privileges granted to me by society by my race and for my gender." He further shared a desire to be seen as something more than his privileged status. Like Mary, Justin also felt there was little support for him to explore his White identity. While they conflated concepts of identity versus privilege, they were also troubled by institutional diversity efforts. Rather, they felt more comfortable limiting conversations to privilege as exemplified by Mary:

> Because I am aware of my privilege, I am able to speak from that perspective, but feel more uncomfortable having conversations with other races that are more in depth about how my race makes me more privileged, as opposed to just acknowledging my privilege and moving on with the conversation. Around other White people, I feel a lot more comfortable speaking about how our race makes us more privileged.

Participants often felt and expressed discomfort and feelings of shame when discussing their White privilege in large groups. They were more comfortable externalizing privilege to concepts of social class that Whiteness provides them, but not discussing how their individual White identities contribute to White supremacy.

Response to programs that attempt to facilitate understanding of privilege differed for each participant. No participants expressed interest in challenging White supremacy, nor did any participant share ideas that were attitudinally representative of a reactive attitude type. However, many participants were aware of their White privilege and understood, to varying degrees, the agency it provided in society. Participants expressed colorblind perspectives when discussing concepts of privilege. They engaged in complete avoidance and lack of openness to discussing White supremacy or Whiteness which are inherent forms or racial hyperprivileged and White immunity.

Dispossession

Participants felt diversity efforts dispossessed them from opportunities and status on campus. All male participants felt as if their needs were neglected for the sake of institutional messaging. Henry shared this sentiment by saying, "I think they are

supportive for the right reasons, but it takes a good bit of focus from the other students that may not be a part of a minority race." Henry's statement highlights a need and desire of majority students for institutional efforts that allow White students to feel included in the mission of inclusivity on campus. Jessica shared her thoughts and expressed concern of being left out of scholarship opportunities:

> Where I feel that there is a disadvantage is with things such as scholarships for college. There are so many out there that cater to the minorities, which is great that they have that option to get the furthered education. But I feel that people of the Caucasian race are a little left out; college is not cheap and there are not any scholarships for being a [W]hite person.

None of the participants expressed disagreement about the necessity of institutional efforts to support diverse students, but many struggled to fully accept them due to feeling left out. However, White men tended to have a different perspective and again expressed nuanced ways in which they felt institutional diversity efforts were oppressive such as Henry:

> [Private U] hasn't provided the tools for me to explore my race, while they provide the tools for others… There is an office of diversity on campus, but it feels like the [W]hite community doesn't even have a place within that office as well…I shouldn't be ashamed for being [W]hite, but at [Private U], that's the feeling I unfortunately receive…Being [W]hite at [Private U] makes me feel like I can['t] express myself for who I am. It feels as if the [W]hite community at [Private U] is being silenced in favor of promoting cultural diversity, which is not a bad thing, there just shouldn't be oppression to achieve this goal.

Yet, some students were in the dominative domain and they expressed attitudinal statements that were covert in nature and in many ways reflected a lack of awareness about diversity or inclusion. For example, Henry expressed that "...at some point, there is a fine line where typical people may be able to tolerate the dialogue," when discussing diversity activities occurring on campus. Henry's use of "typical people" as reference to White students implies a sense of majority regarding White students and othering of Students of Color which aligned with a sentiment expressed by Justin. In this perspective, Justin reflected on the focus of campus inclusion activities:

> White students have no outlet, they are almost expected to tolerate this back-seat approach that they are having to take due to current social issues or universities looking to be more diverse… All I ask is that they don't forget the students that have helped them be at the point they are currently at. Administrators can aspire for a better future; issues arise when those aspirations blur the vision of the current [university] community.

Justin was frustrated with how White students are viewed and treated by campus administrators and covertly referenced White students as being solely responsible for the institution's success. These reflective statements shared by Henry and Justin reveal there is a frustration among some White male students of being left behind and marginalized in favor of pursing diversity and inclusion efforts.

William expressed ideas within his interview which made it complicated to examine his racial attitude orientation. William believed his race has had no impact on his college experience and described his sexual orientation as a more salient identity in shaping his experiences. William felt that institutions should not force

intercultural interactions, and if they do, practitioners run the risk of being perceived as indoctrinating students:

> The university is already naturally a place which encourages people to meet new people, explore themselves, think and question. There's no reason to create a mock up seminar on racial exploration and self-examination when everyday of life should naturally be that way. If it's not, then something's broken, and it's much bigger than the university itself.

William expressed that he believed race should not impact the ways in which individuals are viewed by society because it is meaningless, and he believes there is much more to individuals than race. William believed there is more value to be found in organic interactions between students with minimal institutional influence. Similarly, Henry, supported this by sharing:

> At some points when the campus focuses heavily on inclusiveness, it seems constricting to me and this is where I see it as discouraging. There is nothing that forces me to go to these events, but campus activities directors or other organizations on campus push the attendance so strongly that it almost makes me feel bad or regretful about not attending an event about inclusiveness.

Moreover, these participants remarked that they were continually reminded by campus administrators that these events were necessary, but they had power to not attend. This perspective provides context to the veiled forms of racism that were expressed by these participants in not supporting inclusion because it made them feel White guilt. Students with this more dominative racial attitude highlighted the experiences and attitudes of other White men.

Again, they expressed these perspectives as forms of racial hyperprivilege and White immunity. These expressions of discomfort between intragroup and intergroup conversations were not echoed by a desire for additional support for White students' racial exploration beyond developing an understanding of privilege. White students with dominative attitudes are not interested in learning about themselves as well as others unless it is beneficial to begin a performative process within White groups.

DISCUSSION

This study identified the racial attitudes and perspectives of White undergraduate students framed by White racial consciousness theory which suggests that White students are performative in their responses to discussions about race. Participants responded to campus programming with an openness that diversity was positive and helped them understand other racial identities as a form of property. However, participants seemed frustrated by these institutional diversity efforts which they felt were overemphasized to an extent that they felt ignored and dispossessed from opportunity. As a result, participants were able to describe White privilege, but were unable to differentiate how this concept was separate from Whiteness as a system or their own White identities. These findings contribute to existing research and directly addressed the research questions which asked how White undergraduate students describe their exploration of racial consciousness.

These study findings align with similar results found by Ford (2012) surrounding the importance of White students engaging in intragroup dialogue to aid each other in understanding Whiteness. Participants in this study had limited understanding of the root causes of racism in higher education which stems from both individual and systemic forces working to maintain White supremacy (Cabrera et al., 2017). They held integrative and dominative racial attitudes in which they struggled with racial acceptance and did not even move towards racial justice (LaFleur et al., 2002; Rowe et al., 1994).

The White undergraduate students in this study explored racial consciousness through White privilege pedagogy or through unintentional exposure to other races through their student involvement. They described diversity training based in White privilege pedagogy, which is a pedagogical method that has become a seminal approach for addressing individual racism (Cabrera, 2012; Cabrera & Corces-Zimmerman, 2017). Participants elucidated these White privilege pedagogy-based trainings helped them to recognize their privilege which they believed was associated with their White identity as they conflated Whiteness as a system and White identity as an individual construct. White privilege pedagogy does not allow students to fully conceptualize how Whiteness operates as a socially constructed system of interlocking oppressions through laws and policies and creates an individual student behavior understanding of privilege, but one that is disconnected from the systemic influence of White supremacy (Cabrera, 2012, 2018; Cabrera & Corces-Zimmerman, 2017). This approach allows students to *check off boxes* and if they hold enough marginalities, they often will assume a minority identity or identify as oppressed (Sasso et al., 2023).

Participants perpetuated an enlightenment narrative in which they positioned themselves as the *good Whites* who purportedly support and welcome diversity which is inclusion (Robbins & Jones, 2016; Foste, 2019, 2020b). These White students also perceived social justice and inclusion as performative, which they saw as an achievable endpoint that can be evaluated (Foste, 2020a). The students in this study did not see their White racial consciousness as a continual process of self-work (Ashlee et al. 2020). They perpetuated a racial harmony narrative because their institution offered diversity programming and racial representation, and students may be prone to a punitive, self-righteous orientation toward other White students or others (Ashlee et al., 2020; Foste, 2020a).

Some participants in this study, particularly White men, felt disrupted from White hegemony on campus and assumed a victimization identity because they felt their institution overly centered diversity or inclusion. These sentiments of dispossession were rationalized as acceptable because they expressed an undertone that they suggested everyone *hates* or blames them which made them feel guilty about their own Whiteness and infantilized by diversity training. This supports previous research about responses to diversity and inclusion trainings by White undergraduate men (Ashlee et al., 2020; Boatright-Horowitz et al., 2013; Cabrera, 2018, 2019; Sasso, 2015; Sasso et al., 2022).

From this phenomenological study, the intent was to understand how White students explore race in a predominantly White college environment. The study sought to uncover the ways in which the college environment, diversity programming,

and cultural interactions facilitate or hinder White students' development and understanding of Whiteness. The findings in this study demonstrate that multicultural programming, and intercultural interactions increase students' awareness of White privilege (Boatright-Horowitz et al., 2013; Garriott et al., 2016; Linder, 2015; Robbins & Jones, 2016). However, these experiences and multicultural education do not help them critically work through their own Whiteness. Thus, they were unable to process their own feelings of shame and guilt, leading to discourse and rhetoric of dispossession (Ashlee et al., 2020; Sasso et al., 2022, 2023; Sasso, 2019).

Limitations

There are still acknowledged limitations to this study although the researchers adhered to four standards of trustworthiness relates to the transferability of this study. Although this study used a novel asynchronous interview protocol to garner authenticity, there still could have been demand characteristics presented by the researchers who have professional *a priori* knowledge about campus inclusion practices, but not with the individual participants. Social desirability may have influenced some filtering of self-disclosure by participants and influenced participants to engage in frontstage performances. This study also did not account for the individual differences in the purpose and meaning of the racialized narratives and perspectives. The small sample size may not be fully representative or conceptualize the racial consciousness or racial attitude formation of all White undergraduate students. Despite these limitations, it is the anticipation of the researchers that the data collected can be used to provide insight into the nuanced limitations of White racial consciousness. The researchers also recognize that this research may perpetuate focus on Whiteness and the importance of voice for historically marginalized communities.

Implications for Practice

White students in this study learned through White privilege pedagogy which was originally developed by McIntosh (1989) and featured exercises such as the invisible knapsack. The intention is for students to become aware about their individual privileges, but these curricula fail to contextualize systems of Whiteness and continually proliferate White supremacy (Ashlee et al., 2020). White privilege pedagogy often recenters trauma and others learn about from the expense of others, leading some to identify with class minority or other oppressed identities (Sasso et al., 2022, 2023).

White privilege pedagogy reduces conversations about race or racism and limits opportunity to engage in critical examinations of Whiteness (Cabrera & Corces-Zimmerman, 2017; Lensmire et al., 2013). Its programmatic efficaciousness has been rooted in allowing for students to engage in a critical examination of their social class identities rather than racial locations within systems of oppression (Lensmire et al., 2013; Levine-Rasky, 2000). However, in higher education White privilege pedagogy has been linked to frontstage performances of inclusion programs and diversity education in single events such as *privilege walks* or *tunnels of oppression* (Ashlee et

al., 2020). White students learn at the expense of working-class or Students of Color who they use to check a box of *understanding* to absolve themselves from participation in systems of oppression (Ashlee et al., 2020). However, these programs can facilitate a deeper *angry White man* syndrome which can make White supremacy even more recalcitrant (Ashlee et al., 2020; Sasso, 2019).

Participants also expressed feelings of disdain and frustration with campus diversity and inclusion initiatives they perceived as excluding them (Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000; Cabrera, 2014a; 2014b; 2014c). The students' experiences reveal there is a need for practitioners find nuanced ways to ensure White students are not left out or left behind as institutions progress towards developing diverse and inclusive campus environments. There is a present challenge to develop practices that are inclusive of the identity and attitudinal growth and development needs of all students, without recentering Whiteness. These should include educational programs that utilize socially responsible or culturally inclusive leadership development approaches which facilitate intercultural understanding to humanize the experiences of other racial identities across religion, gender, social class, and ability (Dugan & Komives, 2010; Morgan et al., 2015; Zimmerman et al., 2018). Such approaches may position White undergraduates beyond systems of Whiteness that reduce their racial consciousness. Developing these practices may improve experiences of White students with diversity and inclusion but will also aid achieving the goals of inclusivity for Students of Color and reduce the potential for negative interactions (Boatwright-Hororwitz, 2013).

When White students perceive institutional messaging about diversity and inclusion as communicating that they are part of *the problem*, they begin to resist engaging in diversity and inclusion efforts due to feeling obligated to do so (Robbins & Jones, 2016; Sasso et al., 2023). White students are less likely to engage in or support diversity and inclusion efforts when presented as an obligation (Cabrera, 2014; Does et al., 2011; Wolff & Munley, 2012; Zimmerman et al., 2018). There are powerful opportunities during first-year transition or in foundational seminar courses to provide diversity or inclusion engagement opportunities (Sears & Tu, 2017).

Diversity practitioners should reconsider the manner in which dialogues are facilitated around topics of race and provide opportunities for smaller groups students to engage in the dialogue to reduce fear and shame of appearing racist for White students (Ashlee et al., 2020; Carr & Caskie, 2010; Ford, 2012; Linder, 2015; Zuniga et al., 2002). Structured opportunities for racial caucusing can potentially reinforce White supremacy, but if properly facilitated and supervised, can help other White students critically engage in understanding about their own Whiteness (Ashlee et al., 2020; Delano-Oriaran & Parks, 2015).

Intentional efforts and immersive experiences continue to assist White students as they learn about power, privilege, and oppression (Carr & Caskie, 2010; Karkouti, 2016; Linder, 2015; Rowe et al., 1994, Yea-Wen & Simmons, 2015), but practitioners must find ways to both challenge and support White students as they navigate through the cognitive dissonance they experience with diversity.

Conclusion

This research does not adequately account for the subtleties and complexities of how Whiteness pervades White undergraduate student culture. Moreover, the findings of this study reveal a desire among some White students to engage with diversity and inclusion programming initiatives in more ways than discussing their privilege. White students need to hear that while they have privilege, they are not at fault for creating a system of disadvantage. It is important to recognize that when we approach the dialogue solely from the standpoint of privilege and do not assist White students in understanding how their culture, identity, and attitudes have been shaped by Whiteness, we leave students frustrated, full of guilt and shame, and resistant to change. This will perpetuate dispossession and White immunity which results in the continuation of White supremacy.

White students need to recognize that though they have been shaped by their Whiteness, they do not have to be defined by it. Leonardo (2009) noted that, "Whiteness is a social idea, not a culture" (p. 170). There is a present need to support the racial exploration, growth, and development of White undergraduate students. Moreover, since many student involvement professionals are White, it is important to support and guide them in unpacking and questioning their own experiences in order to avoid reproducing problematic practices such as White privilege pedagogy. This practice also reinforces racial attitudes of dispossession or behaviors of backstage racism. Future research should consider the limitations of this research study and replicate the novel research protocol used in this study as it demonstrates promise in capturing authentic perspectives to identify White racial consciousness in undergraduates and engage them in a longitudinal study. This would allow a more in-depth examination of the individual student experiences that impact racial attitude formation. Whiteness is insidious and complex and the participants in this study did not have full opportunity to understand the racial identities of others or even themselves as White undergraduates, especially their social locations within the system of Whiteness.

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