

# The Diversity Experiment at the Metropolitan State University of Denver

Alfredo Sanchez\* , Christopher Jennings

Journalism and Media Production Department, The Metropolitan State University of Denver, Denver, Colorado

Email: \*asanc141@msudenver.edu

**How to cite this paper:** Sanchez, A., & Jennings, C. (2022). The Diversity Experiment at the Metropolitan State University of Denver. *Advances in Journalism and Communication*, 10, 458-474.

<https://doi.org/10.4236/ajc.2022.104028>

**Received:** November 9, 2022

**Accepted:** December 26, 2022

**Published:** December 29, 2022

Copyright © 2022 by author(s) and Scientific Research Publishing Inc. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

---

## Abstract

This is an untarnished statement after events surrounding Black Lives Matter and the #Metoo movements of the past years. However, when we look at the reality of diversity inside the newsrooms in America, we quickly realize how far we are from a newsroom representing most ethnic sectors of the American population. This article looks closely at how diversity, when incorporated inside the journalism classroom, can improve the quality of news produced by journalists in the newsroom. The hypothesis is simple: an ethnically diverse newsroom is necessary for news organizations to provide a well-researched story that represents different voices. Society is changing. It is becoming more diverse. Newsrooms will fail and be left behind if they do not reflect this change. Joanne Bourgault, President, and CEO of Interviews, believes that: “Maintaining a diverse workforce and providing inclusive content are imperative for the longevity of any media platform” (Bourgault, 2021). Many experts agree that diversity can have a monumental impact on the quality of journalism because a more diverse staff is likely to produce a broader range of stories and perspectives. Our data will ultimately confirm that any successful efforts to improve diversity in the classrooms, like the one taken at The Metropolitan State University of Denver (MSU-Denver), will eventually have positive results in enhancing the diversity hiring practices of news media organizations. The news outputs these media organizations develop should accurately reflect the diverse society it serves. In gathering this content, an ethnically diverse journalist can and will contribute to better and more engaging content.

## Keywords

Diversity, Inclusion, Journalism, Education, Ethics

---

## 1. Introduction

The world of journalism is undergoing a fundamental transformation. From the

journalist's core fundamentals to the way we tell our stories. In the middle of this professional metamorphosis, newsrooms also change, with changes in the characters in front of the cameras, changes in the voices, and changes in how newsrooms are managed. To understand the new rules of the journalism game, we ought to pay close attention to the basic concept of diversity. Even though this is not an unfamiliar word, what is new is how it impacts newsrooms across the nation.

For decades, most newsrooms in America looked the same. With faces and voices that sounded the same, almost interchangeable. The multicultural shift in the U.S. population moving from an Anglo-dominant presence in most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to a more culturally open company in the present has impacted the country's political, social, and religious views.

The transformation has been challenging. Racial and political differences have played center stage in most cable news channels.

But society is changing. It is becoming more diverse. Newsrooms will fail and be left behind if they do not reflect this change.

The news outputs these media organizations develop should accurately reflect the diverse society it serves. In gathering this content, an ethnically diverse journalist can and will contribute to better and more engaging content.

Our data collected since 2018 will ultimately confirm that any successful efforts to improve classroom diversity, like the one taken at The Metropolitan State University of Denver (MSU-Denver), will eventually have positive results in enhancing the diversity hiring practices of news media organizations.

To prove our hypothesis, we focused on the following objectives:

- 1) Quantitative data analysis of enrollment numbers since 2018 at the Department of Journalism and Media Production (JMP) at MSU-Denver.
- 2) Comparison data analysis from different higher education institutions reveals a disparity between low diversity in the classroom and low numbers of hiring practices of news organizations.
- 3) Provide data that reveal that during the past decade, the U.S. has seen racial and ethnic disparities in higher education enrollment and attainment and gaps in earnings, employment, and other related outcomes for communities of color.

In addition, with this work, we want to showcase our experience at the Journalism and Media Production Department at The Metropolitan University of Denver. As a certified Hispanic Serving Institution, MSU Denver has taken the principles of diversity, inclusion, and equality to heart. "Diversity is one of the university's core values and one of the pillars of the university's Strategic Plan. Diversity at MSU Denver encompasses all the characteristics that make one individual or group different and recognizes the value of everyone and every group as part of an inclusive community of belonging" (MSU Denver, 2022).

There needs to be more than diversity to guarantee a more objective news-gathering process. Being objective must and should be a standard for all journalists regardless of ethnic background. However, diversity and inclusion, along with a well-researched and knowledgeable journalist, can identify potential bi-

ases and insensitive reporting. Bottom line: “Having a diverse team of journalists who can assist with reviewing news content can lessen the chance of mistakes that could harm the outlet’s brand” (Bourgault, 2021).

Our work illustrates that the effectiveness of inclusion and diversity in the classroom will eventually translate to a robust newsroom. We support and promote diversity and inclusion at the Journalism and Media Production Department at the Metropolitan State University of Denver. Moreover, while we are cognizant that this is not a top priority for many academic institutions and newsrooms across the country, we firmly believe that giving voice to the under-represented should be a standard not only in the media industry, but a cornerstone in every segment of society.

## 2. Methodology

To prove our hypothesis, we will implement the quantitative research methods of collecting and analyzing data provided mainly by The Metropolitan State University of Denver and other academic institutions and organizations such as the PEW Research Center. We aim to prove that if we increase the diversity in the students and faculty population of any high academic institution, this practice will have a specific positive impact on newsrooms across the United States and, after that, on the quality of news stories produced by such newsrooms.

## 3. Diversity at MSU Denver and Colleges in America

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, diversity is “A range of many people or things that are very different from each other”. As we focus on diversity, we must start in the classroom where our new journalists are trained. It is then that we ought to ask ourselves: “Are our students very different from each other?”

This paper aims to highlight the efforts of the Journalism and Media Production Department at The Metropolitan State University at Denver to increase the number of students with diverse cultural and racial backgrounds in the industry. Our goal is to reach that level of difference in our student population to support the essential elements of the definition of diversity: differentiation.

Our core belief is that a more diverse composition of our student population will stimulate the creation of a richer, more profound, and inclusive voice from our students. MSU (Metropolitan State University) Denver is the perfect laboratory to implement these changes.

In this paper, we will provide three basic steps any academic institution should follow to increase the diversity in the students’ population as well as in faculty and staff:

- 1) Pursue a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) certification from the U.S. Department of Education.
- 2) Recruit practices and enrollment of students from unrepresented communities in higher education.
- 3) Efforts to hire diverse faculty and staff.

#### 4. Our Road to a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI)

According to the White House Initiative on Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunity for Hispanics, a Hispanic Serving Institution must have an enrollment of undergraduate full-time equivalent students at least 25 percent Hispanic students, at the end of the award year immediately preceding the date of application.

The U.S. Department of Education estimated that in the fall of 2022, there were 4.2 million students enrolled in 451 Hispanic Serving Institutions.

Back in the early sixties, State Representative Roy Romer, considered by many as the “Father of MSU Denver”, helped craft the vision of a new college in the heart of Colorado with students that “rise or fall by their wits”. Time had passed since midnight on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1965, when 1189 students enrolled at MSU Denver, then known as Metropolitan State College.

In February 2019, MSU Denver became a Hispanic-Serving Institution partly for its efforts to serve DACA and undocumented students. Nevertheless, diversity does not end there. Nearly 80% of our students work while pursuing their education. In addition, 57% are first-generation undergraduate students (MSU Denver, 2021).

By 2021, MSU Denver had one of the most diverse student bodies in Colorado, with 8591, or 48.4%, undergraduate students of color.

However, when we focus on academic institutions around the country, their minority reality may look quite mixed. According to data from the National Center for Education Statistics, the overall college enrollment rate for Hispanic 18- to 24-year-old was higher in 2019 (36 percent) than in 2010 (32 percent) (see **Table 1**). The college enrollment rate for their American Indian/Alaska Native peers was lower in 2019 (24 percent) than in 2010 (41 percent). There was no measurable difference between these years’ college enrollment rates for White, Black, Asian, Pacific Islander, and of two or more races.

“Every year from 2010 to 2019, the college enrollment rate for those who were Asian was higher than the rates for those who were White, Black, and Hispanic. The college enrollment rate for those who were White was higher than the rate for those who were Black every year from 2010 to 2018; the two rates were not measurably different in 2019. The college enrollment rate for those who were White was also higher than the rate for those who were Hispanic every year from 2010 to 2019 except for 2016 when the rates were not measurably different” (Statistics, 2021).

**Table 1.** U.S. overall college enrollment rate 2010 vs. 2019.

	Total	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Pacific Islander	American Indian/ Alaska Native	Two or More Races
2010	41%	43%	38%		64%	36%	41%	38%
2019	41%	41%	37%	36%	62%	43%	24%	47%

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), October Supplement, 2010 and 2019.

Efforts to increase diversity on college campuses across the nation have encountered many challenges. Let us investigate California, where 2021 marked the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Proposition 209, which banned affirmative action in public institutions, including colleges and high schools; racial gaps have persisted and grown in California's higher education institutions. This shift in California enrollment practices hit minority groups hard, especially among Black and Latinx students. "In 2019, the UC (University of California) system admitted Black students at 16 percentage points lower than the overall rate. Latinx students were admitted six percentage points below that overall rate" (Kelliher, 2021).

Some milestones deserve mention. According to a 2021 news article by U.S. News, "Of the 20 ranked colleges with the highest percentage of Hispanic students in fall 2019, 14 are in Texas or California, though schools in three other states and Puerto Rico also appear on the list. Considering enrollment data, it may be no surprise that California and Texas, respectively, also have the largest Hispanic populations in the U.S. Colleges with 25% or more full-time Hispanic undergrads are designated by the U.S." (U.S. News, 2021).

In 2007, former MSU-Denver President Stephen Jordan, Ph.D., launched a Hispanic Serving Institution initiative (HSI) with a clear goal to increase Hispanic student enrollment to 25 percent of the student body. Back then, people who identified as Hispanics reached nearly 20 percent of Colorado's population, yet MSU Denver's student body was only 13 percent Hispanic.

Our institution's focus has always been to educate the students of Colorado, so we made efforts to ensure our student body reflected the people of Colorado, especially the Denver metro area counties. During the fall of 2018, Hispanic student enrollment reached 26.4 percent. In February 2019, we achieved HSI Designation with 5469 enrolled Hispanics, more than any other higher education institution in Colorado.

As of 2020, and according to The Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU), MSU Denver is among 539 colleges and universities committed to Hispanic higher education success in the U.S., Puerto Rico, Latin America, and Spain (The Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU), 2021).

As the Latinx population continues to grow in the U.S., more predominately white institutions are transforming into HSIs (Hispanic Serving Institutions), federally designated as serving a student population of at least 25% Hispanic. In 2010, there were 311 registered HSIs in the U.S.; in 2020, the number reached 539.

As an organization, one can wonder what it means to be a Hispanic Serving Institution. MSU Denver has launched several efforts and initiatives focused on creating an environment that provides support to Latino students. Resources are available for DACA recipients, and international and immigrant students are helped to transition to the new academic environment. The university also offers Spanish-friendly content on its official website to help with this transition. Hispanic students face an uphill battle in corporate America, especially since only 22% of Hispanic workers have a bachelor's degree or higher, and 10% have

an associate degree, according to Dr. Antonio Flores, president, and CEO of HACU.

“They are the least educated segment of the workforce, but more than half of workers joining the force are now Hispanic. For America to remain competitive, funding for this is necessary”, he added (Herber, 2021).

## 5. Recruit and Enroll Students from Unrepresented Communities in Higher Education

More than 90% of the student population at MSU Denver is originally from Colorado. Since this institution looked inside its classroom and committed to diversity, striving toward this goal means engaging in a conversation, confronting, and grappling with our diverse personas. Students are asked to engage in a variety of roles each day. Our students are workers, parents, children, non-native speakers, and retirees. They are also from culturally diverse backgrounds. Often, they play multiple roles at one time; when their work, family, language, and learning intersect. Many of our first-generation students confide in faculty to walk them through the fields of Academia. Faculties teach and advise but often take a parental role with their students.

But in practice, we needed to recruit our students in Colorado, where minority students were underrepresented in higher education. According to the Colorado Department of Education, 81.7% of the Class of 2021 graduated last spring, a slight decrease from the previous year and the first drop in the four-year graduation rate in over ten years (Colorado Department of Education, 2022).

74.2% of the Hispanic students enrolled in Colorado’s high school graduated in the Spring 2021. This percentage is way below those Asian students (91.5%) and Anglo students (86.65), but when we look at the dropout rate during the same period, the high speed belongs to Hispanic students (2.8%), African Americans (2.6%) and American Indians (3.65%).

Based on the high school graduation data, MSU Denver recruitment efforts focused on the top school districts in Colorado with the most significant presence of Hispanic students: Denver (33.795), Jefferson (13.53%), and Adams-Arapahoe (34.85%). In addition, MSU-Denver facilitates the transfer process from community colleges around Colorado to MSU-Denver. More than half of our student population comes from a Colorado community college.

Most of JMPs (Journalism and Media Productions) recruiting efforts are built on visits to high schools and community colleges, mainly the Community College of Denver (CCD), as well as our Open House events. We participate in Open House opportunities at CCD and partner with their Journalism and Mass Media department to guest in classes there. MSU Denver’s Student Media has also been a fantastic way to recruit women, minorities, and non-traditional students. Our faculty advisors work with students from across campus, and the Met Report is advised in two different languages—English and Spanish. This was part of the Broadcast Journalism program’s goals to increase our Hispanic student headcount. These efforts have shown effectiveness as our ethnic stu-

dent headcount by race has experienced steady growth since 2019 (see [Table 4](#)).

Additional recruiting comes from summer programs bringing students from area K 12 into our classrooms. The first program was Denver Youth Journalism Day which introduced students at various levels to participate in a college journalism course topic. The second program, Write on Sports, is new and brings middle-school students to campus during the summer for a weeklong program, and then the second group of high school students to campus in the spring semester. Both programs recruit students from lower-income schools in the Denver Metro area.

Colleges and universities are still evaluating the pandemic's impact on enrollment. What is clear is that, for many students, education priorities took a back seat during the 2020 and 2021 academic years in response to a reduction of income, illness expenses, and an overall low economy. Without the pandemic limitations, we believe additions such as the acquisition of the Auraria Media Center to the JMP Department will contribute to a more significant headcount increase in all areas.

## **6. Efforts to Hire Diverse Faculty and Staff**

MSU Denver has undertaken several measures to improve the quality and diversity of faculty. Recently the university approved a reduction in the teaching workload for all 585 full-time faculties. A reduced teaching load will enable faculty to invest time and energy in student interactions outside the classroom. Purposeful, high-quality informal student-faculty interactions (e.g. research mentoring, serving together on committees, social interactions at campus activities, career advising, etc.) are known to improve student success, including retention and graduation.

Additionally, this practice would improve the University's ability to recruit and retain diverse faculty. Finally, the policy also will give faculty more time to participate in activities that have been shown to increase student enrollment, such as recruiting high school students and students at two-year colleges.

As a broadcasting Latino instructor, dealing with diversity is a challenging task. Our student population has its own biases linked to an inherited set of values and beliefs that are constantly questioned. Social, racial, and political issues directly impact this vulnerable student population. Students who work, raise their children, or walk into our classroom for the first time in their entire family are tested to prioritize those issues before their education.

Our faculty must walk along with their students through these challenges. One must encourage students to participate in class discussions and ask them to reflect on what they have learned about other ethnicities, jobs, social issues, racial inequality, and what level of comfort or discomfort they feel as we engage in such discussions. Encouraging students to "use your voice" becomes a mantra.

William Koolsbergen, a humanities professor at LaGuardia Community College in New York City, one of the most culturally diverse campuses in the coun-



try, believes faculty involvement in the diversity discussion is a foundation for the success of any academic institution striving toward diversity.

“The inherently collaborative nature of the learning community paradigm offers faculty an opportunity to restructure curricula to include diversity issues. The pedagogical strands that most evidence themselves in such communities (cooperative and collaborative learning, service learning, etc.) are natural modalities for diverse ways of seeing, hearing, and knowing. The supportive nature of the faculty toward one another and students in the community establishes the perfect forum for the difficult but necessary discussions that we must have if our democracy is to generate new ways of dealing with racism, classism, heterosexism, ageism, and variety of ills that plague us” (Koolsbergen, 2001).

## 7. A Closer Look at Our Programs at JMP (Journalism and Media Production)

Students who choose to major (or minor) programs in the Journalism and Media Production Department (JMP) at MSU Denver come from vast and diverse backgrounds. Our nontraditional students are commuters from all over Colorado, primarily in the front range/metropolitan area. Many of our students balance work, home, and academic life at an increasingly prohibitive cost of living in the metro Denver area.

The headcount data brought us some humbling numbers and some numbers that met early goals set for serving students at an equal level. Overall, the JMP headcount has shifted and gone down since our program changes in 2019, but most are steadily increasing. It is not easy to evaluate because, before 2019, Broadcast Journalism was still projecting numbers with the Communication Arts and Sciences Department. In addition, before 2019, the two programs were Technical Communications (TC) and Journalism (JRN) with concentrations rather than programs. Therefore, the headcount for TC in 2014-15 was 185, and in 2020-21, it is 30, representing the remaining students in those concentrations from previous catalog years. When adding up the revamped programs for TC with the remaining TC numbers, the headcount is 162 in 2020-21 (a difference of 23 from 2014 to 2021).

The lower headcount in TC is consistent with the phasing out of the program and the concentrations. Journalism (JRN) went from a headcount of 405 in 2014-15 to 137 in 2020-21. The lower headcount was expected in Journalism from the 2019 program changes alone. However, the public perception of journalism has also taken a hit with changes in the industry and fake news from non-journalism entities.

The journey at JMP has been one filled with optimistic results facing the future. Regarding the academic year of 2017-2018 (see [Table 2](#)), only one student was enrolled in our broadcast journalism program. During the 2020-2021 academic years, we had 64 students enrolled, and data from the summer semester had yet to be included.

Our latest statistics show that the diversified ethnic background of our stu-



dents is a direct consequence of the efforts by MSU Denver to serve as an academic institution where a more diverse student population is welcome. Just look at the impact on the Hispanic and Latino populations that experienced steady growth since the 2017-18 academic years (see **Table 3**).

## 8. Our Recruitment Practices

Most of JMPs (Journalism and Media Productions) recruiting efforts are built on visits to high schools and community colleges, mainly the Community College of Denver (CCD), as well as our Open House events. We participate in Open House opportunities at CCD and partner with their Journalism and Mass Media department to guest in classes there. MSU Denver's Student Media has also been a fantastic way to recruit women, minorities, and non-traditional students. Our faculty advisors work with students from across campus, and the Met Report is advised in two different languages—English and Spanish. This was part of the Broadcast Journalism program's goals to increase our Hispanic student headcount. These efforts have shown effectiveness as our ethnic student headcount by race has experienced steady growth since 2019 (see **Table 4**).

**Table 2.** Student headcount (unduplicated) in the program.

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21*
BJRN majors				1	36	61	64
% Change from previous year						69.44%	4.92%

Note: \*2020-21 data pulled before the end of the 2020 summer term.

**Table 3.** Student headcount by race/ethnicity.

Race/Ethnicity	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21*
African American				0	6	9	6
American Indian/Alaskan Native				0	0	0	0
Asian							
Hispanic/Latino				1	12	22	24
International Student				0	0	0	0
Missing/Unknown				0	0	0	0
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Island				0	0	0	0
Two or More Races					3	4	4
White					15	26	30
Program Major Totals				1	36	61	64

Note: \*2020-21 data pulled before the end of the 2020 summer term.

**Table 4.** Student headcount by race/ethnicity.

% Student by Race	2019	2020	2021*
% African American	16.67%	14.75%	9.38%
% American Indian/Alaskan Native	0%		
% Asian			
% Hispanic/Latino	33.33%	36.07%	37.50%
% International Student			
% Missing/Unknown			
% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Island			
% Two or More Races	8.33%	6.56%	6.25%
% White	41.67%	42.62%	46.88%

Note: \*2021 data pulled before the end of the 2020 summer term will likely change in the future.

Additional recruiting comes from summer programs bringing students from area K-12 into our classrooms. The first program was Denver Youth Journalism Day which introduced students at various levels to participate in a college journalism course topic. The second program, Write on Sports, is new and brings middle-school students to campus during the summer for a weeklong program, and then the second group of high school students to campus in the spring semester. Both programs recruit students from lower-income schools in the Denver Metro area.

Colleges and universities are still evaluating the pandemic's impact on enrollment. What is clear is that, for many students, education priorities took a back seat during the 2020 and 2021 academic years in response to a reduction of income, illness expenses, and an overall low economy. Without the pandemic limitations, we believe additions such as the acquisition of the Auraria Media Center to the JMP Department will contribute to a more significant headcount increase in all areas.

## 9. Minorities' Underrepresentation in the Media

Now, let us move from our classrooms to the newsrooms. In general, people of color face a steep reality compared to their Anglo America. Compared with white Americans, minority groups like Latinos or African Americans earn less, face more education and healthcare barriers, and are underrepresented in higher-paid areas of the workforce and popular culture.

As we can infer, the lack of diversity in the classroom is a mirrored image of the status of diversity in newsrooms across the United States. If we take a closer look at the Hispanic experience in the media, we will find that brown faces are missing from the main media narrative. A 2019 report on the underrepresentation of Latinos in the media industry, issued by the U.S. Government Accounta-

bility Office (GAO), found that Latinos represented only 12% of workers in the news media. Media had the lowest rate of any industry in the country, where Latinos represent 20% of the population (see **Table 5**) (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2019).

U.S. Representative Joaquin Castro, a Democrat from Texas's Twentieth District, spoke about the lack of diversity in the media during an interview for *The New Yorker* magazine in September 2021. "I see this as a foundational problem for the Latino community and other communities in the United States—that we have been left out of much of the telling of American history and our state histories, including in my home state of Texas" (Castro, 2021).

According to a 2016 Pew Research Center study, when we look closely inside local TV newsrooms in the U.S.: "Blacks made only minimal gains in employment in 2015. According to the latest data from the Radio Television Digital News Association, the share of television newsroom employment filled by blacks remained steady at 10% in 2013 and 11% in 2014. The share of black news directors remained at 2013 levels at 4%" (Vogt, 2016).

The GAO study findings reemphasized the perception of lacking alternative faces in mainstream media. The analysis found a modest increase in the overall representation of Hispanics in the media industry in recent years. "Hispanic representation in the media industry remained at an estimated 11 to 12 percent of the media industry workforce from 2014-2019, while Hispanics comprised 16 to 18 percent of workers in all other industries combined over the same time. Similarly, media company reports to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) stated Hispanic representation in their workforce remained at 10 percent from 2014-2018, the most recent years of EEOC data available" (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2019).

As the U.S. population continues to be diversified, there are efforts to increase the employment of a diverse workforce that reflects alternative stories telling dramas on screen and in print. A study of 1000 popular movies from 2007-2019 found that only about 5% of all speaking characters on screen and 4% of directors were Hispanics.

The GAO study also found that Hispanic representation varied across different subsectors of the media industry (see **Table 6**). "The population's greatest representation was in the motion picture and video industries, at 16%. Hispanics' lowest representation (8%) was in the subsector for newspapers, periodicals, books, and directory publishers" (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2019).

**Table 5.** Estimated percentages of Hispanic workers (2014-2019).

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Media Industry	11%	11%	12%	12%	12%	12%
All Other Industries	16%	17%	17%	17%	18%	18%

Note: GAO analysis of American Community Service (ACS) data from the US Census Bureau. GAO-21-105322.

**Table 6.** Estimated percentage of Hispanic workers by media industry subsector (2019).

Motion Picture	Sound Recording	Broadcasting	Informational Services	Newspapers Books
16%	15%	14%	9%	8%

Note: GAO analysis of American Community Service (ACS) data from the US Census Bureau. GAO-21-105322.

## 10. Solutions that Address Diversity

### 10.1. Literature Review and Study Framework

So, how do we address and resolve the problem of a lack of diversity in the classrooms and later in the newsrooms? To understand the lack of diversity in classrooms across America, one must first understand why minorities often struggle to access education.

In her book “Minorities on High Education”, Ryu argued that as of 2007, 27.4 percent of Americans aged 25 to 29 had obtained at least a bachelor’s degree, and an additional 8.1 percent had earned an associate degree. “The current bachelor’s degree attainment rate has shown slight improvement in 20 years—it is up by five percentage points since 1988. These average rates conceal large disparities among subgroups. Asian Americans aged 25 to 29 are at the top, with 58 percent holding a bachelor’s degree, followed by whites (33 percent), African Americans (17 percent), Hispanics (11 percent), and finally, American Indians (9 percent). These large gaps are unlikely to change without reducing disparities at each transition point in the educational pipeline” (Ryu, 2009).

Previous publications characterized the lack of minorities in higher education as a “severe” (Astin, 1982). This lack of minority representation was mainly found in engineering, biological sciences, and business fields. In this context, MSU Denver emerges as a clear alternative for underrepresented sectors of society to access higher education. Let us investigate how this urban institution offers what few others have.

In the classroom, faculty must provide an open safe space where students can engage in a conversation about diversity. Faculty must also reflect openness in the course’s content, from providing Spanish-friendly content in the syllabus to striving to hire diverse faculty. In addition, being a commuter campus in the city, we offer classroom, hybrid, and online options to fit appropriately for our courses. We do our best to meet students where they are at.

In November 2021, Denver local media members met with National Association of Black Journalists (NABJs) representatives to discuss the need to increase minority faces in their newsrooms. Richard Prince, who covers diversity issues in the news business, published a write-up of the weekend for his website. “The news managers in Denver say they are eager to diversify their newsrooms further, but that their dwindling numbers have turned off potential applicants, who would prefer to go places where more diversity already exists”, he wrote.

Cory Hutchins, a writer for “Inside the News in Colorado”, a weekly newsletter distributed among Colorado journalists, highlighted some of the critical topics facing these newsrooms:

- “KUSA executives told the NABJ group that they are ‘trying to elevate minority voices in the newsroom’, looking for executive producers, and now conducts a weekly audit of how many people of color appear in news reports and whether they are shown portraying negative stereotypes.”
- “The NABJ reps were told that KMGH aimed to make one-third of its contracts with minority business owners. The station execs said that more account executives of color would help minority businesses in the city. KMGH is also looking for a Black meteorologist. NABJ said it wanted ‘Black anchors on the desk in prime time, and challenged them with Black managers at the top’, the board members said.”
- *Colorado Sun* editor Dana Coffield “told the group it aimed to be ‘less white and less 50’, according to the NABJ board members. *The Sun’s* staff of 20 includes four Asian Americans, one Cuban American, and one whose first language is American Sign Language, in addition to Tatiana Flowers, its inequality and general assignment beat reporter. In addition, multi-dimensional artist R. Alan Brooks, son of veteran business journalist Rodney Brooks, draws a comic strip”. Flowers and Brooks are Black. *The Sun* also has a Mexican American advertising executive and two LGBTQ staff members.

## 10.2. Comparison Data Analysis among College Institutions

A report by the U.S. Department of Education in 2016 concluded that most high school graduates apply to at least one college or enroll in open-enrollment institutions. Nevertheless, Hispanic and black students enroll in college (particularly four-year colleges) at a lower rate than their white and Asian counterparts.

However, data also indicate that two-year institutions are still a standard postsecondary option for Hispanic high school graduates. “Fewer Hispanic and black high school graduates enroll in four-year colleges than white and Asian high school graduates, but two-year college is a common pathway for Hispanic students” (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLSs) releases estimates from the Current Population Survey (CPS) on the percentage of high school graduates between the ages of 16 and 24 who enrolled in college the following fall. According to the BLS report for 2015, the college enrollment rate of recent Asian (83 percent) and white (71 percent) graduates was higher than the rate for their Hispanic (69 percent) and black (55 percent) counterparts.

## 10.3. Why Diversity Matters

As the United States becomes more racially and ethnically diverse, and as companies from Wall Street to Silicon Valley grapple with how to build workforces that reflect these changing demographics, Americans have a complicated, even contradictory, set of views about the impact of diversity and the best way to achieve it.

According to Juliana Menasce Horowitz, a researcher at the Pew Research Center, while most corporations in the U.S. “value workplace diversity, few en-

dorse the idea of taking race or ethnicity into consideration in hiring and promotions” (Horowitz, 2019).

The article concluded that White, African American, and Hispanic adults are about equally likely to say it is good that the U.S. population is racially and ethnically mixed. “Majorities across these groups say this has positively impacted U.S. culture. However, black Americans value workplace diversity and school integration more than whites and Hispanics” (Horowitz, 2019).

When confronted with the fundamental question of whether diversity matters in an academic institution, one can only answer with an undisputable affirmation, data analysis collected at UCLA’s Higher Educational Research Institute by Silvia Hurtado in the late 80s and early 90s in a study that examined the influence of faculty gender and race/ethnicity on classroom strategies and curriculum supporting diversity, found that “Faculty gender distinctly impacted students in terms of how classes were taught and course content. There was a meaningful relationship between student growth and various educational outcomes and activities during college associated with a diverse student body and faculty” (Hurtado, 2001).

To promote diversity, one must first accept racism and the relationship between microaggressions (individual level) and macroaggressions (societal level). As coined by Dr. Chester Pierce in the 1970s, racial microaggressions are the subtle ways racism manifests in the lives of minority groups and their communities.

“Saying to a Latinx person with a sense of surprise that they are ‘articulate’, crossing the street to avoid walking by a Black person, or overlooking a Native American standing at a counter and serving the person behind them are all examples of common and well-documented microaggressions. Microaggression is often expressed subtly, which sometimes makes it more difficult to interpret and respond to them. This lack of clarity is referred to as attribution ambiguity). The consistency of these messages can lead BIPOC to question if they deserve mistreatment or have done something to justify the micro aggressors’ actions” (Harris, 2021).

## 11. Conclusion

Building a post-pandemic community that fosters diversity and welcomes all students will become a focus. As we have witnessed recently, our societal racial tension has increased. Giving classrooms and newsrooms a new challenge: how to deal with an ethical and cultural gap that post two fundamental questions, is diversity being adequately addressed in classrooms and newsrooms across the United States? and how best to communicate the messages from multiple minority groups?

We should look at these two questions from an academic and journalist perspective. Minority students in educational institutions will welcome familiar faces and voices in power positions. Faculty and students from the same ethnic backgrounds will facilitate this transition.

Minority journalists and students need success stories from members of their communities, so they can validate their own experiences and journeys. One can only hope these efforts will translate into organizations better equipped to listen and speak to multiple ethnicities and culturally different communities. Minority groups, especially Hispanics, are a growing voice in this country. Just look at the latest census report to confirm this trend. If organizations do not adjust, they will find themselves out of touch with society's changes and the people they are trying to serve.

Higher education is a crucial pathway for social mobility in the United States. At roughly 2.5 percent, the unemployment rate for college graduates is about half of the national average. Among Hispanics, adults who had only completed a high school diploma earned \$30,329, compared with \$58,493 for those who had completed four-year college (or higher). Among blacks, adults with a high school diploma earned \$28,439 compared with \$59,027 for those with a bachelor's degree (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Talent is everywhere. We need to find it in places we are not used to looking for talented people. Minority communities are that place.

## 12. The Status of the U.S. Newsroom

Looking closely at the newsrooms across America, we discover a less diverse reality. Newsroom employees are more likely to be white and male than U.S. workers. There are signs of a turning tide: younger newsroom employees show greater racial, ethnic, and gender diversity than their older colleagues, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data (Griego, 2018).

The diverse voices within the newsrooms across America continue to lack input from minority groups. More than three quarters (77%) of newsroom employees, those who work as reporters, editors, photographers, and videographers in the newspaper, broadcasting, and internet publishing industries, are non-Hispanic whites, according to the analysis of 2012-2016 American Community Survey data (Griego, 2018).

According to the U.S. Department of Education, during the past 50 years, the U.S. has seen "racial and ethnic disparities in higher education enrollment and attainment, as well as gaps in earnings, employment, and other related outcomes for communities of color" (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

While the percentage of the population with a high school diploma has risen over time for Hispanic, black, white, and Asian adult U.S. residents, the bachelor's degree attainment gap has widened for black and Hispanic adults compared to white adults. Specifically, the bachelor's degree attainment gap has doubled, from 9 to 20 percent for Hispanic residents since 1974 and 6 to 13 percent for black residents since 1964. This significantly affects students' lives, among all races and ethnicities, there are significant gaps in post-college earnings and employment between those with only a high school diploma and those with a bachelor's degree (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).



What lies ahead is a monumental challenge. Society and its voices must welcome a new and more diverse character. A journalist with a more insightful and robust voice about social inequalities, racial conflict, and sexual identification, among multiple issues. Newsrooms that resist this new character are destined to become infertile and irrelevant. A unique voice must rise from the dusk of an ethnocentric Anglo society that has silenced different, predominantly minority voices for centuries.

As we closely look at the status of newsrooms across America, we must recognize that the distance in college opportunities has contributed to diminished social and financial mobility. This is particularly true for people of color, who share many of the same childhood and educational experiences as low-income and first-generation college students. For instance, research shows that one of the factors most likely to negatively contribute to the racial disparities and ethnic gap in college completion is elementary and high school segregation. Studies have shown the impacts associated with racial and economic isolation in schools and neighborhoods, such as more significant stress that interferes with learning and less familiarity with information and skills necessary for future success. Students of color also, on average, have less access to advanced high school coursework, and counselors focused on preparing students for enrolling in postsecondary education.

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

### References

- Astin, A. W. (1982). *Minorities in American Higher Education. Recent Trends, Current Prospects, and Recommendations*. Jossey-Bass Inc.
- Bourgault, J. (2021, December 1). *World Economic Forum*.  
<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/12/diversity-in-news-media/>
- Castro, J. (2021, September 21). The Exclusion of Latinos from American Media and History Books. *The New Yorker*.
- Colorado Department of Education (2022). *Colorado's Four-Year Graduation Rate Dips for First Time in a Decade*. Colorado Department of Education.
- Griego, E. (2018, November 2). *The Pew Research Center*.  
<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/11/02/newsroom-employees-are-less-diverse-than-u-s-workers-overall>
- Harris, D. F. (2021, April 15). *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education*.  
[https://www.diverseeducation.com/opinion/article/15108908/racelighting-three-common-strategies-racelighters-use#\\_ftn1](https://www.diverseeducation.com/opinion/article/15108908/racelighting-three-common-strategies-racelighters-use#_ftn1)
- Herber, L. (2021, October 25). *HACU's 35th Annual Conference Begins with Tips on Student Success Programs*.  
[https://www.diverseeducation.com/institutions/msis/article/15280463/hacus-35th-annual-conference-begins-with-tips-on-student-success-programs?utm\\_campaign=5663&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=Eloqua](https://www.diverseeducation.com/institutions/msis/article/15280463/hacus-35th-annual-conference-begins-with-tips-on-student-success-programs?utm_campaign=5663&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Eloqua)

- Horowitz, J. M. (2019, May 8). *Pew Research Center*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org>
- Hurtado, S. (2001). *Linking Diversity and Educational Purpose: How Diversity Affects the Classroom Environment and Student Development*. Harvard Education Publishing Group.
- Kelliher, R. (2021, November 8). *Leadership and Policy*. *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*. [https://www.diverseeducation.com/leadership-policy/article/15281186/25-years-later-what-californias-affirmative-action-ban-means-for-higher-education?utm\\_campaign=5675&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=Eloqua](https://www.diverseeducation.com/leadership-policy/article/15281186/25-years-later-what-californias-affirmative-action-ban-means-for-higher-education?utm_campaign=5675&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Eloqua)
- Koolsbergen, W. (2001). Approaching Diversity: Some Classroom Strategies for Learning Communities. *Peer Review*, 4, 4.
- MSU Denver (2021). *MSU Denver*. <https://www.msudenver.edu/about>
- MSU Denver (2022). *Office of Diversity and Inclusion*. <https://www.msudenver.edu/diversity/>
- Ryu, M. (2009). *Minorities in Higher Education*. American Council on Education.
- Statistics, N. C. (2021). *Post Secondary Education, College Enrollment Rates*. U.S. Department of Education.
- The Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU)* (2021). [https://www.hacu.net/hacu/HACU\\_101.asp](https://www.hacu.net/hacu/HACU_101.asp)
- U.S. Department of Education (2016). *Advancing Diversity and Inclusion in Higher Education*. U.S. Department of Education.
- U.S. Government Accountability Office (2019). *Workforce Diversity: Analysis of Federal Data Shows Hispanics Are Underrepresented in the Media Industry*. U.S. Government.
- U.S. News (2021, May 12). *20 Colleges with the Most Hispanic Students*.
- Vogt, N. (2016). *African American News Media: Fact Sheet*. Pew Research Center. <https://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/13/2016/06/30143308/state-of-the-news-media-report-2016-final.pdf>