

Campus Diversity

Media, politicians, and the courts portray college campuses as divided over diversity and affirmative action. But what do students and faculty really think? This book uses a novel technique to elicit honest opinions from students and faculty and measure preferences for diversity in undergraduate admissions and faculty recruitment at seven major universities, breaking out attitudes by participants' race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and political partisanship. Scholarly excellence is a top priority everywhere, but the authors show that when students consider individual candidates, they favor members of all traditionally underrepresented groups – by race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic background. Moreover, there is little evidence of polarization in the attitudes of different student groups. The book reveals that campus communities are less deeply divided than they are often portrayed to be; although affirmative action remains controversial in the abstract, there is broad support for prioritizing diversity in practice.

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The Hidden Consensus

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Dedicated to Lisa, Connor, and Chizuko

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Preface

On the evening of November 11, 2015, close to 200 students gathered at Baker Berry Library on the campus of Dartmouth College. Clad in black and holding homemade posters, they marched to the steps of the iconic Dartmouth Hall chanting, “We shall overcome” and “Black lives matter.” One poster summed up the emotions of many students involved in the demonstration: “This is how we REALLY feel.”

The week before that march, a #BlackLivesMatter display in the campus student center had been defaced. The display featured seventy-four shirts representing seventy-four unarmed individuals killed by police officers in 2015. Twenty-eight of the shirts were black, representing black individuals who lost their lives. Soon after the display was presented, several of the black shirts were ripped down.

The protesters also wanted to stand in solidarity with students of color at the University of Missouri and Yale University, where racially charged incidents had sparked protests. At Mizzou, a swastika drawn in feces was found in a dormitory bathroom, and reports of racial slurs and an overall climate of bias on campus had inspired a hunger strike by one student and broader demonstrations calling for the university’s president and chancellor to step down. At Yale, allegations about a racist fraternity party and a dispute over a faculty member’s push-back against university directives on Halloween costumes led to a March of Resilience with over a thousand participants.

In response to these events, the Dartmouth chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) as well as the Student Assembly sent a campuswide e-mail with an

invitation to wear all black and march as an act of solidarity with the #BlackLivesMatter movement. At 8:00 pm on the “Blackout Thursday” evening, the protesters began their procession. After gathering in front of Dartmouth Hall, some students spoke to the crowd about their personal experiences with racism and exclusion on campus. Then several members of the group moved back toward the library, where the tone shifted. Some of the protesters allegedly began calling out students who had chosen not to participate. Viral videos from the evening depict protesters chanting loudly on quiet floors in the library and directly asking students who had not joined the march, “Do you think black lives matter?” In the view of these protesters, failure to participate was, effectively, an expression of anti-diversity preferences.

* * *

The Dartmouth protest and the events that followed drew national media attention and revealed sharp divisions in attitudes toward the incident, and toward diversity more broadly. *Dartmouth Review*, a conservative publication unaffiliated with Dartmouth College, rebuked the “sign-wielding, obscenity-shouting protestors” for their “overzealous” protest. “Their march through the library was an intentional exercise in every disgraceful behavior they claim to endure themselves, from insults and physical force, to racial barbs tossed out with disgust,” The *Review* claimed. The *Review*’s article attracted nearly one thousand online comments, most of which slammed the protesters, likening the incident to everything from terrorism to Nazi Germany.

National conservative outlets including The Daily Caller, The College Fix, The Blaze, Breitbart, and Fox News picked up the story, echoing criticism of the protesters for “assaulting” and “terrorizing” Dartmouth students. Other national outlets, including *USA Today*, *Washington Post*, and *Chronicle of Higher Education*, as well as the local *Valley News*, published pieces acknowledging the confusion that arose in the aftermath of the demonstration.

The main student newspaper on campus, *Dartmouth*, took a different angle, describing the racial tensions on and off Dartmouth’s campus that led to the demonstration of solidarity. According to the president of Dartmouth’s chapter of the NAACP, who was quoted extensively, the goal of the event was to “show many people really stand for this issue and how many people care about this issue.” Also in support of the protesters, Dartmouth’s Vice Provost of Student Affairs, Inge-Lise Ameer, called the demonstration a “wonderful, beautiful thing.” Reflecting on

critics of the protest, she said, “There’s a whole conservative world out there that is not being very nice.” Ameer’s comments prompted another round of rebuke from conservative students and media outlets, and Ameer ultimately issued an “unequivocal apology” for her remarks.

The controversy continued as the college’s administration took an evolving stance, with Dartmouth President Philip J. Hanlon issuing three statements to the broader Dartmouth community about the protests. His initial message to campus affirmed the values of diversity, reminding students, faculty, and staff that “what we must continue to strive for is a diverse community.” A second e-mail described the protest as “peaceful” and affirmed that the administration had received no complaints of physical violence. Finally, in a third campuswide message, Hanlon acknowledged reports of abusive behavior that may have occurred during the protest: “I have heard reports of vulgar epithets, personal insults, and intimidating actions used both by students who entered the library and students who were already in the library . . . Abusive language aimed at community members – by any group, at any time, in any place – is not acceptable.”

The Dartmouth controversy presented a picture of deep divisions among students over the value of diversity on campus. Against that backdrop of apparent polarization, we were initially inspired to write this book.

* * *

While the cascade of campus diversity protests was occurring at colleges and universities around the nation in the fall of 2015, we were all members of the Dartmouth community. Two of us were professors in the government department, and one was a sophomore who had just declared a government major. Our prior research was in areas other than higher education, but we wanted to know whether students were as profoundly divided over diversity as the campus protests, and the coverage of them, suggested.

Building on a preliminary study two of us undertook in the spring of 2015 with other Dartmouth students, we thus decided to embark on an expansive research journey. The goal was to understand student (and some faculty) attitudes on who should be included in campus communities – specifically, on what factors should be prioritized in undergraduate admissions and in the faculty recruitment process. We set ambitious targets, which included not only Dartmouth but also many other colleges

and universities, in order to understand whether Dartmouth is a special case or if it reveals a typical display of campus diversity attitudes.

We began by exploring the existing body of knowledge and found case studies, focus group and interview-based research, campus climate polls on diversity, and scholarship based on traditional surveys. But we also appreciated that eliciting honest opinions on a sensitive topic like diversity is notoriously tricky. As the Dartmouth protests underscored, students might be reluctant to offer forthright opinions. Moreover, attitudes toward campus diversity and, in particular, student admissions and faculty recruitment are context-specific and holistic in nature. Even if students express support for diversity in the abstract, it is difficult to parse out whether that priority is greater or less than other relevant considerations in the specific admissions and recruitment contexts we focus on. We wanted to see how students evaluate difficult trade-offs that pit diversity against academic achievement and other salient characteristics.

We conducted a series of survey experiments using a method called conjoint analysis, which is particularly suited to evaluate multidimensional preferences underlying holistic decisions. Our participants chose between hypothetical pairs of applicants for undergraduate admission or faculty candidates for hire at their universities. We partnered with faculty at institutions across the United States and abroad to explore how preferences differ across contexts. To test for the deep divisions across student populations that the campus protests seemed to portray, we also explored whether attitudes differed by students' own demographics and attitudes, such as their race/ethnicity, partisanship, or attitudes toward race and affirmative action. In short, we looked for divergence in every place we thought that it might appear.

Did our surveys reveal the irreconcilable divisions suggested by the campus protests of the fall of 2015? To our great surprise, we found almost no polarization in preferences for diverse campus populations. Rather, students across the board (and faculty) showed support for prioritizing diversity in undergraduate admissions and faculty recruitment. We found a strong, while hidden, consensus in preferences in favor of diversity among college and university campus communities.

* * *

We could not have conducted the research for this book without the collaboration of faculty partners from the universities other than Dartmouth at which we conducted survey experiments. Our partners are Professor Marisa Abrajano at the University of California, San Diego;

Professors Tim Ryan and Layna Mosley at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Professor Mala Htun at the University of New Mexico; Professor Kevin Carman at the University of Nevada, Reno; Professor John Polga-Hecimovich at the United States Naval Academy (USNA); and Professor Simon Hix at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). These colleagues secured institutional permission and review board approval for the research, offered advice about the design of the experiments and survey instruments, provided data on faculty and student demographics and insight on specific institutional characteristics, and advised on the interpretation of our results. Professor Ryan's contributions to the design of the pooled experiments and the addition of a range of attitudinal questions were particularly critical. Professor Htun's contributions were central to the work reported in Chapter 8. Professor Polga-Hecimovich's and Professor Hix's contributions were equally fundamental to the sections on the Naval Academy and the LSE, respectively, reported in Chapter 9.

We are also grateful for collaboration from colleagues whose home universities ultimately did not approve requests to conduct experiments, or where approval was conditional on our not disclosing the identity of the institution. We appreciate the efforts of Professor Jennifer Hochschild (Harvard), Professor Tali Mendelberg and Dr. Lisa Argyle (Princeton), Professor Jessica Preece (Brigham Young University), Professor Frances Rosenbluth (Yale), Professor Pat Sellers (Davidson), Professor Jeffrey Staton (Emory), and Professor Dawn Teele (University of Pennsylvania). We regret not being able to bring the work we embarked upon with those colleagues to fruition.

At an early stage of work on this project, we had outstanding research assistance from Maddie Brown and Lauren Martin. We are grateful for institutional support from Dartmouth College that allowed for the administration of our survey experiments, and from Dartmouth's Nelson A. Rockefeller Center for Public Policy and the Social Sciences to sponsor and organize a manuscript review workshop. We thank the participants in that workshop – Chris Hardy, Janice McCabe, Bruce Sacerdote, Andrew Samwick, Al Tillery, Natasha Warikoo, and Sean Westwood – for invaluable input. We thank our Dartmouth colleagues Sonu Bedi, Jeff Friedman, Michael Herron, Katy Powers, and Ben Valentino for suggestions on our research design and comments on earlier drafts of the manuscript. We also thank participants at the LSE Political Behavior seminar series, at the Naval Academy, at Harvard University's Universities: Past, Present, and Future seminar series, and at Dartmouth's Institutional

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