



# Digest of Recent Research

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Edited by Matthew J. Mayhew

with assistance from Eric McChesney

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## About the Digest

CIC's *Digest of Recent Research* is a compendium of summaries of research that independent college and university presidents are likely to find helpful. The *Digest* highlights timely research from scholarly journals and other publications with a focus on findings useful to presidents and to other leaders of independent colleges and universities. Edited by Matthew J. Mayhew, William Ray and Marie Adamson Flesher Professor of Educational Administration at Ohio State University, each *Digest* offers a brief summary of selected articles that includes a discussion of the findings and implications for action by the leadership of independent colleges and universities. CIC is grateful to the Spencer Foundation for its support of this series.

Article reviews in the *Digest of Recent Research* can be downloaded as a single document (PDF). For questions or comments about the *Digest*, please contact Harold V. Hartley III, CIC senior vice president, at [hbartley@cic.nche.edu](mailto:hbartley@cic.nche.edu).

## About the Editor

Matthew J. Mayhew is William Ray and Marie Adamson Flesher Professor of Educational Administration with a focus on higher education and student affairs at Ohio State University (OSU). Before coming to OSU, he served as an associate professor at New York University and an administrator at Fisher College and the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. Mayhew's research examines college and its effects on students. To support this line of inquiry, he has been awarded over \$17 million in funding from sources including the U.S. Department of Education, the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, the Fetzer Institute, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and the Merrifield Family Foundation. He is lead author of *How College Affects Students: 21st Century Evidence That Higher Education Works* and has published over 70 peer-reviewed articles in top-tier journals in the field. Mayhew has served on the editorial boards of the *Journal of Higher Education*, *Research in Higher Education*, and the *Journal of College Student Development*. He earned his BA from Wheaton College (IL); his MA from Brandeis University; and his PhD from the University of Michigan.

Assisting with this issue is Eric McChesney, a PhD candidate in higher education and student affairs at Ohio State University and a research associate with the College Impact Laboratory. His research interests include the cultivation of interdisciplinary skillsets, STEM graduate training, and innovation.

# Helping Students with Disabilities Persist in College

Newman, L., J. Madaus, A. Lalor, and H. Javitz. 2020. "Effect of Accessing Supports on Higher Education Persistence of Students with Disabilities." *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000170>.

## SUMMARY

How does access to support services help students with disabilities persist through college? Analyzing the National Longitudinal Study 2 (NSLT-2), a nationally representative longitudinal dataset that included a sample of 2,330 college students identified as having a disability in secondary school, the authors used a quasi-experimental study to find out. The authors discovered that the students who had accessed universally available (e.g., writing and math centers) and/or disability-related supports (e.g., disability services) were significantly more likely to persist through their college experience at either two- or four-year colleges. In addition, retention rates were higher for students who accessed services that were universally available (those that do not require disability disclosure).

## DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Traditional success markers, including persistence and graduation rates, are grossly understudied among populations of students with disabilities. In addition, the studies that have addressed these important relationships often have critical flaws. For example, sample sizes are insufficient for making causal inferences, comparative frameworks that interrogate differences between students with and without disabilities are not used, and issues related to people with disabilities and related services are not addressed. The authors of this study, however, do a commendable job approaching the persistence of students with disabilities with rigor, nuance, and sensitivity.

The authors noted that nearly three in five students (almost 60 percent) with

disabilities had accessed universally-available (tutors, writing and math centers) and/or disability-related support (disability services); 43 percent had accessed only universally-available but not disability-related support services; and 11 percent had accessed only disability-related support services and not universally-available services.

Overall, the study suggests that all services—those that require disclosure of disabilities and those that do not—helped students persist, at both two- and four-year colleges. Specifically, 75 percent of students who had accessed these services persisted, compared to the nearly 56 percent who did not access any services. Also, persistence rates for students who accessed universal supports reached 79 percent when compared to students who did not access any services

and whose persistence rates reached only 51 percent.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR ACTION BY CAMPUS LEADERS

Students with disabilities are rarely included in conversations about inclusion, equity, and belonging. The authors correctly point out that, "many campus administrators and staff do not receive disability-related knowledge in their graduate training and in their professional journals, and need additional professional development in order to support students with disabilities" (p. 8). Institutional leaders should examine their faculty development programs to be certain the programs prepare faculty to teach students with disabilities.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

Lynn Newman is a principal researcher at the Center for Learning and Development at SRI International.

Joseph Madaus is a professor of educational psychology at the University of Connecticut.

Adam Lalor is the director of the Landmark College Institute for Research and Training.

Harold Javitz is a senior statistician at the Center for Learning and Development at SRI International.

## **LITERATURE READERS MAY WISH TO CONSULT**

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Wessel, R., J. Jones, L. Markle, and C. Westfall. 2009. "Retention and Graduation of Students with Disabilities: Facilitating Student Success." *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability* 21: 116–125.

# How Party Affiliation Influences Educational Policy Choices

Gandara, D., and S. Jones. 2020. "Who Deserves Benefits in Higher Education? A Policy Discourse Analysis of a Process Surrounding Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act." *The Review of Higher Education* 44 (1): 121–157.

## SUMMARY

How do policymakers at the highest levels of government conceive of the purposes of higher education? What logic do they employ to justify their political decisions? How do they understand and represent different groups of stakeholders in higher education? And how does this influence their willingness to distribute benefits and burdens to these groups? This study addresses these questions through a discourse analysis of over 14 hours of deliberation by the U.S. Congress Committee on Education and the Workforce regarding the 2017 reauthorization of the Higher Education Act.

Specifically, the researchers employed the theory of social construction and policy design which "centers the social construction of groups targeted through policy" (p. 125). This form of discourse analysis examines who is given the power to speak, agency over setting definitions, establishing acceptable forms of logic, and asserting "truths" within the discourse that open or close reasonable possibilities for social change. These perspectives were then used to illuminate patterns in how Republicans and Democrats positively or negatively characterized different groups. Furthermore, the researchers traced how the formal political power of each group interacted with this descriptive valence and determined the extent to which policy decisions granted or denied them various advantages.

## DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

As the committee was majority-Republican, the proposed reauthorization (known as the PROSPER act) was drafted by Republican committee members and only later presented to the Democratic members of the committee for debate and amendment. This situation allowed Republicans to define the underlying assumptions of the reauthorization act, which focused on the macroeconomic rationale of higher education (workforce preparation) and upon accruing individual monetary benefits to students. This strategy permitted dismissal of amendments that championed other ends of higher education (for ex-

ample, racial educational equity) by appealing to the "goal of the underlying bill" (p. 133).

Both Republican and Democrat committee members consistently ascribed positive attributes to low-income students, student borrowers, older students and veterans, racial minority students, and high school students. Republicans advocated more frequently for the needs of high school students and older adult students and veterans, while Democrats tended to promote the needs of minority serving institutions, racial minority students, and DREAMers, while frequently voicing concerns about the corporations and for-profit institutions that they frequently characterized as predatory and exploitative.

Several patterns emerged regarding the distribution of benefits and burdens and their attendant rationalizations. Certain groups with positive constructions (for instance, adult students and high school students) that receive benefits through the proposed policy were mentioned often. However, positively-constructed groups that had low political power (such as DREAMers, racial minority students, and low-income students) and were additionally burdened by the proposed policy were not addressed, and amendments challenging these burdens were dismissed.

Finally, it is notable that several communities important to higher education were not mentioned at all during the 14 hours of discussion, including people

with learning disabilities and the LGBTQ+ community.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR ACTION BY CAMPUS LEADERS**

These findings raise the question of how effectively higher education leaders

communicate the needs of their constituents to powerful policymakers in the nation. As government bodies become increasingly specialized and as lobbying groups proliferate, it is important that university leaders communicate clearly and use the political leverage necessary to shape national narratives about

higher education and who it serves. College leaders should have consistent and powerful messages that reach well beyond their own institutions.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

Denisa Gandara is an assistant professor of higher education at Southern Methodist University.

Sosanya Jones is an assistant professor of leadership and policy studies at Howard University.

### **LITERATURE READERS MAY WISH TO CONSULT**

Schneider, A., and H. Ingram. 1997. *Policy Design for Democracy*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas.

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# Study Abroad Leads to Volunteering beyond College

Mitic, R. 2020. "Global Learning for Local Serving: Establishing the Links between Study Abroad and Post-College Volunteering." *Research in Higher Education* 61: 603–627.

## SUMMARY

Does participation in undergraduate study abroad experiences lead to post-college volunteer service? Drawing on information provided through careful analysis of data from the Education Longitudinal Study 2002–2012, the author designed and executed a study that unequivocally established this connection. In short, participation in study abroad is strongly associated with volunteering beyond college. This relationship holds even after controlling for a host of demographic covariates, such as race and gender, as well as volunteer-related behaviors, such as high school and college volunteering. The author argues that more students should study abroad.

## DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The author used an interesting approach to his research question as he situated the importance of the study in human capital and status attainment theories. Taken together, these theories suggest that post-college voting is one of the "non-market benefits" (p. 607) of participating in higher education and a phenomenon that can be explored thoughtfully from pre-college, to during-college, to after-college. These frameworks lay the foundation for his longitudinal analysis of the national dataset.

The author uses a quasi-experimental design to examine participation in study abroad and its relationship to post-college voting. In his investigation of 8,460 undergraduate students, he found that students who studied abroad were 26 percent more likely to volunteer after college than their peers who did not study abroad. This result included a strong list of controls, including sex,

race/ethnicity, first-generation status, family income, parental nativity, parental involvement, social capital, high school grade point average, SAT composite score, frequency of family day vacations or day trips, high school volunteering, institutional control, selectivity, major, college grade point average, participation in community-based or service-learning projects, and whether the student volunteered in college. Given these controls, the longitudinal nature of the data, the strength of the data source, and the rigor of the analysis, there is ample evidence to conclude that college students who study abroad are significantly more likely to vote after college. In addition, the author discovered that students who participate in a community-based project were twice as likely to volunteer after college, even after controlling for other characteristics and experiences. Finally, students who volunteered in college were 96 percent more likely to volunteer after college.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR ACTION BY CAMPUS LEADERS

How do we get college graduates to vote? Can increasing the probability of voting help justify the high costs of higher education? While there are no simple answers to these questions, linking higher education and embedded practices (such as study abroad) to democratic behaviors like voting may be a good place to start the conversation. In addition, efforts should be made to disassociate study abroad from a general perception that only the wealthiest students can participate due to the financial costs of traveling abroad, the social costs of leaving friends behind for a semester, and the family costs of being unable to fulfill work and other responsibilities.

Now that we have evidence that study abroad is tied to future volunteerism, the question turns to "what can we do with this information?" We have known

that service-learning and other volunteer opportunities in college are a good way to instill civic values in our undergraduates, but is leaving the country truly necessary, given the costs? In essence, study abroad is one tool in the civic education toolbox. Although sometimes it does take leaving the country to push a student out of her or his comfort zone and to experience the human condition outside of familiar contexts and narratives, it is not the only option. Colleges and universities can help students learn more about cultural differences and make informed decisions during the admissions process, campus

and college orientations, first-year seminars, and in the classroom.

The fact that only about 10 percent of U.S. undergraduates study abroad, and that this number heavily favors students from white, upper/middle class, humanities and social science majors, begs the question of how we can ensure that the educational benefits of study abroad are more equitably distributed. Intentional efforts are necessary to target students on Pell Grants (and to counteract the myth that students with Pell Grants cannot study abroad) as well as community college transfer students and students from racial minority groups. On this last

point, having more study abroad options in Africa, Latin America, and Asia can be a good first step in developing options that may leave students facing less racism than might be experienced in more traditional locales in Western Europe. CIC institutions could lead the way by establishing memoranda of understanding with institutional leadership in these regions that have more staying power than traditional faculty-led exchange agreements.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Radomir Mitic is a postdoctoral researcher at the Council of Graduate Schools.

## LITERATURE READERS MAY WISH TO CONSULT

Hurtado, S., and L. DeAngelo. 2012. "Linking Diversity and Civic-Minded Practices with Student Outcomes: New Evidence from National Surveys." *Liberal Education* 98 (2): 14–23.

McMahon, W. 2009. *Higher Learning, Greater Good: The Private and Social Benefits of Higher Education*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

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# Improving College Persistence through Text Messaging Campaigns

Castleman, B., and K. Meyer. 2020. "Can Text Message Nudges Improve Academic Outcomes in College? Evidence from a West Virginia Initiative." *The Review of Higher Education* 43 (4): 1125–1165.

## SUMMARY

How does access to information influence retention for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds? This study found that how information is communicated to college students is as important as what is being communicated to them. The purpose of this study was to explore access to information and its relationship to persistence and course credit completion among students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Supported by the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission (WVHEPC) and the Kresge Foundation, the study examined a targeted texting campaign during the 2013–2014 and 2014–2015 academic years. The study looked at students transitioning from high school to college; specifically, the study compared students from 14 high schools that were targeted for the campaign to their peers from 14 high schools that were not part of the campaign. The sample consisted of 3,764 students who "immediately enrolled in a West Virginia two- or four-year institution after graduating from the target and comparison high schools selected by the WVHEPC" (p. 1136).

Students in the campaign received text messages from their high schools as well as from partnering institutions in the West Virginia area. The authors described the intervention in the following way: "Upon matriculating in college, most students received messages approximately one to four times a month on topics ranging from meeting with an academic advisor and the availability of tutoring to financial aid renewal and course registration for the next term" (p. 1135).

Through a careful and rigorous quasi-experimental design, the authors were able to conclude that students who participated in the texting campaign were more likely to persist from their first to second year of college and had a higher first-year course credit completion rate than their peers who did not participate in the texting campaign.

## DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The findings from this study suggest a strong but not causal relationship between participation in the text messaging campaign and first to second year college persistence and first-year course credit completion. Texted students increased their odds of completing their fall semester by a factor of 1.5, their odds of enrolling in their spring semester by a factor of 1.9, and their odds of completing their spring semester by a factor of 1.7. In addition, texted students completed 0.4 more course credits

during the fall semester and 0.9 more during the spring semester than students not involved in the texting campaign.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR ACTION BY CAMPUS LEADERS

Colleges and universities should get involved with high school students early and often. More and more evidence has emerged that involvement of higher education faculty and staff can improve subsequent behavior in college. The implication of this evidence is that higher education institutions should choose

who reaches out to interested high school students and that they will send messages that high school students will see as useful and not overly zealous. Given the many ways students make decisions about college-going and given that traditional pathways from high schools to college are routinely disrupted, it is incumbent on each institution to determine the best ways, and best people, to communicate with incoming students. Results from this study suggest that prospective students will find it reasonable that the institution sends up to four brief messages per month.

Institutional leaders wishing to engage in such campaigns should adhere to two principles. First, jargon should be avoided and demystified where unavoidable. Second, institutional staff and faculty members should show that they

genuinely care about the students. As the authors suggest, “students value and trust interactive, personalized messages as a medium for communicating with their institution” (p. 1154). However, messages that are not thoughtfully

crafted and well-adapted to a student audience run the risk of alienating the students.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

Benjamin Castleman is Newton and Rita Meyers Associate Professor in the Economics of Education at the University of Virginia.

Katharine Meyer is a doctoral candidate in Education Policy Studies at the University of Virginia.

## **LITERATURE READERS MAY WISH TO CONSULT**

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# Achieving Representational Equity in Faculty Hiring

Liera, R. 2020. "Moving Beyond a Culture of Niceness in Faculty Hiring to Advance Racial Equity." *American Educational Research Journal* 57 (5): 1954–1994.

## SUMMARY

What factors stymie efforts to achieve representational equity in faculty hiring? How can faculty move from the interrogation of campus cultures of racism to sustainable, restorative action? And what does movement toward antiracist organizational culture and policy look like from a faculty perspective? This qualitative investigation leveraged cultural historical activity theory to analyze the racial learning and development of faculty members engaged in a series of facilitated inquiry workshops designed to advance racial equity in their institution's hiring process. The study then identifies vital steps in converting examinations of racist cultural practices into lasting organizational change and transformation for racial equity.

The author identifies a "culture of niceness" as one of the primary barriers to initiating deep organizational change among faculty and administrators (p. 1955). Briefly, due to whites having historical power to shape the structure and norms of higher education, subtle racist practices become invisible and taken for granted while still inequitably allocating resources and burdens along racial lines. Collegial norms around collaboration, interpersonal kindness, and reluctance to incite conflict among one's colleagues (that is, a culture of niceness) preserve these implicit racial structures and prevent equity-minded faculty from addressing them. As a result, models of behavior must be inquiry-based to expose underlying racist outcomes from these seemingly color blind policies. Thus, faculty members are allowed to break the norm of collegial niceness in service of achieving meaningful racial equity.

How these novel understandings are translated into lasting intrapersonal and institutional change is explored via data gathered over a ten-month period. During this time, 17 faculty members in a private, religiously-affiliated university attended seven workshops that were professionally facilitated by the study author and others. The data encompass observations from these workshops, as well as interviews with 11 professors and documents produced during the workshop process.

## DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Several central findings emerged from the inquiry. First, faculty members working toward equity must be given the tools to perform antiracist practice and must be supported in their movement toward equitable perspectives. This practice may provide them with the language necessary to create new institutional artifacts and to articulate the racist consequences of widely-accepted institutional policies.

In addition, it is vital for the transformation of the institution to involve senior administrators in the workshops. Indeed, it was clear to faculty members in the workshops that "if senior administrators were not supportive, then faculty colleagues who were not on board would ignore the evidence team's equity efforts" (p. 1979). Another key finding of the study was the necessity of reinforcing the action orientation of the workshop and moving from extended

debates regarding why revisions to hiring practices were needed to focus on how such equity-focused revisions would be made.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR ACTION BY CAMPUS LEADERS

Institutional leadership is frequently confronted with the unacceptably slow pace of change in organizational culture for racial equity. This study suggests that

such change may be more rapid and successful if several conditions are met before such attempts are made. First, faculty members should be ready to develop equity-minded perspectives; this frequently involves confrontations with the university's past and current systems of racial oppression. Second, faculty members should be prepared to en-

counter the considerable emotional burden of performing equity work—something with which white faculty members may have less experience and that may be an additional burden on the already-considerable emotional load shouldered by faculty of color. In addition, senior administrators must devote the time, resources, and energy necessary to support this equity work. Finally, the study

indicated that partnering with external experts who had experience in organizational change for racial equity was vital to the success of the workshops and helped to translate faculty members' learning into institutional learning and transformation.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Roman Liera is a postdoctoral research associate in the Pullias Center for Higher Education at the University of Southern California.

## LITERATURE READERS MAY WISH TO CONSULT

Bonilla-Silva, E. 2014. *Race without Racism: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*. London: Rowman & Littlefield.

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Villarreal, C. D., R. Liera, and L. Malcom-Piqueux. 2019. "The Role of Niceness in Silencing Racially Minoritized Faculty." In *The Price of Nice: How Good Intentions Maintain Educational Inequity*, edited by A. E. Castagno, 127–144. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

# Enhancing Multicultural Education in the Classroom

Schmidt, C., D. Earnest, and J. Miles. 2020. "Expanding the Reach of Intergroup Dialogue: A Quasi-Experimental Study of Two Teaching Methods for Undergraduate Multicultural Courses." *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* 13 (3): 264–273.

## SUMMARY

While many universities have made significant strides in bolstering the structural diversity of their faculty and students as well as the representational diversity embedded in course curricula, a central problem remains: What practical, robust mechanisms exist for enhancing student interactional diversity? How can an institution equip its undergraduates to engage meaningfully and learn across differences? Intergroup dialogue has emerged as a potentially effective contributor to the development of interactional diversity skills; however, that dialogue is usually offered in co-curricular spaces. As a result, students usually must self-select into these experiences, and the skills provided by them are not always available when students encounter multicultural challenges in the curriculum. This single-site, longitudinal, quasi-experimental study examines whether the incorporation of intergroup dialogue with a multicultural curriculum provides an additional benefit to the development of culturally competent outcomes.

The goal of many courses on diversity is to develop critical consciousness among students. This development requires that students be willing to listen to the perspectives of diverse others, exchange in empathetic dialogue with them, and partner in social action to challenge oppressive systems. Intergroup dialogue provides facilitated contexts in which students can practice this dialogic thinking and may develop a sense of responsibility for shaping a more just society. Importantly, intergroup dialogue functions best when students are placed into situations in which diverse groups are relatively equally represented, cooperate to achieve common goals, and experience interactions that have the sanction of custom or authority.

This study examined the development of 112 undergraduate students enrolled in a range of multicultural education courses taught by a variety of instructors. Critically, the courses were placed into one of two conditions: a control group that taught multicultural curriculum in the traditional manner and an experimental group that received traditional pedagogy for the first half of the semester but incorporated intergroup dialogue into the course in the second half of the semester. Students completed online surveys at the beginning and end of each course, and their change scores were analyzed via split-plot analysis of variance (ANOVA).

## DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

This study provides suggestive evidence that the addition of intergroup dialogue to multicultural pedagogy accelerates the development of critical consciousness. Students enrolled in such courses demonstrated significantly more development in their degree of openness to diversity, awareness of privilege and oppression per-

taining to race, and empathetic feelings for individuals with marginalized identities than students enrolled in traditional courses. Students demonstrated increased awareness of privilege and oppression in contemporary society, as well as increased cross-cultural anxiety—a pattern that is well-established in the multicultural education literature. Concurrently, students exhibited a decrease in their sense of multicultural self-efficacy,

which may be due to feelings of guilt and shame that are often engendered by confronting one's participation in various systems of oppression and privilege.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR ACTION BY CAMPUS LEADERS

How to effectively provide developmental experiences for undergradu-

ate students that enhance their multicultural competency, critical perspectives, and ability to function in a pluralistic democracy remains a challenging problem across higher education. This study indicates the potential benefits of incorporating intergroup dialogue, a traditionally co-curricular activity, into the standard pedagogy for diversity-related content.

As universities look to the reinstatement of in-person learning and reimagine both pedagogical methods and the historical divisions between student affairs and academic curriculum, leaders should consider whether sequestering intergroup dialogue methods in the co-curriculum remains the best way to advance equity

across the institution. Indeed, training faculty members in critical-dialogic approaches to working across difference may provide them with strategies to navigate challenging conversations around oppression within the institution as well as within the classroom.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Christa Schmidt is a professor of counseling psychology at Towson University.

David Earnest is an assistant professor of psychology at Towson University.

Joseph Miles is an associate professor of psychology at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

## LITERATURE READERS MAY WISH TO CONSULT

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