Diversity Engagement and Learning and Civic Outcomes

Multiple studies have found that various forms of diversity engagement are linked to positive learning and civic outcomes for Asian American students. Analyzing a national longitudinal dataset of 11,383 undergraduates at 184 institutions (including nearly 496 Asian Americans), researchers found that informal interactional diversity – attending a cultural awareness workshop, discussing issues related to race, and socializing with people of different races – was a positive predictor of higher levels of intellectual engagement, academic skills, civic engagement, and racial/cultural engagement for Asian American college students.

In the same study, there were analyses conducted utilizing data on 1,582 students (including 266 Asian Americans) at the University of Michigan. Results indicate that sustaining interracial contact, experiencing diversity in the classroom, and attending events and/or dialogues related to diversity were all positively linked to active thinking among Asian American students. Classroom diversity and attending events related to diversity were also positively linked with higher levels of intellectual engagement for Asian American students in the Michigan data.

Another national study points to the role of engaging with diversity for promoting civic outcomes for Asian American college students. In analysis of 4,697 students from 10 universities, researchers found that Asian Americans (n = 747) who experienced positive interactions with students of other races and participated in diversity activities had significantly higher pluralistic orientations, a trait that includes the ability to see an issue from multiple perspectives, discuss controversial issues, and be open to having one’s views challenged. Such skills...
are critical to preparing students to engage in a diverse democracy and global workforce.

**Impact of Interracial Engagement**

Other studies show that engaging with students of different races is associated with improved intergroup attitudes for Asian American college students. In an analysis of 3,098 undergraduate students from 28 public and private institutions, Asian American students (n = 765) who interacted more frequently with students of other races exhibited more positive attitudes toward Black and Latino/as in their senior year of college, even when controlling for prior attitudes and experiences. Additionally, both Black and Latino/a students who interacted with students of different races actually had more favorable attitudes toward Asian Americans as college seniors. This study points to two important benefits related to engaging within a racially diverse student body; not only do Asian Americans come to see other racial/ethnic groups more favorably, but other groups come to see Asian Americans more favorably. Such outcomes may play a role in stereotype reduction and improving overall intergroup relations for Asian Americans.

**Racial Diversity and Satisfaction with College**

In a study of a national sample of 21,651 undergraduates, results indicate that Asian Americans (n = 767) were significantly more likely to be satisfied with the racial diversity of the student body at more racially diverse institutions. Such satisfaction may seem like a less tangible benefit than increased intellectual engagement or improved attitudes. However, being satisfied with campus diversity is an important part of the psychological dimension of the campus racial climate – the perceptions that students hold about the state of campus race relations and intergroup dynamics. A negative campus racial climate can lead to strained race relations and an unwelcoming environment for students. Additionally, interacting with students of other races is associated with greater overall college satisfaction for Asian American college students, as well as feeling more prepared for post-college life and intentions to volunteer after college. This finding is especially critical because studies have found that Asian Americans tend to be less satisfied with college than students of other racial backgrounds. Thus, experiences that contribute to higher satisfaction among Asian American students are beneficial to their overall college experience and may contribute to their overall retention and well-being.

**Benefits of Diversity in Professional Schools (Law and Medicine)**

It is less common in legal and medical education to utilize national longitudinal datasets to measure the educational benefits of diversity, and among studies using nationally representative samples there are often not large enough numbers of Asian Americans to conduct separate analyses. However, some studies of diversity at leading professional schools confirm important benefits for Asian American students specifically. For example, Orfield and Whitla’s survey of law students at Harvard and the

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7 Mark E. Engberg & Sylvia Hurtado, Developing Pluralistic Skills and Dispositions in College: Examining Racial/Ethnic Group Differences, 82 J. Higher Educ. 416, 434 (2011) (“While the effects of intergroup learning on the pluralistic measure were significant for all other groups, Asian students seem to demonstrate the strongest benefit compared to White and Latino students.”).

8 Nicholas A. Bowman & Tiffany M. Griffin, Secondary Transfer Effects of Intergroup Contact: The Moderating Role of Social Status, 18 Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychol. 35, 38 (2012) (“In addition, Asian students’ contact with Hispanics was related to improved attitudes toward Blacks, their contact with Blacks was related to improved attitudes toward Hispanics, and their contact with Whites was related to improved attitudes toward Blacks.”).

9 Id. at 38 (“Black students’ contact with Asians was related to improved attitudes toward Hispanics and Whites, and their interactions with Hispanics and Whites were both related to improved attitudes toward Asians. Hispanic students’ interactions with Asians were associated with improved attitudes toward Blacks…”).


11 Samuel D. Museus et al., Racial differences in the effects of campus racial climate on degree completion: A structural equation model, 32 Rev. Higher Educ. 107, 127 (2008) (“Asian and Latina/o college students’ levels of satisfaction with their campus racial climates were only slightly higher than those of their Black counterparts. Thus, institutions of higher education have a long way to go with regard to creating and sustaining welcoming campus racial climates for the minority undergraduates whom they serve.”). See also Tara Yosso et al., Critical race theory, racial microaggressions, and campus racial climate for Latina/o undergraduates, 79 Harv. Educ. Rev. 659 (2009).


14 Nisha C. Gottfredson et al., The Effects of Educational Diversity in a National Sample of Law Students: Fitting Multilevel Latent Variable Models in Data With Categorical Indicators, 44 Multivariate Behavioral Research 305, 318 (2009) (national sample of students at 64 law schools uses structural equation modeling and finds finding that racial diversity is associated with reduction in prejudiced attitudes and increased perceived exposure to diverse ideas by the end of law school).
University of Michigan (1,820 students, 10.3% Asian American) asked whether “discussions with students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds changed your view of the equity of the criminal justice system” and 45% of Asian Americans reported a shift in their views by virtue of these interracial discussions in law school, a higher percentage than either whites (31%) or African Americans (27%) reported. A more recent analysis of the University of Michigan Law School documented how positive interactions among diverse students generally and in the classroom – including for Asian Americans specifically – improves students’ overall educational experience. Likewise, a survey by Whitla et al. of medical students at Harvard and UC San Francisco (639 students, one quarter were Asian American) found that 68% of Asian American medical students reported that “having students of different races and ethnicities” was a “clearly positive element of their educational experience.”

Conclusion

While the vast majority of studies examining the benefits of diversity analyze datasets that include all students in a single pooled sample, this brief identifies studies that report research finding separately for different racial/ethnic groups. Such studies provide noteworthy evidence that Asian American students indeed benefit from engaging with diversity during college and professional school. However, in order for Asian American students to reap the educational benefits of diversity from engaging with peers of different races, they need to attend institutions that are racially diverse in the first place. Affirmative action is an important tool that universities need to foster environments that are welcoming, rigorous, and democratic for all students of all races, including Asian Americans.


17 Dean Whitla et al., Educational Benefits of Diversity in Medical School: A Survey of Students, 78 Acad. Med. 460, 463 fig.1 (2003) (reaching 97% response rate for the 55% of medical students who could be contacted for a telephone interview done by Gallop Poll, included 338 Harvard and 301 UCSF responding students).