



**INSIDE**  
HIGHER ED

# The Black Experience in Higher Education

Higher education has not been exempt from scrutiny during America's current racial reckoning. Far from it, as people increasingly question whether colleges and universities have failed in their stated mission of increasing equity in society.

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## Editor's Note

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Last fall, in the wake of the murder of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter protests that ensued, *Inside Higher Ed* published an eight-part series that sought to give readers some insight into what we called “The Black Experience in Higher Education.”

No mere collection of articles could comprehensively capture the experience of such a diverse group of students, professors, administrators and others. The series did not attempt to be an exhaustive chronicling of every facet of the issues we explored. For example, it focused more on majority-white institutions than on historically Black colleges and universities, which experts agree tend to do a better job of holistically serving Black students.

But our goals were to go beyond our regular daily coverage in response to what seemed like a unique moment in the national discourse, and to shine a spotlight on a higher education enterprise that is very important to the nation's ability to deliver on its promises of equity and social mobility. This report collects the articles from last fall's series and offers some up-to-date context for them.

As you read this series, we welcome your thoughts on what we found, what we missed and what other aspects of educational equity we should explore going forward. Please contact us at [editor@insidehighered.com](mailto:editor@insidehighered.com).

– The editors of *Inside Higher Ed*

Editor's Note ..... 2

Executive Summary ..... 5

The Souls of Black Professors ..... 7

The Emotional Toll of Racism..... 15

Confronting Racism in Admissions..... 23

Racial Equity in Funding for Higher Ed..... 28

'There Are So Few That Have Made Their Way' ..... 35

Black Workers and the University ..... 39

Is It Time for All Students to Take Ethnic Studies? ..... 46

What Happens Before College Matters..... 55

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# Executive Summary

By The Editors



The protests that spread across the country last summer in the wake of the police killing of George Floyd and other Black Americans prompted a painful, national soul-searching that is still unfolding to this day. It spurred a racial reckoning in virtually every sector of American society, from politics to corporate America to the entertainment industry.

Higher education was not spared from scrutiny. *Inside Higher Ed* has been contributing to this important national discourse in our staff's daily news coverage and in the perspectives shared by a wide array of outside writers whose commentaries we publish. Our coverage documented pressure from student activists for their colleges and universities to acknowledge racist

histories and discriminatory practices that continue to this day; calls for greater hiring of Black faculty and staff members and those from other underrepresented minority groups; and a steady stream of incidents that reveal campuses to be uncomfortable rather than welcoming places for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and minority groups.

We believe our content helps illustrate, and hopefully illuminate, how racial inequities and socioeconomic disparities permeate so many aspects of higher education.

We wanted to propel the conversation further, however, with a deeper examination of how race plays out, in ways big and small, on college and university campuses across

the nation. The result was a series of articles last fall, "The Black Experience in Higher Education."

After months of exploration by our reporters, we published a total of eight articles that tried to give a broad view of systemic racism in higher education and its impact on Black students, faculty and staff members, and administrators. The pieces went beyond just describing well-established and intractable problems, by exploring their root causes and asking how higher education can do better. The articles focused on a wide range of campus constituents and issues, such as faculty diversity, admissions, the pre-college challenges faced by Black high-school students, curriculum and academic life, government funding and policies, Black

## Executive Summary (cont.)

campus workers, campus culture, and leadership.

Although the articles examined different aspects of the higher education landscape, certain themes emerged again and again. Some of them were obvious, such as the underrepresentation of Black people in student bodies, among college faculties, and in senior leadership positions on campuses.

The consistent feelings of alienation among Black students and employees, not just on campuses themselves but in surrounding communities that are often whiter than the institutions themselves, was summed up this way by an associate dean at the University of Texas at Austin. "What is it like to buy a house in the community? How do local schools affirm Black children? Where can Black scholars find a critical mass to listen to music, appreciate the arts and otherwise build community?"

Other findings revealed by the series may have seemed like revelations to many white readers who tend to think of their colleges and universities as among the more progressive institutions in the country but were discussed by Black academics as so commonplace and longstanding that they should have seemed obvious.

They described, for instance, the intense demands on Black professors to mentor younger colleagues and graduate students and the heavy load they carry in doing diversity work, all while trying to ad-

vance themselves in a tenure and promotion system that may seem rigged against them.

One of the articles examined the phenomenon of "presenting while Black," in which Black faculty members frequently report being regularly advised by white colleagues to be "more entertaining" during academic presentations, to "lighten up" and to "tell more jokes." Black women in particular reported having colleagues bring up their clothing choices and hairstyles and being told to suppress their "passion" and "smile more."

Our reporters interviewed a wide range of experts and sources for this series, ensuring that they spoke with many who have not previously been cited by *Inside Higher Ed*. These articles are meant to be part of an ongoing and crucial national conversation that we chronicled and contextualized in real time.

In the months since we published the series, the landscape has changed in some important ways – and in other ways not at all.

The U.S. now has a Black woman as its vice president and a president who signed an executive order on racial equity on his first day.

Within higher education, more colleges and universities have announced ambitious plans to hire Black faculty members and strengthen their commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion in various other ways. Many institutions have extended the temporary

test-optional policies they adopted because of COVID-19, potentially eroding a practice long considered a barrier to admission for Black and other underrepresented students.

But the underlying structural racism and institutional policies and practices that reinforce it are deep-seated, developed over generations, and won't be easily dismantled. Evidence abounds: In November, California's voters rejected an amendment to the state's constitution that would have once again allowed public universities there to use affirmative action. And Black students were among the groups whose educational plans were most disrupted by COVID-19, with enrollments declining by nearly 10 percent, twice the level of all undergraduates.

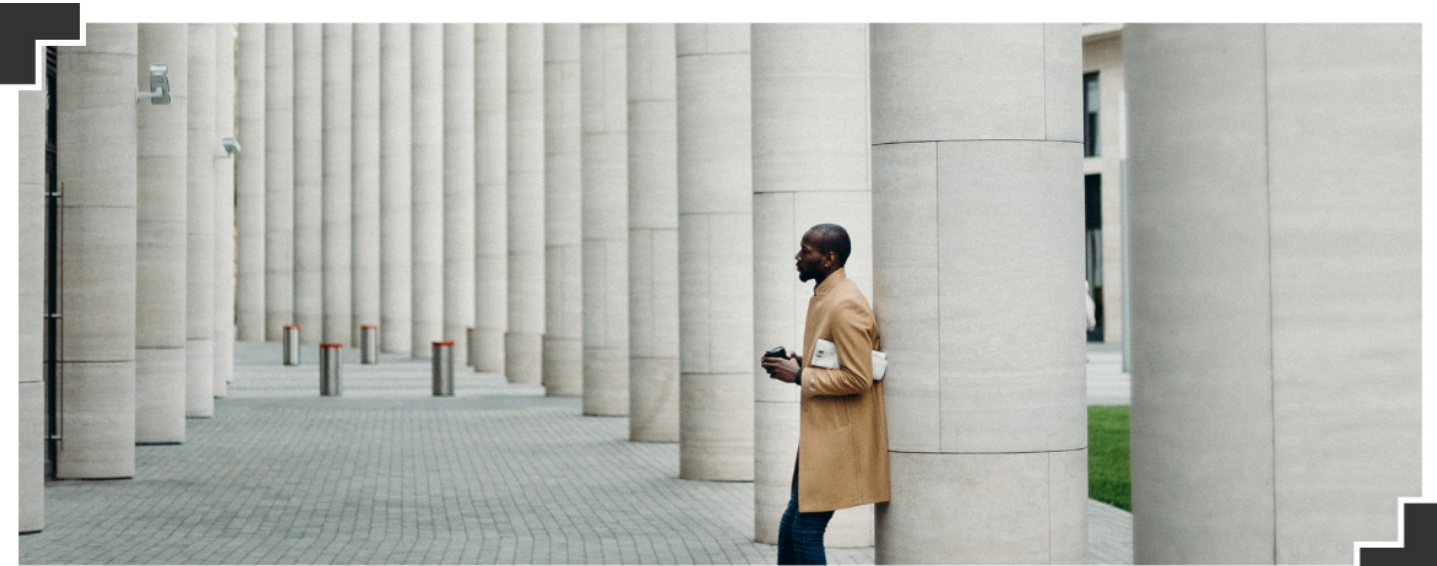
Higher education is frequently portrayed as an engine of social mobility and equity in American society, and it has played that role for many people. But colleges and universities fall short of that promise in many ways, and the racial reckoning that reverberated across the country and academe last summer offered only the latest reminder of that.

In response, many institutions redoubled their rhetorical commitment to making their campuses places where people of all races and backgrounds can thrive. The coming months and years will reveal whether those were more than words. *Inside Higher Ed* and its reporters will be there to document that process. ■

# The Souls of Black Professors

Scholars discuss what it's like to be a Black professor at this moment, who should be doing antiracist work on campus and why diversity interventions that attempt to "fix" Black academics for a rigged game miss the point entirely.

By **Colleen Flaherty** // October 21, 2020



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As colleges and universities issued **statement after statement** this year affirming that Black lives matter, many Black faculty members remained unimpressed with mere words of support – at once dubious and hopeful that this moment might lead to real, lasting change for themselves and their Black colleagues.

"There has never been a golden age for Black faculty in the United States," said Douglas M. Haynes, vice chancellor for equity, diversity and inclusion and professor of history and African American studies at the University of California, Irvine. "Too often people assume that there was after the Civil Rights

Act, that the door was opened, that there was no more resistance. On the contrary, there has been and will likely continue to be resistance."

Richard Reddick, associate dean for equity, community engagement and outreach in the University of Texas at Austin's College of Education, said, "I'm an optimist, but I am very skeptical about permanent change."

That said, Reddick added, if an institution "fixes its mouth to state that they are committed to a diverse faculty, they'd better bring the resources, mentoring, releases, grant opportunities and senior-scholar partnering that will

make these scholars viable for promotion and tenure."

In interviews with *Inside Higher Ed* over the past several months, Black scholars, including some who study race, expressed dissatisfaction with diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives that Black people often are expected to lead – without compensation, on top of their already disproportionate duties mentoring students of color, and often without their recommendations being adopted.

Scholars said they are sick of institutions hiring Black faculty members to reach diversity goals and then ignoring issues of racial cli-

mate and social isolation when these professors arrive. And they're more than tired of the casual and structural anti-Blackness reflected in everyday conversations, resource and funding allocations, personnel decisions, and more.

### 'You've Already Set That Person Up for Failure'

Ayana Jordan, an assistant professor of psychiatry at Yale University, said she was once the lone Black female psychiatrist on the faculty, and that a colleague once realized that this was the case and said so out loud. To Jordan, who was always keenly aware of being the only Black woman in so many rooms, the professor's realization came off as a perverse "luxury."

"The absence of Black faculty in institutions of higher learning is a national crisis," Jordan said. And like other national crises, this one requires a national response, or at least a coordinated effort among groups of institutions and a national repository for effective practices and interventions. Yet institutions generally continue to address the problem – as they do so many things – individually, Jordan said.

Many institutions, especially well-resourced ones, launched faculty diversity initiatives in the wake of the [student protests](#) at the University of Missouri at Columbia in 2015. And while some institutions report subsequent gains in their number of Black faculty members, the national outlook didn't budge between 2015 and 2018, the latest year for which [data were available](#) from the National Center for Ed-

ucation Statistics. Now, as then, just about 5.5 percent of full-time faculty members are Black, compared to about 14 percent of their students.

The University of Pennsylvania, for instance, launched an [ambitious faculty diversity plan](#) in 2011, even before the Mizzou protests. The number of underrepresented minority faculty members at Penn has [increased by 46 percent](#) since that time. Those hires pushed the overall proportion of underrepresented minorities on Penn's faculty from 6 percent to 8 percent by 2018. Climate surveys show similar levels of faculty satisfaction in 2011 and 2016, with women, minority and LGBTQ faculty reporting somewhat lower levels of overall satisfaction with their work environment, however.

Anthea Butler, an associate professor of religion and Africana studies at Penn, said, "These individual campus diversity initiatives are not tackling the structural issues behind what happens to faculty when they get to these campuses."

Beyond climate issues, Butler said the service and mentoring demands on Black professors are extreme, disadvantaging them off the bat in tenure and promotion processes that don't value this kind of labor.

"In my own personal experience, we don't have enough people to go around to help with diversity work," Butler said. "You have an issue, you bring it to a nontenured faculty member who is a person of color, or a woman, and they have

to do all the heavy lifting because they teach race or some related issue. Everyone's calling them all the time, they can't get enough work done and you've already set that person up for failure."

Butler proposed a two-year moratorium on expectations for this kind of service work for new hires on the tenure track, to protect their research and teaching time and give them a real shot at succeeding.

Jordan said that all-white promotion and tenure committees are fundamentally problematic. She advocated mandatory antiracist work for all faculty members, group hires for people of color to avoid social isolation and compensated service work around issues of diversity. No budget for this work means it's a not a priority, she said.

"I'm still not convinced, based on the actions of higher education, that there is a true commitment to making sure that there are Black faculty who are not only representative of the national population in which they serve, but who are also happy and have what they need to be successful."

A narrative within predominantly white organizations – including universities – is that there is will to hire more Black employees, but they simply don't exist. Haynes called this one of several "uninformed myths" about Black faculty members. Other beliefs are that they're not a "good fit," that they're "too expensive" and that they're "a risk," he said.

UC Irvine is busting these myths. This year it hired 13 Black faculty



members onto the tenure track, across fields – something that Haynes said “never happens” in U.S. academe at one campus in one year, because there’s a perception that it can’t or shouldn’t. Haynes said thinking outside the box in terms of hiring is especially challenging in California, where the 1978 U.S. Supreme Court case *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* originated.

In [that case](#), the court upheld affirmative action, including the consideration of race in admissions. But it also came down against reserving a specific number of seats for minority candidates, or racial quotas. Haynes said *Bakke* reflected and contributed to a backlash against racial justice in the U.S. This has had long-term, unintended consequences for higher education, especially faculty hiring. In 1996, California voters approved Proposition 209, a state law saying that public employers may not consider race, sex, color, ethnicity or national origin in hiring.

Next month, California voters will decide whether to repeal Prop 209, in the form of [Proposition 16](#). If

passed, Prop 16 would allow public entities in California to develop affirmative action programs, including, perhaps, faculty hiring programs that consider candidates’ race. Last month, in anticipation of this vote, and reflecting where the U.S. Supreme Court stands on this issue, the UC system’s Board of Regents approved a policy to [prohibit the use of racial quotas](#) or caps in admissions and hiring across its campuses. At least in admissions, though, the university has reportedly said it would consider gender in admissions as part of a larger set of criteria.

UC Irvine, which seeks to become the top choice for Black California college applicants, recently announced its [Black Thriving Initiative](#). It’s a universitywide effort to establish UC Irvine “as the nation’s leading destination for talented Black people to thrive,” Haynes said. “It involves changing the culture, leveraging the research mission and linking UCI’s future to the success of Black people.”

The idea came together relatively quickly, but Irvine’s success with respect to diversifying the faculty can be traced back to 2001, when it became part of the National Science Foundation’s ADVANCE: Organizational Change for Gender Equity in STEM Academic Professions program. Irvine has doubled its share of female scientists, who now account for 27 percent of the science faculty.

Building on [ADVANCE strategies](#), Haynes has led similar efforts to hire more faculty members of color.

“We’ve looked at the pipeline and identified each of the critical milestones and customized specific interventions that led us to this record year,” Haynes said. “And this new initiative expands these efforts to build a culture where Black people thrive as undergraduates, graduate students and faculty.”

Admittedly, that’s the “hardest part – changing the culture,” he continued. “The responsibility rests with the entire institution.”

### When the Game Is Rigged

Among non-tenure-track instructors across academe, Black professors are overrepresented. They’re also overrepresented in lower-paying disciplines and [underrepresented in the sciences](#). Institutions generally consider tenure decisions private personnel matters, but there is anecdotal and empirical data suggesting that Black professors face hurdles their white colleagues don’t in advancing their careers.

In one example from this year, all-white tenure committees at the University of Virginia [denied tenure](#) to two Black assistant professors who were engaged in diversity work within their respective fields. Both cases involved procedural errors on the part of evaluators. In the case of Paul Harris, a human services scholar who studies Black students and athletes, a tenure committee accused him of publishing a paper in a “self-published” journal that was actually peer reviewed. Harris also faced questions about the representativeness of his work just as he was about to go up for tenure – what some say is code for scholars of color and

## The Souls of Black Professors (cont.)

their work being too centered on issues of identity.

The university eventually **overturned** Harris's negative bid, but the majority of cases like his never get a public airing.

A **recent study** of faculty "fit" found that candidates' diverse social identities transformed from competitive advantages when they applied or were courted to apply for a faculty job, to a "non-factor" during the review phase, with "many faculty members having different – albeit still color-blind – perspectives on considering identity." Put another way, the paper found that hiring typically privileges perceived research impact and runs on reproduction, or cloning bias, even when hiring committees are supposed to see diversity as an asset.

Another **paper** on "presenting while Black" found that the majority of Black faculty members interviewed reported being regularly advised by white colleagues to be "more entertaining," to "lighten up" and to "tell more jokes." Black women in particular reported having colleagues bring up their clothing choices and hairstyles and being told to suppress their "passion" and "smile more." Most interviewees reported hearing more overtly racist comments about their presentations.

**Studies** too numerous to list here conclude that Black professors face disproportionate challenges in the classroom, as well, in the form of student bias. **One paper** based on an experiment at a predominantly white research institution in the Southeast found that students rated Black professors' teaching

significantly lower than that of white and other minority professors, including on survey items that influence personnel decisions (Black women face a double bind, based on additional research on students' gender biases). Professors of color **report** bullying and discriminatory comments on their appearance and qualifications in open-ended responses.

In another example, students have been shown to find professors of color **less credible** than white professors. **Other researchers** have found that students rated a hypothetical Black professor less favorably than a white professor, and that students trusted the Black professor more when he was pictured in formal compared to casual clothing. Meanwhile, the reverse was true for the white professor.

Some institutions have **moved away** from using student evaluations of teaching in promotion and tenure decisions for these reasons. Many colleges and universities continue to use student ratings of teaching in high-stakes personnel decisions, despite all the evidence of their vulnerability to bias.

Research funding is another area of concern. **One study** published in June, controlling for career stage and other factors, found that reviewers consistently rate Black researchers seeking Research Project Grants from the National Institutes of Health lower than white applicants. This contributes to a persistent, overall funding gap between white and Black researchers even under the NIH's Enhanced Peer-Review process, which was

supposed to bring more transparency to the process: from 2014 to 2016, the award probability for black applications was 55 percent of that for white applications (10.2 percent versus 18.5 percent).

The study's authors found that topic choice, including community-based work – such as studies that look at the disparate impact of diseases on minorities, including the coronavirus – along with researchers' network size may explain some of the funding gap. But not all of it. The authors expressed concern that instead of mitigating bias, the first stage of enhanced peer review may "absorb" bias, or make new room for it to creep into the process.

An **NSF analysis** of its own data from 2009 to 2016 found that applicants and awardees from underrepresented racial minority groups were growing in number – and that their funding rate remained "substantially lower" than that of majority applicants.

As for the salaries of researchers, a **national survey** of 1,160 U.S. biologists and physicists found that white scientists reported earning higher salaries than nonwhite scientists, despite no significant differences in productivity, funding or institutional status. Black respondents reported earning the lowest pay. Even in science, "a field characterized by explicit overtures of tolerance and inclusion," there is still "reproduction of a racial order," the researchers wrote.

A group of scientists – including Tyrone B. Hayes, a professor of in-

tegrative biology at the University of California, Berkeley, who recently detailed [his many experiences with racism](#) in a letter to his colleagues – cited some of these data in a separate [Science letter](#) on systemic racism in higher education last month.

The “false dichotomy of ‘excellence or diversity’ must end,” Hayes and his colleagues wrote. “Diversity results in better, more impactful, and more innovative science, and it is essential to building novel solutions to challenges faced by marginalized and nonmarginalized communities.” Catalyzing culture shifts in the academy, meanwhile, “will require making tenure dependent on excellence in research, teaching and service that centers on equity and inclusion.”

Reddick said his own research and experience demonstrates that Black scholars are more likely to have positive experiences in their departments and programs than they are away from campus, and that institutions are “woefully neglectful of what it is like to live” in the surrounding environs.

“What is it like to buy a house in the community? How do local schools affirm Black children? Where can Black scholars find a critical mass to listen to music, appreciate the arts and otherwise build community?” Reddick asked. He recalled a professor he once met who realized there were no Black barbers in his rural university town, so he hired one from the nearest city to cut Black students’ hair at his home. It became a community for those students – what Reddick said scholar and author bell hooks would call a “homeplace.”

“Something as seemingly simple as having relationships with community partners in education, services and entertainment would go a long way” toward faculty satisfaction, Reddick said. Paraphrasing what an unnamed colleague of his has wondered, Reddick said, “We sometimes have exit interviews when faculty leave institutions. Why aren’t we engaged in stay interviews, and learning why our faculty choose to work here and live in our community?”

### **Beyond Band-Aids: Breaking Down Barriers**

Akil Houston, an associate professor of cultural and media studies at Ohio University, said he had three different chairs during his pretenure period and an ever-changing list of expectations and requirements. His faculty mentor was not supportive. Now that he’s got tenure, Houston tries to give out the guidance that he didn’t get. But there could still “be a stronger university culture that says to Black faculty, ‘We want you here, and we

want to position you for success,’” he said. Some ideas: writing workshops, cohorts and grants targeted at underrepresented minority faculty members.

Kimberly Griffin, professor and associate dean of graduate studies and faculty affairs in the College of Education at the University of Maryland, College Park, [recently reviewed](#) decades of research on the challenges facing academics of color, including those that make them leave academe altogether. Among the roadblocks: a hostile climate and unwelcoming colleagues, students who challenge their authority in the classroom and question their expertise on teaching evaluations, lower levels of scholarly productivity given more intense service loads, and difficulty publishing work that may be perceived as “unconventional” for the field.

Griffin, co-principal investigator for the NSF-funded [Aspire](#) program to develop an inclusive and diverse national science, technology, engineering and math faculty, said many diversity strategies propose training, professional development and mentoring to help Black faculty look more like an “ideal” candidate and “conform to institutional expectations.” All those strategies ignore “the systemic and individual racism Black faculty face,” she said, “and are based on conforming to norms that privilege white cisgender men.”

What’s a better way to support Black faculty members? Griffin said it’s not an “either-or” between offering professors professional



## The Souls of Black Professors (cont.)

development opportunities, resources and support, and tackling deeper structural racism. The Aspire program, for instance, pushes institutions to consider how they engage in recruitment and hiring, strategies they use to promote acceptance of offers, how they onboard and welcome new faculty to campus – and whether and how they address departmental and campus climates.

Donathan Brown, assistant provost for diversity and inclusion at Rochester Institute of Technology in New York, also said Black faculty members face clear barriers with respect to recruitment, student evaluations and devaluation of their research interests. Search committees often begin their work with conversations about how they can't expect diverse candidate pools because they're not, say, in a given metro area, Brown continued. With respect to teaching evaluations, he said, "The scholarship already exists. We all know it yet continue to place full reliance upon student evaluations as an unadulterated indicator of teaching effectiveness."

Failing to address these aspects of institutional culture and climate means "you are inevitably placing Black faculty members in compromising positions from the very beginning."

### Who's Doing the Diversity Work?

Robert Head, president emeritus and the first Black president of Rockford University in Illinois, tells a story in his new book, *Playing From Behind*. In 1994, when he was

serving as a vice president at a Chicago-area institution, the university brought in late civil rights legend C. T. Vivian to lead discussions on campus and work with a committee on campus climate. Head was appointed chair of that committee, which he said did not surprise Vivian in the least.

"When I was first introduced to C. T., he broke out in a wide grin and said, 'I knew it! Let a race situation occur on a majority campus and they will send in a Black person to deal with it,'" Head said recently, summing up the incident – and academe's propensity for calling on people of color to fix racist systems they didn't create.

In any case, Head said, "I find the delegation of antiracism work to Black faculty, in many cases, to be an act of minimization." The Black faculty members get all the work, with limited influence to change things, while the institution gets to say it's "doing something."

Instead of pushing antiracist and diversity work to one person, group or committee, Head advocated a shared governance approach, where many voices share in the discussion.

Meanwhile, he said, the growing reality is that antiracist work is truly everyone's concern, in that majority-white institutions have experienced significant growth in enrolling students of color, "to the point that in a few years, the enrollment of students of color will exceed the enrollment of white students on several campuses." Therein lies the "crucial business purpose for engaging in antiracism work as a

system and not merely delegating it to Black faculty."

"We must attack the problem with the same commitment and resources as we would any issue that is required to sustain and grow the institution," he said.

Head also said that this service work must be counted in tenure and promotion decisions, just like other kinds of participation in universitywide committees. Cutting-edge solutions that end up as publications should be counted as scholarship, too, he said. And engagement in antiracist work beyond routine meetings should be considered for stipends or teaching load reductions.

Brown agreed with a shared governance, strategic planning-style approach, saying that institutions must publicly affirm that neither Black faculty members nor chief diversity officers are the "panacea for all anti-Black ills on campus."

At the same time, Brown said, institutions must abandon the vague idea that "everyone is responsible" for addressing antiracist work, since not everyone is held accountable for it.

Mentoring students of color and doing everyday diversity and inclusion work is often referred to as "invisible labor" and, as it falls disproportionately on some groups, "cultural taxation." Numerous studies, including a [survey-based one](#) published last year in *Nature: Ecology and Evolution*, have found that those academics most likely to be doing invisible labor are non-white and nonmale.

## The Souls of Black Professors (cont.)

Terza Lima-Neves, chair of political science at Johnson C. Smith University, a historically Black institution in North Carolina, said conversations about Black faculty members must address the intersection of race and gender. Administrations at both HBCUs and predominantly white colleges and universities “seem to be out of touch with reality, with the actual amount of work Black women are doing,” in particular.

Case in point: Lima-Neves was recently encouraged to join an initiative about slavery, linked to a predominantly white institution, even though that does not fall within her area of expertise, and she’s juggling many other responsibilities. She said no.

Black women teaching at HBCUs often have heavy teaching loads and service and research expectations and are “expected to be mentors, advisers, therapists, et cetera” to their predominantly Black students navigating an extremely challenging time, Lima-Neves said. With women’s already disproportionate caring loads at home and a pandemic thrown in, it’s “ridiculous.”

Yet when Black women “do say no to additional projects, we are seen as anti-team player, unwilling to be collegial,” Lima-Neves said, and “when we speak up and address our concerns, we are bitter and angry.” In actuality, “We are tired, emotionally and physically tired.”

Lima-Neves’s comments are similar to those of [Lesley Lokko](#), dean of the Bernard and Anne Spitzer School of Architecture at City College of New York, a part of the City University of New York, who resigned publicly this month after 10 months on the job. Even previously living and working in South Africa didn’t prepare Lokko, who is Scottish and Ghanaian, for being a Black woman in the U.S., she said in a public resignation letter and subsequent interview.

“The lack of respect and empathy for Black people, especially Black women, caught me off guard, although it’s by no means unique to Spitzer,” Lokko said. “I suppose I’d say in the end that my resignation was a profound act of self-preservation.”

Lima-Neves said that because of the current racial climate, predominantly white colleges and universities are seeking grant partnerships with HBCUs. While these partnerships look virtuous, professors at HBCUs are expected to “drop their own professional goals and scholarly agendas.”

From a hiring perspective, Lima-Neves also criticized predominantly white institutions for creating fellowships and term positions geared toward “diversity” candi-

dates, instead of more tenure-track lines or long-term commitments. When institutions bring on Black professors as temporary workers only, institutions “bamboozle” students into thinking they’ll have diverse mentors while avoiding giving faculty members of color a voice and a vote where it counts.

Raechele Pope, associate dean for faculty and student affairs and chief diversity officer at the State University of New York at Buffalo’s Graduate School of Education, helped organize the school’s teach-in for racial justice, which took place over two days in lieu of classes last month. She said that every campus “needs to re-examine and reimagine their approach to diversity work,” and that until they do, “the burden will always fall on the shoulders of Black faculty and other faculty of color.”

Campuses need to “examine and understand the ways in which white supremacy culture is baked into the structures and practices of the campus,” Pope said. “Campuses need to prioritize the education of white faculty, administrators and staff and set aside money to bring in consultants in an ongoing way rather than relying on their own staff and faculty to do the training.” If Black professors do want to engage in this work, “then they should be fairly and financially compensated” and given reduced teaching loads to make time for it.

Reddick urged Black academics to hold potential employers accountable – “receipts” included – for investing in Black faculty success before they invest their own “blood,



sweat and tears building support for an institution that is indifferent years later." Institutions should be able to highlight success stories and opportunities, along with readily available metrics on promotion and tenure – and good explanations for any gaps between Black professors and other groups, with concrete plans for closing them.

"I am talking about restructuring these processes and having the institutional fortitude to recognize work that hasn't been recognized in the past and note its value," Reddick said. "Institutions can't sway students and families that they are equity-minded if the Black scholars who work there are the most fatigued and least compensated."

### Signs of Commitment

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the injustices facing Black communities. But it also risks diverting precious institutional attention and resources – time and money – away from antiracist work on campuses. Still, there are some signs that colleges and universities will put actions behind their words of support for Black lives, including those of their faculty members.

While many institutions have halted hiring for the foreseeable future, Syracuse University **said** that it will proceed with a planned diverse faculty hiring initiative. The Rhode Island School of Design **announced** that it is hiring a cluster of 10 new tenure-track or tenured professors in multiple disciplines as part of a race in art and design initiative.

Stanford University **announced** that it is hiring up to 10 new scholars who study race in American society. The University of Chicago's English department said it's **focus-ing this graduate admissions cycle** on aspiring Black studies scholars. The University of California, San Diego, is unfreezing hiring only in a few cases, including for an **inter-disciplinary faculty cluster** of 10 to 12 experts in racial disparities in STEM fields, with a focus on Black communities.

San Diego is providing \$500,000 in one-time funding for that effort, along with \$200,000 for a related plan to improve retention of underrepresented faculty members through coaching, coalition building and other activities. Makeba Jones, a professor of education at San Diego and a principal investigator for the project, said in an announcement that "at its core, this effort is much more than a cluster hire; it's a systemic effort to address racial inequities on campus for African American undergraduate and graduate students by creating a cadre of scholars who focus on the African American diaspora in the areas of medicine, health and the environment."

Faculty members will not only produce innovative research in STEM fields related to African American communities, she said, "they will also be involved in teaching undergraduates through the African American studies minor and major as well as mentoring both under-

graduates and graduate students."

The University of Houston is opening a national research center to address health disparities in underserved areas. Saint Louis University is establishing a new Institute for Healing Justice and Equity. In the chaos of this semester, thousands of academics participated in the recent **Scholar Strike** for racial justice, co-organized by Butler, the Penn professor. These are just some examples.

Griffin, the University of Maryland professor, said she's hopeful that pandemic-based conversations about "productivity" will be an opportunity to "consider how we value and reward the unique contributions Black professors make to the academy. And we can then make changes that are substantive and enduring, rather than temporary."

Doing so will be "critical to retaining this generation and recruiting the next generation of Black scholars," she added.

Now, when there is "at least some indication to suggest an elevated state of antiracist consciousness," said Brown at the Rochester Institute of Technology, it's imperative that institutions move beyond words, to initiatives aimed at institutionwide progress.

"My hope is that our African American faculty both see and feel their worth to an institution, beyond the times where we are called upon to serve on a diversity and inclusion committee." ■

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<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/10/21/scholars-talk-about-being-black-campus-2020>

# The Emotional Toll of Racism

Black students continuously experience, fight against and bear emotional scars from racism, which can lead to increased anxiety and poor mental health outcomes. Some colleges are just starting to address these issues.

By **Greta Anderson** // October 23, 2020



ISTOCK.COM/BOGDAN KURYLO

Colbie Lofton's first week of classes at Appalachian State University is sealed in her mind.

Lofton, who is Black, asked her macroeconomics professor a question during class and heard someone sitting behind her say, "I guess n\*\*\*\*rs don't understand."

Lofton, "completely shocked" to hear a racial slur used so casually, said nothing, and neither did her professor, who Lofton said paused and appeared to have heard the comment. When the class ended, Lofton left, reeling from hurt, and went to a nearby bathroom to cry. She then returned to her dorm and confided in her roommate, but she

said she didn't report the comment to the university because she was not aware of the process to do so.

That 2018 incident was a marker for other racial incidents that would follow at the predominantly white campus in North Carolina and leave Lofton without any illusions about the deep prejudices that some students on campus have against Black people. She has felt "out of place" ever since and hyperaware of her surroundings, which has taken a toll on her mental health.

"That is a story that continues to sit with me," said Lofton, who is now a junior.

She is not alone. Black students at

many predominantly white colleges have long complained of the racial hostility, subtle and blatant, that they regularly encounter on their campuses. Whether victims of constant microaggressions or outright verbal or physical assaults, many have stories of being called a racial slur directly or seeing it **scrawled on a campus wall**, viewing racist posts by classmates on social media, or sitting through a **presentation** by a classmate professing a white supremacist conspiracy. The incidents were the focal points of **protest movements and demands** for change for several years, but the calls for action **seemed to reach a crescendo** this year as Black stu-

## The Emotional Toll of Racism (cont.)

dents at colleges across the country repeatedly called for college administrators to condemn and address racism on their campuses.

The national racial justice movement fueled by outrage over the police killings of George Floyd and other unarmed Black people has given the students' cause momentum and forced college administrators to act more forcefully and urgently to speak out against racism and implement diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives. But even as the students welcome that they are finally being heard, their efforts have come with a heavy price.

Students of color who engage in activism and leadership frequently sideline their own mental health needs to focus on the fight for racial justice on their campuses. They have less time and emotional bandwidth to dedicate to typical student experiences, such as creating and maintaining personal relationships and a social life, performing academically and navigating what is likely their first time living away from home. Black student leaders noted that the amount of stress they endure and the time-consuming nature of activist work – plus the racist incidents that inspire this work – can cause students to fall behind in their studies or can become so emotionally burdensome that they drop out.

"Right now, everybody is very tuned into changes that they would like to see in our world and our country," said Sharon Mitchell, president of the Association of University and College Counseling Center Directors, or AUCCCD. "It's great that

students are engaged, but there's always been that struggle ... you overcommit to things where you're putting your academics or health in jeopardy."

College administrators, in surveys, repeatedly list student mental health as one of their top concerns and improving it as one of their top priorities. They have focused more attention on setting and meeting diversity and inclusion goals to hire and promote more Black faculty members, administrators and professional staff and pursued new ways to improve the lives of students of color on campus, as conversations about racial injustice in American institutions continue.

But mental health experts, particularly Black psychologists and students themselves, say not enough is being done to address a lack of diversity in college counseling and the stigma associated with seeking help, and students are suffering as a result. Annelle Primm, a nationally recognized cultural psychiatry expert and senior medical director of [the Steve Fund](#), a youth mental health advocacy organization that focuses on equity and young people of color, said the consequences of individual acts of racism and a campus climate that is hostile to Black students can be detrimental to their education.

"There's a high level of students of color suffering in silence," Primm said. "That's unfortunate, because the mental health needs can have an impact on academic performance and whether they stay in school. If they're a student with financial challenges, they may

make the decision to leave school altogether if all these challenges mount on them."

### An Urgent Wake-Up Call

Higher ed leaders across the country rushed to publicly declare their commitment to inclusion and racial justice in May in the days after Floyd's death, as American streets filled with young people of all races demanding change. Presidents of predominantly white colleges joined the public discourse about racial injustice and systemic racism in all aspects of American life, including at the institutions the presidents – the large majority of them white – run.

While many presidents acknowledged the hurt and pain that Black students were understandably feeling and expressed their shared sadness and grief, for some students the statements were not nearly enough.

More often than not, students who experience racism on campus are left feeling invalidated, ignored and undervalued by administrators who consistently maintain that hateful speech is [protected under the First Amendment](#) or require students injured and offended by such speech to seek redress through bureaucratic and time-consuming processes that significantly slow the policy changes they want and need to feel comfortable being Black on campus.

Psychologists and other experts say that addressing racism in a meaningful way on campus can improve these students' mental health.



## The Emotional Toll of Racism (cont.)

"There could also be some harm done if it's not successfully resolved, or if they're put in a situation where they feel voiceless," said Ivory Toldson, a professor of counseling psychology at Howard University.

Students can be "psychologically scarred" if they experience neglect from institutional leaders and when a college does not directly approach issues of racism and inclusivity, he said.

Several racist and anti-Semitic incidents propelled a days-long sit-in at Syracuse University in 2019 and another monthlong occupation earlier this year, when students slept on the floor of a campus building and **risks suspension** to have their concerns about campus safety taken seriously and to push for policy changes. While the demonstrations led Syracuse president Kent Syverud to **agree to multiple policy initiatives** demanded by the students, including a more diverse base of university counselors, students also emerged with a deep mistrust of administrators and the **Syracuse Department of Public Safety**, due to initial disciplinary action taken against them for staging the sit-in.

Racially insensitive comments by **Salisbury University students** after Floyd's death left Black student leaders there hoping for a strong condemnation by the university president and other administrators, which the students felt never came.

The leaders were disappointed that in **a video posted to social media** shortly after the students' comments, President Charles Wight

*"Dealing with COVID-19, the police brutality, and trying to come up with money to pay for fall semester is [causing] me a lot of stress and anxiety because either way it's the stress of trying not to get sick, not getting killed by police or finding a way to pay for school that has me on edge."*

—Student response to UNCF survey

noted that the offensive language was protected under the First Amendment, "no matter how much we abhor what is said or what is written." A statement from the university at the time also said it "condemns and repudiates racism in all its forms" and that the incidents would be investigated.

Savannah Johnson, a junior and public relations officer for the Salisbury student chapter of the NAACP, was not surprised by Wight's response. She said issues that deeply affect Black students frequently "fall to the bottom" of administrators' priorities, despite the emotional toll they take on the students.

She said in the weeks that followed Floyd's death, she struggled to get out of bed because she was so overwhelmed by the incident and the public reaction nationwide.

"I had multiple breakdowns," Johnson said. "It seems like people are just starting to wake up to things we've been trying to say for years, decades, centuries."

Dealing with regular microaggressions and overt acts of racism on an individual level, while also living through the constant debates and discussions of systemic and institutional racism, can be sources of pain, trauma and stress. For some

students, it can also lead to more serious conditions such as anxiety and depression and leave them feeling hopeless that things will improve.

Additionally, the coronavirus pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on Black and brown people who have died from COVID-19 and suffered financially at much higher rates than white people.

A **recent survey report** by the United Negro College Fund highlighted the emotional turmoil that students who attend historically Black colleges and universities are experiencing due to the coronavirus pandemic and economic recession. One student who responded to the survey wrote that it has been hard to "cope with the constant death and sickness around me."

Primm, of the Steve Fund, said it's not surprising that a deadly public health crisis and an epidemic of deadly police shootings of Black people could lead to poor mental health outcomes among Black students.

As racial incidents are more widely covered by national news outlets and shared on social media, the subject of systemic racism is being more openly discussed, debated and analyzed. This new spotlight

## The Emotional Toll of Racism (cont.)

on specific and particularly traumatic examples of racism can be “emotionally burdensome” for all Black people, but especially youth, said Primm, former deputy medical director of the American Psychiatric Association and former director of the association's division of diversity and health equity. Students already coping with the impact of the pandemic on their education and social life may struggle to simply focus on being students and “trying to find their way in the world,” she said.

“They have experienced a mixture of emotions: anger, sadness, fear for their own safety, anxiety, being easily distracted and [having] difficulty concentrating,” Primm said. This wide range of emotional responses is “not a recipe for academic success or balance,” she said.

The Steve Fund recently formed a coronavirus crisis-focused task force, which issued recommendations for how educational institutions should respond to the increased mental health needs of students of color during this time. The task force, which includes students, mental health experts, corporate and nonprofit executives, and college representatives, is the “first time leaders from across sectors have come together to consider the mental health status and needs of young Americans of color,” [a report about the task force recommendations](#) said.

The report recommended that college administrators take a “trauma-informed” approach to their leadership and communications

*“I’m tired, frustrated, and upset. COVID-19 [is] out here killing us and so is the police and I’m tired. I never felt like I needed more therapy in my life.”*

–Student response to UNCF survey

strategies, which includes more listening and demonstrating empathy toward students of color for the injustices they may have experienced, the report said. The group also encouraged more collaborative partnerships between college counseling centers and staff members from the diversity, equity and inclusion and student affairs offices, as well as student organizations that advocate for and support students of color.

“Counseling centers alone do not have the capacity to provide customized outreach for students of color and handle elevated demand,” the report said. “Offices such as Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) and Student Affairs are natural partners. Working collaboratively, they have the potential to promote mental health among students of color, while bolstering equity, inclusion and belonging.”

The report also recommended colleges invest in [teletherapy resources](#) that may better meet the needs of students of color. Some telehealth applications and web platforms, for example, advertise a diverse base of mental health professionals from outside the college or university and could provide students of color with a counselor of their same ethnic or racial background, who tend to have a better understanding of the racial experi-

ences of students of color, or share their perspectives about those incidents. Many colleges struggle to employ enough therapists to meet student demand in general, much less staff their health centers with therapists of color, which the counseling profession itself lacks.

Of course many Black students have long been aware of systemic racism and have experienced examples of it firsthand prior to this year, Primm said. Common incidents such as being racially profiled by campus police, receiving disparate treatment by staff members, witnessing a white professor using the N-word or being stereotyped by peers all contribute to heightened mental health concerns, she said. Even if they attend colleges with large numbers of students of color and where they are less likely to have racial problems and tensions on campus, students of color are still in greater need of mental health support for racism that occurs off campus, Primm said.

“While those students might experience some kind of an oasis in terms of cultural similarity and have a greater sense of belonging in those settings, their experiences in the larger society are consistent with those of students of color who attend a predominantly white institution,” she said. “There’s really no escaping these negative, racially



Courtesy of Colbie Lofton

charged forces in our society, especially at this point.”

The result is a generation of Black students more likely to be suffering from anxiety or depression than their white peers and in need of culturally competent mental health support from colleges.

Most of all, Black students dedicating their time and energy to calling out or preventing racist incidents continue to hurt their mental health in myriad ways.

### **Fighting Campus Racism Is ‘a Whole Other Job’**

Kyndavee Bichara, a junior at Appalachian State, said she frequently feels burned out because of the anti-racism work she does on campus.

Bichara is a varsity track and field athlete, president and co-founder

of the Black Student Athlete Association, and president of the Black Student Association. She’s also part of a collective of Black student leaders, called BlackAtAppState, which is an ongoing campaign to improve Black students’ experiences at the university through [policy changes and administrative action](#). In late May, Bichara and Lofton, who is a student leader for Appalachian Social Justice Educators, helped organize a Black Lives Matter march in Boone, N.C., where the university is located.

Lofton said she received messages on social media from residents who identified her as one of the organizers of the protest and said that the movement doesn’t align with the values and beliefs of the Boone community. One commenter posted directly on BlackAtAppState’s

Instagram account, calling the student movement “terrorism.”

Just 4 percent of the 17,518 undergraduate students enrolled at the university were Black in fall 2019, according to the [most recent data](#) from the National Center for Education Statistics. White students made up 82 percent of the undergraduate population. Boone is a town of about 20,000 and is 93.5 percent white and 2.7 percent Black, according to a U.S. Census Bureau [population estimate](#) from 2019.

Bichara said Black students do not necessarily always “want” to constantly call out racism and advocate for the Black community on campus. But they often feel responsible for speaking up on racial issues that are important to Black students, play a role in their academic

## The Emotional Toll of Racism (cont.)

outcomes and affect their overall college experience on campus and off, she said. Being a Black leader on a predominantly white campus requires the frequent retelling of experiences of racism, leading discussions and presentations about racism, and putting aside personal mental health needs to address the needs of the community, she said.

"Students who aren't fighting these fights have the luxury to be college students," Bichara said. "It's almost like a whole other job added on to just trying to be a student. A lot of times, student leaders who are from marginalized groups, we exhaust ourselves ... our grades drop, our mental health is at stake and a lot of people have even gone as far as dropping out because of the mental burden that being a marginalized student leader comes with."

Mitchell, of the college counseling directors association, said these "extra" burdens frequently come with being Black on a college campus. Black student activists in particular expend a lot of mental energy trying to initiate change, which is sometimes a slow and "disheartening" process, said Mitchell, who is also the senior director of student wellness and director of counseling services at the University at Buffalo.

"There's the racial battle fatigue of constantly having to explain why you're upset and why it's problematic," Mitchell said. "It's something that makes being a student and being a human being difficult."

Lofton, the Appalachian State student who overheard students using a racial slur about her in

class in 2018, said the experience has shaped her perspective of the university in the years since. She wouldn't be surprised if other Black students felt the same way. Because the town of Boone has a smaller Black population than the university, students are also sometimes verbally victimized off the campus. White residents make racist comments directed at Black students while they shop at the local Walmart or walk down the town's main streets, she said.

Lofton said she often feels unwelcome in town and on campus, but she's driven to keep pushing for change so that Black students in future classes will not experience the same racial hostility she and her classmates face.

"It takes a large toll on my mental health," she said. "I know that students have been facing this for multiple years. I think about, why is this still happening today? But that drives me to work harder. It drives me to make sure the generations after me have it better."

### Activism as an Outlet

Mitchell said being part of a community of campus activists with shared experiences, beliefs and goals can be a helpful way to cope with the additional stressors of discrimination. It's also a way for students of color to understand that racism against them isn't unique to them as individuals and is a larger societal problem, she said.

"If nothing else, they have found a sense of community," she said. "They have found like-minded individuals that are identifying some

of the same issues or problems ... A lot of time I think people can feel that, 'I'm the only one who feels this way or has had this experience.'"

Toldson, from Howard University, said student activists who feel they are not being heard tend to suffer emotionally. They could experience increased feelings of "voicelessness" and impostor syndrome, a persistent feeling of inadequacy and self-doubt, he said. But when student activists and college administrators work together to improve the racial climate on their campuses, it can be very positive for the psychological health of the students, he said. This is especially true if the students and administrators come to a "successful and healthy" resolution about controversial incidents on campus and the college provides additional resources or make administrative changes demanded by the students.

Toldson is co-editor of a [book about campus racial unrest](#), *Campus Uprisings: How Student Activists and Collegiate Leaders Resist Racism and Create Hope* (Teachers College Press), which is a collection of essays written by students, faculty members and campus leaders about the nonviolent protest movement for racial justice on college campuses over the last decade.

Primm, of the Steve Fund, said she also views student activism as a way of "counterbalancing" the negative mental health impact of the racism and discrimination that students of color face.

"It can give students and young people a sense of agency and self and collective efficacy," she said.

## The Emotional Toll of Racism (cont.)

"That kind of activity engenders hope, that things can get better. That's good for mental health. To not be isolated and alone, but feel like you're part of a whole, with other people that are of like mind and good conscience."

Bichara said as an active student leader at Appalachian State and member of multiple organizations, she has learned to develop self-care habits such as disconnecting from social media and email messages for a few days when feeling overwhelmed. She took note of the positive feedback and support BlackAtAppState has received for giving voice to Black students and outreach from fellow student activists who checked in on her well-being.

Mitchell said the University at Buffalo's counseling center has been developing "self-care for activists" workshops this fall for students who are doing advocacy work or attending protests, largely in response to the social unrest and large demonstrations against racial injustice across the country this summer. The workshop will discuss topics such as, "How do you be socially aware and socially involved, but also find a way to recuperate, rejuvenate, have downtime before you go back out there? How do you stay safe," she said.

When it comes to mental health support for students of color, it can be difficult for campus counseling centers to deliver what a student might be looking for, such as a person who shares their cultural background or life experiences, Mitchell said. Traditionally, the role of a campus therapist is to remain officially neutral about social or

political issues and not share their personal beliefs with students in order to be seen as unbiased and welcoming to all students, especially those who might not share those same beliefs, she said.

Primm said there is a "dearth of medical health professionals and counselors of color" over all. Lack of diversity in counseling centers can discourage Black students from seeking or continuing care, even though white professionals are supposed to be trained to work with students of different cultural backgrounds, she said.

### Shortage of Counselors of Color

Racial and ethnic representation in college counseling centers that is on par with the racial and ethnic makeup of the institutions' student body is ideal and "something to strive for," Mitchell said. But that is largely not the case at most colleges that are not historically Black institutions or don't serve mostly students of color. Among the BlackAtAppState students' demands is that the university hire a Black mental health counselor and increase student access to Black medical professionals through telehealth services.

In 2019, 11.7 percent of staff members working at college counseling centers were Black or African American, and 6.6 percent were Hispanic or Latino, according to the AUCCCD's [most recent survey](#) of center directors. The U.S. Census Bureau reported in 2018 that 15.1 percent of all undergraduate college students were Black and 20.9 percent were Hispanic, according to a [press release](#).

Lofton and Bichara at Appalachian State have both sought counseling from the university's [on-campus providers](#), but they were discouraged by the lack of diversity among therapists at the center. They both gave up on counseling after their first therapy sessions because they felt the white counselors could not relate to the experiences that were driving them to seek help in the first place. Bichara noted that the counselor she met with was a nice person but unable to connect with her because of a lack of shared perspective.

"Being a Black woman and specifically going to counseling to talk about how taxing being a Black woman is, it's hard to talk to someone who isn't a Black woman about that issue," Bichara said. "I looked very hard for a Black therapist and couldn't find one, even in the surrounding Boone area."

Social justice issues have been increasingly incorporated into master's degree curricula for therapists over the last decade, Mitchell said, and this shift is helping therapists understand how discrimination or a poor racial climate on campus can affect the mental health of black students.

"If social injustice contributes to poor mental health outcomes for people, even as professionals we have to figure out how we speak to that and really validate that," Mitchell said. "Those are things that go into being proponents of mental health on a campus – not just dealing with the individual."

Mitchell said she looks for this type of cultural competency and under-

## The Emotional Toll of Racism (cont.)

standing in everyone she considers hiring to work in counseling services at the University of Buffalo. She has called on white mental health professionals to participate in antiracism work and be allies to their colleagues and student patients of color.

Primm said therapist and patient relationships between people of different backgrounds are successful with the right training on systemic

racism and "cultural humility" rather than a therapist imposing their own cultural viewpoint on a patient.

Negative experiences can discourage students of color from seeking therapy, Primm said. Black students and other students of color also run the risk of being labeled a "person of concern" or a threat on campus simply for seeking mental health support, which fits into stereotypes about Black people being danger-

ous or unstable.

"There's also the issue of cultural mistrust, given the fact that most therapists and counselors are not from diverse cultural backgrounds," Primm said. "There's concern about sharing one's most personal experiences with someone considered an outsider ... Some students, if they're going to see any provider of mental health services at all, prefer it to be someone of their background." ■

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<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/10/23/racism-fuels-poor-mental-health-outcomes-black-students>



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## EQUITY MATTERS

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# Confronting Racism in Admissions

Is now the moment when college admission professionals will start breaking down known barriers to admission for Black students?

By **Elizabeth Redden** // October 26, 2020



JUSTIN SULLIVAN/GETTY IMAGES NEWS VIA GETTY IMAGES.

California voters will decide this fall whether to repeal Proposition 209, which prohibits gender- and race-based preferences in admission decisions. Students called for its repeal in the pictured 2012 protest.

The barriers to admitting more Black students to the nation's selective universities are numerous and well-known.

Research shows college admission officers **focus recruiting efforts** on wealthy, predominantly white high schools.

Black students are **far more likely to attend high-poverty schools** and to have **less access to core college preparatory classes in math and science**.

Black students earn lower scores, on average, on standardized col-

lege admission tests such as the **SAT** and **ACT**.

The wealth gap between white and Black families **remains as wide as it was in 1968**, hurting the ability of Black families to pay for test-prep courses and private college counseling services. And Black students leave college with **higher amounts of student debt** than white students, impacting both their college experiences and their future prospects.

Legacy admission preferences **favor wealthy white students**, perpetuating long-standing inequalities in college access.

And in some states, **prohibitions on affirmative action** preclude any consideration of race in the admissions process.

A **recent report** by the Education Trust on Black and Latinx enrollment at 101 selective public colleges found only 9 percent enroll Black students at rates proportionate to their population within the state. The organization, which advocates for educational opportunities for all students with a focus on students of color, found that the percentage of Black students at nearly 60 percent of the institutions has actually fallen since 2000.

## Confronting Racism in Admissions (cont.)

The report makes a number of recommendations, including increasing access to “high-quality” high school guidance counselors and using race more prominently in admission decisions. The report also advocates rescinding state bans on affirmative action, increasing aid to Black and Latinx students, adjusting recruitment strategies, improving campus racial climates, changing funding incentives, and reducing the role of standardized testing in admissions or going test optional.

“There is no acceptable reason in 2020 for the vast majority of these 101 public colleges to systematically exclude Black students like this – and to a great extent, Latino students as well,” said Andrew Howard Nichols, the author of the report and senior director for research and data analytics at the Education Trust. “It is past time for public college presidents to take substantive antiracist action that matches their soaring antiracist rhetoric.”

Many college leaders **issued statements speaking out against racism** and affirming their institutions’ commitments to diversity and inclusion in the wake of the killings by police of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. But moving those stated commitments from mere words to actual action in the midst of the pandemic will be undoubtedly be challenging, especially at a time when colleges are under more financial pressure than ever before – and under more critical scrutiny for their handling of both racial issues and their response to the public health emergency.

“A lot of institutions are going to be thinking, we need more students who can pay tuition by going for upper-middle-class students, for example, who are predominantly white. That’s all well and good if you’re thinking from a tuition standpoint, but not from an equity standpoint,” said W. Carson Byrd, a sociologist and scholar in residence at the University of Michigan’s National Center for Institutional Diversity. “As more institutions find themselves in more difficult financial times, how much are they going to turn away from their statements about racial equity and instead go back to ... the economic factors that are important? For me it’s a both/and; it’s not an either/or.”

### From Conversation to Action

Marie Bigham, a former college admissions professional and the executive director of ACCEPT, a group that advocates for racial equity in college admissions, said people in the field talk a lot about racial equity.

“We’ve been stuck in conversation as opposed to pushing towards action, but now we’re in a space where everything’s pushing us toward action,” she said. “The racial reckoning happening in higher ed is forcing action.”

“One of the easy immediate fixes that colleges can put into place at this moment to get beyond statements of equity is get rid of legacy admissions right now, across the board, and get rid of demonstrated interest as an indicator in the process at all,” Bigham said.

Demonstrated interest refers to

admissions offices tracking ways in which students interact with them, by visiting campus or engaging on social media, for example. Colleges use demonstrated interest as a measure because they think an engaged applicant is more likely to accept an admission offer.

Longer term, Bigham said, “I think we as admission professionals, we’ve got to become vocal about financial aid, reforming that system from top to bottom.”

ACCEPT co-organized a research initiative, **Hack the Gates**, which culminated over the summer with the publication of a series of policy papers focused on equity in college admissions.

**A paper by Ted Thornhill**, a sociologist and associate professor at Florida Gulf Coast University, advocates for systematically auditing admission officers’ email correspondences with students to ensure they are equally responsive to prospective students and applicants across different socio-demographic groups. Thornhill’s **past research has shown** that fictional Black students who emphasize Black identity or racial activism in email messages to admissions officers are less likely to receive responses than Black students who send messages lacking explicit mention of race.

He argued admissions professionals “should be advocating at their own institutions in a really serious way to bring about greater racial equity. What kinds of institutions are you bringing students into?” he asked.



"You sing the praises, the institutional line, about all the positive things you do and how you help students cultivate a body of knowledge and a skill set that will serve them well in their future endeavors. You say all that, but most of these predominantly white institutions are deeply racist."

### The Standardized Testing Piece

One area in admissions where there has been rapid change since the start of the pandemic is in the movement to make standardized tests optional.

The number of institutions going test optional was already growing fast but accelerated after the pandemic forced the cancellation of test administrations. FairTest: National Center for Fair and Open Testing, a group that advocates for test-optional policies, [reported in September](#) that 1,570 four-year colleges across the U.S. will not require applicants to submit a SAT or ACT score for fall 2021 admission. Test-blind or test-optional institutions now account for more than two-thirds of all four-year institutions in the U.S., according to FairTest's count.

Researchers have found [mixed results](#) as to whether test-optional policies lead to increases in enrollment of low-income and underrepresented minority groups. Testing companies have argued that using standardized test scores alongside other measures, including grades, provides a more accurate and complete view of student performance compared with using any one measure alone.

Even those who advocate for test-optional policies argue they are not a "silver bullet." Dominique J. Baker, assistant professor of education policy at Southern Methodist University, and Kelly Rosinger, an assistant professor of education at Pennsylvania State University, noted in [a recent article published in \*Education Next\*](#) that "test scores are not the only source of bias in the selective admissions process."

"Race and class inequalities are baked into many of the metrics that selective colleges use to evaluate applicants," Baker and Rosinger wrote. "For instance, there are decades of research demonstrating that low-income students and students of color have less access to the advanced high-school coursework that selective colleges view as a measure of a rigorous curriculum. While selective colleges try to evaluate applicants in the context of their individual high schools and communities – that is, taking into account whether students took advantage of the most difficult coursework available to them – other common metrics used to evaluate students may also reflect racial and class privilege."

The topic of test-optional admissions – and what colleges rely on if they *don't* use a standardized test score – came up at [a recent town hall meeting on systemic racism and college admissions](#) organized by the National Association for College Admission Counseling in June.

"Every time someone says 'test optional,' I feel like somebody should say 'transparency,'" said Tevera

Stith, one of the panelists and vice president for KIPP Through College & Career for the KIPP public schools in Washington, D.C. "There are schools who have long done test optional ... but they're not transparent about how those applications are reviewed, so first I would put the onus on my colleagues at the college level in college admissions offices to be transparent about how they're making those decisions."

Ericka Matthews-Jackson, senior director of undergraduate admissions at Wayne State University in Detroit and another panelist at the NACAC town hall, said the pandemic "pulled the scab off the wound really quickly" in terms of colleges' reliance on test scores.

"Now a lot of institutions are going to have to grapple with how do we change with our admissions policies and what things are going to be important to us rather than us taking the easy route and saying, 'Oh yeah, you have this test score and this GPA; therefore you get admitted,'" Matthews-Jackson said at the event.

"I think it's going to require more than just taking a look at essays. There's a lot of things to take a look at when you're considering what a student has gone through to get to the point where they're ready for college, what kind of high school were they educated in, what kind of resources did they have available, what did they avail themselves of in terms of educational opportunities prior to them coming. Are they first generation to go to college; is English their second language? There are so many things that we

## Confronting Racism in Admissions (cont.)

should be considering and looking at, because we do want to have institutions that represent our communities.”

### Considering Race

What about considerations of race?

Fewer than 7 percent of colleges – 6.8 – say race or ethnicity has “considerable influence” on admission decisions, while 17.8 percent say it has “moderate influence” and 16.9 percent “limited influence,” according to [NACAC's 2019 “State of College Admission” report](#).

Well over half – 58.4 percent – said race or ethnicity has no influence on their admission decisions.

The use of race in college admission decisions is, of course, an exceedingly controversial and legally contested topic, subject of [multiple Supreme Court cases](#) stretching back to 1974. The Supreme Court has upheld the consideration of race in admissions, most recently in the second [Fisher v. Texas case in 2016](#).

However, legal challenges contesting the scope of the use of race in admission persist and have kept colleges on the defensive.

Harvard University [successfully defended itself in a federal lawsuit](#) last year alleging its admission policies discriminate against Asian Americans. The case is now being heard in a federal appeals court.

Earlier this month, the [U.S. Department of Justice sued Yale University](#) over its admission policies and accused it of illegal discrimination against Asian American and white

applicants. Yale's president, Peter Salovey, [described](#) the lawsuit as “baseless” and defended the university's admission practices as “completely fair and lawful.”

Meanwhile, nine states – California, Florida and Michigan being among the biggest and [Idaho being most recent](#) – have adopted bans on race-based affirmative action. Public universities in a 10th state, Georgia, [dropped the use of race in admissions](#) after losing a court challenge in 2000.

[A study](#) of the effect of these state-level bans published earlier this year in the journal *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* found “the elimination of affirmative action has led to persistent declines in the share of underrepresented minorities among students admitted to and enrolling in public flagship universities in these states.”

Policy change may be coming at least in California. The Board of Regents for the University of California [unanimously voted in June](#) to endorse the repeal of the state's nearly quarter-century-old prohibition on using race- and gender-based preferences in admission decisions at public universities. California residents [will vote](#) on whether to repeal the affirmative action ban in November.

The UC system [maintains](#) that “despite years of effort with race-neutral admissions,” its enrollment of students from underrepresented minority groups – and its recruitment of faculty of color – “falls short of reflecting the diversity of

California's population.”

Among the steps UC has taken over the years is the introduction of a program in 2001 called [Eligibility in the Local Context](#), which guarantees admission to students graduating in the top 9 percent of each participating high school, and the development of a holistic review process for undergraduate admission in which students are “evaluated for admission using multiple measures of achievement and promise while considering the context in which each student has demonstrated academic accomplishment.”

“We think that in a university as large and as complex as ours, that uses as many as 14 different characteristics to evaluate candidates for admission, that we can implement a 15th characteristic to help us find the right cross-section of students,” said John A. Pérez, chair of the regents.

“It's not just about race,” he said. “It's also about gender. We can't use either, and would argue that the evidence is pretty clear. There is no proxy for gender; there is no proxy for race. You could find a bunch of workarounds or you can be honest and forthright. What we're saying is we should be able to have an honest, forthright evaluation of the totality of factors that make someone who they are and speak to that which they've achieved.”

Among the opponents to ending the affirmative action ban in California is former UC regent chair, Ward Connerly, who led the campaign for the 1996 ballot measure [Proposition 209](#), which imposed the ban in the first place. He is

## Confronting Racism in Admissions (cont.)

chairman of **Californians for Equal Rights**, the campaign to reject the repeal of Proposition 209. The campaign has been endorsed by a **coalition of community organizations**, including a number of groups representing Asian Americans, who fear they will be disadvantaged in admissions by the introduction of race-based preferences.

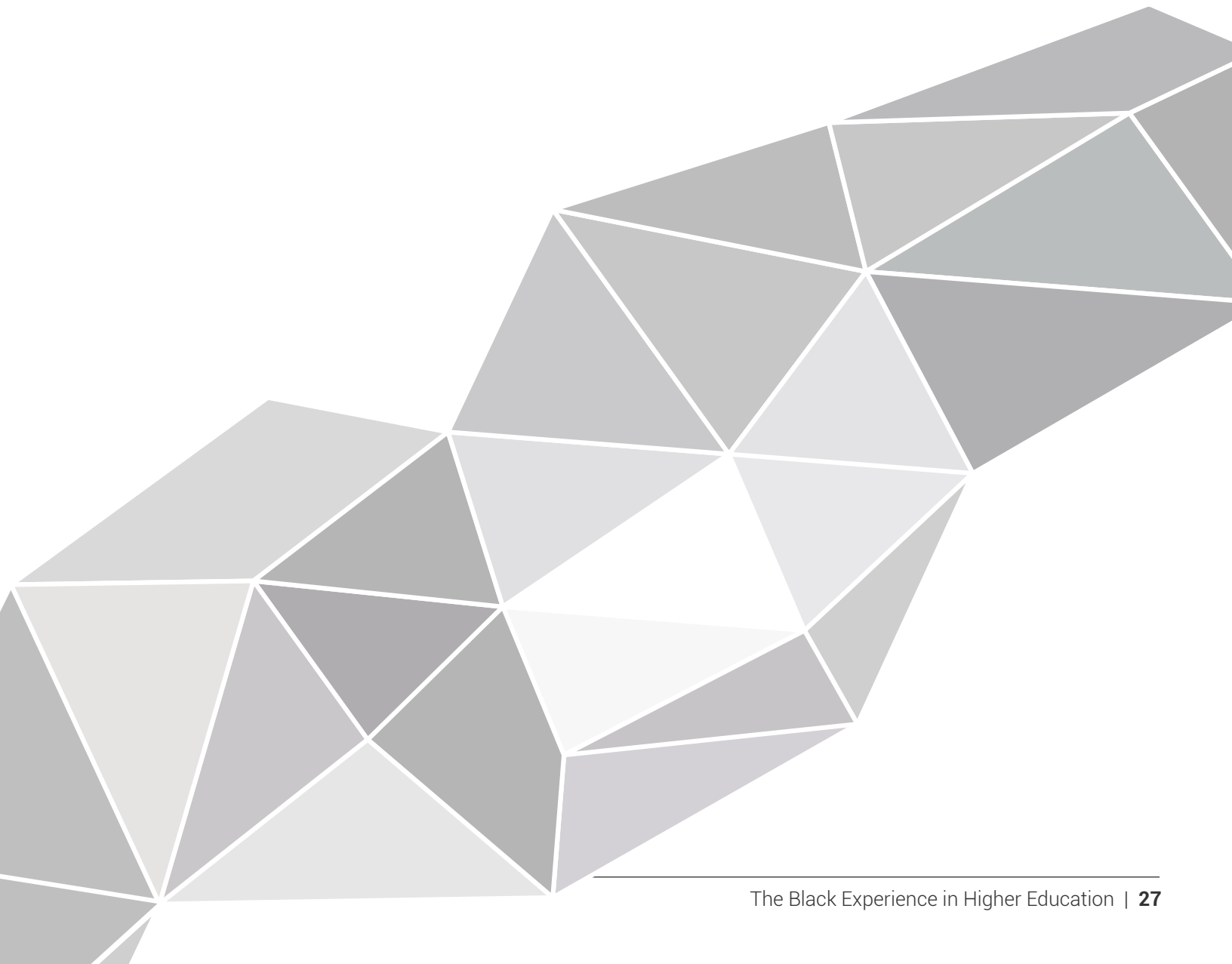
Connerly argued Prop 209 didn't ban affirmative action, per se.

"It bans discrimination and preferential treatment and it's those last two words that create heartburn for the practitioners of affirmative action, because they know in their heart of hearts as they practice it, it really does amount to different standards for different groups on

the basis of race and color," he said. "They can justify that, but I can't, because I'd have to believe that Black people and Latinos are inherently unable to compete alongside whites and Asians for admission to the University of California, and I don't believe that. It's not an accurate premise. It's racist in its own self." ■

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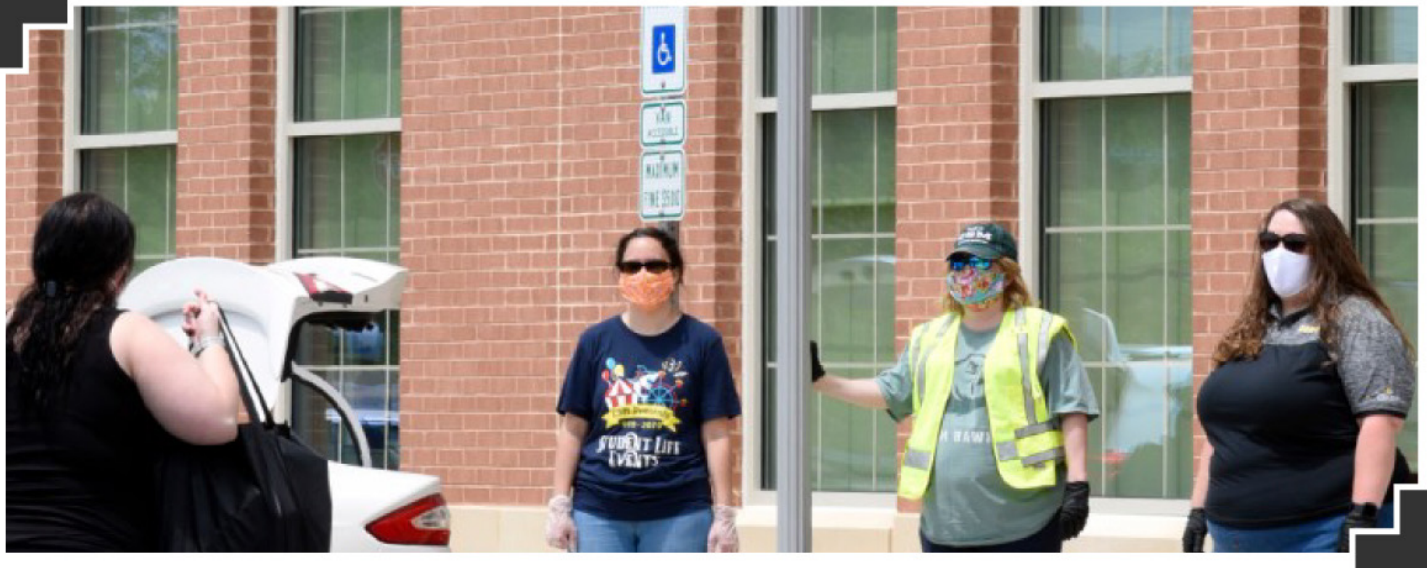
<https://www.insidehighered.com/admissions/article/2020/10/26/will-conversation-turn-action-when-it-comes-issues-racial-equity>



# Racial Equity in Funding for Higher Ed

Since the last recession, the U.S. has made little progress on the funding gap for colleges that serve disproportionate shares of students of color. That gap may widen as the country heads into another recession.

By **Kery Murakami** // October 29, 2020



COURTESY OF THE COLLEGE OF SOUTHERN MARYLAND

The College of Southern Maryland holds a drive-through food distribution event for students struggling during the pandemic.

Judith Moore, a mathematics professor at the College of Southern Maryland, was overseeing a test last term in the way it's done these days. She kept an eye on the images of her students on her screen as the cameras on their computers showed them taking the tests from kitchen tables and bedrooms of wherever they happened to be. But she noticed one woman who appeared to be in distress.

"She kept putting her face in her hands," said Moore. "She had this look of intense frustration, like she was trying not to cry."

So Moore messaged her to ask

what was wrong. What the student messaged back was indicative of the challenges often faced by students of color. Because the students are more likely to come from lower-income backgrounds and families who can't afford to help them pay the bills, they are more likely to have to work or raise children while they go to class. The woman was taking the test after working all night. She was exhausted and stressed. It was all too much.

Students who attend institutions that disproportionately serve more students of color, including community colleges and historically

Black colleges and universities, are less likely to graduate than students at universities where students tend to be richer and, yes, white.

But several studies show colleges that serve greater percentages of students of color, and are more likely to enroll students who struggle with poverty and other inequities in succeeding in college, have less to spend for each of their students than better-heeled institutions.

During the class at Southern Maryland, a community college where 44 percent of the students are of color, Moore told the student to just forget about the test and go home.

*“What would I do with more money? I ask myself that all the time.”*

– Maureen Murphy



She let her take it the next morning. And the student passed.

Moore flagged the student to her advisers at the college as someone who likely needed help. But just one academic adviser is tasked with helping hundreds or thousands of students at each of the college's campuses. “They're overwhelmed,” Moore said.

Recently the college's president, Maureen Murphy, was asked about the disparity in funding that exists in higher education.

“What would I do with more money?” Murphy said. “I ask myself that all the time.”

Six years ago, 1,165 freshmen enrolled at the college. Three years later, only 28 percent of those students had graduated, though another 21 percent had transferred to other institutions. Murphy said she would use any additional funding the college got to increase financial assistance for Black students, who are more likely than white students to have to balance school with working full-time, or for Black, Latino and Native American students, who are more likely to take care of children while going to college.

### **Little Progress**

While the killing of George Floyd has prompted national soul-searching

about racial equity, a number of studies show the nation is making little progress in undoing the decades-long underfunding of colleges with larger percentages of students of color.

According to a [study](#) last year by the Institute for College Access and Success, 54 percent of Black, Latino, American Indian/Alaska Native and Pacific Islander students who attended public colleges in 2016-17 were enrolled at two-year institutions. In comparison, 23 percent of those attending institutions that offer master's degrees that year were people of color.

But funding for two-year colleges, such as the College of Southern Maryland, has lagged. In 2006-07, community colleges had only 59 cents for every dollar institutions offering master's degrees could spend, according to the TICAS study.

By the 2016-17 academic year, the gap had narrowed – slightly. Community colleges could now spend 61 cents for every dollar institutions offering master's degrees could spend – two pennies more than a decade earlier, the TICAS study found.

In 2006-07, community colleges brought in 37 percent of the revenue of doctoral institutions. A decade later, the sector had 37 cents for

every dollar doctoral universities had.

As the nation enters another recession, it's too early to tell what the disparity will look like when it ends.

But there's not much optimism the gap will narrow.

Denisa Gandara, assistant professor of education policy at Southern Methodist University, noted that if previous recessions are a guide, more students will enroll in community colleges while funding will likely fall, meaning the colleges will have even less to spend for each student.

“We're very concerned about what's potentially up ahead. Some states are cutting community colleges significantly,” said David Baime, senior vice president for government relations and policy analysis for the American Association of Community Colleges. “The expectations are that there will be very large budget cuts as the economy slides into a recession.”

In addition, Baime said, the inequities have continued in the financial help Congress is giving colleges to deal with the financial blows they are taking from the closure of campuses during the pandemic. That's because the \$14 billion in aid for higher education in the CARES Act was doled out based on the number of full-time-equivalent stu-

*"We're very concerned about what's potentially up ahead. Some states are cutting community colleges significantly."*

– David Baime



dents enrolled by institutions.

The larger public institutions that benefit from this method say they have more costs during the pandemic, including having had to refund room and board fees to students when campuses closed and sanitizing residence halls as they try to reopen. But Baime says the funding formula works against community colleges because they are more likely to enroll students who attend half-time while they go to work or take care of their kids.

In fact, community colleges received only about 54 cents for every dollar received by public four-year institutions, according to an analysis by Ben Miller, vice president for postsecondary education at the left-leaning Center for American Progress.

What's needed to finally bring about some semblance of equity, said Shaun R. Harper, head of the University of Southern California's Race and Equity Center, is to once and for all level the playing field between what colleges with more

students of color and less diverse universities can spend to help more students graduate.

In a 2018 [study](#), the Center for American Progress put the figure at \$5 billion annually to raise what's being spent to educate each Black and Latinx student at all types of institutions to the same level as white students.

As out of reach as racial equity may seem at times, that figure doesn't appear to be out of the question, advocates said, at a time when Congress is considering spending at least \$500 billion on another stimulus package.

Or, in comparison, Joe Biden, the Democratic nominee for president, has adopted Bernie Sanders's plan to make two-year colleges free, as well as to eliminate tuition at public four-year colleges and public and private HBCUs – a proposal that would cost an estimated \$48 billion annually.

"There is no question we can afford it. President Trump cut the corporate rate at a cost of \$1.3 trillion

[over a decade]. If we let corporations keep only 96 percent of this money, we could invest \$5 billion more a year in our colleges," said James Kvaal, president of TICAS and the former deputy domestic policy adviser during the Obama administration.

### **What Would Funding Equity Look Like?**

But to many, even spending as much to educate students of color as white students wouldn't undo decades of underfunding.

Certainly it would help, said Quinton Ross, president of Alabama State University. But such a shift wouldn't be enough to undo the fact that HBCUs like Alabama State do not have the same level of facilities that research institutions (which enroll more white students) use to help bring in more research money. As a result, HBCUs often lose out to larger institutions in getting government contracts.

His students also are more likely to have arrived on campus after suffering through the inequities of

*"There is no question we can afford it. President Trump cut the corporate rate at a cost of \$1.3 trillion [over a decade]. If we let corporations keep only 96 percent of this money, we could invest \$5 billion more a year in our colleges."*

– James Kvaal



the K-12 system, and often need more help than students from well-funded school districts.

"It wouldn't be equity," Ross said of leveling spending. "Because we're already behind. We need more."

David Sheppard, chief legal officer and chief of staff for the Thurgood Marshall College Fund, which supports HBCUs, said the federal government and states clearly have historically underfunded HBCUs, "principally due to racism, whether institutional or otherwise."

States have never fully honored their obligation under the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890 to treat historically Black land-grant institutions as they did predominantly white ones, Sheppard said, "principally because neither the legislatures or governors of those respective states deemed it important to do so." Instead, he said, many states barely match federal funding for HBCUs, but they will spend multiple times more for flagship universities, where more of the students are white.

But even if funding were more equal, Sheppard, like Ross, said it would still take "a significant infusion" of federal funding to expand research at HBCUs.

"Self-evidently, it's difficult to com-

pete with primarily white institutions for agency R&D dollars when you don't have the money to develop and sustain the research infrastructure needed to compete or retain the faculty doing that very work," he said. "No disrespect to the Johns Hopkins and MITs of this country, but without a significant infusion of federal capital into the research enterprise at our institutions, we'll forever be relegated to second-class status because we can't keep pace."

Gandara agreed that leveling the amount institutions have to spend to educate each of their students still wouldn't bring about racial equity.

"If you acknowledge racialized inequities before a student gets to college, including in K-12 school finance, then funding parity between students of color and white students would be a starting point, but it would not be enough," she said.

Still, increasing funding for colleges that bear a heavier load in educating students of color would be a start.

### **Implications of Disparities in Funding**

The TICAS study noted that only 38 percent of community college students earn a credential within six

years of enrollment. In comparison, 59 percent of students at four-year institutions graduate within that time. As of 2014, about 35 percent of students at HBCUs graduated within six years.

Certainly many moves by the federal government would help. Increasing research at HBCUs would make them less reliant on tuition, helping them continue to keep it low for students, Sheppard said. Particularly because of disparities in income, doubling the size of Pell Grants would mean Black students would not have to go into as much debt to pay for tuition and the other costs of going to college, he said.

But asked what she'd do with additional funding, Murphy, at the College of Southern Maryland, said, "The first thing I would do with more money is triple the advising staff to make sure every student has an adviser tracking them."

She added, "We want to have people reaching out. 'If you're having trouble with math, let me set you up with something.' We want to have someone say, 'Wait a minute, you haven't been in class. What's going on here?'"

Janine Davidson, president of Metropolitan State University of Denver, a four-year institution, where 46 percent of the students are peo-

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*"Self-evidently, it's difficult to compete with primarily white institutions for agency R&D dollars when you don't have the money to develop and sustain the research infrastructure needed to compete or retain the faculty doing that very work."*

– David Sheppard

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ple of color and 80 percent work full- or part-time, also wished she could provide more help for students who struggle with attending college. Twenty-four percent of freshmen who first enrolled at the university in 2013 have since graduated.

"MSU Denver receives less than half the amount of funding per student compared to the average in Colorado," she said. "This means that we can only afford a 500-to-one student-adviser ratio, with up to 800 to one for some of our advisers. With more funding, we would lower that to the best practice level of 150 to one."

The university could do more if it had more counselors, said Will Simpkins, MSU Denver's vice president for student affairs. He'd like to have more who specialize in helping students overcome PTSD.

And things are difficult during the pandemic. The number of alerts distributed by faculty or staff members worried about students who are struggling or could be in danger doubled from 464 in the spring of 2019 to 910 this past spring.

The number of other cases sent to counselors about students struggling academically also doubled from 163 to 357 during that time, as classes moved online.

More funding, Davidson said, would also mean providing more wrap-around services, like the City University of New York's [Accelerated Study in Associate Programs](#), which provides tuition and fee waivers, monthly transit passes, textbook stipends, tutoring, and intensive ad-

vising. Students who receive scholarships at MSU Denver receive that help, and between 80 percent and 95 percent graduate, compared to 68 percent of all students.

"So, we know what works. We just need to scale the effort," Davidson said. "If we were better funded, this investment would have an enormous impact on student outcomes and, ultimately, on civil society and the economy in Colorado."

But even the ASAP program is [facing the ax](#).

### Unique Challenges

The Association of Public & Land-grant Universities declined comment. But it has [countered](#) the criticism that four-year institutions get disproportionately more CARES Act funding, pointing out they have additional costs community colleges do not, including running residence halls. And four-year public universities are working to reduce racial disparities in attending college and graduating, such as through efforts like Powered by Publics, an [initiative](#) involving 130 institutions.

But community colleges say they have their own unique costs that more comprehensive colleges do not have to worry about as much.

Kenneth Smith has been a career coordinator and academic adviser at the College of Southern Mary-

land for a dozen years. One student, he remembered, was working to try to transfer to a university in South Dakota to play football. But he was living with his grandmother and his mother, who had health problems, and he was taking care of a younger sister.

"Life would get too heavy; he would disappear and miss too many classes," he said. Smith did what he could, trying to help the student with time management. But he wishes he could do more to help students get jobs. And while he and other advisers will check in with students they see around campus, or in Smith's case, at the gym, he'd like to do more of it.

But Smith is one of only two academic counselors for the 2,400 students who attend the college's Leonardtown campus. Over all, the College of Southern Maryland employs 12 counselors for 6,900 students, or one for every 575 students – about the same as MSU Denver. That's far too many to track to catch everyone who is having problems.

"I would love to grow the advising office," Smith said. "There's never quite enough advisers to service all of our students."

Faculty and staff members are trying to pick up the slack, on top of their teaching, particularly as many

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*"Life would get too heavy; he would disappear and miss too many classes."*

– Kenneth Smith

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struggle during the pandemic.

College instructors these days are finding themselves teaching in places that feel out of the norm, like their living rooms. Or in the case of Joey Bowling, a math instructor at Southern Maryland, one morning in June he found himself working in his car, parked by a playground in an apartment complex.

A couple of years ago, Bowling had noticed some students failing introductory math classes. Sometimes they'd try again. Sometimes they'd disappear.

"They were spinning their wheels and failing by just a little bit," said Bowling, who teaches at a college where a third of the students are of color.

"We wanted to retain those students," he said.

So he came up with the idea of a math boot camp, in which those who'd failed could get intensive instructions for two months. At the end, they'd take their final again. But when the university's campus closed, like so many others around the country, the students needed computers and internet service to get a second chance on the final. One of Bowling's students, who is Black, had neither.

"I thought I'd proctor the test, old-school," said Bowling. And so around 10 a.m., the student sat at a picnic table at a playground in his apartment complex taking the test by pen and paper. Bowling sat nearby in his car.

The student, he said, got a B, and unlike many community college

students who do not finish their degree, he is continuing on.

Miller, the professor who noticed the distraught student, said she and other faculty have been talking about how to get to know their students so they could better predict if they might drop out because of life's struggles. They're thinking, for instance, she said, about building in time for group games in class, like two truths and a lie.

"If you're able to really pay attention, you can see if someone is spending more or less time on responses. And if you notice a deviation, you can reach out. It takes tremendous time. If you need to teach five classes, your time is less," said Stephanie McCaslin, the college's associate dean of professional and technical studies and the chair of its math and engineering department.

Murphy said she sees her faculty go above and beyond to help students navigate their often complicated lives. She wishes she could pay them more and hire more.

"At other institutions, faculty work what's known as a three-two schedule. They teach three classes one term and two the next term," said. "Here they work a five-five. They're people who we say pay a passion tax."

The disparity in budgets between community colleges and four-year institutions comes in part from state and federal spending.

In the 2006-07 academic year, according to TICAS, community colleges received \$4,996 per student. Universities offering master's degrees were less likely to enroll large

percentages of students of color. But they received an average of \$6,373 to educate each student, or more than \$1,000 more per student than the more diverse community colleges.

Over the next decade, governments actually gave community colleges more funding than bigger universities, the study found.

Appropriations, mostly from states, which are the main entities funding community colleges, went up by 7 percent for community colleges, while they declined by 14 percent for colleges offering master's degrees and by 19 percent for those offering doctorates.

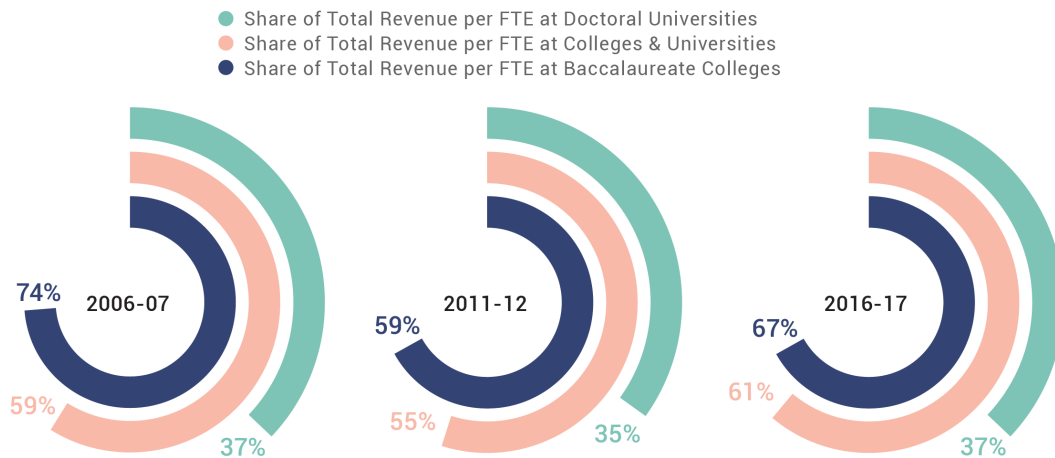
But the TICAS study said colleges offering advanced degrees, which tend to enroll wealthier students, could do what those serving larger shares of students from lower incomes can't do: raise tuition.

Universities offering master's degrees and doctorates raised tuition by about a half, while it only went up by a third at community colleges.

As a result, and with the gap so wide to begin with, community colleges didn't make up much ground despite the increase in government funding. Total revenue from both tuition and public funding went up by 16 percent, the same as for doctoral universities and only slightly more than the 13 percent more money master's-granting institutions had to spend. The gap was still in place.

In 2016-17, according to TICAS, community colleges still only had 61 percent of the revenue as those offering master's degrees and 37

### Associate Colleges' Total Revenue Relative to Other Public School Types



SOURCE: THE INSTITUTE FOR COLLEGE ACCESS AND SUCCESS

percent of the money received by those offering doctoral degrees.

#### What Has to Change?

More funding equity would change how we think about higher education, said many experts, including Marybeth Gasman, distinguished professor of education at Rutgers University, New Brunswick.

"The biggest issue is that these institutions and their students are not being valued," she said. "We as a society value highly selective

research universities and highly selective liberal arts colleges. We have shown this over and over by what gets funded and what doesn't. The recession amplified that issue. But ground was not first lost in the 2000s; the ground has always been uneven and full of potholes."

Murphy agreed.

"Higher education funding is built on a 19th-century model, where a full-time student goes through a degree program in a prescribed amount of

time. That doesn't translate to what the 40 percent of undergraduates in the country need. Parity would mean our mission would be recognized as just as important as research universities. Our students aren't lesser by any means," she said.

"There is a racist, classist element here," MSU Denver's Davidson said. "Thirty, 40, 50 years ago, it was considered perfectly OK to underfund students of color or low-income students. We've been digging out of that hole for decades." ■

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<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/10/29/racial-disparities-higher-education-funding-could-widen-during-economic-downturn>

# 'There Are So Few That Have Made Their Way'

Black campus leaders say their careers can be deeply rewarding, even as they are taxing. So why are Black employees so sharply underrepresented at the top ranks of the higher education ecosystem?

By **Emma Whitford** // October 28, 2020



KEVIN COLTON/HOBART AND WILLIAM SMITH COLLEGES  
Justin Rose teaches a class at Hobart and William Smith Colleges.

Robert Kelly had what he calls “one of the experiences that we hope students have when they go to college.”

He graduated in 1994 from Loyola University in Maryland – then called Loyola College – and soon after earned a master’s degree in education administration from the University of Vermont and later a Ph.D. from the University of Maryland. His career in higher education administration took him to Seattle University, Loyola University in Chicago and Union College in New York. Today, he’s back at Loyola Maryland as special assistant to the president.

Throughout his career, Kelly found

himself one of few Black administrators on campus.

“There are very few people ahead of you who have opened the door. I really had to reach out to people who might not necessarily look like me,” Kelly said.

Today, Kelly tries to be the mentor for others that he himself so often lacked.

“I make an effort to make sure that I’m doing it for all people who might be behind me, but in particular African American or Black people, because there are so few that have made their way through various pipelines in higher education,”

he said.

Despite such individual efforts, Black students, faculty members and staff members remain disproportionately underrepresented across the higher education workforce.

Black and African American employees make up less than 10 percent of higher education professionals, according to [the latest data](#) from the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources. The annual survey includes demographic information for midlevel college employees in academic affairs, athletics, exter-

## 'There Are So Few That Have Made Their Way' (cont.)

nal affairs, facilities, information technology and other areas. White employees account for more than three-quarters of all higher education professionals.

Among administrators and executive leadership, this disparity is even greater. [CUPA-HR's report](#) shows that less than 8 percent of administrators are Black or African American, and more than 80 percent are white.

Higher education professionals and faculty do not reflect the overall population of undergraduates or the shifting demographics in the United States. Fewer than a quarter of faculty members are nonwhite, and only 6 percent are Black, according to [2017 data](#) from the National Center for Education Statistics, or NCES. The data show that 14 percent of undergraduates are Black, more than double the percentage of Black faculty members and still greater than the percentage of Black professional employees. More than 13 percent of the United States population is Black, according to [U.S. Census Bureau estimates](#) from 2019.

The enduring whiteness of higher education professionals is often chalked up to a "pipeline problem," wherein there are not enough Black Ph.D. students, faculty members and entry-level staff members to rise through the ranks and achieve racial parity among the faculty and upper-level administrators.

Still, [studies show](#) the pipeline problem is not the sole answer to the lack of diversity in higher ed. Flooding the pipeline – hiring people of color and admitting people

of color into Ph.D. programs – doesn't necessarily change the demographics at the top.

In their pursuit for tenure, promotions, administrative jobs and college presidencies, many Black faculty and staff members face challenges and microaggressions largely unacknowledged by their white colleagues. Whether due to willful ignorance or outright hostility, this treatment complicates their relationships with their white employers and coworkers. If higher education is to rid itself of these unfair hurdles, experts say that colleges must work to recognize and unravel the many ways racism is baked into their institutions, traditions and practices.

To start, experts suggest a critical look at the tenure and promotion review process.

### Tenure and Promotion

Justin Rose wants to be a college president someday. He once shared that goal with a Black college president he deeply admired.

"This is great," replied the president, whom Rose didn't name. "But don't tell anybody else that."

At the time, Rose was an assistant professor of political science at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva, N.Y. Today, he's the dean of faculty recruitment, retention and diversity at Rhodes College in Memphis, Tenn.

Rose was one of only five Black assistant professors on campus at Hobart and William Smith. He knew that faculty members didn't always view administrators favorably, and

he didn't want to spoil his relationships with his colleagues by telling them he wanted to join "the dark side," he said.

"You're a person of color who already feels like an outsider," Rose said. "You don't want to add to that by portraying the fact that you want to be an administrator."

In addition to worrying about outsider status, Black academics are frequently working harder than others as they move forward in their careers.

While seeking tenure and promotion, Black faculty and staff members are often asked to carry greater service burdens than their white colleagues. A [2019 study](#) found that women and faculty members of color take on a disproportionate amount of the "invisible" work in academia, such as serving on committees, mentoring and advising students, overseeing student organizations, and other community-based service. This service is subsequently devalued [during tenure and promotional reviews](#).



Beverly Daniel Tatum

## 'There Are So Few That Have Made Their Way' (cont.)

"Often Black faculty and staff are taxed more to be there for students," Kelly said. "It's often unrecognized as a part of our job."

Freeman Hrabowski, president of the University of Maryland Baltimore County, is well aware of this dynamic.

"I am strongly encouraging Black faculty to focus on their research and teaching first and to get tenure," Hrabowski said. "Too often, we expect so much of Black faculty – as we have of women faculty – and they give so much in service, and then when it's time for tenure, they don't get it."

That's not easy to do, though. Rose recounted dilemmas he faced in academic service.

"You feel like you always have to be overly gracious and give a lot of your time, because you don't want to be seen as the outsider, because you feel like that will come back and haunt you at the time of review," Rose said. "You're asked to sit on committees, or you feel a special obligation to, because you feel like, 'OK, well, there's got to be diversity representation on these committees. There's not many of us here.' So you start to serve on committees."

### **Institutional Fit**

Beverly Daniel Tatum has had a storied career in higher education. As a psychologist and the former president of Spelman College, she's well versed in the challenges Black faculty and staff members face at predominantly white institutions.

Early in her career, Tatum inter-

viewed for two tenure-track positions, one at Mount Holyoke College – where she was later hired – and one at a similar institution she declined to name.

She presented at the second institution summarizing her research, which sought to answer questions about how Black families living in predominantly white communities cultivated a positive sense of racial identity in their children.

"When I gave my talk there, some of the members of the psychology department asked me why I didn't include white families in my research sample," Tatum said. "The answer should be obvious. I'm not studying white families."

In the eyes of the search committee, Tatum's research was "only important if you can tell us how it connects to what white people do," Tatum said. White academics are sometimes less interested in research that centers on Black people and their experiences, she said.

"If you're a Black faculty member studying issues related to Black people, one of the questions might be, 'Is what you're doing really important enough? Maybe you should be doing something more mainstream,'" Tatum said.

That lack of interest can lead to perceptions of poor institutional fit, according to Kelly.

"Often, we look at somebody and say, 'Oh, I don't like that person's research, I don't like the organizations they've been a part of, or their pedigree of institutional type,'" he said.

But are those statements actually about a candidate's ability, or their identity?

"I think when we look at fit, it's often a way to shut people out," Kelly said.

Fit is subjective – it's an imprecise concept about whether or not a person would suit a particular campus. A [recent study in \*The Journal of Higher Education\*](#) shows that judging candidates based on fit often leaves room for racial biases that harm colleges' diversity efforts.



**Birgit Burton**

Sometimes, hiring managers hold Black and white candidates to entirely different standards.

Birgit Burton, executive director of foundation relations at the Georgia Institute of Technology, founded the African American Development Officers network after holding regular networking meetings with other Black professionals in the fundraising industry. She remembers a story

## 'There Are So Few That Have Made Their Way' (cont.)

that an AADO network member told her about being unfairly passed up for a new job. This colleague was a Black woman. The hiring manager turned her down for the role, claiming that the organization was looking for someone with at least three years of experience at their prior job. They later hired a white man who didn't have the required experience.

"The person they hired only had a year and a half," Burton said.

### **Mentorship, Retention and Changes**

All the people interviewed for this article said they enjoyed their work in higher education. Rose's administrative ambitions were born in part from his work on faculty committees. Tatum turned away from a career in clinical work to continue teaching. But they all agree that the higher education sector has a ways to go before it can claim to be antiracist.

"I don't know of a campus that can say it has arrived," UMBC's Hrabowski said. "We can learn from each other."

Networking in higher education is difficult for many people, but the relatively few Black faces on many campuses make it especially tough for young Black faculty and staff

members to find mentors.

When Tatum and her husband, who is also a professor, were first hired at Westfield State University, their arrival "doubled the Black faculty population" from two to four, she said. At Hobart and William Smith Colleges, where Rose was one of five Black assistant professors, he said three Black assistant professors left the college without receiving tenure. The college has since hired several other Black faculty members, he said.

Burton was the first fundraiser of color that Georgia Tech hired. **Fundraising in general is a predominantly white industry.** Only 9 percent of fundraising professionals are people of color, and only 4 percent are African American, according to the Association of Fundraising Professionals.

Promoting Black faculty and staff members into leadership positions will help colleges identify and address racism in their institutions, Hrabowski said. Rose agrees, but he warns against "the racism of the typecast," in which Black faculty members are considered for positions based on their race. He's often told he would make a great chief diversity officer.

"We don't get thought of for any other positions," Rose said. "We

only get thought of for diversity."

Thinking proactively about what Black faculty and staff members need to feel comfortable in an office is essential to keeping them around, Burton said.

"When I do diversity and inclusion training and I do top-of-the-session questions, I ask, 'How many times a day do you think about eating?'" Burton said. "They'll say three or four times a day."

Then she asks how often participants think about race during the day.

"I kid you not, about 60 to 75 percent will say rarely or never, and it's the white people," she said. "But the people of color are the ones who say, 'I think about it often.'"

Black leaders on predominantly white campuses frequently feel reminded of their race in ways their white counterparts do not. To illustrate this, Burton shared what she called a boring anecdote – at the end of a recent Zoom happy hour call, one person suggested that everybody send in their baby pictures. On the next call, participants would guess who is who.

"I'm the only person of color," Burton said. "It never occurred to anybody, 'Well, how much fun would that be for me?'" ■

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# Black Workers and the University

Black workers at universities are among the most vulnerable people on campuses. But they often are left out of conversations about racial justice.

By **Lilah Burke** // October 27, 2020



PHOTO BY CAROLINE BREHMAN/CQ-ROLL CALL, INC. VIA GETTY IMAGES

Donald Moore has worked as a custodian at the University of Kentucky for nearly two decades. He likes the job and his coworkers.

"I love being there, servicing students," he said. "Being of service to somebody else is the main focus of being there."

But after 19 years, Moore still makes less than \$15 an hour. He is 57.

More than 400 miles away, in Columbia, Mo., the situation isn't much better for employees. In 2018 the state voted to raise the minimum wage to \$12 an hour by 2023. But because of legal technicalities, the University of Missouri

at Columbia wasn't legally obligated to pay that new minimum. So the administration said **it wouldn't**.

That meant in 2019, some workers who cleaned the floors, served the food and cut the grass at Mizzou were making as little as \$9.70 per hour. Dining hall workers were using the university food pantry to feed themselves.

Nonacademic, nonadministrative staff members often are left out of conversations about higher education, race relations and campus climate. But these university workers are the wheels upon which a college runs. They are — in nearly every sense of the word and on every

kind of campus — essential. They also tend to be poorly paid, underappreciated and disempowered. They are the first to be laid off and the last to be celebrated. At many, many institutions, a majority of these workers are people of color. At some, like Mizzou and Kentucky, the majority are Black.

Often, these low-wage workers more accurately reflect the demographics of a college town than the students who attend it.

"If you look and see who's treated badly and who's treated well, you don't have to look that hard," said Anthony Paul Farley, a professor of law at Albany Law School. "Which

group has the most Black people in it – that's the one that's going to be given the narrowest range of choices."

### A Precarious Workforce

The relationship between U.S. colleges and universities and their workers didn't always look this way. Competition, changes in how universities are run and managed, and widespread outsourcing all contributed to shifts in worker treatment and compensation.

In the 1980s college enrollment dipped nationally, and competition between colleges intensified. Administrations searched for ways to cut costs and eke out any advantage. Outsourcing jobs was one way to help get there.

Dining services were among the most obvious areas to contract out to a vendor. Large private companies already were responsible for the food in hotels and prisons, and student expectations about college food were getting more demanding. Vendors would also build in incentives, such as payment for a new dining hall, in return for long-term contracts with a college.

Today about half of colleges, mostly large ones, contract out dining services, said Kevin McClure, a professor of higher education at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. Colleges also have turned to paying vendors to run other services, such as parking lot management and custodial work.

At public institutions, that essentially means privatizing a state-run workforce, which often results in

lower compensation, benefits and workplace protections for staff. Those workers also stand to lose certain benefits, such as tuition remittance, as a result.

"[Before contracting] you could work a basic maintenance job or other low-wage work that is nevertheless stable and tied you to a community at your institution," said Tom DePaola, a research assistant at the University of Southern California who studies labor trends in higher education. "These were institutions that were educating the next generation and finding all of our new medical and scientific innovations. Workers were proud to be a part of that even in some nonacademic way."

A serious backlash to outsourcing occurred on college campuses, most notably in the 1990s as part of the Justice for Janitors campaign by the Service Employees International Union. But while those protests and campaigns notched some significant wins, they were largely unsuccessful at preventing outsourcing.

"Now you have a huge population of deeply alienated workers who are increasingly agitated and fearful," DePaola said. "By and large, these workforces are provided by third-party contractors at very steep discounts. Those companies are just managing their own at-will labor forces in ways that are designed largely to guarantee that these people don't get benefits and don't have any security. Colleges don't have to worry about who's doing the work as long as there's always a ready supply of workers."

One of the major things that makes contracting services attractive for universities, said McClure, is that the administration then no longer has any financial responsibility to those workers, leaving decisions about workers' livelihoods in other's hands.

The pandemic made this lack of accountability more apparent than ever as outside vendors and contractors shed employees as the economic fallout of the crisis grew. Students on some campuses were so concerned about the livelihoods of these low wage workers that they called on college administrations to continue to pay workers furloughed or laid off by the contractors.

"These workers that are here on a campus every day of the week, working long hours, building relationships with students, in a moment of crisis learn very quickly that they, in the eyes of the university administration, are not part of the campus community, but are rather employees of this other company," McClure said. "The reality is that in many ways, the entire purpose of contracting out was that the university would not be financially responsible for those people."

Outsourcing was only one change that has occurred in recent years in higher education, and it is not widespread for every job role. Custodians, for example, are less likely than dining workers to be contractors. Janitors at Mizzou and Kentucky are directly employed by the universities.

But amid the shifts that have affected employee compensation and



status, college and university presidents and other executive officers are earning more. At the University of California system, for example, from 2005 to 2015, the average salary of the top 1 percent of employees **grew from seven to nine times** that of the median full-time employee.

At the end of that 10-year period, the top 10 percent of system employees – likely executives, coaches and chancellors – accounted for over 30 percent of total payroll costs. The bottom half of employees, representing five times as many people, only accounted for 22 percent.

While the disparities in compensation between those at the top of the pay scale and those at the bottom are stark at many colleges and universities, administrators at the University of Kentucky say they've worked to protect the jobs and salaries of their hourly workers despite the budget deficit caused by the pandemic.

Jay Blanton, the university spokesman noted that even with a \$70 million shortfall, Eli Capilouto, the president of the institution, remained committed to a salary increase for workers **in July that raised the starting wage to \$12.50** an hour from \$10.40.

"I would submit that we have driven our local market in wages in recent years, perhaps not surprisingly as the largest employer," Blanton said in an email. "But President Capilouto, nevertheless, made a conscious and intentional choice on wages because he thought it was import-

ant to lead in our region and state. And he stuck with that decision, even in the face of a significant budget gap that had to be closed ... [and] we closed the gap without layoffs, another commitment we made to our employees."

### **Culture of Disrespect**

Beyond pay and benefits, many Black workers on college campuses say they want dignity in their work and to be treated with respect by their institutions. Many of the workers *Inside Higher Ed* spoke with for this article were wary of naming race as a factor in their poor treatment. They said they saw their situations more as a struggle between bosses and working people.

At Mizzou, custodians waged their own fight against outsourcing this year, when the administration announced it was considering terminating its custodial department and hiring a third-party vendor.

After mounting opposition to the plan by a coalition organized by Missouri Jobs with Justice – that included the campus custodial workers' union, the Missouri Democratic Socialists of America and the Mid-Missouri John Brown Gun Club – the administration relented. It would make cuts elsewhere.

But before acquiescing, the university took 70 days to make a decision. Tyrone Turner, a carpenter at Mizzou for 28 years, said several custodians couldn't stand the insecurity. They ended up leaving their jobs before a decision was made.

"You're not talking about someone that makes \$100,000 a year; you're

talking about someone who's working two jobs, working paycheck to paycheck to make ends meet," Turner said. "They should have had a decision made whether they were going to do it or not. But to leave people on hold for months, to leave it up in the air for that long, is almost cruel. It's almost unjust."

Turner said he doesn't fault the university for looking to save money. Budget cuts have been the biggest issue for Mizzou workers in recent years, he said. When Turner arrived at the university in 1992, his department had 75 employees. In the past five years, that number has been cut to 25. The administration is constantly looking for ways to do more with less. (The state of Missouri experienced a 14 percent growth in public college enrollment since 2008 even as state funding declined by 26 percent during that same period.)

Turner said a majority of custodians at Mizzou are Black and Latino. "With all the injustice things we're talking about in the country today, they want to pick on those people. They're the lowest paid, the blackest and the brownest. What kind of message is that sending to the whole community? That we don't give a shit about those people?" he said. "They wouldn't do the president that way. They wouldn't do a coach that way."

Many campus workers say they love their jobs. A university can be a home. Coworkers can be a family. But often that positive experience comes despite a relationship with an administration, not because of it.

At Kentucky, Moore, the custodian,

## Black Workers and the University (cont.)

describes a culture of favoritism and disrespect. Janitors come in every morning to clean through the summer heat, but in some buildings, the air-conditioning isn't turned on until administrators arrive.

Some of his coworkers are Congolese refugees. They are particularly belittled and talked down to by supervisors, he said.

But Moore said he's not sure how race plays into it. His white coworkers don't escape poor treatment, he said.

"We're custodians," he said. "We get more respect from faculty and staff and students than we get from our administration."

Blanton said the administration has not been made aware of any disrespectful treatment of employees, Congolese or otherwise, by supervisors. In regards to the air-conditioning not being turned on for custodians, Blanton said via email, "As part of our energy conservation program, when buildings are unoccupied the air temperature settings are changed. As the pandemic began and many of our non-health care employees worked remotely, that left many buildings with low or no occupancy, and some settings were changed. However, if and when concerns were raised, building temperature settings were addressed on an individual building basis."

In an annual survey conducted by the consulting firm ModernThink, the University of Kentucky has been named a Great College to Work For the past three years, appearing on the "honor roll" in 2020. In an in-

ternal survey of over 4,000 staff members, 90 percent of respondents said their supervisor, director or chair treats them with respect, and 70 percent said employees are treated with respect regardless of their position. It is unclear how different departments and roles were represented among respondents.

"We deeply respect and appreciate all of our custodial staff," Blanton wrote.

### 'We Deserve It'

The COVID-19 pandemic – and universities' response to it – has been an inflection point for some workers.

"I'm on pins and needles," Pierre Smith, a groundskeeper who has been working for the University of Kentucky for 15 years, said in August. At the time, 25,000 students had just moved back onto campus after leaving in the spring. The university has since had nearly 2,300 student cases of COVID-19. More

than 100 employees have been infected.

Smith is 54, and his girlfriend uses a breathing machine. He said he doesn't want to think about what would happen if he brought the virus home.

Groundskeepers and custodians at Kentucky will not be given hazard pay for working this semester. And before it was raised by the workers' union (which does not have the power to bargain with the university), the administration wasn't planning to offer any testing to staff. The union also is pushing the university to cover any health-care costs associated with COVID-19 for campus workers.

Farley, the law professor at Albany Law School, has argued that universities should stay remote to protect the health of their workers of color.

"What experts are certain about is that reopening campuses will



Pierre Smith (left) and Donald Moore at the University of Kentucky

## Black Workers and the University (cont.)

reproduce and reinforce existing racial disparities. Workers of color bear an uneven risk of hospitalization and death," Farley and his four co-authors argued in *Bloomberg Law*. "People of color are also more likely to be the essential workers in the university setting who are exposed to more risk – those who clean university spaces, who interact with students as support staff, the facilities managers, adjuncts and food service employees."

The image universities present to students, faculty, donors and the public is one where knowledge is pursued for knowledge's sake, Farley said, and barriers between cultures, generations and nations are broken down.

"That implies a kind of humanism that we are not exhibiting when we tell the workers, 'Show up, get sick and that's your problem,'" he said. "Blithe disregard for the health of the workers undermines the whole mission of the university."

Jeff Waddell, a union steward who has worked as a cleaner at the University of Pittsburgh for five years, cited ongoing anxiety among campus workers. Pitt has brought 19,000 students back to campus, and since Waddell spoke with *Inside Higher Ed* in August, the university has seen 314 total positive COVID-19 cases.

The administration has given out masks sporadically, he said in August. And although students have access to free tests, employees are asked to go to their own doctors for a diagnosis. Waddell himself is worried because he's over 60 and thus at increased risk of complications from COVID-19.

"We need hazard pay. We need additional sick time off," he said. "Our life is on the line daily."

The university offered an additional 10 days' paid sick time to staff in March, Waddell said. But many workers have had to use that time to care for sick relatives or watch children when childcare became unavailable.

"We've proven we deserve it. Every time they've asked us to step up, we have," he said. "A pat on the back doesn't pay your bills."

As at many institutions, most cleaners at Pitt are people of color. But Waddell doesn't feel that's part of overt racism on the university's part.

"Who applies for cleaners' jobs right now?" he said. "There's a lot of Black and brown people that need jobs."

Josh Armstead, vice president of UNITE HERE Local 23, who works in the dining hall at Georgetown University, said he sees the racial stratification of labor at George-

town as part of a larger systemic problem.

"It's an institutional problem when it comes to the value of Black and brown bodies," he said. "For many, many hundreds of years in this country and on this continent, Black people and brown people were subjected to the servile jobs of cooking and cleaning and other types of work that would sustain the upper class."

Armstead works for Aramark, the contractor for Georgetown's dining halls. In the spring, when Aramark furloughed dining hall and food service workers, the university paid employees the wages they would have earned. Armstead was able to tell his supervisors he wouldn't be coming in this semester because of his young son, a privilege he said he owes to his union.

"The only way that we beat back is when workers, Black and brown workers, but all workers, organize against the legacies that these institutions subconsciously and consciously try to perpetrate," he said. "And capitalists that want the lowest amount possible to pay for the highest extraction of our labor."

### Race and Labor

Like Armstead, many of the Black workers interviewed said they've found power in the labor movement and the unions that represent them. Some said that without a union, they doubted their employers would negotiate with them at all.

Armstead said his experiences at the negotiating table with Aramark were a turning point in his understanding of power.

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*"The only way that we beat back is when workers, Black and brown workers, but all workers, organize against the legacies that these institutions subconsciously and consciously try to perpetrate."*

– Josh Armstead

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"[The negotiator] looks at all of us and he said, 'We are a \$14 billion company and we will not be intimidated by our workers,'" he recalled of an interaction in 2015. "Who's the intimidator? The \$14 billion corporation that currently controls my employment? Or the folks who are fighting for a better day?"

(Aramark did not respond to a request to comment.)

Philosophers and political scientists have developed numerous and competing ways to think about race, class and labor in America.

Olúfẹ̀mi Táíwò, a philosophy professor at Georgetown whose work is influenced by Black radical tradition, said his personal view on racial stratification aligns with a concept called "racial capitalism," first defined by political philosopher Cedric Robinson.

Táíwò said racial stratification means people are invested in maintaining or advancing their own status in a racial hierarchy, which keeps them from attacking a broader system of capitalist inequality.

"Race is a technology for keeping people invested in antagonistic relationships that keep the current system going," he said. "People fight each other for places on the hierarchy rather than the system itself."

Through that lens, the overrepresentation of people of color within the low-wage university workforce is unsurprising. The solution, Táíwò argues, is political organizations that align the interests of the people at the bottom who may differ by race. One such example is unions.

Of course, the American labor movement itself has had its own history of racism and xenophobia.

"It's not magic," Táíwò said. "It doesn't erase bigotry."

Several labor unions that exist today excluded Black workers until the 1960s.

"In the history of unions, there's certainly been what we might call a race problem, and there's a complicated history around that that stems from racial exclusion," said Keona Ervin, a professor of history at Mizzou who studies Black women and the labor movement. But today, Black Americans are more likely than any other racial or ethnic group to be union members.

"Black workers have been indispensable to advancing worker rights struggles in the United States, in part because of just their status in the labor economy and the economy more generally. Often they have been relegated to the lowest-paying positions, low-wage labor, what might be classified as undesirable labor. And from that vantage point, they've really had a clear-eyed take on what economic exploitation looks like in the workforce," she said.

"What's interesting today is you are seeing many more traditional union organizations embracing a platform that recognizes the need to build racial justice into a movement that seeks to build worker power."

Black workers, she said, have a historical tradition of seeing unionism as a vehicle for an expansive

vision of social justice that includes issues like antiracism, antisexism, health care and childcare. Armstead himself said he sees universal health care as the next fight for workers to win.

### **A Changing Campus**

Racial justice is at the center of campus debates and activism and yet lower-wage workers often are left out of those conversations.

"The kinds of struggles that happen on university campuses tend toward the symbolic," said Táíwò. "They also tend to emphasize to an outsize degree the kinds of concerns that academic workers have as academics rather than as workers, and that students have."

Weightier decisions from a university, such as whom it employs and how it interacts with its surrounding city or town, could be taken more seriously, he said.

For people who want to change how universities operate and treat their employees, much attention is often paid to the role of tenured faculty members. Professors with secure job protections often don't do enough to advocate for their disempowered colleagues, some say.

"Academic workers got comfortable with the idea that we had formal protections around things and that took a lot of the pressure off the need to build and maintain networks of power that could be leveraged against administrative austerity or overreach," DePaola said. "Faculty were losing their power, and rather than sort of confront

*"I don't even think hiring Black faculty to give more radical discussions at fancy conference centers and ignoring the people who clean up after them is a politics that makes sense, of racial justice or of any other sort."*

– Olúfẹ̀mi Táíwò

that in the '70s and '80s and '90s, instead they just sort of dug deeper into their bubble of privilege."

But in a few cases, the COVID-19 crisis has kicked off increased solidarity between campus workers and their peers in academia. "Wall-to-wall" unions and staff-faculty coalitions have sprung up at several institutions.

At Rutgers University, for example, several different unions formed a coalition to try to bargain with the university together. Todd Wolfson, the president of the faculty union there, said it was important to try to use the prestige and power of the full-time faculty to protect and

bargain for more vulnerable staff.

"Faculty, me and my unit, we have felt special within the university environment and maybe even treated as special," he said. "We're not special – we're workers like everybody else."

Some in higher education have rebuffed moral arguments that universities should provide more for their workers. A university, they say, is like any business, a firm serving customers, and is under no ethical or legal obligations to its staff. Indeed some have argued that the ethical thing for university administrations to do is dismiss calls to

pay their furloughed staff and invest that money to ensure the longevity of the institution.

Wolfson said moral arguments can only get workers so far.

"They will not accept the moral argument. You want to make a moral argument to the governor, to the Legislature, to the New Jersey public, and we do," he said. "But if we really want to win, we have to organize. This is all about power."

Today, thousands of college students and hundreds of college employees have been infected with the coronavirus. This month, LeeRoy Rogers, a custodian at Drury University in Missouri, **died of COVID-19** after coming in to work. Hundreds of others have been furloughed or fired. Employees continue to sweep floors, prune trees and take out the trash for institutions they love.

The days continue. The work goes on. ■

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<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/10/27/black-workers-universities-often-are-left-out-conversations-about-race-and-higher>

# Is It Time for All Students to Take Ethnic Studies?

As ethnic studies requirements are put in place in California, capping years of struggle, educators discuss why it's important to talk about race in the classroom.

By **Lindsay McKenzie** // October 22, 2020



GARTH ELIASSEN/ARCHIVE PHOTOS VIA GETTY IMAGES

**Student demonstrators march in front of the San Francisco State College (later San Francisco State University) administration building in 1968 to protest the institution's lack of ethnic studies programs.**

For two and a half years, scholar and social activist Melina Abdullah traveled weekly from her home in Los Angeles to Sacramento – uncompensated trips that took a personal toll and kept her apart from her three children.

She was working to build support for California legislation requiring all undergraduates across the 23-campus, 482,000-student California State University to take a three-unit ethnic studies class focusing on Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans or Latinx Americans in order to graduate. The fate of the legislation, known as **AB 1460**, seemed uncertain even when lawmakers

passed it and it moved to the governor's desk.

But Governor Gavin Newsom signed the bill Aug. 17.

"I was not confident it would happen," said Abdullah, who is a professor and former chair of pan-African studies at Cal State, Los Angeles. "We were working up until the very last minute."

It was a watershed moment for Abdullah, who sacrificed her time because she believes in the cause. Likewise for activists, scholars and students who support the legislation, Newsom's signature marked the culmination of a decades-long fight to make sure the Cal State

system leaders take ethnic studies seriously as an academic discipline and as a cornerstone of knowledge all students should have before they graduate and go out into the world.

Cal State's actions have a profound impact on thousands of students, as it counts itself as the "greatest producer of bachelor's degrees" in the most populous state in the country.

The struggle for acceptance and respect of ethnic studies in academe goes back to the late 1960s, Abdullah said. That struggle has not abated over the past 60 years. For those who fight for the protection and promotion of ethnic stud-

## Is It Time for All Students to Take Ethnic Studies? (cont.)

ies in both higher ed and K-12, the story is one of steps forward, backward and sideways.

Mandating ethnic studies will benefit all students academically and socially, according to those who backed the new California law. For Abdullah, it is also a recognition that ethnic studies is vitally important to students of color. Ethnic studies helps them understand their history and realize their own potential.

Abdullah said she wouldn't be where she is today without her own exposure to Black studies in high school.

"Black studies literally saved my life," she said.

### Life-Changing Impact

Abdullah was born in Oakland, Calif., in the 1970s. In the early '90s, the crack cocaine epidemic hit her neighborhood hard and brought with it a wave of violence.

"I witnessed a bunch of my friends be murdered, and a bunch of my friends be caught up in the criminal justice system," she said.

"It felt like there were certain expectations and a plan that the world had for me," she said. "I have a wonderful mother and wonderful grandparents who raised me, but I was teetering myself. I was in and out of really minor trouble, but the kind of trouble that is part of the school-to-prison pipeline."

Abdullah credits a high school teacher, Mr. Navies, who taught Black studies, with planting the seed of the idea that she could go

to college. In an article published in the *Ethnic Studies Review* in 2017, Abdullah wrote that Mr. Navies created a refuge for an "entire generation of Berkeley High School students" and enabled them to flourish.

"It was being exposed to my history and my power as a Black woman that eventually got me to step into my own power," she said. "I could have been a different person."

Despite the teacher's encouragement, Abdullah briefly dropped out of high school at the end of the 10th grade, intending to pursue a career in cosmetology. After studying to pursue a GED, she returned to high school because she wanted to go to the school prom.

With encouragement from her mother, a graduate of Spelman College – a historically Black college in Atlanta – Abdullah applied to Howard University, another well-known historically Black college in Washington, D.C. To her surprise, she was accepted. She thrived at the university and graduated magna cum laude.

Abdullah recently ran into an old friend from high school at a barbecue.

"I told her I'm a professor, and she started crying and laughing at the same time," Abdullah said. "She said to me that you're not even supposed to be alive. That we're not even supposed to be alive."

As a professor of pan-African studies, Abdullah feels blessed to be part of a discipline that deeply impacts students' lives. She said

many students don't have a high school teacher who takes a deep interest in their futures. They don't encounter topics that speak to their backgrounds, like Black studies, Chicano studies or Asian or Indigenous studies.

"I think when students walk into our classes, they find themselves," she said. "When they are exposed in the university, it can do for them what it did for me."

### History in California

The nation's first College of Ethnic Studies was established at San Francisco State University in 1969 – when the institution was known as San Francisco State College. The College of Ethnic Studies was created in response to students of color who led a five-month strike against Eurocentric education and a lack of diversity on campus. That strike would eventually be the longest student strike in U.S. history.

Students fought to create the discipline, and university administrators have over the years tried repeatedly to take resources away, Abdullah said.

"Whenever there are austerity measures, the first set of disciplines under attack is ethnic studies," she said.

At California State, Long Beach, for example, administrators blocked the Department of Africana Studies from hiring any professors for eight years. Then they tried to dismantle the department and replace it with an Africana studies program in 2013, saying the department didn't have enough tenured faculty



SOURCE: 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SF STATE STUDENT STRIKE | KQED NEWS

members – which caused the department's chair to **retort** that the university was penalizing the department for the university's failure to hire. Ethnic studies departments at other campuses in the Cal State system have faced similar attempts to reduce their autonomy, Abdullah said.

"What we saw after Long Beach was that we were going to continue to have these fights on campuses," she said. "We had to get a system-wide response."

The Cal State system's chancellor, Timothy White, formed a statewide committee in 2014 after opposition rose against the cuts at Long Beach. The committee was tasked with reviewing levels of institutional support for ethnic studies over the past decade and making recommendations to sustain and advance the discipline. It spent two years conducting research before publishing an extensive report in 2016, which Abdullah helped write. One key recommendation was for the system to create an ethnic studies requirement for all students.

As a result, the system's governing board approved a systemwide ethnic studies requirement in July this year that the chancellor's office developed. This mandate, created "**by the CSU, for the CSU,**" would have required all Cal State students to take an ethnic studies class or a class with a social justice component in order to graduate. But the California Faculty Association, a union representing lecturers, professors, counselors, librarians and coaches across the system, criticized the requirement for allowing students to take too broad of a choice of classes. They felt that an ethnic studies requirement should mean students must take an ethnic studies class.

The California Legislature's ethnic studies requirement will supersede the one designed by Cal State, despite the chancellor's office and system's Academic Senate having protested that lawmakers overstepped and intruded into the curriculum.

Students receiving diplomas from Cal State institutions in the 2024-

25 academic year will be the first to graduate under the new ethnic studies requirement.

For many academics in ethnic studies, AB 1460 represents a far superior way to protect their discipline than the requirement Cal State leaders designed. Shirley Weber, a State Assembly member who taught Africana studies at San Diego State University for several decades before entering politics, wrote the bill.

"What we are seeing in Washington and on American streets right now demonstrates the necessity of understanding the experiences and perspectives of these historically marginalized and oppressed groups who have nonetheless contributed to the building of our country," Weber said in a press release Aug. 18, after Newsom signed the bill. "This is a great day for students and the state. I am grateful to the Governor for joining me in moving California forward."

Ethnic studies is also important for white students, Abdullah said. A review of research on ethnic studies and curricula commissioned by the National Education Association in 2011 found that both students of color and white students have benefited academically and socially from well-planned ethnic studies curricula, which the report described as "very academically rigorous."

### **A Pivotal Moment**

It is not just California considering mandating ethnic studies in higher education, though no other public university system has so far taken



## Is It Time for All Students to Take Ethnic Studies? (cont.)

the step. Many college leaders face public pressure to demonstrate their commitment to the discipline and to students, faculty and staff members of color. In K-12, discussions about ethnic studies requirements in public education are even more contentious. In states such as Texas, state school boards have become political battlegrounds, with conservatives accused of trying to [rewrite U.S. history](#). Texas's outsized influence on the publishing industry has resulted in [textbooks](#) that have, for example, downplayed the horrors of slavery and its role in the Civil War.

Calls to do more to support students of color on campus are not new – advocates have pushed for years for colleges and universities to take such steps as mandate ethnic studies programs, reduce the influence of European values and culture in curricula, hire and promote more nonwhite faculty members, and stop police brutality on campus. But the Black Lives Matter movement and protests this summer turned up the pressure on college leaders to address anti-Black racism specifically.

After a white police officer killed George Floyd by kneeling on his neck for eight minutes and 46 seconds in May, college presidents [shared statements](#) condemning racism and police brutality against Black men and women. Many drew criticism as meaningless platitudes.

"I care less about words and more about actions," Shaun Harper, executive director of the Race and Equity Center at the University of Southern California, said in a June interview.

"Institutions should hire more Black people to be deans and provosts," Harper said. "They should award tenure to more Black people. They should give more financial support and materials to Black studies programs and departments."

Few institutions have made ethnic studies part of general education requirements. In defending this decision, leaders at institutions such as the [University of Pennsylvania](#) have emphasized the importance of letting students choose what they do and do not want to study. But college leaders face increasing pressure from some students to rethink their curriculum with the aim of educating students to be antiracist.

At Cornell University, for example, President Martha Pollack recently asked the Faculty Senate to develop a for-credit class requirement on racism, bias and equity for all students. The move came in response to demands from a student-led campaign called Do Better Cornell. Pollack also [pledged to review](#) the entire university curriculum and develop new programs focused on the history of race, racism and colonialism in the U.S., among other actions.

At Emory University, President Gregory Fenves shared a [list of actions](#) the university is taking to address racial justice in response to student concerns. The actions include a general education requirement that focuses on race and ethnicity.

"The purpose of this requirement is to provide students with opportunities to learn about race and

ethnicity; political, economic and social exclusions; and the effects of structural inequality," Fenves wrote.

Similarly, at the University of Pittsburgh, first-year students are now required to take a new one-credit class called Anti-Black Racism: History, Ideology, and Resistance. Students will be graded on a "satisfactory/non-credit" basis.

"We hope that this course is a first step in helping students to recognize and challenge anti-Black policies and practices when they encounter them, and to develop strategies to be anti-racist in their everyday lives," Yolanda Covington-Ward, chair of the Department of Africana Studies at Pittsburgh, said in a [press release](#) announcing the new requirement this August. Covington-Ward led a committee of faculty and students who developed the course.

Within the Cal State system, one institution previously had an ethnic studies requirement.

Cal State, Northridge, had a comparative cultural studies requirement that included courses in Africana studies, American Indian studies, Asian American studies, Central American studies and gender and women's studies.

But an [executive order](#) from the CSU chancellor's office designed to make general education requirements at all Cal State campuses uniform so that students could more easily transfer between institutions risked forcing Northridge leaders to mandate only the general education requirements shared

by all campuses. These include English language communication and critical thinking, scientific inquiry and quantitative reasoning, arts and humanities, social sciences, and lifelong learning and self-development. Northridge argued for and won an exemption allowing it to retain its own longstanding general education requirement for "Comparative Cultural Studies/Gender, Race, Class, and Ethnicity Studies, and Foreign Languages" that was in place before the executive order.

Discussions about mandating ethnic studies are not exclusive to higher ed. K-12 institutions, too, have introduced new requirements for students. But they faced significant pushback from politicians who believe that educating students about social justice may inspire civil unrest or that liken it to political indoctrination. In Arizona, for example, former governor Jan Brewer **signed a bill** banning ethnic studies from public schools in 2010. Proponents of the bill argued that ethnic studies was designed only for students of a particular race and does not promote community integration. The bill, which targeted a popular Chicano studies program, was ruled to be **unconstitutional** by a U.S. District Court judge in 2017.

In California, too, mandating ethnic studies in K-12 institutions has proved difficult. In early October, Governor Newsom **vetoed a bill** that would have made ethnic studies a high school graduation requirement, citing disagreements about the proposed curriculum. Just a week before, President Donald Trump issued an **executive order** against federal funding being spent on race and sex "stereotyping and scapegoating," which has already caused some universities **to cancel** diversity, equity and inclusion programs.

As a result, this moment may be even more pivotal – and perilous.

"We're in a critical moment where young people are seeing injustice but not necessarily understanding the root and stem of this injustice. I think they want to learn," said Edmund Adjapong, assistant professor of education at Seton Hall University. "The challenge for institutions and faculty is to provide adequate, effective, sufficient content, curriculum and knowledge."

Students often don't have a good understanding of other cultures when they enroll in college and typically know little about Black history, Adjapong said. The U.S. doesn't have federal requirements for teaching Black history in K-12 schools, but an **increasing number of states** are mandating it.

States including Arkansas, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, New York, Mississippi and Rhode Island have passed laws requiring Black history to be taught in public schools with special Black history oversight committees. Other states such as Cal-

ifornia, Colorado, Michigan, South Carolina, Tennessee and Washington have passed educational laws regarding Black history with no special oversight committee.

Some state curricula focus on the civil rights movement and how it applies to other contemporary human rights issues, while others focus more on slavery and how slavery relates to African Americans today. Adjapong believes the curriculum is often too limited.

U.S. educational institutions are often very Eurocentric, Adjapong said. In his classroom, he likes to talk about the achievements of people who are racial or ethnic minorities. He explores a narrative about a particular person so that students can see themselves reflected in that person in some way, even if they do not share the same background.

Telling people's stories makes them relatable and accessible to more students. It also avoids the pitfall of talking about Black history or other nonwhite history only through a negative lens.

"When we talk about people of color, and Black people specifically, in K-12 schools it's often either about slavery or the civil rights era," Adjapong said. "Those things are important, but rarely do we see the positive being highlighted."

### **Getting Comfortable With Being Uncomfortable**

As a former K-12 teacher and now a professor, Adjapong feels he has a lot more freedom now to teach how he wants to teach than he did in school.

He encourages other higher education instructors to exercise their academic freedom. All instructors should talk about race in their classes, regardless of what they teach, he said.

"We need community right now," Adjapong said. "We need folks to learn from each other. We need folks to be empathetic. We need folks to lead with love and come to a common understanding that we don't all share the same experience and we need to learn about each other's experiences in order not to repeat the negative things that have been done to historically oppressed and marginalized people."

Address issues with students like the Black Lives Matter protests and the disproportionate impacts COVID-19 is having on Black and brown communities, Adjapong said. They will be on many students' minds.

"It's important to use this fall as an opportunity to dive in," Adjapong said. "Race is so deeply intertwined within our history that you can find a way to raise it in any subject."

Fear that the conversation might be uncomfortable is not a good excuse to avoid talking about these issues, he said. Many professors may also need to overcome the idea that they have to be a sage on a stage with all of the answers.

"It's OK for teachers to enter a space and feel vulnerable," Adjapong said. "You can tell students that you're not an expert, but you want to talk about something and have a conversation."

Adjapong uses these strategies

with his own students.

"I'm an educator, but I tell them I also want to learn as well. I want to hear from different perspectives," Adjapong said. "We're all trying to grow together and collectively, and I think that does break down some of the barriers that students have up around talking about race or social justice and the challenges that marginalized groups might face."

Successful classroom conversations are built on community, Adjapong said. You want students to feel comfortable enough to share their experiences, to ask questions and to not get defensive if they are called out for saying something other people find offensive or objectionable.

"We're coming into the space to learn and grow," Adjapong said. "I don't want to crucify anybody that is signaling that they're willing to grow and willing to learn. That's what we're here for."

Some students harboring negative perspectives in a classroom might not change their viewpoints.

"If you're having a conversation with a student and trying to get them to see something from a different perspective, I like to use data to highlight disparities, because you can't deny the data, right?" Adjapong said. "As long as they understand the reality, I've done my job. It's up to them if they want to be empathetic or do something about that."

### **Starting Early**

Talking about race with college students won't solve racism, Adja-

pong said. He and many educators who have worked in schools think that social justice and discussions about race shouldn't wait until college.

Tyson Marsh, associate professor in the School of Educational Studies at the University of Washington at Bothell, teaches in the Leadership Development for Educators program, which is for teachers who want to become school principals or K-12 leaders.

The program focuses on equity and justice. It encourages educators to understand and challenge the role of white supremacy in the education system, Marsh said.

There are school administrators who don't want to touch ethnic studies because they feel it is a political issue, but Marsh says that everything is political in education.

"Administrators who say it's a political issue are shooting themselves in the foot because they're already playing into the politics of it by saying they don't want to be involved," said Marsh.

"From my perspective, nothing is more political than ensuring that a monocultural curriculum continues," Marsh said.

When it comes to talking about race in schools, Marsh said it makes sense to start young. By the time students reach college, they have often already formed political identities based on influences such as their family and faith.

"There are students who grow up in a bubble, who don't go to diverse schools," said Marsh. "When they

## Is It Time for All Students to Take Ethnic Studies? (cont.)

get to college, they're going to be in for the shock of their lives."

Discussing racial issues and studying the culture of people of color are not the only ways that race can play a role in the classroom. Equitable instruction isn't colorblind, it is responsive to students' unique and diverse backgrounds, said Imani Goffney, assistant professor of mathematics education at the University of Maryland College of Education's Center for Mathematics Education.

Historically, Black and brown children have underperformed in math when compared with their white peers, but this does not mean the white students are inherently smarter or better at math, said Goffney. The mathematics curriculum taught in U.S. schools and the way it is assessed were designed by and for white people with little consideration for children of color who are already "swimming upstream," she said.

Closing the achievement gap is a hot topic among educators. But discussions often overlook the fact that the standards by which all chil-

dren are measured, the content that is taught, and the way it is taught, was designed from a white colonized point of view, said Goffney.

"Until we can acknowledge that, we can't really interrupt it," Goffney said. "We wrote these super white standards and spent decades telling Black kids that they weren't smart enough and they weren't good enough, and that was bad. We have to name that we did that as a system, as a country, so that we can then free ourselves to imagine things differently that create new opportunities for students to learn math in ways that are connected to their identities and promote justice."

The idea that it is mathematical standards that are falling short, rather than Black and brown students, is provocative to some educators because it challenges the status quo of measuring student success, Goffney said. She pointed to the work of Danny Martin, a professor of mathematics education at the University of Illinois at Chicago College of Education, who has spent years researching the role that race and identity play in the mathematical education of Black children. Instead of focusing on the notion that Black children are deficient academically, Martin urges teachers to accept that the brilliance of Black children is axiomatic – and use this mindset to inform their teaching.

"A lot of us are trying to imagine what teaching and learning could and should look like when we prioritize Black and brown children," Goffney said. "How does that shift

and change what we teach and how we teach it?"

Goffney tells students studying to be teachers that they should approach teaching with an asset lens especially when working with Black and brown students. She teaches them that they should assume that their Black and brown students are already brilliant. The teacher's role is to understand students' abilities in a nuanced way, then design learning opportunities to develop them further, she said. She wants all children to feel that they are "smart and powerful" at school.

"If we thought about teaching in this way, then we wouldn't have a low math group," Goffney said. "We wouldn't be putting students in the hall or having kids miss recess so that they can memorize more things. We would fundamentally redesign everything we do in education."

With funding from the National Science Foundation, Goffney developed a rubric for assessing whether teachers are employing equitable teaching practices in their classrooms. She also developed a curriculum entitled Mathematical Knowledge for Equitable Teaching (MKET) that is used as the elementary mathematics methods course in the elementary teacher certification program focused on equity and justice. Her colleagues at the University of Maryland now use both the rubric, the Mathematical Quality and Equity (MQE) Observational Rubric and the MKET curriculum. Despite having more than a decade of experience and being well qualified to teach at the

## Is It Time for All Students to Take Ethnic Studies? (cont.)

university level, some of Goffney's students have however questioned her qualifications simply because she is Black.

In student evaluations, Goffney said she frequently received worse feedback than her white peers as students question the relevance of her focus on equity, race/racism, justice, emerging bilingual students and students of color, and critique her inclusion of these topics in their course. They have even explicitly named that they see this as "selfish" because she's Black and wants to teach them about working productively with Black children. These student evaluations of her teaching were not consistent with her peer evaluations. This bias is something that many teachers and professors of color have experienced especially women faculty of color she said. Some student comments were dehumanizing, aggressive, and mean.

"It's problematic. But things are changing," said Goffney. Her colleagues in the Center for Mathematics Education, her department and College have been very supportive of her focus on these topics. The University of Maryland is currently in the process of redesigning teaching evaluations so that student evaluations are less influential in promotion and tenure decisions and are more appropriately described as students' giving their perspectives about the teaching, not evaluating the teaching as they are not pedagogical experts.

### **When Ignorance Holds Back Innovation**

Much of the academy is marked by a lack of understanding of the per-

spectives of Black people and people of color. Not only does it show up in the classroom, but it also shows up in research and the way faculty members treat other faculty members.

Many white professors don't have a grasp of Black history, faculty members say. Many lack an understanding of basic U.S. history – particularly from a perspective other than the predominantly white narrative that's long dominated classrooms.

It's a frustrating truth Lisa Cook, professor of economics and international relations at Michigan State University and director of the American Economic Association Summer Training Program, has experienced firsthand.

Cook discusses the situation through a topic she's researched: intellectual property.

In the mid-'90s, a popular theory took hold that nations could boost their economies by encouraging innovation – investing in science, promoting market competition and passing strong patent laws that would allow inventors to profit from their ideas. But Cook felt this theory was too simple. In her view, strong patent laws do not necessarily lead to greater innovation. Innovation also requires that inventors feel safe enough to do the work of inventing.

To test this theory, Cook began looking at patents filed during a period of history when Black people in America were unequal in the eyes of the law and were regularly threatened by violent acts of rac-

ism. She compared the number of patents Black American inventors filed with the number of patents white American inventors filed from 1870 to 1940.

It took Cook a decade to build her data set from scratch – cross-referencing the names of inventors with other records to determine their race. She amassed a list of 726 patents filed by Black inventors.

Looking at when these 726 patents were filed, it became clear racial violence and events such as the 1921 Tulsa, Okla., race massacre had a negative impact on Black inventors and the frequency with which they filed patents. That supported Cook's hunch that innovation hinges on the equality of a nation, not just strong patent laws.

Ready to publish, Cook submitted her manuscript to various journals. Typically, it might take two or three years to get a paper published.

Hers took a decade.

The manuscript went through round after round of critique and debate from reviewers who struggled to understand how a lynching in one state, for example, might affect a Black inventor in another state.

One reviewer asked Cook what she meant when she described one inventor as a former slave. Cook, who is Black, found the question baffling.

"It threw me for a loop," she said. "I sent it to four or five different people asking, 'Is this asking what I think it's asking? How would you

## Is It Time for All Students to Take Ethnic Studies? (cont.)

interpret this?"

In return, she was told she needed to answer the question, even if the reason she needed to explain it bordered on absurd.

Cook's paper languished in publishing purgatory for years despite gaining support from prominent economists, including three Nobel laureates. Realizing that her reviewers simply did not grasp the history she was describing, the manuscript evolved into a paper about Black history and race relations in the U.S., as well as economics.

Cook's research was finally published in the *Journal of Economic Growth* in 2014.

There's a toxic culture in economics that has particularly impacted women of color, Cook said. Sexism and discrimination are rife. The competitiveness of the field and pressure academics feel has resulted in several high-profile deaths by suicide of people "at the top of their game," she said.

"The economics profession has got to change itself in order to survive. We're not talking about increasing diversity for diversity's sake," said Cook. "We need to change this culture or there will be nobody who wants to participate in it."

Adding an ethnic studies requirement at any single university or university system won't address

all of the issues challenging faculty members of color on campus and in the classroom. But it could be a start.

So when California's governor signed AB 1460, many were thrilled. Abdullah, the former chair of pan-African studies at Cal State, Los Angeles, who spent so much time going back and forth to Sacramento, remembers well the moment she learned the bill would become law.

"I started getting all of these texts and calls," she said. "I was by myself and probably looked like a crazy woman cheering in the street, but this was, you know, a life span of doing this work." ■

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<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/10/22/adding-ethnic-studies-college-curricula-has-long-been-controversial-moment-different>

# What Happens Before College Matters

Experts agree higher education needs to do more to create equity for Black students. But more attention needs to be paid to barriers Black students face before they step foot on campus.

By **Madeline St. Amour** // October 20, 2020



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Students at a Chicago public school

Higher education is not the root of all equity gaps. But it can be a vehicle to lessen those gaps.

Historically, it has not been. Equity gaps between students based on their race, ethnicity and income persist and thrive at most institutions.

For Black students, simply accessing higher education remains difficult, particularly at four-year colleges. At some institutions, including public flagship and research universities, access has worsened for Black students in recent years.

Until real progress is made on this issue, among others, higher ed leaders' calls for diversity and inclusion, public statements on societal racism, and decisions to change building names or remove statues with racist legacies will continue to ring hollow.

One of the first steps in closing these gaps is to realize where they begin and why.

## Bad Odds From Birth

"As soon as you start measuring differences in any outcomes for Black and white kids, you would

find differences, you would find gaps," said Emma García, an economist at the Economic Policy Institute.

These "opportunity gaps" can be found when comparing any non-white, non-Asian American student with their white or Asian American peers, García said. They can also be found when comparing different socioeconomic classes.

Many of these gaps are driven by poverty, she said. And before a Black child is even born, the odds are stacked against them.



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For example, **maternal mortality rates vary greatly by race**. Black, American Indian and Alaska Native women are two to three times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than white women are. These statistics reflect a “failure of the system,” she said, noting the lack of a policy response to these gaps.

“We have a racial caste system in the United States,” said Leila Morsy, an academic lead of teaching and learning in the College of Medicine and Public Health at Flinders University in Australia.

Because of this structure, Black children are far more likely to encounter adverse childhood experiences, also known as ACEs. Research has shown that adults with several ACEs are more likely to face mental and physical health issues later in life than their peers with fewer or no ACEs.

These experiences include any frightening or threatening experiences, such as losing a home to a fire, losing a parent, witnessing violence or having a parent who is incarcerated, Morsy said.

If children have an adult with them who has the time and energy to explain the experiences and help the child make sense of them, they are more likely to have healthy coping mechanisms to deal with toxic stress.

In response to stress, the body will produce hormones like adrenaline and cortisol, which affect almost every organ and tissue in the body and trigger the fight-or-flight response. The hormones increase blood pressure and heart rates, dilate blood vessels, and also limit the parts of the brain that control memory and decision making.

If adverse childhood experiences

are frequent or sustained over long periods of time, then the child’s physiology fails to return to normal, Morsy said.

“This is a physiological response in your body where you become more prone to certain health and behavioral morbidities,” Morsy said. The result can be stunted brain growth, diminished activity in the prefrontal cortex, disrupted metabolism and blood pressure, and a compromised immune system.

People with more ACEs are more prone to viral infections, more likely to suffer respiratory infections and even more likely to become pregnant as teenagers.

**Research** has shown that low-income and Black children were more likely to have more adverse experiences than their white and more affluent peers by kindergarten.

Racial discrimination and housing segregation are just two factors that bake in the chances that Black children will experience ACEs early on. Having more ACEs does not determine whether a child will go to college, Morsy said, but it does increase the likelihood they won’t.

Which is why, when looking for solutions to help close equity gaps in higher education, early childhood education and interventions are important.

“I think of children’s educational outcomes and students’ higher education outcomes as symptoms of the conditions in which they are born and live and learn, more than the other way around,” Morsy said. “We should as a country look



## What Happens Before College Matters (cont.)

to remedying the social and racial inequities as a mechanism to improve people's access and outcomes in higher education, rather than the other way around."

### Enclosures and Hierarchy

The inequities and structural hurdles in society start early on for many Black children, and they continue throughout life.

In the K-12 system, various forces set up challenges for nonwhite students.

"Education itself has been a very, very violent place for Black students," said Damien Sojoyner, an associate professor of anthropology at the University of California, Irvine.

Black students are held back through various "enclosures," which Sojoyner describes as ways to corral Black freedom, especially if those freedoms run counter to state desires.

Examples within education include cultural enclosures. The increase in testing in K-12 helps make the case for removing subjects like art from the curriculum.

"Many of the Black schools were once havens for Black cultural expression," Sojoyner said. From the 1940s to the 1980s, many Black artists were fostered in that setting.

"Increasingly, as standards are set, Black culture is not part of the standard," he said. "If you understand that Black schools were also sites of rebellion and resistance and these cultural formations were integral to making that hap-

pen, then you understand why this happens." Another example is the carceral enclosure. Majority-Black high schools were policed before prisons were expanded in California, Sojoyner said. So in this case, what happened in education informed steps taken by the state.

Kevin Clay, an assistant professor of education at Virginia Commonwealth University, believes Black communities need to reclaim their K-12 schools.

"School has become just a place where students are conferred credentials," he said, but that doesn't protect Black students from societal inequities or teach them about why they exist.

"Black kids in poor schools have very little understanding of the history of social policy positions that have led to Black poverty," Clay said. "You see Black youth who typically blame themselves and blame their communities. They think about poverty as this one-to-one effect of hard work."

In his research, Clay has seen many Black students blame themselves if they realize they were underprepared for college, and that can contribute to mental health issues.

If students learned more history of how society fosters inequities, like the history of redlining or suburbanization, among other things, it

could lift some of the burden off their shoulders, Clay said.

"We have to stop talking about poverty as an isolated individual trait," he said. "We have to talk about class as a position from which we can collectively struggle."

Sojoyner disagrees. Many Black youth understand how the world works against them, he said.

But the way those in the United States understand poverty can make the situation difficult. For example, if a Black student receives a scholarship for college, they may feel it's a weight hanging over their head.

The scholarship is a cloud of expectations. It's also leverage that can be used against them if they speak up.

"Blackness cannot be in the same space with Western modes of being, unless it is in the hierarchal position of being subservient," he said.

What happens in K-12 can color a student's perspective of education for the rest of their lives. Priscilla Mayowa, a dual-enrollment student at North Hennepin Community College and Bemidji State University in Minnesota, expects to not feel welcomed in educational environments in this country.

Mayowa moved to the United

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*"We have to talk about class as a position from which we can collectively struggle."*

—Student response to UNCF survey

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## What Happens Before College Matters (cont.)

States from Nigeria for high school. She said she experienced many microaggressions from her teachers because she is Black and an immigrant. She feels that her teachers in high school, and now also in college, assume she doesn't know things. They also judge her for mistakes more harshly than they do her white peers, she said.

Mayowa struggles with impostor syndrome, the constant feeling of doubt about her skills, talents or accomplishments, and has a persistent internalized fear of being exposed as a "fraud," she said. That insecurity, combined with the different treatment by instructors, has hurt her learning experiences.

"Sometimes I don't turn in work early because I'm scared that my teacher will judge me for it," she said, adding that she would sometimes rather not turn in anything at all because at least her teachers expect that.

College advisers also tried to push Mayowa to study nursing, a program that enrolls many Black women, she said, which delayed her progress. She wants to go to law school, so she has been studying accounting.

But a relationship she formed with a Black staff member encouraged Mayowa to ask for help when she needs it and to push back when faculty are unfair.

By now, Mayowa is "used to the fact that this country is racist."

### House on Fire

Beyond the current structural inequities in society are the historical

inequities that created a ripple effect – redlining, which led to housing segregation that persists to this day. Policies and racism that prevented many Black soldiers from getting the benefits of the GI Bill. Banks that refused to make loans to Black people, or offered them loans at higher rates.

"Race amplifies the effects of poverty," said Anthony Abraham Jack, assistant professor of education at Harvard University's Graduate School of Education.

Black children are more likely to witness crime or other events that tax their mental bandwidth, he said. Some of his students had to pass through metal detectors every morning in high school. One student equated school with darkness because it couldn't afford to keep the lights on in the hallways.

"That was their orientation to learning every morning," he said.

Much of the disparity comes down to the differences in resources between schools. [Research](#) has found that predominantly white school districts received \$23 billion more in state and local funding in 2016 than predominantly nonwhite school districts. The average nonwhite district receives \$2,226 less per enrolled student than a white school district due to community wealth gaps.

"Higher education cannot immediately address these issues," Jack said. "But they can do two things: account for them in how they do admissions and prepare for those students, as well as lobby for initiatives and policies that aid in the

reduction of these equity gaps."

Colleges have to recognize that students don't come to them from a bubble, said Dominique Baker, assistant professor of education policy at Southern Methodist University. The root issue of it all is racism.

"It's part of a structural issue. It permeates all facets of life," Baker said.

Colleges can improve in various ways, but first they have to be intentional. Often, decisions are driven by public relations, she said.

Fixing these problems requires more than a few changes. It will take returning to why colleges were created in the first place and grappling with whether the fundamental structure needs to change.

"To a certain extent, their reason for being was never to address issues of poverty," Sojoyner said. "Rather, it was to completely socialize you to ascend your previous station in life or to civilize you – to become a vehicle that understands you shouldn't be impoverished, and if you are, that's your own fault."

Even some historically Black colleges and universities weren't founded with the best of intentions, he said. When Morehouse and Spelman Colleges were set up by the Rockefellers, they were intended to create a Black working class, which is why students initially received training certificates, not diplomas.

At the same time, the Rockefeller family founded the University of Chicago to create a white, male



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managerial class, he said.

Now – even before the COVID-19 pandemic – higher education has been facing a “rising tide of mass poverty” driven by shrinking numbers of wealthy, white high school graduates as the country’s population becomes increasingly Black and Latinx, causing a disjuncture between the affluent students who know the hidden language of higher education and lower-income students who seek degrees to get careers.

Many of the solutions touted by colleges are merely stopgaps, Sojoyner said. They don’t address the root issue of for whom these institutions were created.

“It looks weird now, because it’s like there’s a house on fire and someone is like, ‘Let’s send in the painters,’” he said.

It’s important to not look at all of

this purely from a deficit perspective, said Tiffany Jones, senior director of higher education policy at the Education Trust, a nonprofit advocacy organization focused on closing opportunity gaps.

“People can draw strength from what they’ve been through and their ability to overcome it,” Jones said. This knowledge has led many students toward activism, but it’s time for higher education to stop relying on that free labor and start making real changes, she said.

Jones and other experts said it’s important to note the effects that racism have on white students as well. While racism isn’t targeted at them, white students often learn in college that much of what they had been taught earlier in life and had taken for granted as truth was not accurate.

“The only emotional breakdowns I ever saw in college were from

white people responding to conversations about race,” she said. “Their whole paradigms were being disrupted, and it was traumatizing for them.”

### Can Higher Education Change?

Higher education can’t solve racism and societal inequity on its own. But the industry can take steps to be part of the solution.

It could advocate for more support for early childhood and K-12 programs like Head Start, which have been proven to help equity gaps, Morsy said.

Colleges also can better train the teachers who shape students’ minds in K-12.

They can do more to support and help Black students become teachers. Black students are less likely to face the kind of discipline that would take them out of the classroom and disrupt their learning if they have a Black teacher, according to research from Constance Lindsay, an assistant professor of education at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Black students who have at least one Black teacher in elementary school also are less likely to drop out of high school and more likely to attend college, Lindsay said.

To attract more Black students to pursue teaching careers, how such careers are promoted may need to change. Some Black students are not attracted to majoring in education because graduate schools of education are not typically diverse, Lindsay said, and they often don’t feature social justice frameworks

## What Happens Before College Matters (cont.)

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*"The only emotional breakdowns I ever saw in college were from white people responding to conversations about race."*

–Tiffany Jones

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in their curricula or embedded in campus life.

Ebony McGee, an associate professor of education at Vanderbilt University, said many students of color have an "equity ethic."

"Many Black students who were marginalized and have experienced racial suffering want to challenge those inequities through their work," McGee said, adding that money is often not the sole goal.

This shows up in science, technology, engineering and math majors especially, she said. Right now, engineering is advertised to students as a way to beat China or create artificial intelligence. Instead, colleges should teach engineering from an equity-minded perspective. Black students could use STEM degrees to fix the infrastructure or improve the environment in their communities, for example, she said.

"There is a totally different message that I think would attract a more diverse and more morally sound group of folks," McGee said.

College admissions tests are also barriers to a college education. Only about half of the nation's high schools offer calculus and physics courses, which many colleges require students to complete, said C. J. Powell, a higher education program analyst at the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human

Rights, a large coalition of civil and human rights groups that fights against discrimination.

Powell was a college counselor in rural North Carolina, where he saw low-income and Black students who have to jump many hurdles to get access to college.

Students need better counselors or access to a college prep pipeline so they can be aware of what they need to do to get into college and succeed, he said. High schools also must stop tracking certain students into courses that won't prepare them for college. And they should stop tracking those students into remedial courses that could delay their graduation.

Once students are in college, institutions need to ensure faculty and leadership are diverse so students are more open to engaging with them, Powell said. They also need to recruit more Black students, perhaps by looking at more and different high schools in their recruiting. Diversity offices or leaders also need better resources so they can "put some teeth behind policies."

Colleges also need to listen to their

Black students.

"A lot of institutions are, all of a sudden, renaming buildings," Powell said. "Now that they've done the thing that was always easy to do, they need to make sure they listen to students about the things that are not easy to do ... If they don't do that, this will all be lip service."

Jack believes colleges should also use holistic admissions and consider social and economic inequities in students' background. Black students often don't have long lists of extracurricular activities in which they participated in high school because they may have had to work to help support their families. And some may not have done well on admissions tests because they couldn't afford tutoring or to take the test multiple times.

"Race provides privileges and it denies privileges in a very, very real way," Jack said.

Jack also advocates for doing away with the hidden language of academia. A practice as simple as defining what office hours are can help decode language that more privileged students take for granted. Students also need to understand they can ask for help, which is something Jack has seen many struggle with.

If a student went to a high school that was overcrowded, with young

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*"Race provides privileges and it denies privileges in a very, very real way."*

– Anthony Abraham Jack

## What Happens Before College Matters (cont.)

teachers and few resources, he said they may be reticent to ask for help because they'll assume it doesn't exist.

"You can be extremely motivated, but if you don't have the opportunities to express that motivation into action, you enter college with an unpracticed hand," he said.

Several experts said colleges need to invest in mental health services, particularly diverse counselors and ones who are trained to be trauma-informed and culturally responsive.

Cost is also a big factor. College assistance programs that solely cover tuition aren't helpful because many students need funds to pay basic living and other expenses, Jack said.

Policy solutions include **canceling student loan debt** and **doubling the federal Pell Grant**, said Rosa García, director of postsecondary education and work development at the

Center for Law and Social Policy, a nonprofit that focuses on policy solutions for low-income people.

Colleges also need to center communities of color and social justice through their curriculums, García said. That can be done through strengthening African American studies departments and requiring all students to take a course on ethnic studies or racial justice.

This will also teach white students about racism and inequity, Jones said, so they can use their positions of power to create more change.

McGee was hesitant to bring up too many solutions. It shouldn't be the responsibility of Black people to find the answers to this problem, she said.

"White people aren't stupid. You got us into this mess – why is it our job to get us out?" she said. "Put your minds together and figure out how to make this world more equitable."

That can seem like a Herculean

task, but not because research presenting solutions for society to use doesn't exist. With all this talk, data and knowledge, how optimistic can one be that things will change in the future when so many problems remain intractable?

"Now is one of the moments to really uncover and realize the potential of what universities could be doing and how to struggle for actual freedom, so that everybody can live in a way that is not utopic, but is a just society," Sojoyner said.

He's optimistic, because he's seen attitudes shift in his lifetime. He researches education in the prison system and remembers going to the inaugural conference of Critical Resistance in 1997. Back then, people looked at you like you were crazy if you mentioned abolishing prison, he said.

"Fast-forward 23 years, and now that is the conversation," he said. "I can't even begin to explain what a seismic shift that is." ■

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