

SPECIAL ISSUE
Striving for Social Justice and Equity in Higher Education

education policy analysis
archives

A peer-reviewed, independent,
open access, multilingual journal



Arizona State University

Volume 28 Number 37

March 29, 2021

ISSN 1068-2341

Introduction: Striving for Social Justice and Equity in Higher Education

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Citation: Okhremtchouk, I. S., Turner, C. S. V., & Newell, P. A. (2021). Introduction: Striving for social justice and equity in higher education. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 29(37).

<https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.29.5154> This article is part of the special issue, *Striving for Social Justice and Equity in Higher Education*, guest edited by Irina Okhremtchouk, Caroline Turner, & Patrick Newell.

Abstract: Through the introduction of our special issue, Striving for Social Justice and Equity in Higher Education, we aim to add to a continued and much-needed discussion on deeply seated institutional inequities that remain to shape the ways by which education occurs across the higher

Journal website: <http://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/>
Facebook: /EPAAA
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Manuscript received: 2/25/2021
Revisions received: 1/3/2021
Accepted: 2/3/2021

education landscape. As we present manuscripts included in this issue, our goal is to capture the vast and many layers within higher education encompassing research and discussions on policy and systems that impact administration, leadership, faculty, and student experiences. In our concluding remarks, we stress that even though deeply seated institutional inequities remain, the work of this type must continue as it is part of a broader fight waged for social and racial justice. It is our hope that institutional leaders and policymakers will use the wealth of knowledge shared in this special issue to cultivate nurturing learning environments that include and value the talent and perspectives of those who have been systematically undervalued and marginalized.

Key words: Higher Education; Education Policy; Social Justice

Introducción: En busca de la justicia social y la equidad en la educación superior

Resumen: A través de la introducción de este número especial, En busca de la justicia social y la equidad en la educación superior, agregamos y continuamos la discusión tan necesaria sobre las inequidades institucionales profundamente arraigadas que siguen dando forma a las formas en que la educación ocurre en el panorama de la educación superior. Nuestro objetivo es captar las vastas y muchas capas dentro de la educación superior que abarcan la investigación y las discusiones sobre políticas y sistemas que impactan la administración, el liderazgo, la facultad y las experiencias de los estudiantes. En nuestra conclusión, enfatizamos que aunque persisten inequidades institucionales profundamente arraigadas, el trabajo de este tipo debe continuar, ya que es parte de una lucha más amplia por la justicia social y racial. Esperamos que los líderes institucionales y los formuladores de políticas utilicen la riqueza del conocimiento compartido en este número especial para cultivar entornos de aprendizaje enriquecedores que incluyan y valoren el talento y las perspectivas de aquellos que han sido sistemáticamente infravalorados y marginados.

Palabras clave: Educación superior; Política educativa; Justicia social

Introdução: Buscando justiça social e equidade no ensino superior

Resumo: Com a introdução desta edição especial, Buscando Justiça Social e Equidade no Ensino Superior, acrescentamos e continuamos a discussão muito necessária sobre as desigualdades institucionais profundamente arraigadas que permanecem para moldar as formas pelas quais a educação ocorre no cenário do ensino superior. Nosso objetivo é capturar as vastas e muitas camadas dentro do ensino superior, abrangendo pesquisas e discussões sobre políticas e sistemas que impactam a administração, liderança, professores e experiências dos alunos. Em nossa conclusão, destacamos que, embora permaneçam iniquidades institucionais profundamente arraigadas, o trabalho desse tipo deve continuar, pois faz parte de uma luta mais ampla pela justiça social e racial. Esperamos que os líderes institucionais e formuladores de políticas usem a riqueza do conhecimento compartilhado nesta edição especial para cultivar ambientes de aprendizagem estimulantes que incluam e valorizem o talento e as perspectivas daqueles que têm sido sistematicamente subestimados e marginalizados.

Palavras-chave: Ensino Superior; Política educacional; Justiça social

Introduction

For this special issue, we purposefully solicited manuscripts that embrace topics focusing on social justice within the higher education context and its many layers while simultaneously addressing factors that encompass policy and systems that directly impact administration, leadership, faculty and student experiences. When we initially envisioned this special issue, the national conversation on racial injustice and racism had not reached the boiling point it had in the final year of the 45th Presidency. During this time, discussions of ethnicity, social justice, and the impact of structural racism became the leading and constant stories featured by news and other media and further stoked by its foregrounding in U.S. election strategy and coverage. Conversely, the conversation and work in academic circles had already begun to evolve to focus on structural racism within educational organizations and systems (McGee, 2020; Merolla & Jackson, 2019). These discussions focus on the framing of education and scrutinize whose frames of reference for education and excellence mattered in the framing, directly exposing institutional injustices often experienced by people of color and underrepresented populations (Burke, 2020; Crowley & Smith, 2020; Solórzano & Pérez-Huber, 2020). Likewise, and as the nation began openly discussing issues of structural bias, scholars were exposing deeply seated institutional inequities that continue to shape the ways by which education occurs across the higher education landscape. The manuscripts and discussions detailed in this special issue are informed by the aforementioned history and empirical research.

We open this special issue with an article discussing racial and ethnic diversity in higher education and its impact on policy, “Racial and Ethnic Diversity in Higher Education: White Privileged Resistance and Implications for Leadership.” This timely piece serves as an entryway to other manuscripts included in the issue. In their article, Lidyvez Sawyer and Roberta Waite center the audience’s attention on the pervasive white privileged resistance impacting the leadership structures within higher education and propose steps to initiate the dismantling process of deeply rooted structures of racism. The scholars unpack the history at the root of mitigating the current underpinnings of racial and ethnic inequities from their fundamental origin, which they term as a mere starting point in establishing sustainable change. Sawyer and Waite challenge their audience to examine, identify and begin to undo colonized structures of America’s higher education systems, acknowledge the implications of the history of structural racism and its impact on leadership, policies, and the academy’s sloth-like progression towards “diversity.” As part of their questioning, the scholars call on higher education leadership to be intentional in unweaving the progeny of structural racism: fragility and privilege.

The second section of the issue focuses on college presidents. Jon McNaughtan and Bryan K. Hotchkins draw our collective attention to the experiences of presidents of color within higher education. Their study, “Leading at the Crossroads: Understanding How Identity Influences Presidential Communication for Black Community College Presidents,” opens a window to six Black community college presidents’ experiences and how their racial identities guided their communication practices. The authors found that presidents of color view their communication through a social justice lens while these leaders also recognize their responsibility to the institution they serve. The authors explore the following five themes which emerged in their conversation with these presidents: a consciousness of who is listening, a sense of racial battle fatigue, a focus on local impact, connection and support from the community, and the skill of racial and social adaptation. The scholars conclude by stressing that the integration of race and leadership is critical to for all higher education leaders who desire to do the work needed to advance causes of social justice and equity.

As we pivot from experiences of Black community college presidents, in the next article Tenisha Tevis explores the role of university presidency. Rooted in a larger study on whether White male presidents in higher education can respond to racism, in “‘It’s a Sea-change’: Understanding the Role the Racial and Socio-political Climate Play on the Role-shift of the American College Presidency”, Tevis challenges readers to advance their understanding of the American college presidency and how the current racial and socio-political climate has shaped college presidential leadership. This timely work posits that just as higher education has been due for a change in direction, so has the postsecondary presidency.

In the next section we intend to highlight the experiences and the pathways to becoming LatinX faculty. Caroline Turner meticulously unpacks her own personal and professional background relative to the topic in her contribution, “On Diversity, Identity and Socialization: Inequality of Educational Outcomes.” Situating her own experience within a national context based on U.S. census and *Chronicle of Higher Education* data and detailing narratives collected via interviews and relevant extant literature, Turner portrays the myriad issues involved in the underrepresentation of Latinx women as students, and later, professors in higher education. Furthermore, she draws our attention toward understanding how role identity and identifiers are used to categorize LatinX women through an examination and discussion of the LatinX designation and privilege. Turner concludes with a list of recommendations on how the underrepresentation of LatinX women and other marginalized groups can be addressed.

This special issue would not be complete without empirical work highlighting student experiences within higher education institutions' walls, which comprises the next section. In their study, “Examining the Continuum of Black Student Leadership: From Community to College and Beyond,” Bryan K. Hotchkins and Jon McNaughtan examine the leadership involvement of 11 Black collegians about how they make sense of enacting transgenerationally informed knowledge/s as racial socialization to navigate a predominantly White campus. Through careful analysis, the authors report that the participants' parents and elders racially socialized them to be self-sacrificing leaders by using values, respect, and honor to preserve Black culture, people, and traditions. Likewise, these racial socialization processes influenced these Black collegians to become leaders who built and sustained Black college communities by being resilient. The authors also highlight the added value in practicing racial resistance, which exposes racially threatening opposition and identifying acts of racism menacing in higher education circles.

International students have long been termed the “bread and butter” of U.S. higher education because of the additional revenue their tuition brings the institution. Notably, international students' presence has expanded significantly over the last two decades across American colleges and universities, and this expansion, in its own right, presents equity issues. In “More than Learning English? The Impact of University Intensive English Language Program Attendance on International Student Academic Achievement,” Adam Clark, Dianna Lippincott, and Jeongeun Kim examine the disparities in academic achievement between two distinctive groups of international students. The authors explored how some international students, in particular, can be found within marginalized groups. By examining international students' experiences and institutional policies with respect to student admissions/placements, this work is one of few that aims to frame Intensive English Language Programs as potential vehicles for social justice among marginalized international student populations. The authors also call on policymakers to focus on data equity and transparency in tracking these outcomes at higher education institutions.

We conclude this special issue with an article highlighting partners of higher educational institutions: community and family stakeholders. In their contribution, “School, University, and Community Collaboration to Promote Equity through Inclusive Cultural Competence,” Tammy

Ellis-Robinson and Jessica Wayde Coles explore collaborative engagements among stakeholders to identify effective practices and ongoing needs to develop inclusive cultural competence in higher education training programs for pre-service and in-service teachers. The authors highlight the importance of ongoing collaborative engagements between the higher education institutions that are responsible for preparing competent and well-rounded professionals and the local communities that these higher education entities aim to serve.

As we continue to tackle and highlight challenges within higher education contexts, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that, even though deeply seated institutional inequities remain, this work must continue as it is part of a broader fight waged for social and racial justice. The effects of unwelcoming and often toxic work environments (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Turner, 1994; Zambrana, 2018) highlight the critical importance of institutional change and responsiveness for the persistence and development of those who continue to be minoritized in higher education. Institutional leaders and policy makers can use the wealth of knowledge shared in this special issue to cultivate nurturing learning environments that include and value the talent and perspectives of those who have been systematically undervalued and marginalized.

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Irina S. Okhremtchouk is an associate professor of educational administration in the Department of Equity, Leadership Studies, and Instructional Technologies at San Francisco State University's Graduate College of Education. She also coordinates SFSU's educational administration certification and educational administration MA programs. In her capacity as educational administration program coordinator, Okhremtchouk is charged with preparing well-rounded and well-informed social justice leaders and school administrators who are ready to build and maintain inclusive school communities, as well as work persistently to eliminate racism, inequalities, and injustices. Okhremtchouk's expertise is in the area of school organization, policy, and school finance. Specifically, her scholarly work stems from a deep interest in how to translate research into better-informed public policy yielding a long-lasting impact on educational leadership, policy, and administration. Irina received her Ph.D. in School Organization and Educational Policy from the U.C. Davis School of Education.

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An internationally recognized and award-winning scholar, Caroline Sotello Viernes Turner is professor emerita of educational leadership at California State University, Sacramento, and Lincoln Professor Emerita of Higher Education and Ethics at Arizona State University. She served as president of the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) and as interim dean for the College of Education at California State University, Sacramento. She is the author of *Women of Color in Academe: Living with Multiple Marginality* and coauthor with Samuel L. Myers Jr. of *Faculty of Color in Academe: Bittersweet Success*. Her numerous recognitions include the University of California, Davis (UCD) School of Education Distinguished Alumna Award and the American Educational Research Association (AERA) Scholars of Color in Education Career Contribution Award. She received her Ph.D. in Administration and Policy Analysis from the Stanford University School of Education.

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education policy analysis archives

Volume 29 Number 37

March 29, 2021

ISSN 1068-2341



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