

Linking diversity with the educational and civic missions of higher education.

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Linking Diversity with the Educational and Civic Missions of Higher Education

Sylvia Hurtado

The Review of Higher Education

Johns Hopkins University Press

Volume 30, Number 2, Winter 2007

pp. 185-196

10.1353/rhe.2006.0070

ARTICLE

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Linking Diversity with the Educational and Civic Missions of Higher Education

Sylvia Hurtado (bio)

"The greatest challenge facing Americans is to accept and take pride in defining ourselves as a multiracial democracy."

—President Bill Clinton's Initiative on Race,
1998

In this address, I will lay out the practical, theoretical, and empirical rationale for linking diversity with the central educational and civic mission of higher education. While these links may be obvious to some, oftentimes diversity and race issues are conspicuously absent from discussions about learning and civic education. In fact, the diversity initiatives and civic initiatives inhabit distinct physical, social, and administrative spaces. Much of the empirical work that links diversity and learning and democratic outcomes emerged from the developing area of research, now termed "the educational benefits of diversity" because of its role in the University of Michigan affirmative action cases. I address the aims of this research and critics who have claimed we have abandoned research on inequality or social justice issues for the sake of legal arguments. Transcending the affirmative action debate, **[End Page 185]** the central thesis is that this emerging work on the educational benefits of diversity is part of a long-term effort to transform undergraduate education, which will prepare the next generation of citizens for a multicultural society. Scholarship on inequality can play a similar role in helping to shape the agenda for change.

Practical Rationale

The practical rationale for advancing research and practice that will link diversity with the central educational and civic mission in higher education emerges from the needs of a society where economic, racial, and religious differences are prevalent and inevitable. It is time to renew the promise of American higher education in advancing social progress, end America's discomfort with race and social difference, and deal directly with many of the issues of inequality present in everyday life. The U.S. Census (2005) projects that by mid-century, half of the population will be racial/ethnic minorities, nearly one quarter of them Latino. Many states

and cities are already facing these population shifts. The disaster of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 literally washed away social infrastructure, making racial and economic inequalities starkly evident. The same marginal existence of low-income, racial/ethnic minorities exists in many American cities. In the face of such challenges, today's leaders appear more attuned to protecting their self-interests than in taking action that will close the widening social gaps.

According to Howard Bowen (1977), it is higher education's responsibility to advance social progress. Such advancement occurs not only through new scientific discoveries that improve the health and well-being of society, but also through the education of citizens and the next generation of "office holders" (Gutmann, 1987, p. 181) who will become the architects of new solutions to lingering social problems. It therefore follows that a key impetus for linking diversity with central educational and civic goals is to better position the next generation of leaders for the project of advancing social progress. Addressing inequality in American society, however, has been elusive in higher education and absent from the nation's agenda. I will return to this point later because I believe we can, as a collective, have greater impact as scholars in shaping the national conversation.

A second impetus for linking diversity with the learning and civic mission in higher education is to achieve greater coherence in undergraduate preparation. Although it may seem obvious to some, these areas of activity are often unconnected. It appears that the diversity and the civic engagement "movements" have proceeded on parallel tracks, emerging not only from distinct histories but also differing in how much broad-based acceptance they receive on campus. These movements and their curricular initiatives can be viewed as two approaches that advance students' awareness of the [End Page 186] origins of complex social problems and employ new forms of pedagogy involving dialogue, experiential learning, reflection, social critique, and commitment to change.

Many campuses already possess a substantial array of initiatives that

address diversity and civic engagement; yet while we may find similarities, not all may achieve the same goals for reasons we have yet to probe. Institutions have begun to...

The Review of Higher Education
Winter 2007, Volume 30, No. 2, pp. 185–196
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The citizen as respondent: sample surveys and American democracy presidential address,
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Unhealthy societies: the afflictions of inequality, if you build in a number of cases of
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Beyond learning: Democratic education for a human future, rassel.
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