A photograph of a classroom. In the center, a woman with glasses and a striped shirt stands, looking towards the camera. She is surrounded by students seated at desks. The room has fluorescent lighting and a chalkboard in the background.

The Future of Diversity

Academic Leaders Reflect on
American Higher Education

EDITED BY DANIEL LITTLE AND
SATYA P. MOHANTY

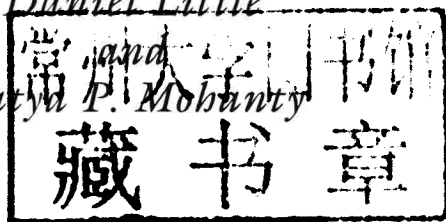
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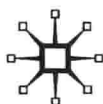
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and
Satya P. Mohanty



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THE FUTURE OF DIVERSITY

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PREFACE

This volume represents an effort at collaboration that goes beyond the customary boundaries of academic writing. The contributors include faculty and administrators; they represent a wide variety of colleges and universities; and they come from a wide range of disciplines as well. What they have in common is a commitment to thinking innovatively and practically about the challenge of making universities more fully embracing of the many forms of human diversity present in our society, and a determination to help institute the changes that are needed.

Several of the essays and many of the topics included here were first raised at a day-long conference at Cornell University in 2005, which was inspired in part by the publication of *Equity and Excellence in American Higher Education* by William G. Bowen, Martin A. Kurzweil, and Eugene M. Tobin (University of Virginia Press, 2005). The issues raised by Bowen and his coauthors are profound, and they demand thoughtful, pragmatic engagement. We need to create greater equity; and we need to go beyond that goal, toward greater inclusion and greater educational success in learning from manifold diversity.

Another main current underlying this volume is the ongoing work of the community of scholars from the many colleges and universities associated with the Future of Minority Studies (FMS) Research Project and the FMS Summer Institute (www.fmsproject.cornell.edu). FMS collaborators have made substantial progress in defining the challenges presented by the goal of creating a multicultural curriculum and university environment, and they have outlined some practical solutions to these challenges.

One of the most durable lessons learned by the experience of FMS concerns the value that comes from an extended and collaborative conversation transcending disciplines and institutions. All of the contributors to this volume agree that the issues raised here will not be resolved by a single moment of reflection and discussion. Rather, we need to learn from each other through extended dialogue,

incorporating the insights of different institutional experiences and different forms of academic knowledge.

As the editors of this volume, we invite our readers to join our ongoing dialogue about the future of diversity. We ask you to share your thoughts with us about how these issues can be discussed on a national scale through the Internet or social media, and we will create an appropriate forum if sufficient interest is expressed. Please send your thoughts to fmsproject@cornell.edu and we will find appropriate mechanisms for sustaining the conversation.

We would like to extend a particularly sincere note of acknowledgment and appreciation to Harin Christine Song for her excellent editorial and research assistance in the process of assembling the volume. Her attention to detail and able assistance in the final stages of the volume are most appreciated.

Daniel Little
Satya P. Mohanty

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INTRODUCTION: THE FUTURE OF DIVERSITY

*Satya P. Mohanty**

In the early 1990s, two social psychologists conducted an experiment to see whether our society's negative racial stereotypes affect the learning experience of students in our educational institutions. They selected a group of black and white Stanford undergraduates and gave them a test made up of items from the advanced Graduate Record Examination in literature. The students had been statistically matched for ability, and since most of them were sophomores the GRE-based test was intentionally chosen so that it would be challenging and difficult for them. The psychologists—Claude Steele and Joshua Aronson—wanted to see whether there were differences in the way students of similar academic backgrounds but from different racial groups experienced a test that is supposed to be scientific and “objective.” In particular, they wanted to see whether simple cues provided in the testing environment would be seen as innocuous or significant, and how these cues would affect the students' performance. The cues they provided casually were intended to refer indirectly to negative social images; their goal was to see, in short, whether negative social stereotypes were mere words, or if they had the power of sticks and stones. What they found was startling. When the test was given to the students as an abstract test of ability (that was the cue from the examiner), the black students in the group performed far less well than the white students. When, however, they presented the same test as a study of “how certain problems are

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generally solved,” with a clear statement that the task did not measure intellectual ability in general, the black students’ performance improved dramatically and now their scores matched those of the white students.¹

Experiments like this one have been carefully replicated by researchers in various countries and they consistently produce the same measurable effect—not only in the case of racial stereotypes but also in those concerning gender and class. Psychologists call this phenomenon “stereotype threat.” It impairs performance as long as it is included, even casually, in the setting in which learning and evaluation occur. A French psychologist later found the same effect of stereotype threat when he studied lower-class French college students and measured their verbal skills: their performance suffered when the threat was present and it improved and became normal when the threat was removed. Similar experiments have been carried out with women and men (in relation to domains such as science and mathematics). Interestingly enough, experiments reveal the power of such socially charged cues even when the group in question is not the target of a negative general stereotype. White students taking a math test with Asian American students performed poorly when they were told that that particular test was one in which Asians generally performed better. While there is no negative stereotype about white students’ ability in math, the positive stereotype of Asian Americans did the trick, and—as in the case of the black students in the first study mentioned earlier—whites felt they were under the spotlight and the anxiety it produced made them perform worse than usual (unlike the white students who were not given the same cue about Asian Americans’ performance on that test).

The series of experiments Steele and his colleagues conducted revealed to them that all our current beliefs about bolstering self-confidence and eliminating socially produced self-doubt are much less relevant to the learning context than we think. Instead, what the black students showed was that they were responding to their educational environment with “social mistrust.” “When they felt trust,” says Steele, summarizing the results of a series of these experiments, the students “performed well regardless of whether we had weakened their self-confidence beforehand. And when they didn’t feel trust, no amount of bolstering of self-confidence helped” (52). He goes on to suggest that educational policy needs to recognize how “different kinds of students may require different pedagogies of improvement” (50), and that it should not be based on easy psychological

generalizations about, say, the low self-esteem or self-confidence of some groups.

Policies for helping black students [for instance] rest in significant part on assumptions about their psychology....[T]hey are typically assumed to lack confidence, which spawns a policy of confidence building. This may be useful for students at the academic rearguard of the group. But the psychology of the academic vanguard appears different—underperformance appears to be rooted less in self-doubt than in social mistrust. (52)

Steele says that we need to think about “fostering racial trust” (52) if we want to improve the educational environment for vast numbers of American college students. This proposal—and the research on which it is based—goes to the heart of the discussion of “diversity,” which is the focus of this volume. For social trust or mistrust are not merely attitudinal matters, to be left up to those who are affected by them, that is, the students; trust and mistrust—as we see in the case of the cues provided in the psychology experiments—are produced by our actions as teachers and administrators, and they reveal much more than our personal intentions as individuals. As many have argued in recent decades, trust is a social achievement and it takes us beyond our contractual obligations to be legally fair.² Trust and mistrust are often defining characteristics of the environment in which we all live and function, and they can exist even in the absence of overt discrimination. Social mistrust is often the net effect of a series of half-conscious acts. The presence of stereotypes alone is not enough; stereotype threat is the product of the social stereotypes *and* the ways they are reinforced by the partly unconscious cues we provide to students. In order to think about the “future of diversity,” then, we need to look carefully at how our institutional attitudes and practices can be changed so that our colleges and universities can foster trust and effectively practice the “different pedagogies” that different “kinds of students” need. This is something every good teacher knows about the classroom, but when it is raised as a question about the college or the university campus as a whole, it makes us rethink the meaning of social diversity as a cultural ideal. Far from being content with recruiting greater numbers of socially underprivileged students, staff, and faculty, we need to see the ideal of social trust as a positive challenge to reimagine the culture of our campuses, to envision a culture that will be more conducive to learning precisely because it is more open, democratic, and genuinely attentive to the experiences of

different social groups. Diversity and its future need to be rethought not only through the perspective of access (admissions, recruitment, financial aid, etc.) but also—and equally importantly—through the perspective of the campus as a learning environment for learners “of various kinds.”

This volume contains essays by academic leaders from a variety of American institutions on both these perspectives—access and the culture of learning. How do we broaden access to more kinds of social groups? How do we make our campuses more genuinely inclusive? How do we conceive social diversity as a valuable educational resource, rather than a problem to be managed or solved? How, finally, do we replace the mistrust many feel—and the inequality of access, opportunity, and experience it points to—with the kind of social trust on which all learning, and indeed the very ideal of democracy, depends? These are big and general questions, and the prominent academics who have contributed to this volume—university and foundation presidents, deans, leading scholars—address them by drawing in part on their own specific experiences. They review what we have all learned from recent history—from the Supreme Court’s verdict on the University of Michigan’s use of affirmative action to experiments on various campuses involving students from different cultural backgrounds—and they make concrete proposals for the future.

Chapters 1, 2, and 3, by Nancy Cantor, Jeffrey Lehman, and Michael Hames-García, respectively, deal directly with the challenge of imagining a diverse campus as a valuable and unique learning environment, one that is in effect a social laboratory of sorts. Cantor—the President of Syracuse University and former Provost of the University of Michigan during the critical period when the recent Supreme Court cases were being prepared—cautions us against seeing diversity through “simplistic exercises in counting and balance” and argues that university campuses have a special role to play in building the future of our multicultural and diverse society. “In many cases,” she argues, “college will be the first and best opportunity for young women and men (not to mention their faculty) to learn to affirm—rather than fear and privilege—difference, and to confront our common fates.” Drawing on her own experiences at Michigan, Illinois (where she also served as Chancellor), and Syracuse, and on the most recent work in educational psychology, Cantor outlines general principles for building “healthy group dynamics”—an understanding of which, she argues, is critical “if we are to open up our institutions (and the power within them and conferred by them) and transcend

the destructive fault lines of our society, thereby building the capacity for—and trust in—democratic culture beyond the campus.” At the heart of her essay is the claim that the campus culture needs to be organized in such a way that it respects the “delicate balance between strong group identification and vibrant inter-group exchange.” Like many psychologists, Cantor affirms the importance of group identification for the psychological well-being of those who are from socially marginalized groups, thus implicitly rejecting the popular notion that group identities are necessarily opposed to the nonparochial ethical perspective required of citizens of a democratic society. She also focuses on the importance of “normalizing” conflict, of raising—through “mutual respect and healthy interaction”—our consciousness of conflict so that we see it as a potential source of knowledge, a vitally important knowledge in a democratic society that thrives on difference (of background, of views, of life experiences).

Jeffrey Lehman—former President of Cornell as well as former Dean of the University of Michigan Law School during the *Grutter v. Bollinger* Supreme Court case—adds to Cantor’s perspective on diversity by reminding us of Justice Scalia’s skepticism (in his dissenting opinion in *Grutter*) that our campuses are indeed laboratories of a diverse culture and not in fact endorers of “tribalism and racial segregation.” Lehman says that taking Scalia’s charges seriously should encourage proponents of diversity to demand a more rigorous self-evaluation of our efforts to produce an integrated culture of learning. Focusing on what he calls “integration pods” on campus—such as the campus cafeteria, where groups of students from different backgrounds often interact—he urges us to examine not just numbers but rather the way such pods affect the life of an individual student over time: “One must resist the psychological temptation to fixate on indicators of failure [of cross-racial integration]. One must not fixate on the homogeneous lunchroom tables.... Rather, one must try to see the entire picture, over time.” Reflecting on his experiences at Cornell, especially of student-led efforts to forge an alliance of Muslim and Jewish students, he highlights the importance students attached to the supportive presence and participation of faculty. As long as they are not too “heavy-handed,” he points out, “faculty members can have an impact on the culture of a campus. They can gently but effectively nudge their students in the direction of a daily ebb and flow. And they can nurture the integration pods they see on campus.” Concluding with the assertion that campuses should be not merely diverse but also integrated—defined by “a flourishing, integrated, learning environment that is characterized by curiosity, civility, and a

shared commitment to understand and appreciate the complex truths that define our world”—Lehman reminds us that beyond the challenge of the admission of a diverse student body lies the hard task of achieving a genuinely diverse culture, and to do that we need more empirical investigation to measure our successes and failures.

The author of chapter 3, Michael Hames-García, also focuses on the ideal campus culture, one that would consider social diversity a resource rather than a problem to be tackled, but he raises a basic challenge: “Is social diversity without social justice enough?” Examining his own experience as a faculty of color at a major research university, the University of Oregon, where he is Chair of the Ethnic Studies department, as well as his experiences as an undergraduate at a private liberal arts college and as a graduate student at an Ivy League school, Hames-García provides a trenchant critique of the current practice of separating the offices of “Diversity” from the main research mission of the university. His argument is that this makes Diversity Officers of most colleges and universities academically irrelevant and hence less effective. It may also foster a bureaucratic mindset that makes equity and diversity offices “get in the way of building substantive links between research faculty and multicultural student affairs.” Hames-García makes at least two far-reaching proposals, one of which is easy to appreciate while the other—though tantalizingly bold—may be controversial in some quarters. His first proposal is quite simply that “[t]he research mission of the University needs to be front and center in multicultural affairs” and that “it is necessary for senior administrators to think of the positions as research positions in the hiring process.” He sees the diversity offices as larger-scale versions of what Lehman would call “integration pods”—since he thinks of these offices as providing the links among various research units on campus that work on matters of race, gender, and social inequality. More radically, however, Hames-García goes on to argue that all diversity requirements in undergraduate curricula “should substantively address the nature of structural inequality, racism, power, and privilege, rather than emphasizing cultural diversity and tolerance of difference.” His proposal contains the suggestions that (1) diversity offices be reconceived as offices with a mission to enhance social justice, and that (2) they—and the university in general—see student activism as a socially valuable resource and that they actively support and nurture it. Student activism, in other words, especially around identity issues, is less an example of the tribalism Justice Scalia deplors and more the kind of necessary group affirmation that Chancellor Cantor endorses. Hames-García’s own experiences as a student “in a

Latina/o group, in a gay and lesbian student group, and a peace-and-justice residence hall enabled [him] to feel that even if there were very few students like [him] on campus, [he] at least had a place (or places) where [he] could feel supported and affirmed.” Supporting socially marginalized students in their efforts to organize in these ways, he concludes, validates them in a pedagogically crucial sense—it makes them “more sophisticated activists and citizens.”

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 focus on a subject that is not usually covered in many recent studies of diversity and higher education: the important role regional and nonflagship—rather than national and elite—institutions play in serving social needs and the ways they help us understand the varied nature of the “excellence” we seek in our educational contexts. Daniel Little, the Chancellor of the University of Michigan, Dearborn, talks about the particular role his institution plays in providing social mobility to a large group of (mostly minority and less affluent) Americans. He reflects on the role education can play in achieving social mobility, especially for first-generation college students, those who are the first in their families to go to college, and the special social role of nonflagship institutions:

These institutions create a set of opportunities that mean that students from a range of backgrounds, from middle class to disadvantaged, can get a high quality undergraduate education for a total educational cost of about \$8,000 per year, and can develop the preparation that will be needed for ‘next steps’ in professional schools, graduate schools, and working careers. UM-Dearborn is a source of genuine opportunity for the students we serve, and it provides them with a high-quality and effective education. (pp. 74–75, this volume)

Both Little and Steven Diner, the Chancellor of Rutgers University, Newark, focus on the unique functions of their own nonelite institutions, and they explicitly raise the question of value—of how we define educational excellence. Diner’s campus serves first-generation immigrant families and provides an educational experience in which sociocultural diversity defines the learning environment, an environment that reflects the rich diversity of both American society in general and the increasingly globalized world in which we all live. But Diner points out that while his alumni recognize this environment and talk about it eloquently, the mainstream culture seems to lack the tools with which to measure its value. Thus, while *U.S. News and World Report*’s rankings system’s focus on SAT scores skews it in favor of those institutions serving students from more privileged backgrounds, it lacks the ability to fully appreciate the value

of diversity. It measures diversity, but it does not relate its diversity rankings to its quality rankings of schools. Diner points out, as does Little—and Muriel Howard, former President of another regional university, Buffalo State College—that their institutions are rich in pedagogical experimentation in part because their student body is so organically tied to the locations of the institutions. The faculty come to recognize this fact as an invaluable educational resource, as do faculty at most of our great urban institutions (the City University of New York is another good example), designing courses that explore the marvelous variety of immigrant and urban workers' experiences, memories, and cultural histories. Howard talks about how Buffalo State College consciously designed its mission and a comprehensive academic approach by focusing on its own history as a regional and urban institution; "through classroom discussions, curricular experiences, out-of-classroom activities, projects, discussions, or special mentor relationships," she writes, her colleagues "go beyond what is usually expected as a part of their regular job expectations or teaching assignments. The campus provides special financial incentives to students, faculty, and professional staff to support programs and projects that strengthen college diversity initiatives." The perspectives of the leaders of these nonflagship institutions suggest that conscious planning built around the recognition of the particular social role of their own institutions is a key ingredient of success. It also suggests, as Little puts it, that "excellence" in higher education may be the result of more things than the "inputs" that money and elite social status bring with them: students with high grades and SAT scores, faculty with the best educational credentials, and the best laboratories and libraries. Excellence, says Little, may have more to do with the ongoing project of mixing everything together in a certain way, envisioning the future as thoughtfully as we can. Like baking bread, success depends less on getting the most expensive ingredients and more on paying "constant attention to the process," which is the hard work put in by the leaders of various institutions. And here, elite social status provides no guarantee of success:

[A]chieving a quality education is...like baking bread. The ingredients are the beginning. But constant attention to the processes is needed in order to keep the joint product working up to its maximum potential. If faculty lose focus on the importance of close intellectual relationships with their students; if they come to overvalue research time over classroom time; if deans and department chairs ignore signs of quality erosion; if faculty and leaders grow inattentive to important

developments in pedagogy, curriculum, and content; and if university leaders fail to consistently emphasize the priority of effective teaching and learning—then high-quality ingredients will still lead to mediocre bread. Put it another way: there is an important intangible aspect of educational quality that is measured by academic values and shared commitment to students' learning that is a feature both of the people of a successful university and its institutional makeup. And institutions differ greatly in this dimension! (pp. 76–77, this volume)

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 together clarify the nature of excellence in the educational setting. While elite status and financial resources are valuable, they do not guarantee a superior educational experience, for a quality education depends on a combination of factors, chief among which is the conscious planning and coordination by various levels of the campus leadership—in particular, the administration and the faculty. Moreover, these three essays in particular point to the crucial role played in any democratic society by regional and urban institutions in providing access and social mobility to immigrants and those from lower-income groups. If the goal is to reduce social inequality through education, then regional and urban universities need to be both recognized and supported by policy makers at not just the state level but also nationally.

The scandalous truth is of course that American national educational policy is weak precisely on a national level, since funding of public universities is increasingly being left entirely up to the states. What the recent economic downturn makes clear, however, is that American higher education, which has traditionally been the engine of the country's economic development, has fallen behind dramatically, and that is mainly because of the erosion of federal funding and our myopic social policies about lower-income groups. As the economist Paul Krugman points out in the *New York Times*, “[W]ith [the] weak social safety net [of the United States] and limited student aid, students are far more likely than their counterparts in, say, France to hold part-time jobs while still attending class.”³ Education and social mobility suffer due to a variety of related but largely invisible economic policy decisions, and the net effect is that American higher education is no longer available to the population at large. California's community colleges, for instance, have served for generations of lower-income families as a means of access to the state's admirable state university system; but now with the state's economic woes, transfer students are finding it impossible to enter the state universities. The phenomenon is a general one, with national effects, and it may leave its mark on this generation of students over their entire lifetime.

Krugman considers this predictable result of myopic national policy to be “a large gratuitous waste of human potential,” and calls for Congress to take appropriate measures. “Education made America great,” he points out, and goes on to issue a timely and urgent warning: “neglect of education can reverse the process.”

The effects of poor educational policy on the lives of less affluent families is the direct or indirect focus of chapters 7, 8, and 9 in the volume. Eugene Tobin, former President of Hamilton College and currently an officer of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, draws on the book he coauthored with William Bowen and Martin Kurzweil (*Equity and Excellence in American Higher Education*⁴) to summarize their research findings about the positive effects of affirmative action on the racial composition of our campuses. But he also highlights the urgent need to pay attention to the issue of socioeconomic class as a measure of real diversity. Documenting the growing inequality of access to higher education in recent years, Tobin says that a big part of the problem is the difference in what is called “college preparation” between students from different class backgrounds.

Young people whose parents’ income is in the bottom quartile are half as likely to even take the SAT as those whose parents’ income is in the top quartile. Our research (National Educational Longitudinal Study) indicates that the odds of taking the SAT and scoring over 1200—using the old scoring system with 1600 as the perfect score—are roughly *six times higher* for students from the top income quartile than for students from the bottom income quartile; and those odds are roughly *seven times higher* for students from the top income quartile than for students who are from the bottom income quartile *and* who are also the first in their families to attend college. (p. 100, this volume)

Noting the need to address social inequality in the broader national context, Tobin goes on to recommend, however, that at least the top universities, private and public, consider putting a “thumb on the admissions scale” by taking low-income status at least as seriously as we now take race. Research shows that students from less affluent backgrounds, once admitted, go on to do at least as well as those from more affluent ones. Broader considerations of social justice would necessitate that colleges and universities take class seriously in their definition of social diversity. Income-based preferences in admission, Tobin argues, should be seen as a necessary complement to the race-based programs that have been so successful in diversifying the major colleges and universities that have initiated such programs in recent decades.