Abstract

Using a critical paradigm, in this paper we highlight how current theoretical perspectives may serve to minimize and undermine historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) within the discourse on racial climate assessment in higher education. In particular, we closely examine a widely used campus climate theory to highlight how it centers predominantly White institutions and fails to consider the unique history, structure, and issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion for HBCUs. In addition to identifying limitations on the current discourse on campus climate assessment at HBCUs, we provide important considerations and recommendations for future scholarship on this topic.

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Re-Imagining Campus Climate Assessment at HBCUs

*E*fforts to assess campus climate in terms of inclusivity (not interpersonal violence) play a critical role in fulfilling student retention and institutional diversity, equity, and inclusion goals (Brennan, 2018; Cardemil, 2018; Museus et al., 2008). In the United States, interest in campus climate assessment has increased as institutions increasingly wrestle with their commitment to these principles (Steward, 2019). Today, a variety of assessment tools are available, and scholarship is beginning to examine their strengths, weaknesses, and overall value (Hurtado et al., 2008).

Problem Statement

Most of the discourse surrounding campus climate assessment has understandably revolved around predominantly White institutions (PWIs), which make up the majority of institutions of higher education in the United States. While this is an important and necessary focus, the approach leaves a troubling dearth of inquiry and reflection about the role of campus climate assessment in minority serving institutions (MSIs). In the United States, MSIs are federally designated institutions that serve a significant number of minoritized students. MSIs can be mission focused (i.e., designated to serve a particular minoritized group, such as African Americans, American Indians, or Hispanics) or enrollment focused (i.e., designated to serve a minimum percentage of enrolled minoritized students). There are seven types of MSIs in the United states, and each type has its own unique sociopolitical origin, political support and scrutiny, and target student population: Alaska Native or Native

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Hawaiian serving institutions, Asian American or Native American Pacific Islander serving institutions, Hispanic serving institutions, historically Black colleges and universities, Native American serving Nontribal institutions, predominantly Black institutions, and tribal colleges or universities. This paper focuses on historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). As the oldest type of MSIs, HBCUs have a long history of serving disenfranchised students. Perhaps because of this history, there is often an implicit assumption that HBCUs do not have diversity, equity, and inclusion goals and requirements or do not need to engage in assessment in this area (Booker & Campbell-Whatley, 2019; Mutakabbir, 2018). The purpose of this paper is to raise critical questions and awareness about the need for more inquiry about campus climate assessment at HBCUs. We explicitly examine the limitations of the current discourse on campus climate assessment for HBCUs, but we believe this work highlights the value of similar work for other MSIs. We offer important considerations and recommendations for future scholarship on this topic.

Background

The term *campus climate* both enjoys and suffers from a broad definition in higher education. Its measurement or assessment is equally opaque. Rankin and Reason (2008) define *campus climate* as "attitudes, behaviors, and standards/practices that concern the access for, inclusion of, and level of respect for individual and group needs, abilities, and potential" (p. 264). Assessing campus climate, Hurtado, Carter, and Kardia (1998) argue, is "key for institutions that wish to create comfortable, diverse learning environments" (p. 53). Seen as a "proactive initiative rather than a reactive attempt to deal with significant issues affecting women, racial/ethnic minorities, disabled students, and LGBT students" (Hurtado et al., 2008, p. 204), campus climate assessment relies on a shared understanding of what and whose experience the particular assessment aims to understand.

Hart and Fellabaum (2008)'s seminal analysis of 118 campus climate studies contributed to answering some of the field's earliest questions about campus climate research, including the following:

> What are the foci of the studies? Are they interested in race/ethnicity, gender, social class, or other issues? Is it the student experience that is most central, or is it faculty or staff, or a combination? What method or methods are being used? Who is conducting them? Are they being conducted by a campus researcher or an external researcher or consultant? (Hart & Fellabaum, 2008, p. 222)

It is difficult for researchers to do a thorough analysis of campus climate without first identifying what is meant by the term. However, the fluid definition of *climate* has complicated scholars' attempts to codify and create a reliable history of campus climate activities.

As a first step, Peterson and Spencer (1990) make the important distinction between campus culture and campus climate. Culture, they argue, "focuses on the deeply embedded patterns of organizational behavior and the shared values, assumptions, beliefs, or ideologies that members have about their organization or its work" (p. 6). Climate, on the other hand, "can be defined as the current common patterns of important dimensions of organizational life or its members' perceptions of and attitudes toward those dimensions" (p. 7). They further define *climate* by its major features:

- a primary emphasis on common participant views of a wide array of organizational phenomena that allow for comparison among groups or over time

- a focus on current patterns of beliefs and behaviors

- an often ephemeral or malleable character (Peterson & Spencer, 1990, p. 8)

Peterson and Spencer (1990) offer that "climate is pervasive, potentially inclusive of a broad array of organizational phenomena, yet easily focused to fit the researcher's or the administrator's interest" (p. 8). The "pervasive" and "inclusive" nature of climate opens the door to a variety of activities and assessments. However, the majority of available instruments

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seem to target the experiences of underrepresented campus community members. Therefore, while the ways to identify climate are many, the targets for these assessments are narrower. While all students may be asked the degree to which they have experienced racism or micro-aggressions in the classroom, the data from students who are underrepresented are more likely to be reported and subsequently used for policy or programming initiatives (Jensen, 2011). This approach, however, can dangerously lead to othering the already othered and defining climate as what happens to others, not how the overrepresented are implicated in the experiences of others (Jensen, 2011).

Chang et al. (2010) explain that understanding climate is essential to helping colleges and universities meet diversity and equity related outcomes and indeed the student learning outcomes that form the core of their enterprise. However, the ambiguous parameters for the design of a more inclusive curriculum can lead to widely different standards for what is chosen and how more diverse materials are utilized. Chang et al. explain that "when it comes to engaging with diversity, White students tend to view this as an opportunity to be exposed to different cultures, whereas African American students tend to view this as an opportunity to enhance their institution's capacity for inclusion" (p. 46). This spectrum of purpose can lead many institutions to take an unbalanced approach to how they write campus climate assessments and make decisions based on the results. This can be even more complex for HBCUs that may be assumed to not have a problem with diversity and inclusion of historically marginalized populations.

Increasingly there have been specially tailored climate tools and models focused on specific populations, such as LGBT+ students (Evans et al., 2017; Garvey et al., 2015; Yost & Gilmore, 2011), international students (Soria & Brazelton, 2018), faculty (Austin, 1994; Martinez et al., 2014), socioeconomic class (Park et al., 2013), immigrant students (Stebleton et al., 2014), and various religious groups (Riggers-Piehl & Lehman, 2016). However, few of these studies identify HBCUs as research sites.

Paradigm

We approach our examination of this topic using a critical paradigm. The goal of critical theory is to uncover dominant perspectives that may serve to minimize, undermine, or devalue HBCUs within the discourse of assessment in higher education. Critical theory seeks to highlight hidden language, approaches, and perspectives that privilege and disempower in order to raise awareness, spark reflection, and invite actions that will promote change. In particular, we problematize the current discourse on diversity, equity, and inclusion assessment in higher education that centers PWIs and neglects to address HBCUs and the special circumstances, issues, and approaches that may need to be considered in order to implement effective assessment that measures how diversity, equity, and inclusion is implemented within these institutions.

Explanation of the Project

Recent campus climate research build on earlier iterations to include the experiences of racially and ethnically diverse students. Though distributed and analyzed with the stated purpose of making all students feel welcome and like they belong, these assessments are built on the embedded notion that other(ed) students do not belong and, in some cases, should not belong. The thrust of this paper is to ask what assessments of inclusion and belonging in terms of campus climate should look like in spaces where traditionally underrepresented populations are the majority. Before we explore the possibilities of how the discourse can be expanded to include HBCUs, it is important to understand the current discourse on campus climate assessment and its origins and influential factors.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and the Courts

Higher education access for students of color has always been strongly contested by Whites, using the law of segregation as a shield. Once legal segregation was declared unconstitutional, historically White institutions resorted to using arbitrary methods to systematically exclude non-Whites (Goldstein Hode & Meisenbach, 2017). To combat this, affirmative action was established through executive orders. While regarded as a contentious

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policy issue, desegregating acts like affirmative action contributed to institutionalizing diversity within higher education (Lipson, 2011). The overriding discourse of proponents of affirmative action points to the research on the benefits to the general (White) population (Goldstein Hode & Meisenbach, 2017). Some scholars have argued that this defense of affirmative action has negatively skewed the discourse on diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education to center Whites as benefactors of these goals to the neglect of non-Whites, who get cast as educational props (Chin, 2011; Wray, 2008). Regardless, this discourse on affirmative action has bled into the way campus learning environments are conceptualized. The discourse focuses on how a critical mass of often racially diverse students can influence the learning environment for both White students, who stand to benefit from contact with diverse students, and students of color, who have been shown to do better in environments where they are at less risk for tokenism, alienation, and microaggressions (Campbell et al., 2019).

Campus Climate Theory and HBCUs

Hurtado et al.'s (2008) critical review of climate assessment instruments utilized a campus climate theory proposed by Hurtado, Clayton-Pederson, et al. (1998). In their review, they set current racial climate assessments against a four-dimensional backdrop of (a) historical, (b) structural, (c) psychological, and (d) behavioral dimensions of campus climate (Hurtado et al., 2008, p. 205). We have identified significant ways in which this framework may fall short for HBCUs.

Historical Component

As evidenced by the Hurtado et al. (2008) review of campus climate assessments, the historical component of campus climate theory is often ignored. The historical component of campus climate theory refers to the degree to which the institution has and sustains a "history and legacy of inclusion or exclusion" (Hurtado et al., 2008, p. 205). Indeed, history plays a significant role in campus climate. Efforts to address diversity, equity, and inclusion often focus on the exclusionary history of PWIs and efforts to eliminate this legacy of exclusion. Access into higher education for students of color has always been strongly contested, thus limiting the opportunities for both Whites and students of color to learn from multiple perspectives, join in cross cultural dialogue, and bridge gaps between communities that have to interact in the work environment. Universities have a long history of using arbitrary methods to decide who gets admitted while systematically using criteria that intentionally prohibit large numbers of students from particular groups from attending, such as SAT scores, pictures, and recommendation letters (Anderson, 1988; Bowen and Bok, 1998).

The discourse on campus climate and HBCUs is largely ahistorical (in that climate conversations do not include a rich contextualization of these colleges' and universities' beginnings). When history is acknowledged, there is often a failure to connect how diversity, equity, and inclusion may be complicated by this history. HBCUs are federally designated, defined, and protected according to the Higher Education Act of 1965 and arose in response to the theretofore unchecked traditions of discrimination and exclusion. Understanding their history, including the fact that HBCUs have historically been more open to diverse students than their PWI counterparts (Gasman & Nguyen, 2015), may help better contextualize efforts to assess their campus climate.

Structural Component

Although some efforts have been made to diversify higher education, there are still considerable disparities between the higher education enrollment and graduation rates of students of color and White students, especially at PWIs. Despite these gaps, a plethora of research demonstrates the benefits for White students of interacting with diverse, non-Black students at PWIs (Milem, 2003). However, sustained resistance to efforts to broaden access for students of color at PWIs persists.

With the settlement of several segregation de jure lawsuits between states and the Office of Civil Rights and the rise of performance-based funding, there has been mounting pressure for HBCUs to diversify and expand the type of students they recruit (Lundy Wagner, 2015; Mobley et al., 2017). In fact, in some states, particular performance metrics designed

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to meet state equity and diversity goals reward HBCUs for enrolling and supporting students who are characterized as racial minorities within the scope of the institution (i.e., non-Black students; Jones et al., 2017). To address this pressure, many HBCUs have begun to focus on recruiting more diversity by attracting and enrolling more non-Black, international, nontraditional, and LGBT+ student populations (Snipes & Darnell, 2017).

This new focus on diversification brings with it increased scrutiny and controversy about the identity and mission of HBCUs (Ingram et al., 2015; Palmer et al., 2018). While there is little discussion about these tensions when considering campus climate assessment, there needs to be more critique about how traditional campus climate assessments may gloss over these very real and complex tensions.

HBCUs, with their historical mission of serving disenfranchised and marginalized students, are closely connected to and greatly influenced by state government values and priorities and play a valuable role in promoting equality and opportunity in both education and the workforce. For example, HBCUs only represent 3% of all institutions of higher education in the United States but grant almost 20% of all bachelor's degrees earned by African Americans. They also produce 70% of all Black dentists and physicians, 50% of all Black engineers, 50% of all Black public school teachers, and 35% of all Black attorneys (Lomax, 2015). Additionally, many HBCUs have a history of and ongoing commitment to empowering both students of color and the communities from which they hail. This legacy is not often reflected in the ways in which HBCUs are assessed. We also know that enrollment among non-Black students at HBCUs is steadily growing. White students make up the highest number of non-Black enrollments, followed by Latinos and Asians respectively (Palmer, et.al., 2018).

Psychological Component

Much of the literature on campus climate within higher education focuses on the psychological impact of the PWI campus climate for students of color as well the sociological implications for communities of color. Within PWIs, the campus environment for students of color can be particularly toxic, with stereotyping, tokenism, evidence of microaggressions, and overt racism increasing with the percentage of Whites in the student population (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Karkouti, 2016). Empirical studies on PWIs show that inclusive programming positively engages students of color and provides a forum for promoting interactions between students of color and faculty members. This is obviously a crucial component in improving campus climate for students of color, who report feeling alienated and even unwelcome in a majority environment, but there is also evidence that White students benefit indirectly from this type of diversity through greater awareness of its presence and mission and directly by interacting with non-White peers. Consequently, White students seem to develop a higher level of empathy for diverse groups on campus (Bowman, 2010; Hurtado, 1999).

This kind of evidence is not apparent for non-African American and international students who attend HBCUs. For example, both Closson and Henry (2008) and Carter and Fountaine (2012) found that, absent a critical mass, White students who attend HBCUs do not feel isolated; however, they do experience feeling othered in certain contexts. The picture for Latinx students attending HBCUs shows they sometimes feel isolated and encounter microaggressions (Allen & Stone, 2016).

HBCUs embody inclusion in both their mission and history and for many Black students who attend HBCUs, the presence of a critical mass can make a significant impact on campus climate and feelings of self-efficacy and belonging. However, while HBCUs are producing better results for Black students, it is sometimes forgotten that a critical mass is not enough to cultivate inclusion or equity. Black students are not a monolith; there are subcultures within the Black student population, and every student has multiple identities that may also be marginalized. The danger in taking the success of Black student performance at HBCUs at face value is that it negates the intersectionality of Black students and deters a closer examination of how HBCUs may or may not nurture other parts of a student's identity and how they support non-Black students. For example, Bonner (2001) investigated HBCUs where Black women composed the highest percentage of students on campus and found that Black female students faced similar struggles within HBCU contexts as they did in PWIs,

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reporting that HBCUs have a lot of work to do when it comes to dismantling sexism. These findings have been confirmed again and again by recent scholars (Glenn, 2019; Jean-Marie, 2017; Lockett & Gasman, 2018; Njoku & Patton, 2017). While HBCUs are more inclusive and supportive of diverse students in many ways, they still have work to do in creating a sense of belonging for non-Black student populations. For example, studies show that Muslim college students often encounter a Christian-normative environment at HBCUs, and while some HBCUs are making efforts to support non-Christian students, there is still a presumption and, in some cases, a demand to prioritize Christian beliefs and values. This norming of Christian values has implications for other populations as well, especially those in the LGBT+ community. In fact, according to Lenning (2017), "Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) are notoriously perceived as unwelcoming towards lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBT+) students, and are considerably behind predominately White institutions (PWIs) in regard to providing supportive and affirming environments" (p. 283). There is empirical evidence that LGBT+ students face a toxic environment at HBCUs, primarily due to the affiliation many HBCUs have to the Black church and its conservative fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible which condemns homosexuality (Coleman, 2016; Ward, 2005). Gasman and Nguyen (2015) also point out that the historical relationship between HBCUs and the church has stymied efforts to institutionalize support for LGBT+ students. Studies show that LGBT+ students at HBCUs often do not view their campus administrators and faculty as supportive (Lenning, 2017).

Behavioral Component

In PWIs, the behavioral component is addressed through change for greater inclusion. For example, White student development is enhanced through the efforts of students of color to organize protests against campus behavior that marginalizes students of color (Lane et al., 2017). In this setting, organized demonstrations empower students to become involved, raise awareness about identity issues formerly not known to the majority population, enhance democratic participation, and create a sense of purpose (Malaney & Berger, 2005). Astin (1993) found that cross-cultural discussions and interaction can increase racial understanding, foreign language skills, listening ability, and attendance at cultural events; while Kezar (2019) points to organized student groups and extracurricular activities that create spaces for learning, dialogue, and a shift in cultural inclusivity for different students. Samson (2018) presents evidence that largely homogenous White student organizations at PWIs, such as fraternities and sororities, have a negative impact on intercultural interactions for White students. Specifically, Samson suggests that there is a link between group membership in what he calls Greek letter organizations (GLOs) and heightened negative racial attitudes, particularly among White males. While these GLOs do not explicitly bar applicants or recruits from other races, implicit rules usually limit GLOs to token or trophy members of different races.

Another important area within higher education that addresses the behavior component is the classroom. Nussbaum (1997) refers to the social context of multiculturalism and the dilemma institutions face as they struggle with how to include diverse perspectives and ways of thinking into the curriculum. She asserts that all students benefit from a discourse of diversity that acknowledges and legitimizes marginalized histories, curriculums, and pedagogies.

There is an assumption that with a Black critical mass of students, HBCUs embrace behavioral inclusion. Perhaps this is why centralized offices and resources are not commonly dedicated to multicultural centers and diversity and equity at HBCUs (Carter & Christian, 2015). But while alternative curricula and attention to cultural identity are some of the key and most visible staples to an education at an HBCU, these are almost exclusively focused on the African American perspective. The key challenge is that the Black diaspora spans many continents, ethnicities, nationalities, classes, sexualities, and religions. There has been very little examination about the limits of what is considered Afrocentric or Black within HBCU curricula and approaches to teaching and learning. Additionally, the same challenges that were raised in regard to other marginalized identities and populations within the psychological area extend to the way space, traditions, artifacts, curriculum, pedagogy, and interactions are used and occur on the HBCU campus. For example, an HBCU with a

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strong Christian doctrine may not consider how the celebration of other religious holidays may affect the academic calendar and availability of students from other faiths. Similarly, there may be pervasive heteronormative speech and language that conveys LGBT+ students are not welcome.

Denouement: Interrogating and Revising HBCU Climate Assessment

Moving forward, several steps can be taken to better conceptualize what an HBCU climate assessment could look like and how it could be used. First, Hurtado et al.'s (2008) seminal work must be extended or refocused to include the HBCU institutional family. Within this collection of schools, attention needs to be paid to how majority-minority HBCUs differ from majority-majority institutions in their approach to climate assessment. Looking across these institutions could provide necessary information on what is currently happening and the degree to which it is working.

Recommendations

While some scholars are beginning to push for the need for campus climate assessment at HBCUs (Contreras, 2018; Cuellar & Johnson-Ahorlu, 2016; Hurtado & Ruiz Alvarado, 2015), there is a noticeable dearth of approaches and models designed specifically for HBCUs. We hope that this conceptual work offers a foundation for HBCU climate assessment.

Proposal 1: A New Conceptual Theory for Campus Climate Tailored for HBCUs

Current campus climate assessments are deficient by nature as they operate based on the assumption that an alien or aberrant element is added to a monolithic (read functional) population. Climate assessment results are often focused on the responses of the minorities and rarely on the perceptions of the majority. In many ways, climate assessments at PWIs may be construed as a way to assess marginalized populations about their awareness of their place in institutions that were not built for them. New theories need to posit ways of knowing that transcend the them/us binary; identify intragroup and intergroup dynamics; accommodate the intersectional identities of all students; and suggest a definition of climate that goes beyond safety to include belonging, value, and ownership.

In addition to reassessing traditional campus climate theories to consider the unique needs and strengths of HBCUs, we propose the consideration of other conceptual frameworks that decenter Whiteness and instead focus on the broader goal of equity. Two frameworks to consider are Gonzales et al.'s (2018) organizational framework and Bensimon et al.'s (2016) five guiding principles for addressing equity in policy and practice. Gonzales et al. (2018) propose using a new organizational framework for institutions to examine both individual and group dynamics. The goal of this framework is to not only improve the performance of the organization but also give more priority to the principles of power and justice. In this framework, the authors make an effort to reimagine a hierarchical construction of leadership so that leadership can be understood beyond de jure structure or what French and Raven (1959) refer to as *legitimate* power. Instead, referent power and expert power may better identify ways institutions manifest meaningful and sustainable transformation.

Bensimon et al.'s (2016) five guiding principles for equity in both policy and practice require the following: (a) clarity in language, goals, and measures; (b) equity-mindedness as a guiding paradigm for language and action; (c) equity in practice and policies designed to accommodate differences in the contexts of students' learning; (d) a continual process of learning, disaggregating data, and questioning assumptions about whether goals are relevant and effective; and (e) equity enacted as a system-wide principle. When applied to assessment, these five principles support a more in-depth, critical, and grounded approach to measuring diversity, equity, and inclusion in policy and practice. This theory also demands concrete language, objectives, and outcomes within assessments for supporting diversity and equity goals. While these principles are helpful for understanding how diversity, equity, and inclusion are addressed within policy, they have yet to be used as a framework for examining assessment. Though this proposal focuses specifically on the need for a new campus climate theory for HBCUs, the same need is certainly shared in their unique ways by the other MSIs.

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Proposal 2: Creating New Campus Climate Assessments for HBCUs That Consider Their Unique Histories, Missions, Challenges, and Tensions

For HBCUs, this would require addressing specific subpopulations within the Black community and the intersectionality of Black students, LGBT+ students, religious minorities, students with disabilities, non-Black students of color, non-Black international students, and White students. HBCUs are not internally or externally monolithic. HBCUs have complex histories that tell an important narrative of American higher education. The many characteristics that can be used to define these institutions, their funding sources, resource richness, geography, longevity, and prestige can all influence how climate could (and should) be assessed. Internally, HBCUs must acknowledge that their student, faculty, and staff populations are not only diverse but that majority/minority politics cannot play out the same way at these institutions as they do at their predominantly White counterparts. Again, the spectrum of MSIs involves unique populations, histories, and contexts that should determine which assessments would be appropriate to capture their distinctive climate. Moreover, these new MSI-specific assessments must be accepted by accrediting bodies, state boards of education, professional organizations, and peer PWIs as equally valuable or internally more valuable than traditional assessments that may make more sense to those outside of the MSI world.

Proposal 3: Linking Climate Assessment to Accreditation

Accreditation is a critical process designed to foster continuous improvement and the development of exemplary programs. In the accountability movement, accreditation has become more visible and significant to an institution's survival. While primarily loss of accreditation translates to a loss in Title IV funding, it can also be tied to a loss in research dollars, enrollment, alumni giving, and prestige. All colleges and universities have the goal of achieving and maintaining accreditation for all of their academic units; however, HBCUs are more vulnerable during the accreditation process. A socially just and inclusive mission often leads HBCUs to accept more underprepared students, which can have a direct impact on student learning outcome assessments and graduation outcomes.

With the decline of state funding and the rise of accountability demands, particularly those related to regional and discipline-specific accreditation, assessment has become a top priority in higher education. Most institutions of higher education engage in some form of assessment, but the push to identify and incorporate ways of assessing diversity, equity, and inclusion is rarely a part of most institutions' accreditation-facing assessment strategy. Assessment for continuous improvement usually focuses on learning, graduation outcomes, financial efficiency, and mission-centered effectiveness. As accreditation can be an incredibly powerful force in institutional development and change, additional standards or requirements related to climate could motivate institutions to regularly assess diversity, equity, and inclusion and think about how these areas are linked to other campus-wide goals. Accreditation agencies rarely ask questions about diversity, equity, and inclusion unless they are specifically noted in the strategic plan or mission of an institution, but many regional accreditors will require institutions to disaggregate their student and faculty outcomes by a variety of demographics, including race, gender, expected family contribution, and faculty employment status. An important step forward would be for these agencies to include race and ethnicity, as appropriate, when assessing equity.

Campus climate assessment provides an important but additional accountability lever that is usually only pulled by institutions whose mission specifically identifies a focus on inclusion or diversity. Little consideration is given to how HBCUs cultivate diversity and equity goals. There is a growing critique about the lack of attention paid to these values in the accreditation process, and how addressing diversity and equity can benefit HBCUs in the accreditation process. Additional regional requirements and discipline-specific requirements could force institutions to acknowledge that climate assessment extends beyond tracking and means more than good publicity.

As accreditation can be an incredibly powerful force in institutional development and change, additional standards or requirements related to climate could motivate institutions to regularly assess diversity, equity, and inclusion and think about how these areas are linked to other campus-wide goals.

It is time to reimagine campus climate theory and assessment to build and create sustainable theory and practical campus climate assessment models for the 21st century that emphasize the enduring mission and goal of HBCUs to offer equitable, diverse, and inclusive learning environments for all students.

Proposal 4: Rethink How Campus Climate Assessment Focuses on Outcomes

Cardemil (2018) points out that while campus climate assessment can play a critical role in advancing diversity and inclusion efforts, one of the key limitations of this type of assessment is that it focuses on outcomes, not processes. He suggests that the approach to campus climate assessment needs to change to a more developmental approach that is reflective and educationally process-centered rather than focused on outcomes. Whether building on Cardemil's approach or utilizing more traditional assessments, outcomes and the use of data for improvement must be reconsidered. Institutions cannot depend on head counts and data from the multicultural center to give the kind of 360 degree view of climate that is needed for administration to make lasting and appropriately funded changes.

Scholarly Significance and Suggestions for Future Research

In both accreditation and assessment efforts, diversity, equity, and inclusion at HBCUs are woefully under researched. This paper offers a bridge for assessment officers to consider the approaches, tools, and gaps for assessing institutional commitment and support toward these values and goals. In addition to the aforementioned recommendations, we have identified possibilities and openings for future research that may be of interest to scholars interested in campus climate assessment at HBCUs and other MSIs.

Conclusion

Many HBCUs are currently reevaluating their institutional strategic plan and assessments due to demands from the state, federal government, and accreditation organizations. HBCUs are already doing a fantastic job of educating underrepresented students of color in the United States (Chenier & Bista, 2019; Palmer et al., 2010; Toldson, 2018). In many areas they have done a better job than PWIs. Adopting specially tailored campus climate assessment would not only inform how these institutions can best meet the needs of their different populations of students but also highlight their achievements. Traditional models of campus climate assessment may not be suitable for HBCUs because they are based on theoretical suppositions that center PWIs and White students and do not take into account the unique history, structure, populations, and tensions found within HBCUs. It is time to reimagine campus climate theory and assessment to build and create sustainable theory and practical campus climate assessment models for the 21st century that emphasize the enduring mission and goal of HBCUs to offer equitable, diverse, and inclusive learning environments for all students.

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