

CULTURAL DIVERSITY AS AN ELEMENT OF THE UNIVERSITY CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT: DOES IT MATTER TO TODAY'S STUDENTS?

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The authors empirically investigated 1) student ratings of the importance of cultural diversity as an element of the campus environment as part of their educational experience at the university level, using a sample of students enrolled in a culturally diverse university, and 2) differences in student ratings of the importance of cultural diversity by ethnicity and other demographic characteristics. ANOVA procedures showed significant cultural differences in student rankings. Also, administrative and/or managerial implications are presented.

INTRODUCTION

Consider the following numbers:

239,746,000	244,995,000	302,626,000
38,343,000	40,454,000	61,361,000
13,160,000	14,241,000	33,430,000
44,321,000	47,756,000	102,560,000

In and of themselves, these numbers have little meaning. But if we reflect on the source of the numbers, the U.S. Census Bureau, we can begin to sense that they represent something of importance to this country and to the world. And if indeed those numbers are related to the population of the United States, it would seem that we – as marketers and marketing educators – would be well advised to pay attention to and understand them. This manuscript presents an empirical study designed to help marketing educators and university administrators deepen their understanding of the importance of these numbers.

As shown in Table 1, the numbers cited above represent U.S. government projections of the population of the United States in the years

The Marketing Management Journal
Volume 21, Issue 1, Pages 214-221
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2006, 2010 and 2050. Those projections show that the overall population of this country, as well as the ethnic diversity of the U.S., is expected to grow dramatically during the next forty years. For example, by the year 2050, it is projected that over 100 million people claiming Hispanic origin and more than 60 million Blacks will reside in this country. In addition, experts predict that, by that same time, nearly 35 million people with Asian origins will live in the United States. In short, the current U.S. population includes significant ethnic diversity and that diversity is predicted to grow rapidly in the coming years.

The population projections and the diversity estimates within that population are also representative of the make-up of the student body on college and university campuses across the United States. NCES statistics indicate that college enrollments in the U.S. reached a record 17.6 million students in 2006 and that enrollment is expected to increase by another 13 percent between 2006 and 2015 (National Center for Education Statistics 2006). The proportion of American college students who are minorities has also been increasing. Between 1976 and 2004, the percentage of total undergraduate students claiming minority status increased from 17 percent to 32 percent. During

TABLE 1
Projected Population of the United States by Race and Hispanic Origin

Race	Population Projections by Year		
	2006	2010	2050
White	239,746,000	244,995,000	302,626,000
Black	38,343,000	40,454,000	61,361,000
Asian	13,160,000	14,241,000	33,430,000
Hispanic	44,321,000	47,756,000	102,560,000

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2004, "U.S. Interim Projections by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin."

that time span, the proportion of Asian or Pacific Islander students rose from 1 percent to 6 percent, the proportion of Hispanic students rose from 4 percent to 10 percent, and the proportion of Black students rose from 9 percent to 13 percent (National Center for Education Statistics 2006). Also, by 1980, the percentage of females enrolled as undergraduates surpassed the percentage of males enrolled as undergraduates (National Center for Education Statistics 2007).

The population statistics reported by the U.S. Census Bureau and the minority college enrollment numbers reported by the National Center for Education Statistics provided the impetus for this study. Specifically, the work reported here was designed to answer two broad research questions: 1) Do university students feel that cultural diversity on campus is an important component of their educational experience, and 2) Does ethnicity (as well as other demographic characteristics) influence university students' ratings of the importance of cultural diversity on campus?

Ancis, et al. (2000) found that student perceptions of the cultural climate on their campus varied by race/ethnicity. The goal of this research is to extend our understanding of campus cultural diversity to include whether and to what extent such diversity matters to students, and how that varies by race and/or ethnicity. The remainder of this manuscript presents the methodology used in the study, the

findings of the research, and administrative implications.

THE STUDY

This study employed the survey research method. Participants were asked to complete a paper-and-pencil questionnaire that included a series of six statements designed to assess student perceptions of the importance of cultural diversity as part of the university environment. The items were written into seven point Likert scales with endpoints of (1) strongly disagree and (7) strongly agree.

The six item "Importance of Cultural Diversity in the Education Environment Scale" or, simply, the ICDEE, was originally developed and evaluated by Amyx and Bristow (2006). The ICDEE was developed following the guidelines for scale development as proposed by Churchill (1979), with the overall construct of cultural diversity defined as *the representation, in one social system, of people with distinctly different group affiliations of cultural significance* (Cox 1994). The psychometric properties of the ICDEE were generally very good, yielding a one-factor scale and coefficient alpha of .885 for the six item scale. However, the sample of 339 students used in that study was overwhelmingly Caucasian, thus limiting the authors' ability to examine ethnic differences in student perceptions of the importance of cultural diversity on their campus.

In the present study, the ICDEE and several other demographic questions were included as part of a questionnaire that was distributed during regularly scheduled class sessions at a large, culturally diverse, west coast university in the United States. Student participation in the study was voluntary. All participants were asked to sign a consent form and were provided with completion instructions for completing the questionnaire.

A total of 480 students participated in the study, with 436 of those students providing complete and useable questionnaires. The student participants were enrolled in a variety of sophomore through senior business courses at the AACSB accredited institution. As seen in Table 2, the sample was quite ethnically diverse, with nearly 75 percent of participants indicating minority status (47.2 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, 19.8 percent Hispanic, 6.8 percent Other, 0.6 percent Black, and 0.4 percent American Indian). In addition, 17.9 percent of participants identified themselves as Caucasian. Unfortunately, so few students identified themselves as either Black or American Indian that it was not feasible to include those groups in the analysis. Consequently, four ethnic/racial groups were studied: Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic, Caucasian and Other.

In addition, 91.5 percent of the participants were between 18 and 27 years of age, and 70.9 percent were traditional aged college students between 18 and 23. The sample was split approximately evenly by gender. Finally, 54.3 percent of participants held part-time jobs and 12.8 percent held full-time jobs while attending school.

RESULTS

The research was designed to provide information pertaining to two broad questions: 1) How important, if at all, is campus cultural diversity to college/university students?, and 2) How much difference, if any, is there in the importance of cultural diversity by student ethnic subgroups and/or other demographic

variables?. Student responses to the following items comprising the ICDEE were analyzed in order to investigate student ratings of the importance of cultural diversity as part of their educational environment:

The following statements relate to your feelings about the importance of cultural diversity as a part of your learning environment at this university. If you strongly disagree with a statement, circle the number "1" on the scale below. If you strongly agree with a statement, circle the number "7." Use the intervening numbers to indicate intermediate levels of disagreement or agreement.

For me to learn effectively, I must have cultural diversity among students on campus.

For me to learn effectively, I must have cultural activities and programs available to me.

For me to learn effectively, I must have faculty and staff who are culturally sensitive to me.

For me to learn effectively, I must have harmony with students from different cultures.

For me to learn effectively, I must have other students who are culturally sensitive to me.

For me to learn effectively, I must have a cultural environment that allows me to express myself as an individual.

The authors created a Cultural Diversity Importance (CDI) index by summing each student's responses to the six items in the ICDEE and then dividing that summed score by six. CDI index scores could range from a possible low of "1" to a possible high of "7".

TABLE 2
Demographic Profile of Participants*

Demographic Variable	N	%	
Gender	Female	220	46.8%
	Male	244	51.9%
Ethnicity	American Indian	2	.4%
	Aisan/Pacific Islander	222	47.2%
	Black	3	.6%
	Caucasian	84	17.9%
	Hispanic	93	19.8%
	Other	32	6.8%
Job Status	no job	149	31.7%
	part-time job	255	54.3%
	full-time job	60	12.8%
Voting	Eligible and Did Vote	207	44.0%
	Eligible and Did Not Vote	155	33.0%
	Not eligible to vote	100	21.3%
Age	18-22	333	70.9%
	23-27	97	20.6%
	28-32	21	4.5%
	33-37	6	1.3%
	Over 38	6	1.3%

*Note: Due to non-response on some items, totals and category responses may differ.

Scale Properties

As it had in its initial assessment, the ICDEE yielded excellent psychometric properties in this application, as shown in Table 3. Overall, Cronbach's alpha for this study was an exceptional .895, with all six items contributing to that result (see "Alpha if Scale Item Deleted" in Table 3). In addition, a common factors analysis yielded a single factor solution explaining and 65.6 percent of total variance, with eigenvalue of 3.938.

Ethnic/Racial Comparison

ANOVA procedures showed significant differences in the way in which the four included ethnic groups rated the importance of cultural diversity on their university campus. As presented in Table 4, Caucasian students

tended to rate cultural diversity on campus as being significantly less important than did any of the minority ethnic group students. Specifically, the Mean Cultural Diversity Importance (hereafter, M-CDI) score among Caucasian students was 3.99, compared to 4.86 for Asian/Pacific Islander students ($p < .01$), 4.90 for Hispanic students ($p < .01$), and 4.67 for Other students ($p = .02$). There were not significant differences in M-CDI scores among the three students groups with ethnic minority status.

Gender Comparison

The authors were also interested in possible gender differences in terms of the importance of campus cultural diversity to students. The analyses revealed that female participants considered cultural diversity to be more

TABLE 3
Psychometric Assessment of the ICDEE

Scale Item	Factor Loading	Scale Item Mean	Scale Item Std. Dev.	Scale Item-to-Total Correlation	Alpha if Scale Item Deleted
1	.789	4.36	1.77	.696	.880
2	.785	4.02	1.65	.695	.879
3	.837	4.65	1.66	.748	.871
4	.778	5.21	1.55	.673	.882
5	.860	4.55	1.60	.779	.866
6	.808	5.16	1.60	.713	.876

TABLE 4
Student Rankings of the Importance of Cultural Diversity on Campus ANOVA Results: The Effect of Ethnicity

CDI Index Mean				Source	SS	df	MS	F*	p
Asian/ Pacific Islander	Caucasian	Hispanic	Other						
4.86 *(p < .01)	3.99*	4.90 *(p < .01)	4.67 *(p = .02)	Between	51.21	3	17.07	10.47	< .01
				Within	685.21	420	1.63		
				Total	736.42	423			

important (M-CDI = 4.69) than did their male counterparts (M-CDI = 4.32). The observed difference was statistically significant, but only at the p = .06 level.

Work Status Comparison

Participants in the study were also asked to indicate whether, in addition to going to school, they were employed on a part-time or full-time basis or if they did not work in addition to attending school. ANOVA procedures revealed that students who were not employed while attending college considered cultural diversity as part of the learning environment to be significantly (p = .03) more important (M-

CDI = 4.84) than did students who held full-time (40 or more hours per week) jobs while attending school (M-CDI = 4.40).

Civic Participation Comparison

Finally, the authors were interested in what relationship, if any, might exist between student ratings of the importance of cultural diversity and their level of civic participation, as measured by their voting status in the most recent US Presidential election. In order to empirically test this relationship, students were asked the following question:

Did you vote in the “most recent” United States Presidential election?

- I am eligible to vote and yes, I did vote*
- I am eligible to vote, but no, I did not vote*
- I am not eligible to vote*

ANOVA procedures showed that student participants who were not eligible to vote in this election rated cultural diversity to be a significantly ($p = .01$) more important component of their educational environment (M-CDI = 4.98) than did students who were eligible to vote and did indeed vote (M-CDI = 4.58) and students who were eligible to vote but did not vote (M-CDI = 4.58).

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS

Several interesting conclusions and attendant implications for college and university officials can be gleaned from the findings of this study, which examined student perceptions regarding the importance of diversity on campus. Overall, students in the study regard campus diversity as at least moderately important. Even Caucasian students yielded a mean CDI score of 3.99, virtually at the midpoint of the scale which ranged from 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree with six statements assessing student opinions about the importance of diversity on their campus. Even these students, with backgrounds largely in the dominant Caucasian culture, did not disagree strongly that cultural activities should be available to them personally, that there must be harmony on campus between students from different cultures, and so on.

Perhaps not totally unexpected, the findings also showed that ethnic/racial minority students were significantly more of the opinion that campus diversity is important. This was so for Hispanics (M-CDI = 4.90), Asian/Pacific Islanders (M-CDI = 4.86), and Others (M-CDI = 4.67), each mean between one-half and one full scale point higher than that among Caucasian students. On average, all three groups' responses lay to the "agree" side on such issues as having faculty, staff and other students who are culturally sensitive to them personally, having a campus environment that

allows the student to express himself or herself as an individual, and so on.

At many colleges and universities, officials have actively recruited among ethnic and racial minority groups for some time now. And, statistics cited earlier strongly point to the fact that minorities continue to account for an increasing percentage of the college student population nationwide. That change has resulted in at least two key advances. First, of course, increasing numbers of minority students have had access to the personal growth and professional preparation afforded by a college or university education. Second, the resulting diversity among a school's student body has provided for the possibility of a richer, more stimulating environment for the entire campus community, a fact that has been recognized and validated by the students in this study.

However, just recruiting minority students to campus is insufficient. For example, Love (2009) suggests that minority students in general, and African-American students in particular, wish to be on a campus that offers and inclusive academic body and one that works to promote diversity and student success. In other words, the next real challenge for administrators who succeed in creating a diverse student body is to provide an environment where cross-cultural interaction can flourish, lest the campus community is left with nothing more than a shifting demographic profile. This second task, after recruitment has succeeded, can be just as difficult, if not more so. Anecdotally, any stroll through a campus student union tends to verify that, if left to their own volition, students tend to seek the company of those most similar, a variation on the old adage "birds of a feather ...". So, it becomes again the task of those in charge to nudge, nurture and, if needed, shove, students in the direction of cross-cultural interaction.

Creative minds in university offices across the country have designed a myriad of methods to accomplish this task. Much can be done through student life, using judicious roommate selection processes and, when it comes time,

careful re-configuration of public areas in dormitories during renovations. Meal plans, menu plans and floor plans in dining areas both in the dormitories and student unions can either encourage or discourage student interaction; the former will accomplish more than the latter. Student organizations can help enormously, through cross-cultural recruiting efforts as well as through programmatic efforts. At one authors' school, for example, numerous international student groups host special nights showcasing their countries' cultures, traditions and cuisines.

Faculty, both collectively and individually, can also provide learning environments that encourage students to engage one another in the school's academic setting in ways that stimulate cross-cultural learning. Ethnic and/or racial minorities can be used in an official or unofficial capacity in furthering the school's diversity education. Formal programs, housed within general education, offered as a certificate program, or comprising majors and minors can and have been devised. Individual faculty can employ methods to encourage (even, to assure) cultural cross-learning during class discussions, planned or impromptu break-out sessions, or when constructing groups and teams for project work. Even tasks as simple as ice-breaking exercises at the beginning of the term that go beyond the typical "tell us who you are and what your major is" can help begin to bring a diverse student body together. In addition, Colbert (2010) cautions that faculty need be mindful of their own cultural background and that their cultural biases might influence how they interact with students.

So, in order to truly succeed, university plans and programs to increase campus diversity must be more than a sheer numbers game; students in this study certainly opine that cultural diversity must be inculcated throughout the fabric of the campus, from the President's Office to the Maintenance Department, from the Faculty Senate to the Student Union, from the classroom to the lunchroom.

It is also interesting that male students are generally less concerned about the importance of campus cultural diversity than are female students, that students who work full-time are less concerned than those who do not work, and that those eligible to vote are less concerned than those not eligible. As to gender, women students, part and parcel of another protected class with a long and inglorious history enduring bias and discrimination, likely might better emphasize with the need for diversity of all sorts on their college and university campuses, including cultural diversity. And, we tend to forget how recent it has been that female students have been welcomed into certain areas of academia. One of the author's can recall in the mid-70s it being very easy to memorize women students' names in his business classes – there were never more than one or two such names in a class of forty; now it's always within a rounding error of a fifty/fifty split.

The results with respect to voting behavior, in the end, have been difficult to sort out. There are several reasons for voting ineligibility, including residency, age and citizenship. Not knowing why a student was ineligible to vote makes it difficult to sort out why ineligible voters feel more strongly about the importance of cultural diversity than eligible voters, but it remains that they do. (This might be one fruitful area for further investigation.) What is more intriguing is the lack of a difference in perception between eligible voters who did versus did not vote. Evidently, civic participation, as measured by this single and somewhat weak indicator, is not closely tied with student feelings about the importance of campus diversity.

Finally, Amyx and Bristow (2006) show how the ICDEE can be adapted, with minor wording changes, to assess student satisfaction with (as opposed to their attitudes about the importance of) cultural diversity on their own campus. Hart, et. al (2009) found that Hispanics, Non-Hispanic Caucasians and African-American students exhibited significantly different overall levels of satisfaction with their university, so

similar differences might be expected with respect to satisfaction with the level of cultural diversity on campus.

Using the ICDEE as an assessment tool for student satisfaction, college and university administrators charged with enhancing the school's cultural diversity and/or interactions and mutual, shared learning across diverse groups of students, can make these changes and utilize the scale first to establish a benchmark of student satisfaction and, later, as a periodic institutional progress check. We agree with Amyx and Bristow's (2006, p. 56) conclusion that the ICDEE is a "versatile, easily adapted instrument with which university administrators can readily assess student perceptions of the institution and compare perceptions across segments of the college/university student population."

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