

Diversity and Whiteness in the California Community Colleges: Recommendations Toward Institutional Transformation

by Debbie Klein, FACCC President

During a recent meeting, Chancellor Oakley and I agreed to write a joint piece on faculty diversity within the California Community College system as a way of engaging in productive dialogue about areas of mutual concern. I welcomed the challenge and began my research by delving into the system's diversity data, which led me to some of the latest studies on Whiteness and diversity within higher education in the United States.

Since our meeting a few months ago, there have been several new incidents of gun violence motivated by white nationalist ideology. One of these shootings occurred at the Gilroy Garlic Festival, Gilroy's treasured annual celebration with deep roots in Gavilan College, my community. According to Andrew Dyer's article in the San Diego Union-Tribune,

"Leaks Reveal San Diego Operations of White Nationalists Active at Area Colleges," over the past few years, a white supremacist organization, Identity Evropa, has targeted college campuses in California with flyers luring students to meetings where they discuss the anti-immigrant, racist, and Islamophobic ideas of the "great replacement," the "Jewish question," and Islam as a "cancer".

It is no accident that these groups are on the rise under a U.S. administration that espouses white nationalist rhetoric and pushes through racist policies and practices on a regular basis. After several white identity recruitment flyers were posted on my campus last semester, my colleagues and I organized an event in which students and faculty discussed the history and current threat of white supremacy and ways



we could take action to ensure a safe, inclusive, and antiracist campus. When we situate our systemwide conversations about equity within this context, the urgency of our charge becomes clear. How can we take action to transform our institutions into multicultural, antiracist communities that collectively engage in the struggle for a more just future?

One of the most illuminating recent texts for framing our challenges around diversity and student success is *Whiteness in Higher Education: The Invisible Missing Link in Diversity and Racial Analysis* by Cabrera, Franklin, and Watson. The authors apply five frameworks to their analyses of Whiteness: colorblindness, epistemology of ignorance, Whiteness as property, ontological expansiveness, and assumed racial comfort. The monograph concludes with suggestions for future study alongside cautionary notes, including the potential pitfall of recentering the dominant group's experiences while attempting to disrupt its dominance. Cabrera, Franklin, and Watson make a compelling case for applying the insights of Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) toward the destabilization of the "normativity of Whiteness within institutions of higher education".

I have designed my anthropology curriculum around themes of social justice for the past 20 years, featuring course content from the broad fields of Critical Race Studies (CRS) and CWS. While I am not an expert in these fields I take it as my responsibility as FACCC's new president to become more familiar with these fields and reach out to colleagues who have been doing the hard work of transforming our colleges into more equitable communities. In this spirit, I will briefly define and discuss Whiteness, offer my analysis of our system's diversity data, and conclude with some recommendations for ways to move the needle toward institutional transformation.

Whiteness is not White people. Within the field of CWS, Whiteness is defined as a discourse or social concept encompassing the following historically rooted policies and practices: failure to recognize or analyze systemic racism; failure to empathize with or seek understanding of marginalized groups or experiences in which race plays a part; and minimization of the history of racism in the U.S.

The category "White People," on the other hand, is a socially constructed identity often based on skin color. Though White

people are the beneficiaries of Whiteness, any person or group of people can participate in Whiteness, an invisible and normative discourse that often remains unnamed and undefined in our institutions. Given that our colleges are microcosms of our larger society, the discourse of Whiteness permeates the culture of our colleges. For example, as we implement equitable hiring practices, an understanding of the hidden assumptions of Whiteness would help in the development of more racially conscious approaches to hiring.

Empirical studies have concluded that campus cultures become more racially conscious with the institutionalization of the following practices: 1) development of racial justice allies; 2) White privilege pedagogy; and 3) diversification of the curriculum. Each of these practices consists of a wide range of strategies and models, including pitfalls and reasons why these practices alone are not panaceas. While I do not have the space to discuss these practices in detail, I will offer a brief discussion of what it means to become a racial justice ally.

"Ally" is a general term describing individuals from a majority group trying to work to support a marginalized group by stepping out of the confines of the majority context. Allies work to interrogate the majority system of oppression while making sure they do not recenter the conversation on the majority experience. Social justice ally literature defines the process of becoming a racial justice ally as developing an understanding of racism, power, and privilege and one's role in perpetuating these systems. For White people, this process includes developing an understanding of these systems intellectually and effectively; developing consciousness around Whiteness; and participating in racial justice action. Cabrera, Franklin, and Watson recommend that colleges "hire, develop, and support instructors and professors who are racial justice allies," colleagues who become integral to the goal of altering campus cultures.

As a White, middle-aged, educated, U.S. American woman, I benefit from the privileges of Whiteness. Through listening, reading, teaching, researching, organizing, and collaborating with people from diverse race and ethnic backgrounds, I am committed to becoming more conscious of my own privilege and more aware of what it's like to walk in someone else's shoes.

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Snapshot Comparison and Analysis of Student and Faculty Diversity

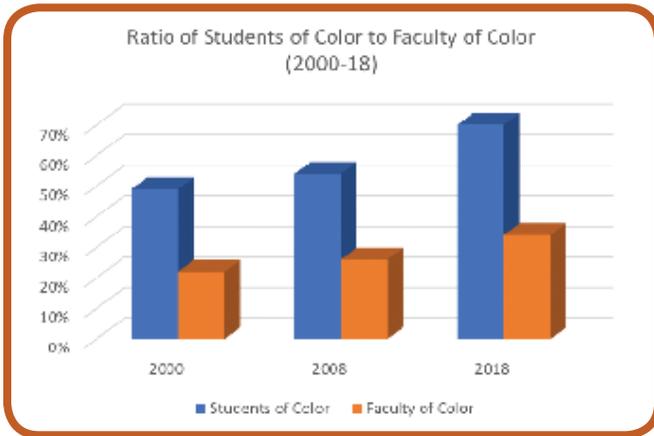


Figure 1

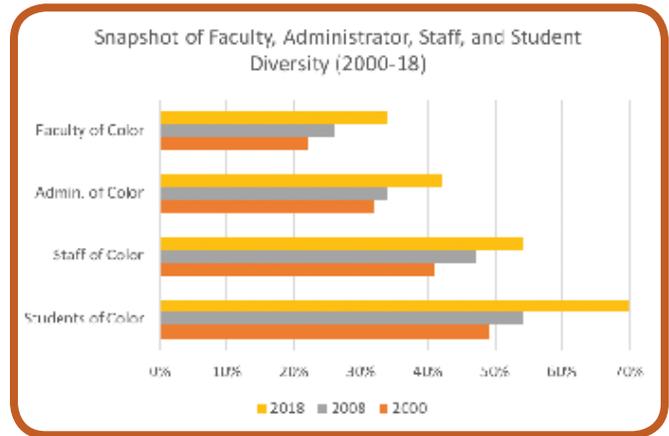


Figure 2

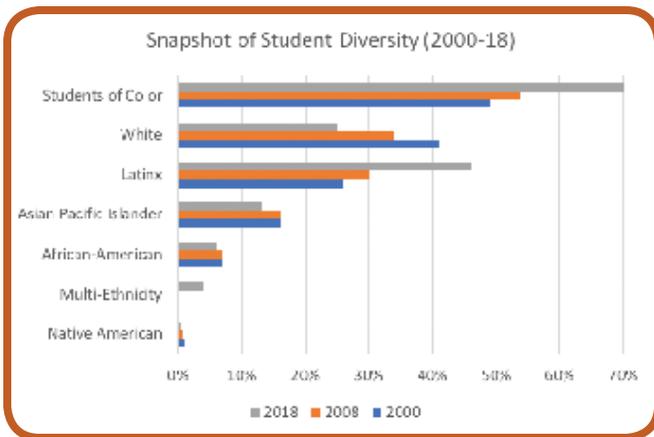


Figure 3

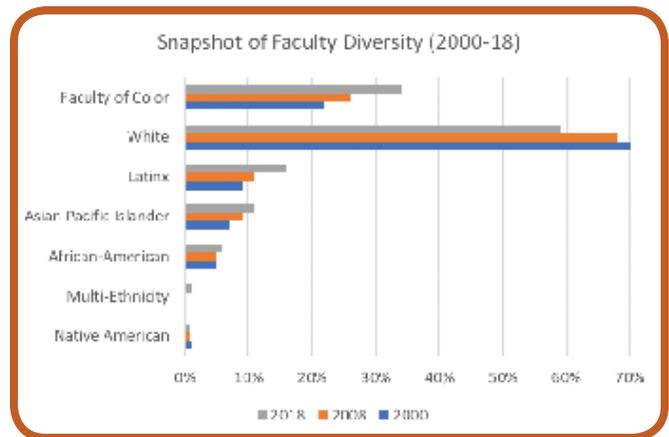


Figure 4

few generations ago, most of my Jewish family were persecuted during the pogroms in Europe and I have been personally targeted over the course of my life because of my cultural background. My life's work as an anthropologist, teacher, and activist and my experiences and empathy with people and groups who are marginalized fuel my passion and desire to fight for an antiracist and just world. Once willing to acknowledge and analyze the privilege of Whiteness, each of us can choose to disrupt Whiteness and participate in collective, antiracist action that can lead toward the transformation of our colleges into more equitable communities (13).

Since 2000, the percentage of Students of Color, the majority of our students, has steadily increased. Over the past decade, the percentage of Students of Color increased by 16 percent, representing 70 percent of all students in 2018. However, the ratio of Students of Color to Faculty of Color has remained relatively constant (figure 1). Over the past decade, Latinx students have become the largest ethnic group of students in our system, representing 46 percent of all students in 2018 (figure 3). While the ratio of Latinx faculty to Latinx students has improved slightly (by 3.7 percent), this ratio was 1 to 77 in 2018, the largest gap between faculty and students in any group.

The percentages of API and African-American students decreased slightly in the past decade (by three and one percent respectively), while the percentages of API and African-American faculty have slightly increased (by two and one percent respectively). The ratio of API faculty to API students was 1 to 27 in 2018. The ratio of African-American faculty to African-American students was 1 to 26 in 2018. The category, "Multi-ethnicity," was not yet recorded in 2000 and 2008, though the ratio of Multi-ethnic faculty to Multi-ethnic students was 1 to 75 in 2018. Though the ratio of Native American faculty to Native American students was 1 to 19 in 2018, the percentages of Native American students and faculty were a mere one percent in 2000 and have declined to around half a percent in 2018. While the percentage of White students decreased to 25 percent of all students in 2018, the ratio of White faculty to White students was 1 to 11, the smallest gap between faculty and students in any group (figures 3 and 4).

The ratio of Faculty of Color to Students of Color was 1 to 54 in 2018 (figure 1). The percentage of Faculty of Color has increased since 2000; however, the gap between Faculty of Color and White faculty in 2018 was still 25 percent. And finally, in comparison with students, staff, and administrators, Faculty of Color are the least represented within their category. In 2018, Students of Color were 70 percent of all students. Staff of Color were 54 percent of all staff. Administrators of Color were 42 percent of all administrators. And Faculty of Color were 34 percent of all faculty (figure 2).

Research shows that all students benefit from working with Faculty of Color in the classroom and on campus. Professor of Education at San Diego State University, Luke Wood summarizes recent data from US colleges and universities:

"...[T]he representation of diversity within the professoriate is disproportionately White. Roughly speaking, for every one White faculty member there are 16 White students. In contrast, for every one Black and Latinx faculty member there are 49

Black students and 84 Latinx students respectively. These data have direct implications for student advising, same-race role models, mentorship, cultural relevance and, ultimately student success."

According to Sebastian Hua-Yu Cherng and Laura Davis' research, "The Importance of Minority Teachers: Student Perception of Minority Versus White Teachers," all student groups, including White students, evaluate Faculty of Color more positively, suggesting that Faculty of Color are able to communicate and work effectively with students who do not share their race or ethnicity. Black, Asian, and Latinx students have more favorable perceptions of Faculty of Color than White faculty, even after considering factors such as faculty working conditions and student performance.

Eugene Whitlock points out in his research, "Diversity, Equity and Unconscious Bias: How We Can Create an Inclusive Environment to Best Serve our Students" that Faculty of Color are more engaged with students due to their consistent use of the following practices: decolonizing the curriculum; relationship building; culturally relevant teaching; collaborative learning; validating messages; welcoming engagement; appropriate disclosing; facilitating connection to support services and resources; empowerment techniques; and institutional responsibility. When White faculty learn and implement these exemplary and effective practices, they also do a better job serving students. Not only do we need to hire more Faculty of Color, we need to institutionalize equity-minded professional development for all faculty.

In the past decade, FACCC, ASCCC, and the faculty unions have tirelessly advocated for dedicated and ongoing funding for full-time faculty positions with an emphasis on diversifying the faculty. Given our system's diversity data and the current research on Whiteness and diversity in higher education, there is indisputable evidence that more resources should be dedicated to hiring and diversifying the faculty if we are serious about making any progress toward our equity and completion goals.

>> *continued on page 20*

Recommendations

- ▶ Institutionalize ongoing funding for full-time faculty positions with an emphasis on diversity.
- ▶ Institutionalize ongoing funding for part-time faculty equity.
- ▶ Institutionalize ongoing funding for professional development for faculty, staff, and administrators with an emphasis on equity-mindedness. While some faculty organizations (e.g. 3CSN, FACCC, ASCCC), colleges, and colleagues have been leading and participating in equity-minded programs and perhaps experiencing cultural shifts on their campuses, equity-minded professional development has yet to be institutionalized across the system.
- ▶ Institutionalize equitable hiring practices, such as the following recommended by Wood:

Implicit bias training:

- ▶ Certification that applicant pools reflect the diversity of relevant degree holders within the field;
- ▶ Diversity advocates on every committee;
- ▶ Inclusive job search criteria such as the prioritization of candidates who have “demonstrated experience in research, teaching, and/or service to historically underrepresented and underserved communities” (2-3);
- ▶ Require candidates to address issues related to diversity and equity in their applications and interviews. (Whitlock)
- ▶ Incentivize institutions to make progress on the four areas listed above.

The California Community College system is one of the most significant and vital engines for educational, economic, and personal growth opportunities in California, and particularly for Residents of Color and low income. While many faculty are actively working to create more equitable college cultures and classrooms, transformation will only happen with “the commitment of [our] institutions and the unwavering support of [our] administrations. It is extremely difficult and constant work, but that is what makes it so necessary” (Cabrera, Franklin, and Watson 94). Our colleges must “confront racism, power, and privilege at all levels of the institution” (89) if we want to become better teachers, colleagues, and allies capable of creating more equitable relationships, classrooms, and institutions.

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