THE DIVERSITY THAT WAS PROMISED: A SONG OF CULTURE AND DIFFERENCE

ABSTRACT

Diversity in higher education discourse is largely presented as a problem of proportions and a domain for categoric difference. Often, diversity functions as a way to talk about racial inequality without explicitly evoking systems of privilege and oppression. As a consequence, the capacity for diversity to effect institutional change and minimize inequality is severely limited. This paper problematizes “diversity” as a concept and examines who, exactly, is framed as the principle beneficiaries of campus diversity. It looks at the University of California, Riverside in particular, a campus that has received attention for its diverse student population. However, a preliminary examination of UCR’s promotional statistics suggests that black, Latino/a, and Asian students are not adequately represented at the graduate and faculty levels. This paper concludes with a short list of recommendations for UCR.

PROBLEMATIZING DIVERSITY

In the winter of the 2015, I was granted the opportunity to participate in a quarter-long research seminar as part of a broader two-year project at the Center for Ideas and Society at the University of California, Riverside. The project was titled “Advancing Intercultural Studies: A Seminar Series,” and was generously funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. The research seminar in which I participated was called “Beyond Diversity: Are We There Yet?” and while the original funding proposal conceptualized diversity as something that is both expansive and processual, I found myself troubled this notion that diversity is something that we are on a path to get “beyond.” This is for several reasons. First, despite the argument (evident in the proposal, and advanced by others) that the definition of diversity has expanded beyond a more limited idea of racial diversity to encompass other identities and salient categories of difference, diversity is arguably still used, first and foremost, as a stand-in for race. Use of the nebulous term “diversity” allows institutional and state actors to avoid invoking the dreaded “R” triplet: race, racism, and racial inequality. To the extent that diversity has been broadened to encompass categories and identities beyond race and ethnicity, this expansion—while superficially inclusive—gives the term a strategic slipperiness that allows users of the term to position themselves closer or farther away from talking about race through the use of code words and phrases such as “culture” and “cultural difference” (see Urciuloi 2009).

Second, although (as noted in the funding proposal) there has been a push to expand diversity initiatives beyond issues of access to include making diversity a core institutional value, diversity is still largely regarded as a problem of proportions. That is, diversity is principally expressed through and achieved by certain numeric arrangements for various categories of difference. When an organization like the University of California, Riverside wishes to demonstrate its supposed diversity, it points—first and foremost—to the numbers it can conjure up. Similarly, an institution is proven to be non-diverse to the extent that it cannot manipulate and fracture the bodies that make up that institution to fit into underrepresented categories. Numbers are hardly representative of an institution’s “true” (lack of) diversity even in this extremely limited sense of the word; instead, institutions will choose the numeric representation that presents them in the best light, for example by possibly counting a white non-Latina woman with a Latino surname through marriage as Latina (Aguirre 2010).

Third, diversity initiatives are formulated, advanced, and defended by invoking the perceived institutional benefits that are derived from those measures, or by falling back on an amorphous conception of the “public good.” Diversity initiatives are thus not designed to serve marginalized populations but are instead designed to serve those who possess institutional power and/or to serve “society at large.” Diversity has a history, and yet diversity is ahistoric as it relates to the United States’ history of racial oppression (see Bell 2003). Its history is circumscribed within legal battles and organizational/institutional implementation; at most it only indirectly references larger systems of oppression.

In light of these three points, then, the idea that it is possible or even desirable to go *beyond diversity* is troubling. What does it mean to go beyond diversity when diversity is framed, first and foremost, as achieved through proper proportions? What does it imply about the fight for racial equality and racial justice?

The purpose of this paper is to take a critical look at the concept of “diversity” as it relates to higher education. In particular I will look at the University of California, Riverside (hereafter, UCR), due to its much-lauded status as one of the most diverse campuses in the United States. I am concerned first and foremost with the idea that diversity discourse and diversity initiatives serve institutional and state interests more so than the interests of those who are targeted by these measures. The capacity for diversity (or something like it) to destabilize white supremacy and remedy racial inequality in higher education is severely limited by the way diversity is framed, which likewise limits the initiatives that are developed within this framing.

SELLING DIVERSITY, SERVING THE STATE/INSTITUTION

In order to foster “diversity” or implement diversity initiatives, actors inside or outside institutions and organizations must “sell” diversity, either by drawing on long-standing public discussions and arguments about what diversity is, and why, and who, or by presenting novel arguments that attempt to answer these same questions. When it comes to diversity in higher education in the United States, the discursive framing of “what” diversity is, “what” it should do, and “whom” it should serve, draws heavily on court rulings (particularly the Supreme Court) on the hotly-debated, and often misunderstood, topic of affirmative action. Affirmative action in the 1960s and 1970s acted as a “racial equalizer” that was meant to remedy some of the damage done in light of pervasive, systemic, and historic racism that disadvantaged people of color in the United States (Aguirre and Martinez 2014:163).

Affirmative action programs conflicted with the popular myth in (white) America: the myth of the meritocracy (Aguirre and Martinez 2014). This myth and its partner in crime, the “American dream,” sustain the false promise that hard work will yield equitable results and that success is solely a function of will and determination. Embedded within the myth of the meritocracy is the assumption that there are objective ways to measure this thing we call “merit,” when in fact merit is a social construction, and measures of merit that are used in the admissions process (for example, standardized tests) are biased against marginalized groups (Harris 1993). Affirmative action received its first full review by the Supreme Court in *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (Harris 1993), on the grounds that the special admissions program at the University of California, Davis’ school of medicine, which reserved 16 out of 100 seats for minority students, violated the Equal Protection Clause under the Fourteenth Amendment (Aguirre and Martinez 2014). The Court ruled in Bakke’s factor, but, rather than outright disallowing the use of race as an admissions consideration, Justice Powell articulated in his opinion a “diversity rationale” whereby “ethnic diversity” is “one element in a range of factors” that a university can consider in pursuit of a “heterogeneous student body.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Powell’s opinion implicitly delineated what were acceptable and unacceptable institutional goals; institutions acting on behalf of oppressed students was not acceptable, but institutions acting on their *own* behalf was (Newfield 2008). In so doing, Powell “insulated the concept of diversity from the legal pursuit of racial equality” and effectively “de-raced diversity” (Newfield 2008:112). Following *Bakke*, affirmative action plans in selective universities were framed in terms of their capacity to satisfy a compelling state interest in diversity (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, and Gurin 2002). The Supreme Court’s ruling in *Bakke*, and Powell’s plurality opinion, set the stage for diversity in higher education and whose needs are permissibly considered in pursuit of a diverse student body.

Although highly influential, Powell’s diversity rationale was not binding as precedent, and since *Bakke* court rulings at multiple levels have varied in the extent to which they concur with Powell’s opinion that diversity is a compelling state interest (Aguirre and Martinez 2014). For example, in *Johnson v. University of Georgia* (1999) Judge Edenfield rejected what he saw as the university’s preoccupation with proportional diversity as a compelling interest (Aguirre and Martinez 2014). In 2003, however, the Supreme Court in *Grutter v. Bollinger* affirmed that racial diversity in higher education was a compelling state interest and that race could be considered as one of many factors in the admissions process (Morfin et al. 2006).

While court rulings have not required any empirical evidence demonstrating the benefits of diversity for the state, a target institution, or its student body, there is an implicit understanding that such evidence *could* be gathered, if one so desired. In fact, researchers have attempted to pin down what effects diversity has on a student population, and what types of diversity are most effective at changing attitudes and yielding (positive) results. The majority of this research focuses on racial and ethnic diversity in particular (Pascarella 2006), which is not surprising in light of the argument I advance (in the next section) that diversity is principally a vehicle for talking about race. The purported benefits of diversity fall into four main types: heterogeneous environments as better learning environments; preparation for success in a diverse society; post-graduation integration and intergroup interaction; and social stability (Crosby, Iyer, Clayton, and Downing 2003). While campus diversity perhaps most readily brings to mind proportional representation, informal interactional and classroom diversity are also means through which universities can encourage diverse interactions, with the latter to being arguably of greater import (Gurin et al. 2002).

Studies that examine the impact of diversity (at multiple levels) on students typically focus on learning outcomes, such as critical thinking and emotional engagement (Gurin et al. 2002; Mayhew and Fernandez 2007), democracy outcomes, such as civic engagement, intergroup understanding, and the ability to take multiple perspectives (Gurin et al. 2002; Gurin et al. 2003; Zuniga, Williams, and Berger 2005), and social outcomes, such as reduction of racial bias, integration, and intergroup interaction (Chang 2001; Engberg 2004; Lopez 2004; Boisjoly et al. 2006; Denson 2009). Of the three types of diversity (structural, informal interactional, and classroom), informal interactions are particularly influential for positive learning outcomes (Gurin et al. 2002). Programs designed to encourage interaction among diverse peers lead to positive democracy outcomes, including increased sense of intergroup commonality and higher rates of civic engagement, such as participating in political activities on campus (Gurin et al. 2003). White students who had black roommates were more likely to support affirmative action and interact with other students of color (Boisjoly et al. 2006). Interactions between students of color and white students also reduces racial bias (Engberg 2004; Denson 2009). However, it is important to note that interactions among diverse peers may simply enhance preexisting attitudes, and these interventions should not be interpreted as “magic bullets” that radically alter student worldviews (Zuniga et al. 2005). Further, increased intergroup interaction can also yield negative consequences, and thus diversity does not yield uniformly positive results in all circumstances and for all students (see Mayhew and Fernandez 2007).

Importantly, the presumed benefits of diversity arguably (and sometimes demonstrably) benefit white students more than students of color, as they start from the assumption that students arriving at a university are coming from racially homogenous environments and thus “gain” intergroup interaction by coming to the university. While some studies (see Gurin et al 2002) are based in student populations where a substantial proportion of both black and white students come from segregated communities, it is important not to conflate housing segregation with racial group insulation. Whites in the United States, unlike people of color, are largely able to insulate themselves from interaction with other racial/ethnic groups if they so desire (McIntosh 1988). Further, for people of color, living in segregated communities does not negate (and in some circumstances highlights or exacerbates) their experiences of racial oppression. The experiences and meanings attributed to living in segregated communities thus differ.

Further, people of color in the United States, by virtue of their subordinated position vis-à-vis whites, are more likely to have a working knowledge of how to move through majority white spaces and interact with white peers than the reverse. Through their encounters with the “white gaze,” people of color develop an understanding of themselves in “third-person mode” (Fanon 2001:185), or what Du Bois (1903) calls “double consciousness”: the capacity to reflect on oneself and one’s position in U.S. society with a disembodied, top-down gaze. Whites, on the other hand, are not likewise compelled to develop an understanding of themselves through an alternate lens.

White students, then, have more to gain from their interactions with students of color, and the differential impact of diversity initiatives on student subpopulations is evident in the ambivalent, and sometimes nonexistent, effects that scholars have observed when comparing white students to other racialized groups. Diversity initiatives have the strongest, most consistent effects on white students (Gurin et al. 2002; Engberg 2004; Lopez 2004), with the effects on other racialized groups being inconsistent (Gurin et al. 2002) or virtually nonexistent (Lopez 2004). Students of color who attend majority-white institutions may experience alienation and have to work harder than their fellow white students (Brower and Ketterhagen 2004); diversity initiatives in majority-white campuses that aim to attract students of color may, then, disadvantage students of color relative to initiatives in a similarly positioned, diversified campus. Context, then, in addition to content, when it comes to measuring the impact of diversity and diversity initiatives.

While some of the purported benefits of diversity (particularly decreased racial bias) doubtless benefit students of color, they nonetheless exist outside the framing that diversity is “for” them. That is, diversity is presented as something that changes the campus for the better; white students, more so than students of color, are those targets for change. Students of color, by contrast, are expected (through their interactions or their mere presence) to bring about that change. In this context, then, students of color are objectified as resources for the provision of “human nourishment” (Fanon 2001:194) to white students.

This idea, that students of color are principally a resource for white students, is evident in the dominant framing for diversity: diversity as an institutional or organizational selling point. Via the courts, diversity was principally framed as serving state and institutional interests, and universities that implemented affirmative action plans tailored those plans accordingly. This “sells” diversity initiatives as legally permissible and socially desirable. However, diversity is also “sold” by universities as a way to attract “good students” (Urciuoli 2009; see also the later section in this paper on diversity as a selling point at UCR), including white students who choose diverse campuses as a place to enjoy “safe difference” that reflects positively on them as “good citizens” (Urciuoli 1999:292). The commodification of campus diversity places students of color in a strange gray area wherein they are presented as both members of the campus community and as resources *for* the campus community (Urciuoli 1999).

Diversity is commodified; racialized bodies become counts, which are then turned into graphs and pie charts and presented to prospective students as saying “something” about a given university. That “something” is cloudy and indefinite, and requires those prospective students to fill in the gaps as to what that “something” is. This ideal commodity type allows universities to sell a “fact” about itself while committing to very little in terms of what that fact actually means in a concrete, demonstrable sense.

Nonetheless, this lofty discussion from on high must be grounded by the difficulties of day-to-day implementation of institutional change. While the framing of diversity as something that principally serves institutional elites and privileged groups constrains the extent to which remedies for racial oppression can minimize the inequality gap between whites and people of color, it does enable some advances (however small). This is particularly true in light of what Bell (1980) calls “interest convergence”: the theory that privileged groups will only support and implement change that affects the status of oppressed groups to the extent that there is an alignment in interests between the privileged and the oppressed. The privileged act in ways that preserve their privilege. Diversity as a sugar pill, a way to get courts and institutions to “swallow” initiatives designed to address racial oppression, has successfully implemented *some* change, but its capacity for challenging racial oppression and other systems of oppression on a fundamental level is severely limited by a frame that positions students of color as objects or context, but not agents.

DIVERSITY, NOT RACE

(White) American society has a strained relationship with the concept of race. It fundamentally shapes one’s life chances, how one moves the world, and how one is perceived, and yet we exist in a time and space where a white person may utter, “I don’t see race” with a straight face and with presumably little pushback (see Bonilla-Silva 2014 for an extended discussion of color-blind racism and the ways that it preserves existing power structures). Diversity in higher education is “not seeing race” on an institutional scale (see Newfield 2008). Ostensibly, diversity refers to numerous categories of difference, but when it comes to measuring the effects of diversity (see previous section) or when it comes to representing the diverse character of an institution (see following section on UCR), race (along with, perhaps, gender; see Urciuoli 2009) is foregrounded. If a university wants to “present” its diverse character (for example: to attract students, to attract donors, etc.), the most obvious way of doing so is to wrangle its students into various discrete categories that are then proffered as a desirable distribution of percentages. Notably absent in this textual or visual representation of diversity is any notion of hierarchy, inequality, or oppression. Categories are presented side by side as merely representing “cultural difference,” and carry an implicit assumption that racial classification or racial categorization maps easily onto cultural diversity and cultural difference (Urciuoli 2009).

Different racial/ethnic categories are taken as representing different “types” of people (Urciuoli 1999), and what someone’s racial/ethnic category “says” about him or her is taken as both permanent and unchanging. This representation of race stands in direct conflict with what we know to be complex processes of racialization and racial inequality. How people racially and ethnically identify can and does vary throughout the life course (see Saperstein and Penner 2010) and by context (see Harris and Sim 2002; Brown, Hitlin, and Elder 2006). Presenting racial diversity as static categories reifies racial constructs and essentializes those who are placed within those categories as ambassadors of a particular type of culture or life experience.

From an interest convergence perspective (see Bell 1980; Aguirre 2010), talking about diversity in lieu of talking about race serves the interests of the privileged (white Americans) because it does not overtly challenge that privilege, nor does it directly implicate them for their embeddedness within a system in which they directly or indirectly contribute to the oppression of the marginalized. Talking about “diversity” rather than talking about race facilitates the perpetuation of the myth of the meritocracy and is concordant with the stress that U.S. society places on individualism by removing privilege and oppression from the discussion. For privileged group members, reflecting on their privilege and the unearned benefits of group membership can harm their group image (Branscombe 1998). Perhaps not surprisingly, then, to the extent that social inequality does enter the conversation, it is framed in terms of disadvantages for the oppressed group, rather than as advantages for the privileged group (Powell, Branscombe, and Schmitt 2005; Lowery, Knowles, and Unzueta 2007). “White guilt” is associated with higher support for compensatory, proactive programs to redress racial inequality (Iyer, Leach, and Crosby 2003), but reflections of privilege can also prompt a defensive response that results in increased levels of racism (Branscombe, Schmitt, and Schiffhauer 2007). Diversity in this context functions as a lukewarm compromise designed to acknowledge inequality (to an extent), but which also individualism and thus does poses minimal threat to the meritocratic myth and privileged students’ (and institutional actors’) perceptions of their positions as resulting from earned privilege (see Morfin et al. 2006). Reintroducing the twin notions of privilege and oppression, advantage and disadvantage, into diversity discourse will mark a point of interest divergence, but so long as diversity discourse fails to meaningfully engage with these concepts, the relative status of advantaged and disadvantaged groups will remain more or less the same.

While diversity may be associated with race and gender in certain contexts (see Urciuoli 1999; see also the section on UCR, below), the links between race and diversity are arguably stronger than the links between gender and diversity. This holds true for challenges to diversity initiatives in the United States and it holds true for the majority of the studies that have been attempted to measure the effects of “diversity” on student populations. There is a lengthy legacy of gender inequality in higher education, but on the whole, Americans appear less reluctant to discuss issues of gender inequality versus racial inequality, particularly in higher education (for example, see the numerous initiatives designed to increase women’s participation in STEM). A full exploration of why this is so is beyond the scope of this paper, but I will advance two preliminary thoughts. First, while there is certainly resistance to engage with the *relevance* of gender, gendered stereotypes, and sexism as it relates to inequitable outcomes, there is not (in general) a movement toward society-wide “gender-blindness.” To the best of my knowledge, “I don’t see gender” is not a phrase oft uttered, although “gender isn’t relevant [to this situation]” is unfortunately all too common. Second, what we are witnessing in higher education (particularly at the faculty level) may be a cooptation of white women into white masculine power circles. By saying this I do not mean to suggest that white female faculty members are not disadvantaged relative to their male coworkers. Instead, I am suggesting that in light of the flexibility of power and strategic extensions of that power (see, for example, the shifting boundaries of whiteness in U.S. history), that white women are the most logical group to receive provisional extensions of power in exchange for shoring up the base of white masculine privilege against the threat of an increasingly diverse society.

UC RIVERSIDE: REJECTING THE “REJECT” LABEL

The University of California, Riverside (UCR) is a higher educational institution with strong ties to the concept of diversity. A land grant university that was designed to serve the local and state community (Moses 2014), UCR has received attention from President Obama and the national news media for its diversity and perceived value. Using the Obama administration’s proposed higher education ranking system, UCR comes out on top.[[2]](#footnote-2) Similarly, it has been rated (by some) as providing the best educational “value.”[[3]](#footnote-3) According to U.S. News and World Report, UCR is tied for sixth place for diversity in national universities, receiving a score of .70 on an ethnic diversity index that ranges from 0 to 1 with higher values associated with higher ethnic diversity.[[4]](#footnote-4) UCR places a heavy emphasis on its diversity; on the university’s “about” page, UCR is described as “a university of distinction and diversity,” then goes on to state that UCR is “[w]idely recognized as one of the most ethnically diverse research universities in the nation.”[[5]](#footnote-5) Of note, before moving on, is that this about page seamlessly shifts from an unqualified notion of “diversity” in its header to the more precise “ethnic diversity” in the body text.

Yet, despite the esteem that UCR has received, it nonetheless has a reputation among undergraduates that it has not yet been able to shake: the “UC Rejects.” The University of California (as a system) has a percentage plan in place where eligible high school seniors will be offered a spot at one of its nine undergraduate campuses.[[6]](#footnote-6) While high-performing high school seniors are not guaranteed entry into their campus of choice, they will be granted admission somewhere within the system. Various campuses have functioned as the “overflow” or “safety valve” for students who were not admitted into more competitive campuses; UCR acted as one of those overflow campuses until 2010.[[7]](#footnote-7) As such, for some students, UCR was likely a second (or third, or fourth…) choice to campuses like UCLA and UC Berkeley.

To this point I offer a brief anecdote to underscore this idea. The writings on the interior walls of restroom stalls on a university campus can, in their own way, be quite informative of campus sentiment. Most stall writings are shouts into a void, but at times you can see the lingering afterimages of unfolding conversations. To wit, on the inside wall of a stall on campus, I recall the following “conversation” (the words are not verbatim; but the general sentiments are intact):

“UCR sucks”

“Someone didn’t get into Berkeley”

“Actually I did I just couldn’t get financial aid”

UCR cannot claim equal access to prestige on a level with UCLA and UC Berkeley. However, what it can do (and, arguably, what it *has* done) is to commodify and sell that which sets it apart from UCLA and UCB: its (ethnically) diverse student body. In so doing, it is presumably hoped that UCR can capitalize on the diversification of its student population by turning it into a selling point that will lead to students *selecting* UCR, rather than defaulting into it.

The University of California system has, at a minimum, made overtures to diversity as something to be valued and nurtured. The University of California Diversity Statement (Regents’ Policy 4400) defines diversity as

[Referring] to the variety of personal experiences, values, and worldviews that arise from differences of culture and circumstance. Such differences include race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, language, abilities/disabilities, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status, and geographic region, and more.[[8]](#footnote-8)

This definition (at least superficially) encompasses a wide range of difference categories beyond race and ethnicity, however, it frames diversity as both individualistic (diversity is not categoric membership but rather the *experiences, values, and worldviews* that presumably result *from* categoric membership) and as principally a matter of *difference*. The statement makes only oblique references to inequality, most notably by, in tying the statement up, referencing “historically excluded populations” (who?) and the need to “remove barriers” (such as?) for the “advancement of talented students, faculty, and staff.” While this appears to conflict, somewhat, with the “personal views” model of difference advanced above, it is still funneled through an individualistic lens. The targets are *talented* students, faculty, and staff, and in fact the statement stresses this linkage, twice by referencing “talented students, faculty, and staff” and once by asserting that the University of California is open to “qualified students from all groups.” Largely, diversity is (in keeping with court rulings) framed in terms of state and institutional interests: the University of California “serve[s] the interests of the State of California”; diversity helps the University to “accomplish its academic mission”; the University of California has a “compelling interest” in how the University of California is perceived.

In keeping with the definition of diversity in the UC’s diversity statement, UCR’s diversity page[[9]](#footnote-9) speaks to an expansive definition of diversity that goes beyond race and ethnicity. As of this writing (3/20/2015), the main page features a rotating display that advertises a diversity certificate program, its status as a diverse institution, its status as a top institution for LGBT students, and its status as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). Once again the flexible association of diversity with racial/ethnic diversity is evoked in the statement that “UCR’s undergraduate student body is among the top 5 most diverse of major research universities in the United States, with graduate rates above the national average for all students and African-American students leading the way.” While subtle, the linkage of diversity with graduation rates for black students, accompanied by a picture of male and female students from various racial/ethnic groups, underscores the relationship between diversity and race. In the context of the website as a whole, it further demonstrates how UCR’s racial and ethnic diversity (at the undergraduate level) is deployed to advance the image of UCR as a broadly diverse campus.

As discussed in the introduction, diversity is often conceptualized as a problem of proportions. While UCR does not, to its credit, overtly stress statistics as the sole factor that makes its campus diverse, how it chooses to present (and *what* it chooses to present) its “diversity statistics” is informative. The webpage[[10]](#footnote-10) dedicated to presenting UCR’s diversity breaks the university population down into student, academic, and staff diversity statistics. For each of these subpopulations, the main page presents two basic pie charts, one for gender (categories: male/female) and one for race and ethnicity (categories: White/African American/Hispanic/Asian/Native American/Unknown/International). Each section is accompanied by a “more” link with slightly more detailed statistics. For example, students are disaggregated into undergraduate and graduate students, while the faculty diversity statistics provides information on new appointments for multiple academic years, ladder rank faculty numbers, and full-time faculty numbers. Notably absent, even in the pages that provide more detailed statistics, are any numbers for any other “type” of diversity beyond race/ethnicity and gender. Further, race/ethnicity and gender are presented as separable and mutually exclusive; it would be impossible to determine, for example, whether there were any black female faculty members based solely on the information provided on these pages. This is significant because UCR presumably points to *these* statistics when furnishing “proof” of its diversity.

Examining these statistics by level, it quickly becomes apparent that even in the limited sense of diversity as race/ethnicity and gender, UCR’s claim to a diverse campus only really holds at the undergraduate level. Female students made up 51.9% of the undergraduate student body in Fall 2012, but were only 43.7% of the graduate student body that same year[[11]](#footnote-11). The shift is even more dramatic for race and ethnicity: in Fall 2012, 14.9% of the undergraduates by 36.9% of the graduate students were white. Every other racial/ethnic category (excluding the catch-all “international” category, and the Native American category which raised from .4% to .9%) fell in representation: 34.1% of undergraduates were Hispanic, but only 9.8% of the graduate students were; 38.5% of undergraduates were Asian, and only 13% of graduate students were; and 7.1% of the undergraduate student body was African American, versus 2.9% of graduate students.

This trend continues further up the ladder to the faculty level: In 2011, 68.3% of full time ladder rank faculty members male, and 68.6% were white[[12]](#footnote-12). Despite being a “Hispanic Serving Institution”, only 5.7% of full-time, ladder rank faculty were Hispanic. Particularly if we assume that institutions are motivated to manipulate numbers in their favor (Aguirre 2010) this disparity is astonishing, but in the absence of any evidence to this effect (at this time) it is damning enough to state that UCR’s vaunted status is only demonstrably true when one keeps a narrow focus on the undergraduate student body. In fact, according to the side-by-side UCR/UC system comparison provided on the faculty statistics page, while UCR has fewer white full-time, ladder rank faculty than UC (68.6% versus 76.0%) and more comparatively more Asian full-time, ladder rank faculty (21.7% versus 15.3%), it is more or less at parity with the system as a whole when it comes to faculty in the other racial/ethnic categories. I acknowledge that, by fixating on UCR’s numbers, I am perpetuating the idea that diversity is principally a problem of proportions. That said, proportionate representation is important, it just isn’t *enough* and should not be an institution’s end goal. In light of the greater investment universities make in graduate students (as future academics and representatives of UCR) and faculty (as determinants for department/university rankings), these numbers suggest that UCR has a long way to go before its diversity promise can be met.

CONCLUSION: GOING BEYOND, OR TAKING ANOTHER PATH

In opening this paper, I indicated the notion that “diversity” (however defined) is something we can get “beyond” is troubling. In lieu of attempting to go “beyond” diversity, I propose that we switch tracks altogether. That is, while previous conceptualizations of diversity were useful for implementing some change, the term has since become coopted to serve the elites and the privileged. Switching tracks does not mean derailing the train, but it does mean going in a different direction from the one we’ve been chugging along on for the past few decades. Simply put, diversity (as it is popularly regarded and conceptualized) has outlived its usefulness. What is needed now is something more. I will not weigh in on whether it is better to keep the term diversity or jettison it for another word or phrase. However, whether we keep or lose diversity, to the extent that diversity is meant to address and remedy racial inequality and racial oppression, we must re-inject these concepts into the discussion. Talking about diversity in lieu of talking about race and racial inequality may make it “easier” to push through certain initiatives, but those initiatives are limited in their capacity to institute real change.

The University of California follows a percentage plan that enables it to draft high-performing high school seniors into its system, but this plan does nothing to address the poverty, violence, racism, and other barriers that boost some students while suppressing others. Further, this plan does nothing to address the whiteness at the graduate and faculty levels of schools like UCR. When a Latino/a student, or a black student, graduates with a bachelor’s degree from UCR, where does he or she go? Feelings of community and camaraderie with one’s fellow undergraduate students will only take a student so far; ideally, he or she should be able to look at his/her teaching assistants or, even better, his/her professors and see opportunities for advancement. UCR has a racially/ethnically diverse undergraduate student population; this is good, it just isn’t enough, and it should not be accepted as enough.

As part of our participation in this research seminar, we were asked to generate a list of suggestions for UCR, and in closing I will do just that. Some of these suggestions would be easy to implement, while others stand as points of consideration for future campus initiatives.

UCR RECOMMENDATIONS

1. For as long as UCR keeps a broad “diversity” framework, it must commit to that broader definition by showcasing not only race/ethnicity and gender distribution by level, but other distributions by sexuality, class, ability, and so on. Demographic snapshots that present “diversity” as proportional distributions are flawed, but they are also the dominant means through which an institution “shows” its diversity, and proportional representation is a necessary first step in achieving a fuller notion of diversity. Thus, on their website, UCR should include other categories of difference beyond race and gender to present a bigger snapshot of campus diversity.
2. UCR must commit to a definition of diversity that is *intersectional*. As this relates to racial and gender inequality, UCR must demonstrate that it is equally committed to the success of women *and* men of color.
3. Admissions programs designed to increase “diversity” should not be the sole means by which to address inequality. Diversity flattens and dehistoricizes oppression into a problem of proportions. Within a diversity framework, attempts to redress racial inequality require fracturing an individual into discrete categories of difference. Further, these initiatives place too much emphasis on the warm bodies/critical mass hypothesis. As such, inequality must be addressed at multiple institutional levels (structural, interactional, classroom) *and* within each stratum (undergraduate/graduate/faculty/staff).
4. Regarding courses that fulfill the undergraduate diversity requirement, UCR should audit the courses that are designated as fulfilling this requirement and excise those that do not address the systemic oppression of marginalized groups through a sociological framework. Courses that take a systemic, sociological approach to the study of oppression yield stronger results as it relates to social justice than courses based in philosophical and psychological frameworks (Mayhew and Fernandez 2007). It should be noted that arguing for the use of a sociological framework is not the same as arguing that these courses must go through the sociology department; rather, any course that fulfills this requirement should incorporate an understanding of oppression as systemic and embedded within society, versus a characteristic of individual actors.

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