Chapter 2

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

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ABSTRACT

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

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INTRODUCTION

Promoting the representation of socially and economically disadvantaged students has been a major goal for universities in the United States for roughly 50 years. Despite the numerous attempts to create diverse learning environments, research indicates that higher education institutions have failed to create inclusive learning environments conducive to minority students’ success (Karkouti, 2016a). The United States of America has always been regarded as the land of opportunities where all people equally share the benefits of its democratic society (Aguirre & Martinez, 2003; Lewis, 2004). However, racial and ethnic minorities still suffer the deleterious effects of structural racism that promotes oppression and increases social disparity (Lewis, 2004; Stout, Archie, Cross, & Carman, 2018). In the higher education arena, minority students view postsecondary education as a means for social mobility and strive for degree programs to pursue successful career tracks, enhance their employment opportunities, and remain competitive in the 21st century global marketplace (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). In an effort to bridge the gap between the privileged majority and the underprivileged minority through education, the Obama administration launched the Race to the Top initiative in 2009 that aimed at educating all of the U.S. population and increasing the number of Americans with college degrees by at least 60% (Ewell, 2011). This ambitious initiative seems to be ineffective because the gap in bachelor’s degree attainment between Whites and Hispanics has increased by 10% and between Whites and Blacks by 6%, between the years of 1975 and 2010 (Aud et al., 2011).

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