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What We Are Studying, Why, and How

Diversity is hotly contested at colleges and universities. Yet, what campus populations actually think about the issue is not well understood. This book is an effort to understand student (and some faculty) attitudes on who should join campus communities – on what factors should be prioritized in student admissions and in the faculty recruitment process at institutions of higher education.

What do we mean by campus diversity? Our focus is on the race/ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic background of undergraduate students, and the race/ethnicity and gender of faculty. These are the most salient attributes of students and faculty in campus diversity controversies. By diversity, we mean the inclusion of students and faculty from racial/ethnic, gender, or socioeconomic groups that have traditionally been marginalized among and excluded from student and faculty populations, and who might continue to be excluded under admissions and recruitment practices that do not take these identity factors into consideration (Bowen and Bok 1998; Espenshade and Radford 2009; Massey et al. 2003; Reardon et al. 2018).

We deploy a new survey experimental method – conjoint analysis – to measure preferences for prioritizing these factors, alongside academic achievement and many others, in decisions about student admissions and faculty recruitment. Across the populations of students and faculty whose attitudes we study, we find broad support for making diversity a priority in undergraduate admissions and in faculty recruitment.

In this chapter, we make the case that the campus diversity is important, as is understanding student attitudes toward it, but that measuring

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those attitudes is challenging. We argue that we have measured them in a way that improves on standard techniques and sheds new light on student and faculty preferences. We then summarize our key findings with respect to those preferences and provide a map to the rest of the book. But first, we offer a story about campus discourse surrounding diversity and merit that we think illustrates how and why students' sincere attitudes toward these issues can remain hidden.

1.1 IDENTITY VS. MERIT IN THE DARTMOUTH COLLEGE TRIPS PROGRAM

The Dartmouth Outing Club First-Year Trips program was established in 1935 as a way to connect incoming students with the idyllic natural surroundings of the College's New Hampshire campus. Every year, nearly all first-year students spend five days hiking, climbing, canoeing, kayaking, mountain biking, or otherwise enjoying the outdoors before the fall term begins. The Trips program is almost entirely student-run and is headed by a twenty-one-member directorate of students who handle everything from logistics, to risk management, to communicating with parents of incoming freshmen. The director and assistant director of "Trips" are students appointed in consultation with College staff. These two individuals then review student applications and make appointments for the remaining nineteen slots on the directorate.

In the winter of 2018, the director and assistant director, both women, appointed women to fifteen of those slots. A male student whose application was declined then penned an op-ed that was published in the College's main student newspaper, *The Dartmouth*, decrying the gender imbalance as "ludicrous" and contending that "no self-respecting person could believe that one gender, on principle, is four times more likely to write a winning application than the other." The author characterized the actions of the director and assistant director as "prejudice," based on a "pernicious theory that sees race, gender and identity as dictating qualification . . . Credentials matter not, but skin tone, womanhood and claims of marginalized status do."

The backlash against this op-ed was swift. More than forty student organizations sent campuswide e-mails in solidarity with the Trips director and assistant director. Several of these e-mails attacked the author of the op-ed, labeling his rhetoric as "hateful," "toxic," "vicious," "privileged," "ignorant," "patriarchal," "white supremacist," "racist," "misogynist," "homophobic," "oppressive," and "endangering lives."

At least ten of the letters condemned *The Dartmouth* for publishing the article to begin with, accusing the newspaper of "giving hate speech a platform" (Magann 2018). A smaller number of student groups and publications sided with the author of the op-ed, publishing their own response pieces and sending out e-mails in solidarity with him (e.g., Jones 2018).

The debate struck a chord with our campus diversity research in progress. We too were concerned with student attitudes toward merit and diversity in competitive selection processes. But the tone of the campus discussion was troubling. The cascade of the public letters "in solidarity" with the Trips directorate suggested to us that to question openly how diversity interests are prioritized and implemented would, itself, not be tolerated by communities on campus. At that point, two of us penned our own op-ed for *The Dartmouth*, entitled "Debating without Deprecating." We discouraged the kind of elevated rhetoric used to characterize the original op-ed and its author, suggesting that "the effect on open discussion of difficult ideas can only be chilling. Anyone who does not hew to established and codified positions will be afraid to express any opinion" (Carey and Horiuchi 2018).

Our article attracted online comments from readers who felt we had failed to appreciate the effects that the *original* op-ed had had on marginalized communities on campus. One held that "[you] talk about how confronting ideas will make us better people, but don't take into account the toll that this has on women ... What will discourse do if it's centered on silencing half of the participants? ... [Y]ou, as professors, should not be commenting on student affairs unless it is to make sure that marginalized students feel safe and able to learn in their classrooms." Another defended the heated rhetoric we had criticized on grounds that "it would be patronizing to [the original author] if critics were to avoid using certain words that do very accurately describe him; if someone [is] to be misogynistic, ignorant, or, racist, we cannot baby them by tip-toeing around these words."

More telling to us, however, were the differences between the comments posted online and the private messages we received from students via e-mail. One noted that, "I'm sure I'm not the only student who disagreed with the [original] article but also totally supported its publication, but over the past few days it has almost felt like I have to pick a side. Such vitriolic reactions only make the issue more polarized, and immediately shut down any space for open dialogue." Another student wrote, "[High school] taught me that it's important to always take the

other side ... just so you could get a better understanding of your own argument and the flaws that may exist there ... because that is the basis of humility as an academic and a person."

In short, the differences between the private messages students sent us and those posted online suggested that the voices *not* heard in such debates may differ systematically from those expressed publicly. In this context, understanding what students think – what they *really* think – is challenging. Our survey experiments allow us to tap into students' views without provoking fear of sharing unpopular opinions. It is therefore particularly noteworthy that we find broad support for prioritizing diversity in admissions and faculty recruitment.

For one other reason, the 2018 Trips controversy was salient to this book's central contribution. In a response op-ed to the original piece, one student wrote, "A majority-female Trips directorate is not evidence of the systematic devaluing of any identity ... Rather, it is an acknowledgement of a nuanced point that escapes the author: that individuals cannot be separated into a set of identities and a set of credentials. 'Identity' and 'merit' are not separable categories as the author claims" (Petroni 2018). We agree that separating identity and merit in any real-world selection process is a conundrum. Real applicants are thoroughly multidimensional and selection processes are holistic. The experimental approach we employ, however, allows us to estimate distinct preferences for demographic diversity and for achievement across a range of endeavors. We find consensual support for both types of priorities.

1.2 CAMPUS DIVERSITY IS A BIG DEAL

Dartmouth College is far from the only place where diversity discourse is paramount. From university communities, to the courts, to journalists, to academics, and beyond, everyone seems to be talking about campus diversity. Much of this debate concerns affirmative action in undergraduate admissions and faculty recruitment. Arguments in favor of diversity considerations tend to rest on one of two pillars. One is that historical exclusions from universities based on race and ethnicity were unjust, and that a positive preference favoring formerly marginalized identity groups would help remedy past injustice (e.g., Valls 1999).

A second argument is more utilitarian, focusing on the benefits of diversity to the whole campus community rather than on righting past wrongs done to particular groups. Proponents of this view claim that

cognitive diversity contributes to learning and problem solving – that is, to the core intellectual activities of colleges and universities. Although identity diversity is not the same as cognitive diversity, it nevertheless *contributes* to cognitive diversity by bringing together on campus a broader range of life experiences and perspectives than would otherwise be the case (Page 2017). This utilitarian argument has been at the heart of jurisprudence on campus diversity (*Regents of the University of California* v. *Bakke* 1978). Indeed, for over four decades, the US Supreme Court has regularly confronted litigation concerning one of the core components of campus diversity as we have defined it – whether and how applicants' race and ethnicity should be considered in admissions decisions – and has leaned on the idea that racial diversity brings benefits to the whole university community as a rationale for allowing race to be considered in admissions decisions (*Regents of the University of California* v. *Bakke* 1978; *Gratz* v. *Bollinger* 2003; *Grutter* v. *Bollinger* 2003; *Fisher* v. *University of Texas at Austin et al.* 2013, 2016).

Outside the courts, scholarly debate is fervid over the value of diversity, both to students from underrepresented minority groups and to broader university communities (e.g., Bowen, Chingos, and McPherson 2009; Sander and Taylor 2012). Arguments have evolved alongside changing demographics on college campuses. While women's representation increased among student populations at American colleges and universities in the second half of the twentieth century and surpassed men after the 1980s, imbalances by race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic background remain substantial. There are disputes over whether affirmative action in university admissions designed to mitigate these gaps serves the academic interests of students admitted under such policies (Arcidiacono et al. 2014; Arcidiacono, Aucejo, and Hotz 2016; Arcidiacono, Aucejo, and Spenner 2012; Cortes 2010; Ho 2005; Sander 2004; Stinebrickner and Stinebrickner 2011). Yet long-term studies indicate that the student beneficiaries of affirmative action programs succeed academically and professionally (Bowen and Bok 1998; Charles et al. 2009). What is more, students from groups not targeted by affirmative action may recognize benefits from being educated in a diverse environment (Warikoo 2016).

Others debate the effects of demographic diversity on broader campus culture. Some studies have demonstrated evidence for socialization effects based on racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity, wherein acceptance of people coming from diverse backgrounds and support for redistributive economic policies are associated with the level of diversity

on university campuses (Mendelberg, McCabe, and Thal 2017; Sidanius et al. 2008). On the whole, the evidence for socialization effects suggests that increased demographic diversity among students encourages a social climate of greater tolerance (Ahmed 2012; Chang 1999; Chang, Astin, and Kim 2004; Park 2018). Diversity also appears to have important downstream effects on all students' psychological, social, and emotional well-being, with benefits that range from increased intellectual development, to better leadership skills, to higher civic engagement, to vocational success (Gurin 1999; Hu and Kuh 2003; Umbach and Kuh 2006).

Beyond debates about student representation and affirmative action in admissions, discussions about faculty representation permeate campus diversity discourse. Among faculty, racial and ethnic minorities remain vastly underrepresented, and women substantially so, in particular at the senior and tenured ranks. Scholarly research has revealed biases among existing faculty that could obstruct minorities and women in the academic jobs pipeline (Bavishi, Madera, and Hebl 2010; Leslie et al. 2015; Moss-Racusin et al. 2012; Reid 2010; Snyder, de Brey, and Dillow 2016; Turner, González, and Wood 2008; Wu 2017). Moreover, student protests born of frustration over the lack of progress in advancing faculty diversity at many universities have attracted nationwide attention. A number of schools including Yale University (Yale University Office of the President 2015; Yale University 2016), Brown University (Paxson 2016), Dartmouth College (Hanlon et al. 2016; Dartmouth College 2016), and the University of Missouri (Loftin 2016) have recently committed to diversity initiatives aimed at increasing racial and ethnic minority representation among faculty. Yet, there is little evidence that speaks to these programs' effects, and antipathy toward such initiatives and to campus diversity protests more broadly also grabbed headlines (Flier 2019; Lewis 2016; *Wall Street Journal* 2015), revealing a seemingly polarized debate over the issue. It is thus clear that campus diversity has attracted a lot of attention for decades, and increasingly so in recent years.

1.3   KNOWING WHAT STUDENTS THINK IS ESSENTIAL

Should we care what students think about demographic and socioeconomic diversity on campus and, specifically, about how diversity considerations should weigh in decisions about undergraduate

admissions and faculty recruitment? After all, students are not the ones making admissions decisions or hiring faculty. And measuring student attitudes is not the same as measuring public opinion overall. Attitudes toward diversity among people who are "in the door" might differ from those among the broader public, applicants who were not admitted, or faculty job candidates who were not selected, including those who perceive their prospects were hurt by policies aimed at fostering diversity. Prominent media commentators argue, for example, that an "embrace of diversity inside higher education does not represent a national consensus" (Lemann 2018).

We maintain that understanding student attitudes matters in its own right. Even if students are not directly involved in admissions or recruitment decisions, they are the largest group of stakeholders at every university. They are the principal subjects of the admissions process and they are the faculty's main constituents. They attend faculty lectures, study readings assigned by faculty, are subject to faculty evaluations of their work, and are guided by faculty mentors. Their peers are other admitted students. They have every reason to care deeply about what factors weigh, and how, in both student admissions and in faculty recruitment.

What is more, although we do not measure opinion beyond the college campus in this study, our results suggest that our participants' attitudes are not simply driven by their position inside the campus gates. For example, if students who were admitted to their top-choice schools bear no grudge against efforts to promote diversity while students denied their top choices are embittered, then the populations at more selective and less selective schools should display starkly different attitudes toward diversity. Yet our experiments revealed few significant differences across schools. And if pro-diversity preferences were a luxury indulged in only by those who fear no loss from affirmative action, then we should see a lack of support for diversity – or even opposition to diversity – among participants who profess opposition to such policies. Solid majorities of our respondents did express opposition to race-conscious admissions and hiring *in the abstract*, yet even these respondents favored minority applicants and faculty candidates relative to whites in our choice experiments. We discuss these results in detail in subsequent chapters, but for now, we emphasize that although our participants are not a representative sample of the broader US population, their attitudes do not appear to be mere products of their institutional status.

Finally, student attitudes toward the value of campus diversity – and, specifically, uncertainty about those attitudes – are prominent in the arguments of diversity critics from both the left and the right. In *The Enigma of Diversity* (2015), Ellen Berrey argues that admissions policies that increase the presence of racial and ethnic minorities on campus foster complacency among whites. She notes that universities advertise not only their diversity but also the *satisfaction of their students with diversity* in promotional materials based on carefully curated interviews and cherry-picked quotations. Yet, as Berrey claims, these arguments and PR materials are rarely based on scientific evidence that probes the students' attitudes systematically (Berrey 2015, pp. 72–73).

From the other side of the ideological spectrum, there is skepticism as to whether broader university communities favor admissions policies to promote diversity at all. A recent Supreme Court decision upheld the University of Texas's consideration of race in admissions in part on grounds that diversity advances "the destruction of stereotypes" and "the promotion of cross-cultural understanding" (*Fisher* v. *University of Texas at Austin et al.* 2016). In his dissent, however, Justice Samuel Alito specifically questioned whether university administrators ought to be the sole judges of whether race-conscious admissions policies serve campus interests:

These are laudable goals, but they are not concrete or precise, and they offer no limiting principle for the use of racial preferences. For instance, how will a court ever be able to determine whether stereotypes have been adequately destroyed? Or whether cross-racial understanding has been adequately achieved? If a university can justify racial discrimination *simply by having a few employees opine that racial preferences are necessary to accomplish these nebulous goals (citing only self-serving statements from UT officials)* [emphasis added], then the narrow tailoring inquiry is meaningless. Courts will be required to defer to the judgment of university administrators, and affirmative-action policies will be completely insulated from judicial review. (*Fisher* v. *University of Texas at Austin et al.* 2016, pp. 15–16)

It remains to be seen whether Justice Alito's skepticism toward race-conscious admissions would be allayed by evidence that campus populations in general, well beyond just a handful of administrators, value diversity. But his argument, like Berrey's, suggests that understanding what students think about campus diversity is of real consequence for policy makers, college administrators, and anyone concerned about the state of higher education. Yet gauging student preferences for diversity is a new area of research that poses significant challenges. We use a new approach to address these challenges.

1.4   HOW WE GAUGE ATTITUDES TOWARD DIVERSITY

Gauging honest attitudes about diversity is difficult for a number of reasons. First of all, diversity is a hot-button issue. Social science has long established that individuals are reluctant to openly express preferences that they suspect could be divisive (Gilens, Sniderman, and Kuklinski 1998; Jiang and Yang 2016; Kuran 1995). As a result, interviews, focus groups, and surveys on sensitive topics can produce biased results. Critics of diversity discourse specifically contend that talking about diversity suppresses the free expression of contentious opinions (MacDonald 2017; McWhorter 2015).

Moreover, even if a researcher could be sure to elicit sincere responses, standard questions about what factors should matter in admissions and faculty recruitment would not capture the essence of those decisions because of the nature of the decisions themselves. Choices among potential new students and faculty members are fundamentally multidimensional, and therefore inescapably holistic. Admissions and recruitment committees choose among candidates who are, themselves, multifaceted bundles of characteristics. Therefore, asking individuals to make choices that prioritize a particular characteristic (such as race/ethnicity) over others could produce an unnecessary "framing" effect by design (Chong and Druckman 2007; Rosen 2017).

Faced with the growing need to understand students' attitudes toward diversity and the challenge of eliciting honest ones, we use a new approach: fully randomized conjoint analysis (hereafter referred to as conjoint analysis). Conjoint analysis has its origins in market research but was recently refined by Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto (2014) based on the potential-outcome framework for causal inference (Splawa-Neyman 1990; Rubin 1974, 2005), and has since been applied by many political scientists to measure individuals' multidimensional preferences for policies (Bechtel and Scheve 2013; Horiuchi, Smith, and Yamamoto 2018*a*), politicians (Carlson 2015; Horiuchi, Smith, and Yamamoto 2018*b*; Teele, Kalla, and Rosenbluth 2018), and politicized issues, such as immigration (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2015). This method is particularly suitable to understand opinions on sensitive topics such as discrimination (Caruso, Rahnev, and Banaji 2009), as research shows that it reduces the urge to respond in a "socially desirable" way as compared to alternative survey designs that ask respondents for their preferences directly (Horiuchi, Markovich, and Yamamoto 2019).

The core of our study is a coordinated set of conjoint survey experiments conducted in 2017 and 2018 at four major American universities – the University of California, San Diego; the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; the University of Nevada, Reno; and Dartmouth College. In the experiments, participants chose between hypothetical applicants for admission as undergraduate students, or between hypothetical candidates for faculty appointments, at their institutions. Like real applicants and faculty candidates, these hypothetical applicants and candidates were bundles of attributes, all of which could well be salient to their candidacies. Our survey participants, therefore, were confronted with holistic decisions much like those taken by admissions or recruitment committees. We conducted the experiments across these four universities using a consistent format that allows us to pool the results, providing statistical leverage by increasing our sample size, and analytical leverage from the distinct environments and student populations at each institution. We also compare the results to those from related experiments we conducted in 2016 at the University of New Mexico and at the London School of Economics, and in 2018 at the United States Naval Academy.

1.5   THE HIDDEN CONSENSUS ON CAMPUS DIVERSITY

Our results point to strong, broadly shared preferences for prioritizing campus diversity in admissions and faculty recruitment. Specifically, our student participants give preference to admissions applicants and faculty candidates from underrepresented minority racial/ethnic groups, to faculty candidates who are women, and to admissions applicants from disadvantaged economic backgrounds. The estimated preferences for these diversity considerations vary across groups, and are generally stronger among participants from racial/ethnic minority groups (particularly blacks) than among whites, and among women than among men. But notably we find no evidence for *polarization* in preferences across groups on the basis of race/ethnicity. That is, we do not find any set of participants (e.g., nonwhites) favoring student applicants or faculty candidates from a particular racial/ethnic category while another set of participants (e.g., whites) disfavors it. Nor do we find such polarization with respect to men versus women applicants or candidates, or with respect to high-income versus low-income applicants. By contrast, we do find some evidence of polarization with respect to gender