

Advancing Diversity in Higher Education

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This special section of the *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education (JDHE)* on “Advancing Diversity in Higher Education” emerged from the 2012 Association for the Study of Higher Education Council on Ethnic Participation (ASHE-CEP) Pre-Conference Forum. CEP, a standing committee of ASHE, partnered with the *JDHE* to offer a publication opportunity for authors of articles accepted for presentation at the Forum. All manuscripts submitted by CEP presenters underwent the full peer review process of *JDHE*. Forum research articles engaged issues of race or ethnicity, equity, and diversity, as well as topics related to historically underrepresented, underserved, or marginalized populations in higher education. The work of researchers presented here contributes insights for the continued development of an inclusive and nurturing workplace environment for diverse populations of students, faculty, and staff. As such, they build upon the discussion began in a previous *JDHE* special issue related to the critical importance of campus climate in supporting diversity in higher education (Worthington, 2008).

Keywords: diversity, higher education, underrepresentation

The articles presented here address the overall theme of *Advancing Diversity in Higher Education*. As challenges to diversity in academe persist, scholars speak out about the continued lack of diversity in higher education. For example, scholars of color published in the 2011 Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) *On Campus with Women* address this situation. Beginning in 1989, AAC&U produced the first reports examining the experiences of Asian Pacific American (APA), Black, and Latina women in higher education. In celebration of the program’s 40th anniversary, AAC&U asked for updates on the progress of these groups and, while progress has been made, scholars reached the following conclusions: Hune (2011) states that the model minority stereotype continues to mask challenges APAs face within academe; Moses (2011) declares that while Black women students’ success is improving, many institutional barriers remain in place; Turner (2011) finds

that Latinas have made modest gains, but longstanding challenges continue. Across the board, including American Indian men and women, demographic data reported by the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (2010), documents longstanding lack of racial, ethnic, and gender diversity among students, faculty, and staff in academe. Meanwhile, the situation for males of color in academe has reached crisis proportions. Investigating disparities in educational attainment within African American, Hispanic/Latino, Asian American, and Native American communities, a College Board study (College Board Advocacy & Policy Center 2010) reports significant differences in performance between males and females. Males of color from these racial or ethnic groups can be described as “vanishing” from the landscape of higher education (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009).

While scholars address this lack of diversity, the existence of programs and processes to increase diversity continues to be challenged (Chang, 2013). Nonetheless, Chang contends that researchers must not be dissuaded and pursue a line of inquiry with an “overarching goal . . . to improve educational opportunities and subsequently how education is more broadly delivered for a wider range of students on different types of insti-

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tutions.” (p. 173). He refers to this as our “unfinished research agenda on student diversity in higher education.” (p. 172). The authors of articles in this special section of the *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education (JDHE)*, in my view, contribute toward addressing this unfinished business.

In “A Compelling Interest: Activating the Benefits of Classroom-Level Diversity,” Haslerig, Bernhard, Fuentes, Allen, Panter, and Daye examine the benefits of student diversity in a law school classroom setting. Of interest here is the notion that having a diverse class is not enough. There is a need to activate diversity in order for benefits to ensue. The authors point to the responsibility of faculty to create and facilitate a context for diverse points of view to be expressed. Responses from focus groups conducted with students provide an insight from their perspectives of how faculty might guide beneficial student cross-racial interactions. Haslerig et al. conclude the importance of faculty facilitation of such interactions because “tomorrow’s attorneys and other professionals must be able to engage the diversity of people, cultures, values, and ideas that increasingly define society.”

In “Student Success for Men of Color in Community Colleges: A Review of Published Literature and Research, 1998–2012,” Harris III and Wood examine, as previously noted, an important current topic within an institutional type recently highlighted by President Obama (2009) as critical to the economic welfare of the nation. The authors point out that most men of color, if attending college, enroll in the community college. However, little research has been conducted to examine their experience within the community college setting and what has been done primarily focuses on the experiences of African American male students. They provide suggestions for future research directions to advance our knowledge of the experience of all men of color within the community college context.

In “Underrepresented and In/visible: A Hispanic First-Generation Student’s Narratives of College,” Pyne and Means, using critical race theory, explicate the nuances of persistence, retention, and graduation for first-generation, low-income Hispanic students through a case study of a Hispanic female student. From her stories, we hear

when she first heard the word “college,” feel the tension between staying in college and family needs when she cannot “be there” for her family as her mother “voluntarily relocates” to Mexico for a time, and experience important interactions with faculty and peers which supported her persistence in college. Pyne and Means conclude that usual solutions such as remedial courses and cultural student organizations must move toward ways in which the presence of students like Ana can be normalized and validated in the everyday college experiences of all students.

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