Does the Introduction of TX SB17 Decrease Positive Attitudes in UTD Undergraduate Students Regarding Student Success?

By

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Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies are widespread practices across schools, organizations, and workplaces. The purpose and goal of DEI has been emphasized through research and implementation, as well as has grown in different sectors over many years. More people are acknowledging the importance of DEI and maintaining environments that offer opportunities for growth, understanding, and inclusivity. One sector where DEI policies are a hot topic is college campuses. More universities and community colleges have been expanding their DEI programs and policies to encourage student success. Many studies have explored the factors that contribute to students' understanding and acknowledgment of DEI, including the role of inclusion efforts inside and outside of classrooms. Faculty and staff can also contribute to these attitudes, as study spaces that embrace DEI can inspire students to feel a greater sense of belonging and satisfaction in their discipline or field (Perez et al., 2020). Student activism can also promote discussions and change around DEI, as though universities might implement DEI policies and recommendations, it is not guaranteed that students will see the benefits of those policies without actionable efforts by the university (Hoffman et al., 2016). Not only are the policies themselves important, but the practice and enforcement of these policies can be imperative to student satisfaction and comfort within their universities.

Given the efforts to crack down on DEI in the state of Texas, many have been worried about the negative effects of such restrictions on college campuses. Many students benefit from DEI practices and programs, including racial/ethnic minority students, LGBTQ+ identifying students, students with disabilities, religious minority students, and more. Creating a welcoming and inclusive environment can be integral to students' trust in their campus communities. Some studies have explored the effects of DEI on LGBTQ+ students' satisfaction with and safety on campus,

including how anti-discrimination policies can benefit students' well-being and decrease discriminatory practices (Woodford et al., 2018). These studies also describe how minority students – specifically LGBTQ students – experience higher levels of distress, discomfort, and overall feelings of discrimination (Woodford et al., 2018). We aim to explore not only how important these policies and practices are for student success, but also their satisfaction in their discipline/field and their personal well-being. We wish to address the attitudes students have toward Texas Senate Bill 17 (TX SB17) and how the perceived consequences of the bill will affect student success, desires to pursue graduate education, and positive attitudes about inclusivity on college campuses.

Research question: Does the introduction of TX SB17 decrease positive attitudes in undergraduate UTD students regarding student success?

Our research question is two-faceted; we aim to address not only how TX SB17 will affect positive attitudes students have toward their campus, but how those attitudes will affect participation in graduate education and satisfaction within students' field of study. We believe this research, as well as future studies, will be imperative to determining the effects of DEI policies across college campuses, and possibly help policymakers and universities improve the lives of their students. Our study can also offer solutions to potential issues that can arise because of TX SB17, and potentially laws other states. We seek to explore how anti-DEI impositions by states can be harmful to all minority students, including racial/ethnic minorities. In Florida, attacks on social justice education race-related subjects have the potential to harm students interested in studying those areas (Russell-Brown, 2023). Anti-DEI laws have the potential to harm all students, especially minorities. We seek to measure attitudes related to this legislation and determine how future policies could be harmful to universities.

Hypotheses

H1: The introduction of TX SB17 will decrease positive attitudes about student success at their university.

H2: Negative attitudes about student success at their university will discourage students from exploring higher education at their universities.

H3: Negative attitudes about student success at their university will decrease satisfaction and positive attitudes toward their discipline/field of study.

Methodology: Survey Research and Data Scraping

We seek to implement two methods of data collection into our study, one mechanism being survey research, and the other being social network data scraped from the website Reddit. Reddit was chosen because it is a widely used platform by UTD students, especially undergraduates. We also selected surveying because they are effective means of measuring the attitudes of a sample group, such as through Likert-scale/feeling thermometer questions.

Surveys are generally helpful in measuring attitudes, yet there are different modes of data collection for surveying. One of those modes is through an online, web-based format. Qualtrics is a popular platform for survey design and data collection and offers a clear and minimalist format for survey questions. Traditionally, online surveys offer the opportunity to reach more people in a shorter period, which is more convenient when surveying large-scale samples (Ansolabehere & Rivers, 2013). Our goal is to generate a sample that will help generalize the population, being the undergraduate student body at UTD. Using a simple random sampling method, we will generate a sample of participants from the population that will respond to our survey. Randomness is essential to best generalize the overall population.

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