

*After Fisher: What the Supreme Court's Ruling
Means for Students, Colleges, and the Country*

Opportunities and Priorities for Future Research

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The *Fisher* decision suggests several future opportunities and priorities for rigorous research. The time is ripe to shift the research focus from developing basic justifications for campus diversity to better understand how campuses can achieve rich diversity in their admissions, recruitment, and student aid systems and to better understand how to achieve diversity across campus and across academic fields.

Desegregation vs. Integration

- Martin Luther King Jr. often described the difference between desegregation—bringing people together in the same place—and integration.
- Desegregation, or the creation of diverse institutions, is an essential step but is basically about removing barriers. The “democratic dream of integration” was “creative” and “profound” because it involved true acceptance and respect, giving everyone the freedom to “fulfill my total capacity.” (M. L. King Jr., “An Analysis of the Ethical Demands of Integration,” 1962).
- In the higher education context, integration involves acceptance, genuine diversity, and growing understanding and collaboration—conditions that can greatly increase the benefits of diversity.

Evolving From Desegregation to Integration

- For a half century, most of the legal and political battles have been about desegregation—whether selective colleges can take the steps they think are necessary to achieve a reasonable degree of diversity in a society that is still racially polarized on many dimensions.
- The legal and political context has meant that a great deal of research has, by necessity, been devoted to the questions that determine whether colleges can take the steps they think are essential to achieve desegregation.
- Now that the central legal issues seem decided by the Supreme Court, there should be space to devote a great deal of intellectual energy and on-campus experimentation and research about the conditions that foster real integration and the long-term impacts it has when it is achieved.

Research Needs

The Impact of Admissions, Recruitment, and Counseling

- The *Fisher* decision recognizes that classroom diversity as well as institutional diversity are important. However, there has been little research, for example, on how admissions and recruitment practices as well as counseling can produce diversity in more fields and professional careers.

The Impact of College Cost and Student Aid

- Although there is an overlap between race and socioeconomic status, they are two different and important considerations. The Court has recognized that economic diversity is not a substitute for racial diversity. But it is clear that college cost and student aid issues limit access for many students of color and lead them to select colleges that offer fewer academic benefits.
- Research on the aid and cost dimensions of access and the special dimensions that affect students of color is very important.

Issues of Diversity and American Indian, Asian, and White Students

- Because most of the legal and political controversy has been about the very large African American and Latino populations, there has been far less research on issues of American Indian and Asian diversity and on multiracial relationships on campuses and classrooms. Much better data are needed for serious analysis of the variety that exists within these smaller groups that also can contribute to diversity benefits.
- Although research has shown the problems of token representation of students of color, some groups, like American Indians in Texas, make up such a small share of the state's population that they are only likely to have a modest representation in an affirmative action plan. Research on ways to include these students more positively on campus and to diminish their isolation could be very valuable.
- Most of the long-term research on the effects of diverse education is about African American and Latino students. We need much more research on those effects on White and Asian students, since the impact of such outcomes will increase as society continues to change.

Institutional Context of Local Communities and Demographics

- The *Fisher* decision clearly recognizes that plans for diversity must take into account the communities and demographics within colleges' major areas of service.
- In an extremely complex society with extreme demographic variation, campuses face both urgent needs and practical obstacles and have to make plans that make sense in their context.

- The way that the University of Texas at Austin addressed diversity was accepted by the Court. However, it would certainly be a very useful area of research, developing and testing processes that could help colleges make these judgments.
- Many of the problems in achieving college diversity relate directly to high schools and elementary schools that are extremely segregated by race and poverty and unequal in opportunities and outcomes.
- Policy makers and courts have often treated colleges separately with almost no focus on the many deep impacts of unequal preparation by race and class.
- Research needs to cross these barriers and follow students across these lines, something that should be much more possible with the development of longitudinal data on students in a number of states.

Dynamics of Differing Mixes of Students

- The court has rejected the idea that colleges should be required to identify a specific “critical mass” of diverse students needed to achieve benefits. However, research exploring the dynamics created by differing mixes of student populations could contribute to campus planning.

Contemporary On-Campus Discrimination

- There is very little systematic research on contemporary on-campus discrimination. Many current incidents show that this is still a quite severe problem in some settings. It needs to be systematically explored and documented.

Long-Term Benefits of Diverse Education

- The *Fisher* decision extended the basic justification of diversity efforts from producing educational benefits for the entire campus community (the *Bakke* rationale) to including the social and institutional benefits to our businesses and public institutions in producing leadership that makes these institutions work better in our multiracial society. Looking at the long-term effects of diverse education on these outcomes for all groups of students is very important.