Making the Case for Real Diversity: Redefining Underrepresented Minority Students in Public Universities

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Abstract

Immigration to the United States has been a major catalyst for population growth and is the significant factor in the changing racial/ethnic composition of our population. The specific changes in the racial/ethnic mix in United States in recent times are due in large part to a surge in immigration from diverse sending countries. However, much of the terminology that continues to be used in the context of higher education to describe diversity in the student populations are anachronistic and serves actually to occlude true diversity. We argue that variables such as country of birth of the student, the country of origin of the parent, and parental educational achievement, all have significant impact on the academic progress and success of undergraduate underrepresented minority students. These are variables that should be used to disaggregate the traditional racial and ethnic categories, to really serve the needs of the increasingly diverse student body. These are not data typically collected by institutions of higher education, but without which appropriate needs assessments and targeted interventions cannot occur.

Anachronistic Terminology Fails to Define Diversity in Today's College Student

There is an expansive literature identifying potential factors that are argued to produce and sustain the academic achievement gap faced by minority groups in the United States. Equally, there have been waves of educational policies and reforms directed toward addressing and ameliorating such factors. It is beyond the scope of this article to review and/or summarize this history. While terms such as *multicultural education, culturally sensitive pedagogy*, and *diversity and inclusivity* are widely used throughout the abundant literature, research assessing the academic achievement gap, as well as the intervention programs directed toward ameliorating its known contributing factors, continues to use outdated population categories such as "Latino," "Hispanic," and "Black" as racial/ethnic and cultural descriptors that fail to reflect the compositions of ethnically diverse populations as they occur today. How do we then explain or justify the use of these restrictive terms to describe highly complex multicultural/multiethnic diverse populations and their subethnic groups? Such questions have recently become the focus of attention as these restrictive terms inaccurately define the

ethnic composition of today's increasingly diverse U.S. undergraduate college student populations. The use of such restrictive and unmatched terms obscures what these confining categories attempt to describe, and subsequently creates more ambiguity as to what "diversity" actually represents in both smaller simplex and larger complex categories of multiethnic populations. It is our opinion that these monolithic descriptors of the college undergraduate minority student populations, in fact, constrain the definition of diversity and limit any valid extrapolations on data targeted to design interventions for educational reform. Thus, the term *diversity* as it is used today to label these very diverse multiethnic and subethnic groups inadequately represents all ethnicities in

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which educational interventions for diverse populations should be designed (i.e., a nonmatch to sample educational prescription). Treating the increasingly diverse college undergraduate student population with a "one prescription for education fits all approach" may serve only to maintain, or perhaps even widen, the current academic achievement gap.

In the current context of intense scrutiny regarding educational outcomes and assessment in the U.S. public undergraduate 2- and 4-year colleges, the use of descriptors (e.g., Latino, Hispanic, or Black) lacks sensitivity to the true changes in today's diverse college student populations. In addition, these descriptors are ineffective in guiding educational assessment and further reform processes geared toward understanding and ameliorating the disparities that continue to exist in public colleges and universities. The call for the disaggregation of data is not new. Traditionally, Asian students are not perceived as an "undeserved minority"; in fact, they are often seen as "the model minority," suggesting that they are more academically successful and do not face the academic challenges experienced by other racial/ethnic minority groups. However, an accruing body of research indicates that the "Asian" category is not a monolithic group. The academic success of some subethnic groups such as Chinese, Korean, and Japanese are very different from other subethnic groups such as Cambodian and Laotian, where academic performance is actually lower, drop-out rates are higher, and college completion rates are reduced. The aggregation within the "Asian and Pacific Islander" category renders these subethnic groups invisible (see Chang, Park, Lin, Poon, & Nakanishi, 2007; Teranishi, 2010). One example of increasing the sensitivity in assessing subethnic Asian population needs occurred in 2007, where the University of California moved to change its undergraduate application to reflect the diversity of its student body by disaggregating the "Asian American and Pacific Islander" category the following year, expanding from its original eight to now 23 categories. Until all subethnic group data are disaggregated and evaluated within the same context, the reporting of diversity in the college education system will remain ambiguous.

The Definition of the Term "Diversity" Within the Literature Remains Obscure

The achievement gap among increasingly diverse student populations and equity concerns are no less profound, nor less pressing, for institutions of higher education across the nation. However, research and writing in postsecondary education seems not to recognize the need to "fine-tune" terminology and to recharacterize the diverse student populations to suitably parse out and further differentiate the "true diversity" of the current and future multiethnic public undergraduate student populations. This is particularly problematic in the continued use of the term *underrepresented minority* (URM), which often translates as the broad categories of *Black* and *Hispanic* students when discussing issues of recruitment, funding, and support of students in specific curricular areas such as the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields in postsecondary education.

A recent study on the efficacy of developmental programs' (i.e., services for the underprepared college students; also known as remedial, foundational, guided, or transitional programming) success as measured by student degree completion in community colleges, noted multiple academic achievement gaps and recommended for more sensitive assessment, placement, and reformations in pedagogy. However, the report continued to use broad descriptive terms such as "African-American," "Latino," and "White" to describe URM student plurality (Center for Community College Student Engagement [CCCSE], 2016). While the report was scattered with multiple photographs representing a widely diverse URM student population comprised of varying racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds, none of the suggested recommendations recognized, nor addressed with a more refined analysis, the diversity represented in those pictorial representations. Much of the literature on college student educational outcomes continues to present data in aggregation. A recent report from the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U), tracking the priorities and trends in higher education, shows that while member institutions have adopted changes with priorities directed toward successful advancement for all students, few disaggregate data on student characteristics (e.g., race/ethnicity) to accurately track student achievement of adopted institutional learning outcomes (Hart Report, 2015). This report indicated that while a majority of institutions (70%) tracked the achievement of learning outcomes, only 16% of them disaggregate the data by variables such as race/ethnicity, 9% by income levels, and even less by the undergraduate student's parent's educational attainment (6%). This latter variable is arguably an important predictor of the undergraduate student's ability to complete their degree, which remains often overlooked.

Many public educational institutions collect data only with the five Office of Management and Budget (OMB) categories for their student populations. The OMB aggregates diversity by using a minimum of five categories: White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander. Interestingly, when searching for reports and their readouts within the literature, in many instances, the data are actually further aggregated rather than disaggregated. The widely used category of URM is a case in point, which aggregates together Black and Hispanic categories making extrapolations for each individual subethnic group undecipherable.

The response to a query about race or ethnicity is a measure of "identity" and "self-construction," both of which

have important psychological consequences and further affects the many aspects of an individual's cognitive functioning. These issues are at the heart of ethnic and cross-cultural psychology, both burgeoning fields well beyond the scope of this article to delineate further. However, one true challenge for current and ongoing research in these respective fields must address the issue of "disaggregation": breaking down large categories like Black, Hispanic, Asian, and so on, even URM for that matter, into smaller more appropriate subethnic categories such as Central American, South American, South Asian, African, and so on. Moreover, if and when appropriate, these data require further parsing by the student's parental country of origin. Due to increased subethnic group variability, the true "identity" of each of these subethnic groups are currently masked within the aggregated data. As previously mentioned, it is impossible to have evidence-based assessments and targeted interventions in STEM or other fields of education, without access to disaggregated data. Perez and Hirschman (2009) traced changes in the U.S. Census categories of race or ethnicity and the effects of that type of data disaggregation on the concept of identity. Their research suggested that the blurring of boundaries between traditional racial/ethnic categories due to interracial marriages (i.e., the "multiracial blending" of America) has resulted in the dual effects of both reducing the salience of a given race and/or ethnicity in American society and "racializing" *disadvantaged* multiracial blends of subethnic groups. Therefore, the educational institutions must be very conscientious, careful, and yet critical of determining the best and most appropriate approaches for disaggregating data without racializing these subethnic groups.

We argue that disaggregating data in the postsecondary context, particularly at 2- and 4-year public institutions, would reveal important factors contributing to the academic achievement gap such as parental educational background, and parent and student nativity. This information would be of particular importance when discussing potential future predictive analytic-based educational interventions addressing the academic achievement gap for specific "minority" populations. These types of ethnic background variables appear to have significant effects on retention, academic persistence, and achievement. Thus, disaggregating diversity data regarding the variables affecting academic performance is paramount for assessing the precise needs of specific subethnic populations within the larger racial/ethnic categories to design effective evidence-based programs, which target the exact needs of these distinct populations. To illustrate this timely issue, we will discuss the State University of New York (SUNY), arguably the largest and most diverse public university system in the United States, and SUNY Old Westbury (SUNY-OW), its most diverse campus. The types of disaggregated data argued for in this article are currently not being collected by SUNY, nor to our knowledge, at most other postsecondary public college institutions nationally. In the absence of this disaggregated data, given the rapidly increasing diversity within the student body, we argue that meaningful, evidence-based, and *targeted* interventions cannot occur. Moreover, given our nation's immigrant history, knowing more about student parental nativity and country of origin may better inform us about our undergraduate student population than previously considered, as will be argued below.

Parental Nativity and Country of Origin: A More Sensitive Form of Diversity

Immigration to the United States has been a major catalyst for population growth, as well as its by-product, of increasing the various and diverse changes comprising the racial/ethnic composition of the U.S. population. During the past 50 years, immigration accounted for over half of the total U.S. population growth, and is projected to account for 88% of the population growth from 2015-2065, if current trends remain. Since 1965, the racial and ethnic composition of the country has changed dramatically: The Hispanic U.S. population rose from 4% in 1965 to 18% in 2015; the Asian population increased from less than 1% to 6%; the non-Hispanic White population decreased from 85% to 62%, and the Black population remained relatively the same from 11% to 12%, during the same time period. By 2060, the United States will see an even greater change in the population; Hispanic or Latinos are expected to climb to 29% of the U.S. population, and Asians to 9.4%. The change is attributable not only to the post-1965 surge in immigration but also the aging of the White native population in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). It is projected that immigration patterns will continue to change the racial/ethnic group composition of the country in the future (Pew Research Center, 2015) and as such require the field to move in the direction of data disaggregation.

The specific changes in the larger racial/ethnic groups are due, in large part to a surge in diversity of sending countries. In 2015, 13.5% of the U.S. population was foreign-born and by 2020, this number is expected to rise to 14.3%. By 2030, almost 16% of the U.S. population will have been born outside the United States, according to projections made by the U.S. Census Bureau (2014). The upswing in immigration is largely a direct result of the Hart Celler Act passed in 1965, which dramatically changed the number and composition of immigrants entering the United States. In 1960, prior to the Hart Celler Act, 84% of immigrants were of European origin; by 2013, this number dropped to 14.2%. By 2013, Mexicans (28%) accounted for the largest share of immigrant groups in the United States, followed by Asians (25.8%); 24% of immigrants in 2013 cited other Latin American countries as their country of origin (Pew Research Center, 2013).

While these numbers are dramatic and shifting, they obfuscate an important point, which is the diversity within

larger multiethnic and racial groups. In 1980, the push for official Census (OMB) panethnic group classifications came in large part from Latino groups calling for remediation of undercounting (i.e., the effect of which is to lower federal aid dependent on population size; Anderson, 2015b). Today, however, the placement of new immigrant's groups into large panethnic or racial categories masks and further dilutes the diversity within multiethnic groups (Itzigsohn, 2004; Okamoto, 2003). For example, while Mexicans (and their children) make up the majority of Latinos in the United States today, Mexican immigrants are relative newcomers to New York and joined existing Latino groups such as Dominicans and Puerto Ricans (Foner, 2013; Smith, 2005). Asians are an even more multiethnic group, spanning diverse religions, languages, cultures, and vast geographic regions (Okamoto & Mora, 2014). Black immigrants are often grouped with African Americans, but their immigration history and their cultural backgrounds vary significantly from that of African Americans, as do their experiences with systemic racism (Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, & Waters, 2002; Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, Waters, & Holdaway, 2008; Lieberson & Waters, 1988). As a result of this classification scheme, which was introduced by the U.S. Census and adopted by the majority of governmental and nongovernmental institutions, we lose the ability to understand important markers of distinction that are specific to country of origin, including, but not limited to, gender roles, educational values, religious affiliation, family and marriage arrangements, as well as varying levels of social, cultural, and human capital that diverge across regions.

In New York State, for example, unlike the majority of the United States, Puerto Ricans are the largest Latino subethnic group, followed by Dominicans and Mexicans (Krogstad & Lopez, 2014). Due to the unique ties that Puerto Rico has with the mainland United States, the lived Latino experience of Puerto Ricans varies greatly from that of Mexicans. Puerto Ricans have legal status, are more likely to speak English, and have access to social services and embedded networks. Mexicans, who recently arrived to New York, are less likely to speak English, have fewer financial assets and less access to government resources (Bergad & Klein, 2010). Mexicans, while fewer in number than Puerto Ricans, are the fastest growing Latino immigrant group in the New York area. As a whole, foreign-born Mexicans have some of the lowest educational attainment rates among Latinos in the New York area (Bergad, 2013). This suggests a likely correlation between low educational attainment rates of young Mexican immigrants and a combination of factors specific to members of this group's national origin such as the lack of parental and peer support and low human capital levels. The rise in Mexican migration to the New York area and the particular challenges members of this subethnic group face further underscore the need for data disaggregation among public colleges and universities that will likely see an increase of members from this subethnic group in the coming years.

A number of factors negatively affect educational attainment in subethnic student populations such as college readiness and retention among immigrant students, many of which are country of origin specific. Larger racial and ethnic categories such as Latino or Asian obscure premigration structural barriers to education such as country of origin political instability or economic development. Overall, immigrants from more politically stable countries outperform their immigrant peers who hail from destinations with a history of political upheaval (Dronkers & de Heus, 2012). Similarly, gross domestic product (GDP) levels have been positively correlated with academic success among immigrants (Levels, Dronkers, & Kraaykamp, 2008). The term *Latino* encompasses not only U.S.-born students of Latino heritage but also immigrants from more than 33 countries. Yet within Latin America, national economic development varies widely from the Southern Cone to the Caribbean. Grouping all immigrants from Latin America into one large panethnic "Latino" category limits our understanding of premigration, country-specific human capital. This results in a "one size fits all" approach to pedagogical curriculum and programs, where we argue a tailored approach is much more likely to ensure success for a larger number of immigrant undergraduate college students.

While social scientists have long pointed to cultural capital as a significant variable in educational attainment and achievement (Bourdieu, 1987; Coleman, 1988), new research indicates the importance of understanding how country-specific cultural capital works as a meditating factor in immigrant educational attainment. Prior research suggests that cultural factors specific to styles of learning, as well as familial and communal social pressure to excel, largely account for the educational success of many Chinese and Korean immigrants (Zhou & Kim, 2006). However, when all Asian subethnic groups are lumped into one larger category, the success of Chinese and Korean immigrants conceals the experiences of other less-advantaged Asian subethnic groups in the United States, such as immigrants from Cambodia, Laos, or Vietnam. Members of these groups are more likely to have arrived to the United States as refugees (or are children of refugees) with fewer socioeconomic resources and cultural capital which results in reduced ability to excel within the U.S. educational system (Ngo & Lee, 2007).

Intersectionality is a term first introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989, 1991), to refer to the ways in which identity should be understood multidimensionally (i.e., the overlap of institutionalized power structures in society operate to create a "whole" which is larger than its constituent or component parts). For example, one cannot fully understand the experience of a Black woman without understanding that the forces of discrimination, which operate at the level of race or gender independently, intersect to create a systemic structure of oppression or domination, which is greater than their simple additive components. The term *intersectionality* is used in this article to emphasize that not including factors such as

parental education, nativity, immigration status, and immigrant generation and using only the lens of the standard ethnic categories, fails to capture the true multidimensionality of the undergraduate student population and does not veridically reflect students' experiences within the current educational system.

The intersectionality of premigration structural factors, as well as, pre- and postmigration cultural and social capital directly affect immigrants' educational achievement. A nuanced and targeted approach to elucidate how different subethnic groups are affected by the intersectionality of these variables in today's diverse world is inevitable and *absolutely* necessary to ensure the appropriate integration, college readiness and retention, and educational success of U.S. immigrant undergraduate students.

Parental Education and First-Generation College (FGC) Students: More Diverse Than Previously Considered

FGC students are typically defined as students whose parents never attended college. A National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES; 2010) study found that even when controlling for variables such as prior high school academic preparation, demographic background, postsecondary credit production or performance, FGC students were less likely to earn a bachelor's degree as compared with students whose parents had college education. They complete fewer undergraduate college credits, earn lower grades, need more remedial assistance, and are more likely to withdraw prior to completing their degrees. As compared with students whose parents obtained college degrees, FGC students were twice as likely to leave college without earning a degree, 43% versus 20%, respectively. FGC students, even among those who enter college expecting to earn a bachelor's degree attending 4-year institutions, are more likely to leave (29%) as compared with those with college-educated parents (13%), and they are less likely to earn a degree (47%) than those with parents holding a college degree (78%). Only 26% of FGC students who enroll in undergraduate colleges complete degrees (i.e., after 8 years), as compared with those whose parents went to college (Chen, 2005).

Students who are non-White and/or from low-income families are disproportionately represented in the FGC group. FGC students experience complex familial, cultural, social, and economic pressures related to being the first in their families to go to college, and these pressures have undeniable psychological consequences. Research indicates that FGC students, as compared with their non–first-generation counterparts, are both academically and psychologically underprepared for college. They lack knowledge of the "orienting" information pertaining to college: how to access information about financial assistance and other forms of support before they get into college, and then upon arrival, they have additional difficulty acclimating themselves to the routines and expectations of "college student life"; they tend to delay entering postsecondary institutions, often for financial reasons, and many continue to work full-time, even after enrollment, which further delays the time to degree completion (for more detailed analyses, see Tym, McMillion, Barone, & Webster, 2004).

Other research indicates that FGC students are less likely to receive support from their family (and community) to attend 2- and 4-year public colleges. Families of FGC students may often discourage them from going to college, sometimes for financial reasons, which leads to a sense of alienation from their family support structures. In addition, this may raise FGC student doubts about being "college material" and generalize over to self-question whether or not they will succeed in college. This leads to a sense of disorientation, isolation, and an unclear future (Engle, 2008; Gofen, 2009; Horn & Nuñez, 2000; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nuñez, 2001). FGC students are less able to connect their current academic performance with their expectations for the future, especially if they have no prior family role model or reference model. For FGC students, there is also a sense of cultural dislocation and/or disconnect with the U.S. college experience (for a discussion of cultural capital deficit, see Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, & Covarrubias, 2012). Students whose parents have gone to college are typically brought up to see college as a "continuation" of their academic and social experience. For FGC students, going to college may often be seen as a break from communal or social roles, norms, and expectations from their cultural background (Engle, Bermeo, & O'Brien, 2006). These FGC student–specific needs provide ample evidence that early intervention, as well as social and psychological support programs, are effective in promoting their readiness and retention in college increasing their success toward degree completion.

There is one important caveat that needs to be made here: the FGC versus non-FGC student may be an over-simplification, and there is still considerable ambiguity in the definition of the term *first generation*. For example, is an FGC student defined as having parents without a college degree? Alternatively, is an FGC student defined as having at least one parent with a college degree? What if one or both parents attended college, but did not complete or graduate with a degree? Thus, there is considerable variability (and ambiguity) in the current literature as FGC is currently used. Thus, the term *FGC* moving forward requires operational definition refinement and over generalization of its current interpretation is cautionary.

Student Nativity: Generation as Another Important Form of Diversity

However, while there is a positive association between parental achievement and the academic success of the diverse

college student, as pointed out above, there is an intersectionality of the racial/ethnic category, academic achievement of the parent, the immigrant generation of the person (i.e., whether they are the first generation of their family to be born in the United States) and parental country of origin, that needs to be examined as well. The flow of immigrants into the country in recent decades has divided the group of "new comers or nontraditional students" to the country into two distinctively different groups, with strikingly dissimilar characteristics. As the flows of immigrants from diverse regions and countries of origin are so unique, the links between immigrant status and postsecondary success are very complex and highly dependent on the country of origin of the parents. Moreover, this evidences that aggregating data from such populations is inappropriate.

Baum and Flores (2011) discussed the children of more recent immigrants in the context of postsecondary education. Similar to the situation for native-born youth from low-income backgrounds and whose parents do not have college experience, children of immigrant backgrounds face many of the same barriers to enrollment and success in college. However, there is wide variation in the patterns of educational outcomes, which are related to the immigrant generation of the child (i.e., student) and the country of origin of their immigrant parent. To summarize the detailed analysis of Baum and Flores (2011), they point out that on "average," the children from immigrant families were just as likely as native-born children to have a parent (i.e., father) with a college education. This "average" finding, however, obscures the fact that foreign-born fathers from regions such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Africa, Iran, and Korea were nearly 8 times more likely to have a college degree as compared with those fathers who were born in Laos, Cambodia, or the Caribbean and Mexico. As discussed earlier, parental education has an important academic influential effect on the successful outcomes for the child and should be included in data disaggregation.

Baum and Flores (2011) additionally summarized a body of data and pointed out that first-generation immigrant (FGI) status also has a significant effect on college enrollment and attrition. FGI children are defined as foreign-born children of immigrants and second-generation immigrants as U.S.-born children of immigrants. Research indicates that FGI students have higher likelihoods of enrolling in college than native-born children. They also point to significant differences in educational attainment differences between immigrants from different regions of nativity. Black immigrants are less likely than native-born Blacks, to possess some characteristics that may impede their educational success: They are more likely to be from two-parent families and/or attend better schools (Baum & Flores, 2011). Other research indicates that immigrants are also more likely to come from racially and socioeconomically heterogeneous neighborhoods (Jargowski & Komi, 2011). Baum and Flores (2011) discussed other issues related to attitudes toward education, cultural identity, and

traditions regarding the primacy of education, all of which increase the probability of success for their children, and these vary markedly with the countries of origin of parents of immigrant children.

In an analysis of immigrants and their children, Rumbaut (2004) stated,

> Differences in nativity (of self and parents) and in age and life stage at arrival, which are criteria used to distinguish between generational cohorts, are known to affect significantly the modes of acculturation of adults and children in immigrant families, especially with regard to language and accent, educational attainment and patterns of social mobility, outlooks and frames of reference, ethnic identity and even their propensity to sustain transnational attachments over time. (p. 1164)

In summary, the body of research points to a wide variety of factors influencing educational outcomes within the three main broad categories of Black, Hispanic, and Asian. This body of research supports the need to identify a more granular data set about students entering postsecondary educational institutions: parental academic achievement (i.e., whether the student is FGC), immigrant generation of the student (i.e., whether they are native-born or foreign-born [FGI]), and countries of origin of their parents.

Redefining College Student Diversity: The SUNY

In September 2015, SUNY, which is arguably the largest and most diverse public institution of higher education, released a *Diversity Brief* (SUNY, 2015), stating,

> Despite the evidenced-based definition and application of diversity promulgated today, in practice, institutions across the country, including those within SUNY, continue to struggle to fully meet diversity goals and/or to take steps necessary to prepare for projected demographic shifts . . . (p. 1)

The *Diversity Brief* (which defines URM with the traditional categories of *Black* and *Hispanic*) goes on to acknowledge that while SUNY has made gains in the recruitment of URMs in the total enrollment, from 14.7% to 23.3% in the last decade, there remains a significant gap between the retention and graduation rates of these URMs when compared with their White and Asian counterparts. Pell grant funding is a measure of student financial need, and 56% of SUNY URM students are Pell grant recipients. Despite these support systems, URM students and Pell grant recipients have the lowest retention and graduation rates among SUNY students. Low graduation and retention rates for URMs are problematic not only for SUNY but is an issue of national concern. While "access and success" rates in college enrollment and completion have increased across the board, there are some significant differences across racial and ethnic groups. Nationally, for the years 2009-2011, the enrollment

rates for Hispanics increased by 22%, and for Blacks by 8%. However, the 6-year graduation rates in 2011 for the same groups were 51% and 39.9%, respectively (Yeado, 2013).

To address the achievement gap within SUNY, its System Administration has called for, among other initiatives, the use of "predictive analytics" to "map-out" specific intervention-based needs and the implementation of "high impact" programs such as community engagement which have been shown to positively affect URM retention and graduation rates (SUNY, 2015, p. 33).

SUNY announced that it would now begin to provide its students the opportunity to self-identify their sexual orientation and gender identity, which certainly is a creditable move toward the recognition of student diversity. In addition, SUNY is in the process of including a question about parental academic achievement in their new SUNY-wide Common Application form. The SUNY application form does solicit information about Hispanic/Latino identification, and in a following question asks about "background" country (i.e., provides the following choices: Central America, Cuban, Dominican, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South American, and other Hispanic/Latino).

Given the aforementioned discussion about the sources of the population growth with respect to specific countries of origin, this information can be used to provide targeted interventions to subethnic groups comprising the nontraditional college student population. However, in contrast to the SUNY categories for Hispanic/Latino identification, there is only one categorical response for Black or African American. We believe that despite the intent of this data collection tool, some important information is "lost in the data." A recent Pew report (Anderson, 2015a) points to the fact that Black immigrant populations have more than quadrupled since 1980. Jamaica and Haiti are the two largest countries of origin from which Black immigrant populations have come to the United States, and account for 18% and 15% of the Black immigrant population, respectively. Moreover, immigrants from Africa have increased by 137% between the years 2000 and 2013, and they constitute 36% of the foreign-born Black population.

This information about country of origin (i.e., nativity of student or parent) is important to consider as the data indicate that when compared with immigrants overall, foreign-born Blacks speak English at a higher rate; immigrants from Africa have higher levels of educational attainment (i.e., a college degree) than Americans overall (30%). However, Black immigrants from Central and South America, as well as the Caribbean, have significantly lower rates of educational attainment, at 12%, 25% and 20%, respectively. The Report goes on to point out that in the New York metropolitan area, which is an important catchment area for SUNY, foreign-born Blacks make up 28% of the Black population. We are therefore arguing that the single response category for Blacks, which conflates race with country of origin, masks important information, which would be directly related to students' academic performance and success.

In addition, a more recent report (Lopez & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2016) points out, as we have earlier, that for U.S. Hispanics, self-identity is a complex issue. Among Latinos with Caribbean roots, according to the Pew Report, nearly a quarter (24%) identify as Afro-Latino, Afro-Caribbean, or Afro-(i.e., country of origin). There is no category, currently in the SUNY application for these students to respond to that matches their self-identification. This form of subethnic group data disaggregation is critically important as the Pew Report suggests that people identifying as Afro-Latino are less likely to have a college education (24% as compared with 37% of Latinos overall) and also have lower incomes overall as compared with other Latinos.

We argue that adding response categories related to the immigrant generation of the student, as well as parental and student countries of nativity, with a more detailed desegregation of racial/ethnic identification would be very useful information to parse the differences in the student population. These parameters can and should be used in predictive analytics in college education, which could then lead to sensitive needs assessment, targeted interventions and approaches to pedagogy in the classroom, and in other forms of support structure. Early identification of these factors will allow for development of fine-tuned interventions that can be directed toward the appropriate student ethnic populations for optimizing outcomes.

Student Diversity at SUNY-OW: A Truly Representative Sample Population

SUNY-OW is one of 14 comprehensive public liberal arts undergraduate colleges in all of SUNY. It is the most student diverse campus of the entire SUNY system, with 64% student diversity (URM, Asian, and International student body) as compared with the entire SUNY system-wide aggregate student diversity of 34.2%. SUNY-OW has the highest percentage of URM student enrollment (53.3%), more than double the SUNY-wide URM student enrollment of 23.2% across the other 13 SUNY 4-year colleges (SUNY, 2015). However, SUNY-OW currently does not institutionally collect data that would disaggregate the subpopulations within the categories of Black, Hispanic, or Asian, or information about their immigrant generation of its students, or countries of nativity of students or their parents. Anecdotally, we are conscious of the wide subethnic group diversity that exists in the backgrounds of our students. In an informal study conducted by the authors during Fall 2015, a small sample of students ($n = 271$) enrolled within psychology classes were asked to indicate whether or not they were born in the United States, and if not, where they were born. They were asked about their parental nativity (i.e., where their parents had been born) and if foreign-born, their country of origin and the number of years each parent had been in the United States. The results of this informal survey revealed that the

majority of the sample (75%) had one or more parents born in a country other than the United States. In addition, one in four of the sample of students had been born in a country other than the United States (see attached survey).

There is an important issue to raise in this context: while self-identification by the dimensions of race/ethnicity or nativity is done by most people fairly routinely, "FGI" or "first generation to college" is not a label that students readily apply to themselves. Anecdotally, the authors of this article have found this to be true of our first-generation students at SUNY-OW. To the extent that students may not consistently self-identify as FGC/FGI, they do not perceive the difficulties they may experience in their adjustment to the demands of an academic environment to their FGC/FGI status. Furthermore, as they do not attribute their difficulties to such causes, they do not seek out available services nor are they able to reach out to other FGC/FGI students, who share those same background factors as they, to lessen their sense of isolation. Based on this insight, we at SUNY-OW have for the past year been engaged in a series of efforts to raise awareness of those factors shared by FGC/FGI students that present barriers to success among our student body and the wider college community. Last March, we held our inaugural First Generation Student Conference with faculty, students, administration, and staff. In addition to external speakers who presented information about best practices for support and intervention with FGC students, there also was opportunity for institutional self-reflection and identification of existing support structures and resources yet to be identified. One of the most powerful outcomes from the conference was the verification of the sense of isolation felt by FGC/FGI students, of which we had had anecdotal evidence. SUNY-OW has instituted an awareness campaign which includes establishing a webpage on the college website with information about available resources specifically for FGC/FGI students, a regular series of conversations with FGC/FGI students and faculty who are themselves FGIs and of whom many are first generation to college in their families. SUNY-OW has a Freshman Year Experience (FYE) program dedicated to introducing students to the social justice mission of the college. In the first semester, all freshmen (less than 24 college credits) enroll in a seminar, *The Ethics of Engagement: Educating Leaders for a Just World*. In their second semester, all first-year students must participate in a community action, learning and leadership program that is a course embedded community-based learning program. Last year, FYE staff and administrators conducted surveys with our freshmen cohort for early identification of FGC/FGI students. This year, the authors of this article are collaborating with the FYE administrators and staff, and have begun a formal study consisting of online surveys, structured interviews, and focus groups to collect data on nativity, countries of origin, parental educational background, and generational status to disaggregate the data in a more meaningful way. Through such an approach, we aim to disaggregate subethnic

group data to develop appropriate predictive analytics for college students. We know these factors play a significant role in our students' academic achievement, persistence, and motivations for degree completion and aspirations beyond a college degree. Thus, fine-grained analyses on the associations of our students' background demographic factors with other parameters related to academic performance and retention will enable us to develop targeted interventional programs for our diverse undergraduate students.

Conclusion and Future Considerations on College Student Diversity Needs

In summary, it is of critical importance to truly operationalize the term *diversity* in the context of today's multicultural undergraduate student population as it relates to their academic achievement. At SUNY-OW, we are honored to contribute to this special edition on student diversity for SAGE at a time when our school is celebrating its 50th Anniversary as one of the most diverse public 4-year undergraduate colleges with a socially conscious curriculum (i.e., Ethics of Engagement: Educating Leaders for a Just World) within the country (Anker & Feder-Marcus, 2013). We want to promote an increasing national dialogue on social consciousness and further to disaggregate data on diversity. We are currently doing so within our college, in the hopes of becoming a pioneering example within our increasingly diverse nation. It is our opinion that disaggregating URM data will increase the social sensitivity in identifying factors that will close the academic achievement gap and promote educational equality for all the diverse groups, which create our great nation. The need to move away from the OMB categorization of "diversity" is timely, as the number of diverse URM students is rapidly increasing and major governmental programs such as those in the STEM fields critically rely on this information. Similarly, the new "terms/descriptors" which would evolve from the disaggregated data should be monitored and updated to reflect changing diversity predicted over the next 10 to 20 years, to really serve the needs of our nation's increasingly diverse college student body. Perhaps Lechat (2001) had said it best . . .

> equity concerns arising from the enormous diversity that students represent—in culture, language, prior educational experiences, home situations, learning styles, attitudes toward learning, and future aspirations. This diversity requires a level of individualization that traditional education has never been designed nor equipped to provide. The twin mandates of equity and accountability have made it imperative that educators base decisions on accurate and meaningful data about student learning and achievement. (p. 15)

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