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Segregation Versus Inclusion: Understanding Minority Serving Higher Education Institutions in the U.S. and Canada

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A myriad of perspectives surround the role of higher education in society; should it reflect and change according to market demands or should it be the nucleus of academia and research? For most students in Ontario a postsecondary certificate, diploma or degree is the final educational requirement to employment in the labour market. Higher education serves as the “middle man” between publically funded elementary and secondary education and the labour force. As a result, both forces play an influential role in the structure, function and direction of higher education in Ontario. Directives at the elementary and secondary school levels directly affect short and long term strategic plans of individual institutions and higher education collectively. In 2008 the Toronto District School Board approved the establishment of an Africentric elementary school in response to concerns that the current system and curriculum did not adequately support the needs of students of African descent. Since then, the school board has established a secondary school to continue to provide the same learning environment as students in the elementary grades. The establishment of minority serving higher education institutions would seem a likely progression building on the now mandated mission and beliefs of the Toronto school board and other schools boards in the country. Thus far minority serving higher education institutions have not gained much appeal in Canada, but they do have a longstanding history in the U.S. As such this paper will rely heavily on information collected from the U.S. as a possible model to implement. This paper will explore the issues which surrounded the establishment of an Africentric public school in Ontario. I will provide a historical overview of the foundation of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) in the U.S. as well as the benefits they provide to Black students, communities and the labour force. I will interpolate the tropes guiding the principles of Africentric schools to explore other minority serving higher education institutions, focusing in particular on institutions for Indigenous students and students with disabilities. Although the current focus within the Toronto school board remains Africentric schooling, the factors which contributed to establishing the school can be easily applied to other underrepresented groups. Lastly, I will conclude with a discussion of the implications for Canadian postsecondary education institutions.

Africentric Education in Toronto

On January 29, 2008 the Toronto District School Board voted 11-9 to establish Africentric education in Toronto. This decision was spurred and prompted by continuous data suggesting that Black students do not find the curriculum relevant or relatable and subsequent high dropout rates. “The three-year pilot program will be established in three existing schools beginning in September 2008, and aims to integrate ‘the histories, cultures, experiences and contributions of people of African descent and

other racialized groups into the curriculum, teaching methodologies, and social environment of schools” (Thompson & Thompson, 2008, p. 45). Following the Africentric elementary school, the Toronto District School Board established a parallel secondary school in September 2012. “Teachers drafted new curriculum over the summer for the five compulsory Grade 9 subjects; math, science, English, French, geography. Classes will use, where possible, African and African-Canadian examples of poetry, inventions, novels, politics and philosophy” (Brown, 2012). The elementary and secondary schools are a culmination of current debates on the efficacy of the current curriculum to motivate and relate to underrepresented students, particularly Black students. The secondary school is a continued attempt to meet the specific needs of Black students, who are at risk of disengagement and dropout. Students are especially vulnerable to dropout during high school grades. This message was reflected in the decision voted by the District trustees. “Trustee Shaun Chen said an Africentric high school is the next step in addressing the 40 per cent dropout rate among black students. ‘The disengagement that the students in the black community are facing in our regular schools does not stop in Grade 8,’ he said” (CBC News, 2011). The implementation of Africentric public education in Toronto spurred contentious debates on the future of education; those opposing the Africentric-focused schools argued it was a step backwards to the days of segregated schooling while proponents of the schools called for a recognition of bias and discrimination within schools and action to create a learning environment where students feel represented. Thompson and Thompson (2008) discuss how firmly both sides were divided:

What is clear is the polarization of the issue at hand: the debate has been characterized in the media and general public as an epic battle between the rhetoric of "segregation" and appeals to Canadian multiculturalism on the one hand and blaming the nameless and faceless (but utterly racist) public education system on the other, creating a no-win situation in which advocates on either side believe in the legitimacy of no alternative other than their own. (p. 47)

The decision of the Toronto District School Board continues to incite controversy because it speaks to the core of our identity as a multicultural nation and recognizes that not all students benefit from the current curriculum and educational structure. At the provincial level, Premier Dalton McGuinty stated he would take action if other school boards established similar schools. “McGuinty says he will intervene if other Ontario cities follow Toronto's plan for new black-focused program” (Howlett & Bradshaw, 2008). Although the province does not support the implementation of Africentric schools in other school boards throughout the province, it remains that in the most populated district in the province students are able to attend elementary and secondary schools with this focus. The debates surrounding this issue have led to debates surrounding minority represented higher education institutions in the province. This is compounded by the strong history and presence of historically Black colleges and universities in the neighbouring United

States. It is necessary to explore the history of HBCUs in order to be able to assess whether and how it will affect higher education in Ontario given the recent approval of Africentric public education.

The History of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the United States

Access to higher education in the United States cannot be fully understood without looking at the role HBCUs have played in granting black students postsecondary certification when other institutions excluded their participation. "HBCUs were created to provide access to higher education for African Americans when their participation in other educational institutions was limited" (Palmer, 2010, p. 767). Currently, these institutions continue to provide undergraduate and graduate degrees to the majority of black students, many of whom have become prominent figures in American society and culture.

Today, there are 107 HBCUs with more than 228,000 students enrolled. Fifty-six institutions are under private control, and 51 are public colleges and universities. The public institutions account for more than two-thirds of the students in historically black institutions. Most (87) of the institutions are four-year colleges or universities, and 20 are two-year institutions. In the past, more than 80 percent of all black college graduates have been trained at these HBCUs. Today, HBCUs enroll 20 percent of black undergraduates. However, HBCUs award 40 percent of baccalaureate degrees earned by black college students." (U.S. Department of Education, 1991)

Many of the HBCUs were established after the Civil War and the subsequent passage of the Morrill Act of 1890. From 1865 until 1870, the federal government founded the Freedman's Bureau. The organization's aim was to assist improving the lives of freedmen and the poor. These institutions were called colleges and universities, but they played a more significant role in access to education for Black people. With the exception of a few institutions, these institutions also provided secondary school and college preparation (Palmer, 2010, p. 766). In the 1860s, Congress enacted land-grant provisions to promote access to higher education to recently freed Black Americans. Nineteen institutions were established which did not provide degrees but were higher education entities focusing on agricultural, mechanical and industrial certification (Abelman, 2009, p. 105). These institutions became the hub of trade schooling, remediation and higher education for Black students in a supportive and nurturing learning environment.

The end of the Civil War opened greater possibilities of access to higher education for Black Americans which had previously not been granted to them. "With the exclusion of blacks from American higher education (only 28 black Americans received college degrees before the Civil War), a watershed period in the development of black private higher education began with Reconstruction" (Jacques, 1984, p. 382). The majority of the HBCUs were founded between 1876 and 1914. Legislation

was also enacted to foster the promotion and capacity of doctoral programs in HBCUs (Powell, 2012, p. 507). It has been argued that with a unified history and purpose, HBCUs lack institutional differentiation. The lack of differentiation limits an organization's ability to promote their institution as unique. It limits the ability to sell what sets them apart from competitors who seek to recruit the same pool of students. This has been one of the current issues facing the sustainability of a thriving HBCU community.

HBCUs are grounded in a shared, historical mission (see the Higher Education Act of 1965). Although this provides legacy and unity, and helps give definition and branding to these institutions, it may also hinder efforts to identify and promote key characteristics and academic aspirations that make each institution distinctive and appealing. (Abelman, 2009, p. 124)

Despite current issues facing HBCUs, they have a rich and vibrant history in the United States. Today they continue to maintain a critical role in increasing access to higher education for minority students and the field of higher education. Perhaps most importantly, HBCUs have increased postsecondary options for Black students and have contributed to increasing the number of Black students earning degrees.

HBCUs have played an important role in narrowing the education and earnings gaps by providing the opportunity for a college education for a significant number of African-Americans, especially during the period of segregation. Furthermore, low tuition costs have enabled many HBCUs to provide a college education to those who would have been unable to afford one otherwise. (Wilson, 2007, p. 11)

The increase in graduates from HBCUs has also had a significant contribution to promoting access in graduate studies and employment in professional fields.

Many minority students rely on state or federal financial support to fund their higher education studies. These supports restrict funds to institutions that hold accreditation. "Today, both federal and state governments rely on the accreditation process to assure institutional quality, and both link accreditation status to the disbursement of their funds to postsecondary institutions and students" (Fester, 2012, p. 809). Within the American system of higher education, there are four types of accreditation; regional, program-focused, faith-based and private career. Institutions are required to meet standards which grant them institutional accreditation but many individual programs also have specific requirements that must be satisfied in order to maintain accreditation. The strict requirements for accreditation pose challenges for HBCUs because they serve the most disadvantaged students but are still compelled to comply in order to receive state and federal funds and compete with other wealthier institutions to recruit students.

In other words, minority-serving institutions are tasked with educating the most underserved students and are required to produce better results with fewer resources, and still they are evaluated using the same accreditation standards as prestigious public flagship and private institutions. (Fester, 2012, p. 816)

Since funding is available to students attending accredited institutions, HBCUs have struggled to maintain accreditation status in order to support students who would otherwise not have access to higher education. HBCUs benefit their students in multiple ways. Not only do they increase access, but they provide leadership and support in a nurturing environment to a specific niche of students. They have shown to have better results than Black students attending predominantly white institutions (PWI).

However, African Americans seem to benefit more by attending HBCUs rather than PWIs and report higher levels of satisfaction with the academic environment, achieve higher intellectual gains, express more social and political awareness, and aspire more often to continue their education at the graduate level. (Malhotra, 2011, p. 447)

Although there are differences in the higher education structures between Ontario and the United States, explicating the benefits of HBCUs provides a framework for analyzing whether these institutions will provide similar results in Ontario. These results must be considered in light of current policies which advocate Africentric education as complimentary to the traditional curriculum.

There is a direct connection between higher education and the principles of American society (Jacques, 1984, p.382). The structure and types of higher education reflect the values and beliefs of a society. In the context of American society, HBCUs serve to affirm and acknowledge a history plagued by racism and legalized slavery. Here I also acknowledge Canada's participation in similar actions with Black people and Indigenous peoples. They attempt to create a supportive environment whereby the majority of students share a common experience. In my opinion, HBCUs provide an opportunity for underrepresented individuals to feel like they are the majority, where their specific needs are seen as common practice instead of being "othered." Price et al. (2010) investigated the educational, personal and social benefits of HBCUs using a frame work proposed by Akerlof and Kranton which views schools as institutions instilling social goals and promoting identities. This can be seen in the overrepresentation of HBCU graduates in professions correlated with high self-confidence such as judges and university professors (p. 106). This suggests that HBCU offer more than degrees to their students but actively promote the fostering of a positive self-identity in light of the racialized history of the United States.

As such, our results lend support to the idea that HBCUs continue to have a compelling educational justification, as the labour market outcomes of their graduates are superior to what they would have been had they graduated from a non-HBCU. Our estimates of the effects HBCUs have on the psychological outcomes of graduates also lend support to the idea that HBCUs have a comparative advantage in nurturing the self-image, self-esteem, and identity of its graduates, which theoretically matters for labour market outcomes. (p. 127)

HBCUs have consistently met the needs of minority populations who have been ignored or underserved by higher learning. They provide access to higher education for a large portion of under represented individuals as they promote an environment with higher retention rates than other institutions. "Simply put, large numbers of HBCUs consistently graduate African-American students at higher rates than do majority schools. This fact indicates that HBCUs' retention rates, while roughly 33 percent are higher than those of majority institutions" (Ashley, 2007, p.32). Thus, there are quantitative and qualitative benefits resulting in HBCUs which parallel the results reported by the Toronto District School Board on their Africentric elementary and secondary school program. These include higher graduation rates, lower retention rates and positive psychosocial adjustment.

Researchers have consistently argued that Black colleges and universities foster a nurturing, family-like environment and that faculty members are supportive of Black students. Research has also shown that Black students on Black campuses exhibit positive psychosocial adjustments, cultural awareness, increased confidence, and higher academic performance. (Palmer, 2010, p. 764)

Contact and support with black faculty also offers students the advantage of creating valuable networks. Faculty encourage Black students by providing support in an environment directly correlating with their education. "One unique opportunity offered by HBCUs is the extensive contact with Black faculty and students. For racial minorities, contact with the racial in group is a critical source of cultural information, and provides positive role models for development" (Van Camp, 2010, p.229). Students are able to understand materials with faculty who can guide them and act as role models to students who live in a society where discrimination still exists. "Advocates of HBCUs emphasize the disproportional percentage of black community, professional, and academic leaders that graduated from HBCUs, and attribute this to the advantage of an education received in a non-judgmental, inspiring, and racial-identity affirming setting" (Malhotra, 2011, p.447). Education to prepare students for the labour force is done in a nurturing and encouraging environment and promotes positive self-concepts and builds community.

There are also economic benefits resulting from HBCUs. Since HBCUs graduate the majority of students with undergraduate and graduate degrees, they greatly contribute to diversifying the labour market and the creation of a skilled workforce. "In addition, HBCUs continue to account for a disproportionately high number of diverse, racially underrepresented entrants into the labor force" (Powell, 2012, p. 506). In relation to wage earnings, Constantine (1995) conducted a study on the wage earnings of students who had attended HBCUs in the 1970s. The study concluded that students who had attended HBCUs earned substantially higher wages than Black students who had graduated from historically white institutions (p. 544). In a turbulent and ever-changing labour market, these results provide support that HBCUs do produce qualified candidates in the labour market and produce individuals who earn higher wages than Black students who did not attend HBCUs. In fact, research shows that there is a correlation between distance from a HBCU with the number of adult Black individuals with degrees. "HBCUs also appear to have important spillovers onto the economic well-being of their local communities, as decreased physical distance of a community from the nearest HBCU increases the share of adult blacks with college degrees and thereby, increases community-level per capita incomes" (Mykerezi, 2008, p. 175). Focusing particularly on Black males, HBCUs increase the number of higher education graduates and also provide long-term economic benefits. Many HBCUs are facing organizational changes in an effort to compete with wealthier institutions and a changing labour market. These organizational structures include offering a limited number of programs, reducing the amount of financial aid and student services available. Mykerezi et al. (2008) discusses how these changes are likely to affect Black males, but can also be applied to all individuals who attend HBCUs.

Overall, the results present consistent evidence of significant long-term economic benefits from HBCU attendance for black males. Thus, policies that alter the HBCU environment, such as those that merge HBCUs with nearby predominantly white institutions or even those that place restrictions on the missions, types of programs administered, and admission policies of HBCUs, are likely to impose a long-term burden on young black males who choose to attend four-year colleges. Continued public support of HBCUs, on the other hand, is likely to have a long-term positive impact on the economic success of young blacks from disadvantaged backgrounds." (p. 186)

HBCUs provide extensive remediation and educational support to Black students as well as produce qualified individuals with undergraduate and graduate degrees. These individuals are more likely to earn greater wages than Black students who did not attend HBCUs. The institutions provide a nurturing environment where faculty pass down cultural information and are a source of long-term networking. These institutions also produce graduates with increased self-identity and self-confidence. Although HBCUs are currently struggling to compete with wealthier institutions that provide limited remediation support and have

higher admission requirements, they continue to serve the most underrepresented groups and have positive returns when looking at personal, social, economic and community benefits.

Minority Services Postsecondary Institutions: An Indigenous Perspective

HBCUs have a prominent position in higher education discussions in the United States. Current discussions are likely to increase in a Canadian context given the recent approval of Africentric public education in Toronto. However, there are other minority represented higher education institutions which contribute to the conversation as well. These institutions, formed on the heels of HBCUs, may not represent the same longstanding history and number of institutions as HBCUs, but they also serve underrepresented minority groups seeking higher education. In fact, the same justifications for the establishment of HBCUs can be made for other groups. This is particularly true for Indigenous peoples. "Questions surrounding Africentric education could equally be asked about First Nations, Asiatic, and other forms of education. First Nations peoples can and do generate knowledge about their own societies that could be tapped by an initiative for inclusive schooling" (Dei, 1996, p. 177). In America, the history of segregation and the establishment of HBCUs have led to the foundation of other institutions collectively called minority serving institutions. "Furthermore, the American history of segregation and post-segregation racial tension has led to a proportionally immense system of what are called Minority-Serving Institutions, with a related precedent for legislating federal funding for these separate postsecondary institutions" (Jenkins, 2007, p.13). Much like the mission of the HBCUs, the movement to establish higher education institutions for and by Indigenous peoples reflects a struggle to create an institution where education can be the vessel for changing a history of colonization and marginalization. In *Indigenous Postsecondary Institutions in Canada and the U.S.* Jenkins (2007) outlines the history of Indigenous postsecondary education in both countries and the different structures that form Indigenous higher education in them.

Indigenous postsecondary institutions are institutions primarily run by and for Indigenous peoples that provide postsecondary education programs. In the U.S., these institutions are generally called Tribal Colleges & Universities (TCUs), but in Canada, Indigenous postsecondary institutions fall under the full spectrum of Canadian postsecondary education terminology, including everything from community learning centres and institutes to community colleges and universities. (p. 4)

Many Canadian postsecondary institutions have thriving Indigenous learning centres and departments within larger higher education institutions. Historically, education has been one of the major forces of colonization for Indigenous communities. At the hands of government and religious missionaries, education was used as a mechanism to segregate children and youth from their families and communities. They were relocated and placed into residential schools. They were forbidden

to speak their Indigenous language and forbidden to practice customs and traditions. In an attempt to assimilate, education was the vessel for colonization so much so that when children returned to their communities, they were strangers to their own heritage. The effects of a brutal colonized history of Indigenous communities in North America are still evident today. Due to the fact that Western Christian education played such an oppressive role in the colonization of Indigenous peoples, the movement towards Indigenous controlled higher education institutions is at the core of reclaiming an Indigenous identity and educating Indigenous peoples in a community which fosters Indigenous knowledge and culture. Thus, the movement towards an Indigenous postsecondary institution was promoted by and a result of larger decolonization efforts for sovereignty in Canada.

The first Indigenous postsecondary institution in the U.S. was established in 1969. Now called Dine College it was originally named Navajo Community College. The College was established as part of a larger expansion of community colleges in the United States to meet the specific needs of local communities. In Canada, jurisdictional and accreditation issues have limited the number of recognized indigenous postsecondary institutions.

In Canada, there are some fully independent Indigenous postsecondary institutions, but the vast majority exists without accreditation and with little public funding. Many are community learning centers and institutes that offer Indigenous programs, which may or may not culminate in some form of credential, and they often also provide space for external accredited programs to be made available to local Indigenous peoples. (p.16)

The position of Indigenous postsecondary education in Canada is complicated by differences in jurisdictional authority over education and Indigenous affairs. The federal government has jurisdiction over all Indigenous affairs. However, the provincial and territorial governments have jurisdiction over public and postsecondary education. These conflicting jurisdictions have thwarted attempts for a thriving Indigenous higher education community. This issue also thwarts the granting of funds, which is crucial to the establishment of a postsecondary institution.

As a result of this jurisdictional confusion, there are very few public funding mechanisms available to Indigenous postsecondary institutions. The primary federal fund that aids credentialed postsecondary programs for Indigenous peoples, the Indian Studies Support Program, provides only a small portion of the funds needed by Indigenous postsecondary institutions and only does so through one-year grants that require annual reapplication with no guaranteed continuation of funding. (p.12)

The requirements for the distribution of funds in Canada is one of the primary reasons why minority represented higher education institutions have not had the same history as in the United States. Canada holds

strong beliefs in collectivist ideals. Competition and privatization are viewed as the antithesis of the Canadian higher education structure. There is vast similarity between higher education institutions, and this is viewed as the measure to ensure equality and measure quality. Most are comprehensive institutions holding the same degrees and academic requirements, which poses roadblocks for the establishment of minority serving institutions.

In this way, the Canadian system allows little variance in the value of postsecondary degrees, creating an equality of results, but promoting some inequality of opportunity, since there is also little variance in the standards of entry into degree-granting postsecondary institutions. (p.12)

The Aboriginal Institutes' Consortium (AIC) in Ontario is currently working toward developing an accreditation system which will recognize Indigenous higher education institutions. The persistence of HBCUs as institutions where Black individuals can have access to higher education, become competitive in the labour force and employ supportive faculty which serve as role models holds true for advocates of Indigenous postsecondary institutions. Indigenous individuals are one of the groups least likely to hold postsecondary degrees. Access to higher education is one of the biggest forces which will contribute to improving employment and economic opportunities for disadvantaged individuals. It is the driving force behind the creation of a collective of Indigenous higher education institutions. "Consequently, Indigenous postsecondary institutions in Canada are truly pioneers in their efforts to ensure recognition and funding, while similar institutions in the U.S. can reference and even build upon policies that are already in place" (p.19). Although limited in numbers thus far, it is clear that the prevalence and promotion of minority serving higher education institutions will be a discussion surrounding the future structure of postsecondary education.

Minority Services Postsecondary Institutions: A Disability Perspective

Alternatively, there are colleges that focus specifically on providing postsecondary education to people with disabilities. For example, Landmark College was founded in 1985 and is located in Vermont. It is the first higher education institution designed for students with dyslexia, learning disabilities and ADHD. The institution is designed to provide a degree-granting environment which fosters an inclusive learning environment. "At Landmark College, we have created a unique learning environment that actively promotes individual success among students who learn differently. We help students learn in new ways, enabling them to become independent, self-directed learners and self-advocates" (Landmark College, Academic Programs & Points of Entry). The College was established with a recognition that although there are services at postsecondary institutions to support students with disabilities, they act as an addition to traditional teaching methods and environments which do not meet the needs of students who learn differently. "The reality is that everyone learns differently. But, for many bright and talented students with ADHD, dyslexia and learning disabilities, the mainstream educational system often is unable to meet their needs." (Landmark College) The

institution is a pioneer in its model and delivery. It builds upon the missions of HBCUs and Indigenous higher education institutions and encourages students to resist common stereotypes and marginalization. It also promotes a strong and nurturing environment between students and faculty.

Our singular focus creates a welcoming and supportive college community where faculty and students alike understand the challenges of learning differently. Landmark College acknowledges but does not accept the societal practice of labeling and stigmatizing students who learn differently. Every aspect of the campus environment is designed to promote individual development and peer interactions that challenge the fundamental assumptions inherent in these labels and that build on the strengths and talents that accompany different ways of learning. Landmark College transforms lives. (Landmark College, Why Landmark?)

The American higher education structure is different in many ways to the Canadian structure. Minority serving higher education institutions are an active part of postsecondary options for students. As the number of different institutions grows, such as those primarily serving Indigenous students and students with disabilities as well as others in development, it serves as an example, both good and bad, for Canadians to consider.

Minority serving higher education institutions are the result of century-old discussion regarding segregation and inclusivity. To date, Canada has promoted a more inclusive approach to higher education, although there are school boards such as the Toronto District School Board that offer publically funded segregated schooling for several underrepresented groups such as people with disabilities, Indigenous students and students who identify as queer or transgendered. Applying these same principles to higher education is not far removed from what exists today. Data still show that marginalized peoples are less likely to access and complete postsecondary education. The inclusive approach may work for some, but it cannot be assumed that a curriculum built upon Western concepts of knowledge will be able to equally educate such a diverse population.

Inclusivity requires spaces for alternative, and sometimes oppositional, paradigms to flourish in the schools. It demands the development of a broad-based curriculum, the institution of diverse teaching strategies, and the establishment of educational support systems that enhance conditions conducive to success for all students. (Dei, 1996, p. 176)

Accepting that an alternative may be dichotomous to current structures will help in keeping all options on the table. “Nevertheless, ‘inclusion’ may not be enough. Current definitions and practices of inclusion still leave students on the margins, even when these students are ‘included’” (p. 177). Whatever solutions individual school boards

decide, higher education is the jurisdiction of the provincial governments. In order to support a higher education structure which truly benefits all groups of students, all options must be carefully considered. The advantage is that we have experiential evidence from institutions in the United States.

Conclusion

Taking from a Toronto District School Board recent decision to establish an Africentric elementary school followed by a secondary school, this paper has investigated the history of minority serving higher education institutions in the United States. This paper has explored the history of historically Black universities and colleges in the United States and the benefits they provide as well as (although smaller in numbers) Indigenous institutions and institutions for people with disabilities. Implications for Canadian postsecondary education were discussed. Given the changes to postsecondary education within the last 50 years, it is unknown how higher education will address the continuing under representation of minority students. The topic is open for discussion.

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