MAY 7, 2015

# CAMPUS RACIAL CLIMATE

## POLICIES TOWARD A BETTER UNIVERSITY

MINAHIL AMIN
EDLF 5700

## May 1970

*Committee on Educational and Employment Opportunities, Obligations and Rights, in an advisory report to the President*

"No white person at The University of Virginia prior to very recent times ever considered it important to think about how to encourage a black person to think of the schools as "his University." Indeed, the underlying feeling seems to have been "this is our University, but we (white) will permit you (black) to attend." It seems safe to say that this concept and its offshoots in the minds of Blacks and Whites will be major obstacles to our progress in human relationships at the University of Virginia."

## October 1975

*BSA, in a proposal to the President calling for the establishment of an Office of Minority Affairs*

"The human condition of the Black students at the University of Virginia has been less than desirable. With the small numbers of Black students, being confronted with the cultural shock of an alien and hostile environment, have lapsed into a mood of discontent, anxiety, and frustration. This has activated a posture which demands definitive action for change."

## June 1987

*The Task Force on Afro-American Affairs, An Audacious Faith Report*

"The challenge for this institution entails a significant self-transformation from a previously all-white university devoted, in the eyes of many, to perpetuating the power and privilege of an elite, to an open, welcoming enclave of shared learning dedicated to serving a diversity of student clients truly reflective of contemporary society in the Commonwealth and the Nation.

…All students, regardless of race, recognize the quality of this institution, value its excellence, and wish to become active participants in its academic process.

…Nevertheless, although the primary motivation to attend the University of Virginia may be similar across racial lines, the experience of many minority students, once enrolled in this institution is that they are unable to achieve their full potential academically.

…The judgement of the Task Force on Afro-American Affairs is that the University of Virginia has not actively created a welcoming environment for all blacks, which it can and must do in order to overcome its heritage as a closed, segregated, elitist institution."

## April 2015

*UVA Alumni for Change, in a letter to the President*

"Today, we call upon you as President of this prestigious University to do what your predecessors have not chosen to do: join us and say 'no further, no longer'. Commit to doing all that can be done to ensure that our wait for access and justice goes no further than this moment. Commit to doing all that can be done to ensure that we no longer have to wait to transform the University into an ecosystem that gives no fertile ground to racism. Commit to dismantle the institutional indifference and culture of ignorance and intolerance that have permitted the continual denial of Black excellence."

## April 2015

*Members of BSA, Towards a Better University Proposal*

"The University of Virginia, no different from the nation, has far to go in regards to fostering a harmonious, inclusive environment for all."

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Recent events concerning race around the nation have triggered a critical introspection on the state of our society. The University of Virginia, too, has been compelled to address race relations on its campus and in the larger community directly as a result of the brutalization of Martese Johnson on March 18th, 2015 outside of Trinity Irish Pub. This policy proposal seeks to outline the current research on racial climates in higher education, the implications of hostile climates, and potential strategies universities can implement to address hostile climates, in particular, conducting campus racial climate assessments, increasing intergroup contact, transforming curriculum to reflect more diverse perspectives, and explicitly committing to a multiracial campus climate.

## The current state of campus racial climates

### Racial minority students have negative perceptions of campus racial climates

While college enrollment for minority groups has been increased over the past thirty years (IES, 2010), these changes in numbers have not necessarily been accompanied by changes in campuses' "chilly" racial climates (Peterson, 1990; Hurtado, 1999). Students of color frequently find the campus an unwelcoming and unsupportive place (González, 2002; Villalpando, 2003).

Campus racial climate is comprised of students' perceptions of racial discrimination, stereotypes, and prejudice on campus, beliefs about institutional response to racial diversity issues, and interactions between and among racial/ethnic groups (Hurtado et al., 1999). "The Campus Racial Climate: Contexts of Conflict" (Hurtado, 1992) is the most widely cited study on this topic. The researchers used data from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) fourth-year follow-up survey, a nationally representative longitudinal study of college students in the late 1980s. They found that approximately one in four survey respondents perceived considerable racial conflict on their campuses; this proportion was even higher at four-year institutions that were large, public, or selective.

Multiple studies have shown that racial minority students perceive more generally negative campus climates and more racist campus climates than do White students (Reid and Radhakrishnan, 2003; Rankin and Reason, 2005; Worthington et al. 2008). In particular, Black students report lower levels of satisfaction with racial climates and perceive differential treatment on the basis of race more frequently than do their Asian American, Latino, Native American, and White peers (Ancis, Sedlacek, and Mohr, 2000; Cabrera and Nora, 1994; Hurtado, 1992; Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2003).

### Racial minority students face prejudice and microaggressions

The negative perceptions on part of racial minority students of campus racial climates can be partially attributed to "an underlying current of racial prejudice" at many college campuses (Umbach & Kuh, 2006). About 50% of students report encountering some form of prejudice on campus (Biasco, Goodwin, and Vitale, 2001; D'Augelli and Hershberger, 1993; Fisher and Hartmann, 1995). This prejudice is often delivered in the form of microaggressions – subtle slights and insults that are offensive but often unintentional (Bourke 2010; Samuel 2004). Sue et

al.'s seminal work on microaggressions (2007) defines them as "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group." They identify three categories of microaggressions: microinsults – "behaviors/verbal remarks or comments that convey rudeness, insensitivity and demean a persons' racial heritage or identity"; microinvalidations – "verbal comments or behaviors that exclude, negate or nullify the psychological thoughts, feeling or experiential reality of a person of color," especially the denial that racism or White privilege exists (or the insistence that a perceived racial microaggression is nonexistent); and microassaults – "explicit racial derogations characterized primarily by a violent verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior or purposeful discriminatory actions."

Students cite classrooms as among the most common places for prejudice to occur (Marcus et al., 2003; Rankin, 2003). Examples of microaggressions that can occur in classrooms are: hearing stereotypes in the content of lecture and other course materials, being dismissed or ignored by the instructor before or after class, and being called on in the classroom to offer the "student of color perspective." A study of 4,800 undergraduate students of color at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign found that 51 percent of participants reported experiences of stereotyping in the classroom. 27 percent of the students of color reported feeling that their contributions in different learning contexts were minimized and that they were made to feel inferior because of the way they spoke. Additionally, 25 percent of students of color reported feeling that they were not taken seriously in class because of their race (Harwood et al., 2015). Corroborating this research, a study by Milkman, Akinola, & Chugh (2014) exposed the prevalence of racial bias among professors. Their findings showed that Professors favored White male students as advisees, while racial minority and female students had a more difficult time finding professors to advise them.

Residence halls are another space where microaggressions often manifest. A study at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign found that racial minority students had faced prejudice in dorms in the form of: (a) racial jokes and verbal comments, (b) racial slurs written shared spaces, (c) segregated spaces and unequal treatment, and (d) denial and minimization of racism (Harwood et al., 2012). Minority students, and especially African American students, perceive significantly more interracial tension in residence halls than do White students (Ancis, Sedlacek, and Mohr, 2000; Johnson, 2003).

## Hostile/prejudiced racial climates have adverse outcomes

As racial minority students perceive more negative racial campus climates, rates of academic persistence, defined as the continuation of one's studies in spite of obstacles, and retention fall (Cabrera et al., 1999; Chang, 1999; Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003; Worthington et al., 2008; Museus et al., 2008; Rodgers & Summers, 2008).

Negative perceptions of campus climate by students color are associated with further adverse outcomes: poor academic performance, greater stress, mental health problems, and even

accelerated biological aging (among African-American men) (Worthingtonet al., 2008; Smith, Allen, and Danley, 2007; Chae et al., 2014).

Numerous studies have demonstrated the detrimental effects of microaggressions on students' sense of belonging and emotional states (Solo´rzano et al., 2000; Yosso et al., 2009; Hurtado and Carter, 1997; Johnson et al., 2007; Nora and Cabrera, 1996). Latina/o and African American students reported feelings of self-doubt when faced with microaggressions in their academic environment (Solórzano et al., 2000; Yosso et al., 2009). Black men and Latina women reported a sense of not belonging after being targeted by exclusionary microaggressions (McCabe, 2009). Filipino American graduate students' experiences with racial microaggressions, overt racism, and systemic racism often led to feelings of marginalization and disconnect from their institutions; furthermore, students reported feeling isolated and misunderstood because of their ethnicity (Nadal et al., 2010). Among undergraduate students, racial microaggressions negatively predict a lower self-esteem, and that microaggressions that occur in educational and workplace environments are particularly harmful to self-esteem (Nadal et al., 2014).

## Stereotype threat mechanism

One mechanism through which perceived negative racial climates translate to adverse outcomes for students is stereotype threat. Claude Steele, author of the seminal research on the topic, defines stereotype threat as "the threat that others will view one through a negative stereotype or fear that something one does will confirm or strengthen the stereotype" (Steele, 1995).

Several studies confirm the existence of stereotype threat in the domain of higher education (Owens and Massey, 2011; Charles et al., 2009; Fischer and Massey, 2007; Massey and Fischer, 2005; Massey and Mooney, 2007). Stereotype threat has been linked to lower academic achievement and degree incompletion (Fischer, 2010; Steele, 1992, 1997). It has also been associated with reduced working memory capacity (the ability to focus one's attention on a singular task, while tuning out task-irrelevant thoughts), which can affect academic performance (Schmader, 2010).

In the sphere of academia, African Americans have consistently been stereotyped as unintelligent and lazy; threat from this stereotype can cause students to disengage in class and not seek out academic support (Taylor and Walton, 2011). In a study of undergraduates at three colleges, African American students voiced that stereotypes and the threat of fulfilling them is a major obstacle in their college careers (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013).

## The necessity for change

Despite improvement in recent decades in the graduation rates of African-American, Latina/o, and Native American students, these rates remain significantly lower than those for white students, and racial differences persist even when members of racial/ethnic minority groups are matched with whites on high school preparation and socioeonomic factors (Sporte, 2002). The research done on the adverse effects of perceived negative campus racial climate provides insight into this disparity. Given this research, the substantial evidence for the incidence of racial microaggressions at universities both inside and outside the classroom, and the fact that

racism is unjust and intolerable, there is a clear need for institutions of higher education to address the factors that render their campus racial climates hostile to racial minority students.

## Strategies to build supportive campus racial climates

The strategies outlined below seek to translate research on building positive intergroup relationships, adopting curriculum that reflects diverse perspectives, and substantively committing to a multiracial climate, into policy recommendations for universities. The ultimate goal of these policies is to design supportive campus racial climates for racial minority students.

### A note on implementation: racial identity

In implementing the following policy recommendations, it is important to first delineate an understanding of race as an independent variable.

Helms et al. (2005) articulate that racial categories, such as African-American/Asian-American/Latino, should not be used to explain psychological phenomena because the categories have no conceptual meaning. "Assignment of research participants to a racial category reveals something about the researchers' beliefs about race but nothing about the behaviors or attributes of the research participants." Instead, they recommend replacing racial categories as independent variables with independent variables derived from racial categorization (RC) theories. RC theorists define constructs based on people's experiences of categorizing or being categorized into one mutually exclusive group rather than another. Thus, this perspective advocates substituting conceptually meaningful RC constructs for racial categories. One salient construct for this policy proposal is racial identity, which "refers to a sense of group or collective identity based on one's perception that he or she shares a common heritage with a particular racial group" (Helms, 1993); this construct can be derived from racial identity theories such as Cross's Black racial identity development model or Helms's White racial identity development model (Cross, 1978; Helms, 1995).

Racial identity as an independent variable is particularly useful in policies targeting campus racial climate because the salience of a student's identification with a racial category, that is the frequency with which individuals think about their group membership and the level of importance of this social identity in an individual's self-concept (Cameron, 2004; Sellers, Chavous, & Cook, 1998), mediates their experience of racial climate (Parker and Flowers, 2003; Rankin and Reason, 2005; Hurtado, Alvarado, and Guillermo-Wann, 2015). Potential measures for the independent variable of racial identity include the Racial Identity Attitude Scale (Parham & Helms, 1981 as cited by Parker & Flowers, 2003) and the Cross Racial Identity Scale (Vandiver et al., 2000), although both of these are centered around African-American identity; two more broad measures are the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) (Phinney, 1992; Roberts et al., 1999) and the race-specific Collective Self-Esteem Scale (Crocker et al., 1994).

### Campus racial climate assessment

In a research-based report on "Making Diversity Work on Campus," Milem, Chang, and Antonio (2005) write, "the context in which diversity is enacted matters a great deal." In order to understand this context and determine the need for change, institutions should regularly evaluate

their campus racial climate through surveys and interviews (Kezar and Eckels, 2002; Hurtado and Harper, 2007).

Several studies of campus climate demonstrate that administrators, students, and faculty from different racial and ethnic backgrounds are likely to view the campus racial climate very differently (Milem, Chang, and Antonio, 2005). Moreover, phenomena like self-segregation, which students and administrators alike may take as a proxy for racial climate, is often deceptive; there is usually a fairly high frequency of cross-racial interaction among students, despite appearances of self-segregation (Milem, Chang, and Antonio 2005). Careful monitoring of the campus climate can help determine the actual extent of interaction across groups that students engage in and can indicate whether their behavior may be at odds with surface level perceptions. Milem, Chang, and Antonio (2005) make the recommendation that findings on cross-racial interaction, especially those that diverge from cursory perceptions, should be communicated through articles in the student newspaper and official statements by the president in order to help dispel negatively perceived images of the racial climate and replace them with information more consistent with students' actual experiences.

As mentioned above, in carrying out these surveys, universities should use the lens of racial identity rather than race to target participants, form questions, and disaggregate data during analysis.

### Intergroup contact

One strategy that has been widely studied for its ability to foster more positive intergroup attitudes and relations, which play directly into shaping campus racial climate, is intergroup contact.

In a meta-analysis on the topic based on 515 studies (the majority of which were conducted with college students), Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) found small but positive effects of intergroup contact on intergroup attitudes. Studies focusing on the higher education context have found that college students with more racial outgroup interactions exhibit increased cultural knowledge, less ingroup bias, and reduced intergroup anxiety (Antonio, 2001; Chang, 1996; Levin, van Laar, & Sidanius, 2003; Page-Gould, Mendoza-Denton, Alegre, & Siy, 2010). Chang et al. (2004) found that a student body's average level of cross racial interaction affects students' knowledge of and ability to accept different races and cultures.

Given that many individuals still have very few interactions with diverse populations before entering college (Frankenberg & Lee, 2002; Mouw & Entwisle, 2006; Stearns, Buchmann, & Bonneau, 2009), universities must pay attention to and can play a key role in mediating this contact.

### Increasing the compositional diversity of a campus

To increase intergroup contact, universities can increase the compositional diversity of their campuses. Compositional diversity refers to the extent to which a college has students, faculty, and staff from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds; the more students from different backgrounds, the greater the likelihood of cross-group interaction (Chang, 1999). In a survey of 715 white students across 27 colleges, Fischer (2010) found that the percentage of Black students

on campus had a significant impact on reduced negative stereotypes. Compositional diversity also engenders a student body that holds a wider variety of views. Although individuals of any given race hold a range of opinions on a variety of pressing social and political issues, the average viewpoints of each group differ (Chang, 2003). Divergence of opinion on these issues increases as the proportion of underrepresented students in an entering class increases (Chang 2002; Chang, Seltzer, and Kim, 2001).

Milem, Chang, and Antonio (2005) give several caveats about the inadequacy of simply increasing percentages of racially underrepresented students alone. "Research on diversity consistently shows that educational benefits do not automatically accrue to students who attend institutions that are, in terms of student or faculty composition, racially and ethnically diverse." Intentional institutional efforts to facilitate and mediate cross-group interactions are critical because it is much easier for students to gravitate toward people of the same racial background than to engage in these interactions on their own.

### Freshman year roommate assignments

One key area where many universities can facilitate cross-group interaction is first-/freshman-year housing. Several longitudinal studies demonstrate the benefits of pairing different-race students as roommates, including more positive attitudes to out-groups, less automatic activation of racial stereotypes, lower race-related anxiety, and more positive engagement with other-race individuals in subsequent diverse settings (van Laar, Levin, Sincalir, & Sidanius, 2005; Shook & Fazio, 2008, 2011; Shook & Clay, 2012; West, Pearson, Dovidio, Shelton, & Trail, 2009; Gaither and Sommers, 2013). For example, Gaither and Sommers (2013) found that after four months, White students who lived with an other-race roommate came to have more diverse friends and believe that diversity was more important than did Whites with a White roommate. After six months, self-reports, partner ratings, and nonverbal behavior indicated that Whites with an other-race roommate were less anxious, more pleasant, and more physically engaged during a novel interracial interaction. There is also evidence that the positive effects of contact with one outgroup can, under some circumstances, generalize to other outgroups (Allport, 1954; van Laar, Levin, Sincalir, & Sidanius, 2005; Pettigrew, 2009; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2000, 2011; Tausch et al., 2010); for example, living with an African-American roommate can decrease a White student's prejudice towards both African-Americans *and* Latinos (van Laar, Levin, Sincalir, & Sidanius, 2005).

First year housing assignments are of particular importance because many students select best friends based on those they interact with the most in the first year of college, not on the basis of race (Antonio, 2001).

### Curriculum

Curriculum is another medium through which universities can facilitate a more supportive racial climate for racial minority students. According to Sue (2010), the ability to properly address microaggressions requires awareness of what microaggressions are, awareness of personal cultural values, and awareness of personal bias; curriculum can create this awareness.

Indeed, curricular/co-curricular programs focusing on racial/ethnic diversity have been shown to be associated with positive changes in intergroup attitudes (Lopez, 2004); decreased racial prejudice and increased commitment to improving racial understanding (Springer et al., 1996; Hurtado et al., 1999; Chang, 2002; Nesbitt, 2004; Radloff, 2010); and more positive attitudes toward campus diversity (Springer et al., 1996). The specifics of these courses vary[1]; for example Chang (2002) found that students who had nearly completed a required diversity related course made significantly more favorable judgments of African Americans than those who had just started the requirement, even though the content of the courses varied, and many of them did not specifically focus on African American issues. More research must be done in order to identify the components of these courses that engender these positive intergroup attitude effects, assess whether these effects are long-lasting, and determine whether these attitudes translate into behavior.

### Demonstrated institutional commitment to multicultural climate

An institution's articulation of and demonstrated commitment to a multicultural climate can influence student perceptions and the way that students contribute to this climate. Higher perceived levels of institutional commitment to diversity are associated with perceptions of relatively low racial tension among African American, Chicano, and, to some extent, white students, as well as increases in personal goals to promote racial understanding and higher levels of acceptance of racial/ethnic diversity (Milem, Chang, and Antonio, 2005; Simmons et al., 2011). Linking to the strategy of intergroup contact, Chang et al. (2004) found that a supportive campus climate and set of institutional practices can be linked to, or serve as a proxy for, high levels of cross-racial interaction among students.

In order to demonstrate an institution-wide commitment to a multicultural climate, Milem, Chang, and Antonio (2005) offer the following recommendations: top campus leadership should issue statements of support, purpose, and action[2], enact specific policies for the recruitment and retention of faculty of color, and create and support "safe" cultural spaces. Support and purpose statements are necessary but not sufficient – in focus groups with 278 students across five universities, Harper and Hurtado (2007) found that racial/ethnic minorities and White students alike expressed frustration with "the incongruence of espoused and enacted institutional values concerning diversity." In terms of faculty hiring and retention, recent research indicates that racially homogeneous faculty search committees are not likely to hire candidates from different racial groups unless deliberate steps are taken to require the committees to seriously consider such candidates (Smith et al. 2004). Finally, creating cultural spaces are a substantive and evidence-based means of promoting a more supportive racial climate for racial minority students; ethnic culture centers, minority student organizations, and other counterspaces yield positive academic and socioemotional outcomes for racial minority

[1] Examples of diversity requirements can be found at http://www2.unca.edu/genedrev/curriculum_team_diversity_report.htm

[2] Statements such as those at Carnegie Mellon University, Colby College, and the Universities of Michigan, Nebraska, and Western Washington are good examples of publicly stated commitments to diversity.

students (Guiffrida, 2003; Harper and Quaye, 2007; Patton, 2006; Solórzano and Villalpando, 1998).

## A further note on implementation

The bulk of the research backing the above policy recommendations is based on a racial categories approach – where the authors either use existing survey data or ask their own question in which participants select a racial category (eg/ African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, etc) to describe their race. If the studies cited above were carried out with a racial identity approach, they may have yielded different outcomes. For example, in the literature on diversifying the racial composition of a campus, it is unclear if including more students who have developed a strong sense of African American identity as opposed to those who have weaker ties to this identity would influence the nature of intergroup interactions. One solution to bridging this gap in research is for policymakers to emphasize racial identity over racial categorization in the data-gathering stage of their policy changes. As explained in the racial climate assessment section, in conducting focus groups, surveys, and interviews that universities use to inform context-specific policy changes, policymakers should use the lens of racial identity. For example, African American students in the later stages of racial identity development tend to engage in more social activism (Whittaker, 2013), and may thus have greater or more specific demands of the university in regard to supporting the "safe cultural spaces" mentioned above.

## Conclusion

Racial minority students face prejudice and microaggressions at university, leading to negative perceptions of campus racial climates. Hostile racial climates have adverse outcomes for racial minority students, both academically and socio-emotionally. The research above provides compelling evidence that universities can build supportive racial climates by mediating intergroup interactions, integrating curriculum that focus on diverse racial/ethnic perspectives, and demonstrating institutional commitment to a multicultural climate. Given the consequences of hostile racial climates for racial minority students and the injustice of tolerating prejudice, the cost of not enacting these policies is high.

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