

Strategies for Diversity & Inclusion: A Case Study of Faculty Decision Making

Byron A. Green
PRX, Inc.

Jacklyn Bruce¹, Katherine McKee, Joy Fleming, and Harriett Edwards
North Carolina State University
Raleigh, NC



Abstract

The diversity of undergraduate students on college campuses across the country is increasing (Pope et al., 2014). In conjunction with this increase in diversity has been a rise in negative responses to that diversity, which in turn, causes decreased student satisfaction in the campus experience for those diverse student populations (Evans & D'Augelli, 1996; Evans & Rankin, 1998; Harwood et al., 2012; Seymour & Hewitt, 1997; Tonso, 1999). This increase in student diversity and decrease in student satisfaction has challenged universities to not only support students, but also create programs, design policies and procedures, and implement strategies and interventions that are culturally sensitive. All those within the university must take part in addressing these climate issues, including, and maybe especially, faculty; however, Lowenstein (2009) suggested faculty are not trained on how to teach their subject matter, much less how to address the increasing diversity of student populations and the multicultural competence needed to support this growth. The purpose of this study is to provide insight into HBCU College of Agriculture (CoA) faculty experiences with diversity, focusing on those HBCU CoA faculty who chose to become multiculturally competent.

Keywords: HBCU, multicultural competence, faculty development

Across the country, students are experiencing and engaging in events and practices that create inhospitable conditions for women and minority students. Yale's Sigma Alpha Epsilon Fraternity members reportedly barred Black women from a party stating "white girls only" (White, 2015) shortly after two members of the faculty publicly defended students' privilege to "be a little obnoxious" through Halloween costumes that were culturally insensitive

(Friedersdorf, 2015). These events and many others like them - Lipscomb University president hosts black students with cotton centerpieces, multiple nooses found on the campus of Duke University, Oklahoma University fraternity SAE sings "there will never be a N***** in SAE", NC State GLBT center vandalized, a banana hanging from noose on a Black woman's door at American University - highlight the context in which faculty, staff, and students operate on campuses across the nation (Fortin, 2017; Gardner 2011; Jaschik, 2015; Moye, 2017; New, 2015).

Researchers noted a difference in diverse student experiences between those at predominately white institutions (PWIs) and those attending historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) (Allen et al., 1991; Lenning, 2017; Love, 2009). Boyd et al. (2010) noted that PWIs promote white ethics, attitudes, and beliefs. Studies of climate at PWI land grant institutions indicated Eurocentric and nationalistic perspectives including the belief that those of European descent are superior and that faculty perpetuate these beliefs (Persaud et al., 2008; Rouse et al., 2013). Those hostile institutional climates and perceived racism are reasons for diverse students' departure from PWIs (Davis et al., 2004). PWIs do not provide the same cognitive growth or positive interpersonal support for diverse students as HBCUs and when considering graduation rates for African American students, particularly, the rate is much lower at PWIs than the 40% at HBCUs (Guiffa & Diuthit, 2010).

Diversity on college campuses continues to increase with more students of color, international students, older students, and first-generation college students attending college every year (Jones & McEwen, 2000). Luo and Jamieson-Drake (2009) described that the percentage of non-white identifying students at four-year institutions of higher learning has doubled from 13% of the student body in 1976 to 27% in 2005. This increase in racial diversity of undergraduate students brings with it campus climate challenges like those described above. Universities must

¹ Corresponding author: Jacklyn Bruce, jackie_bruce@ncsu.edu, Broughton Hall, NC State University, Raleigh, NC 27695

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find ways to not only support diverse students, but create programs and services, design policies and procedures, and implement strategies and interventions that are culturally sensitive (Pope et al., 2014). All those within the university must take part in addressing these climate issues, including, and maybe especially, faculty; however, Lowenstein (2009) suggested faculty are not trained on how to teach their subject matter, much less how to address the increasing diversity of student populations and the multicultural competence needed to support this growth. While not taught explicitly how to address diversity issues, faculty are positioned to create a positive campus climate via student interaction.

Faculty in Higher Education

Brookfield (2003) argued that higher education is grounded in Western European intellectual traditions and, salient to this conversation, are racialized implying that the roots of the university are created and maintained with white students in mind. This racializing of the university system is complicated further as we consider female faculty and faculty of color whom often face different expectations. Hurtado (2001) argued that while faculty development opportunities could promote changes in pedagogy, it might not address different methodology for supporting diverse classrooms. Scholars noted that faculty of color and female faculty members are often expected to serve on committees and more actively address diversity issues compared to their white male counterparts who are expected to only be excellent scholars and teachers (Brayboy, 2003; Moore & Toliver, 2010).

Adesina (1993) found significant differences between sensitivity to cultural diversity with minority faculty showing greater overall sensitivity than their Caucasian counterparts. However, Gaughan (1998) found no relationship between diversity awareness and student satisfaction. These findings indicate that awareness alone cannot improve student satisfaction. Considering the work by Gaughan (1998) and Adesina (1993) on the disconnect between sensitivity, awareness, and satisfaction, the identity breakdown of faculty does not paint an inclusive picture.

Student-Faculty Relationship

Regardless of the identity breakdown, sensitivity to diversity, or difficulty in incorporating multicultural competence into coursework, faculty members have a notable impact on student experiences (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) suggested that faculty interaction had a strong influence on students when tied to the academic experience. Additionally, faculty interaction impacts the development of intellectual, social, and personal values and orientations as well as educational attainment and other positive outcomes. Toney and Lowe (2001) found a relationship between a student's satisfaction and the frequency with which they interacted with their adviser. Similarly, Smith et. al (2007) found that faculty making students feel valued was essential to student satisfaction with the relationship.

Pascarella and Terenzini (1977) also found that interacting with faculty about intellectual or course-related matters, career plans, and academic programs was significantly related to first-year attrition. The researchers revisited the relationship between faculty and students in 1980 stating that the frequency of contact between student and faculty is positively related to students' learning outcomes, even controlling for students' incoming differences (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1980). Similarly, Endo and Harpel (1982) found that the frequency, content, and quality of student-faculty interaction affected not only satisfaction but also mediated the effects of college environments. In addition, Love (2009) found that the perception of campus climate was positively affected when faculty engaged with students of color at PWIs.

Literature confirms that the relationship between faculty and students can be negative and harmful to minority students; however, when there is a positive relationship or interaction between faculty and student, it is noted to be key to student satisfaction and development. Simply stated, faculty impacts student satisfaction and research shows that student satisfaction and campus climate are linked. Considering both bodies of literature, it is evident that faculty sit in a position to affect campus climate. Considering this positionality, Love (2009) argued that faculty should be brought to the table to address campus climate issues.

Multicultural Competence

Multiculturalism is the presence and/or support of multiple social constructs within a space (Tiedt, P, & Tiedt. I, 2005). Those social constructs include, but are not limited to, race, religious affiliation, sexuality, gender, ethnicity, linguistic diversity, and disability (Tiedt, P, & Tiedt. I, 2005). Multiculturalism has been used as a strategy to address diversity in the classroom and provide an equal playing field for all students to achieve by providing differing voices in the classroom and support to those voices (Hartman & Gerteis, 2005). From an individual perspective, multiculturalism enables people to examine their own and others' cultural heritage (Sims et al., 1998). In the literature, definitions of multiculturalism are very inclusive and far-reaching; however, in popular culture the term has often been relegated to referring only to race or ethnicity, ignoring the other constructs mentioned above (Tierney, 1994). Logistically, for the context of this research, faculty who are multiculturally competent will possess the knowledge, skill, and awareness to better handle diversity-related issues that arise in the classroom and contextualize interactions they have with students.

Statement of the Problem

Higher education institutions want to confront diversity issues and create better campus climates for all students (Guiffrida 2005; Smith 2005). While tasking student affairs professionals to address issues of campus climate and student satisfaction, institutions often do so without considering research that notes faculty-student relationships and issues stemming from the classroom correlate with

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student satisfaction (Brayboy, 2003). Differences in climate and student satisfaction between PWIs and HBCUs are also noted in the research (Brayboy, 2003). Who should be tasked with creating this favorable campus climate that, in turn, impacts student satisfaction? Love (2009) argued that faculty should engage in the conversation to address campus climate and diversity issues. There is a clear connection between campus climate issues and student satisfaction as well as student satisfaction and student-faculty relationships. Astin (1984) argued that interactions with faculty are more strongly associated with satisfaction of college students than any other involvement.

Faculty response to diversity and inclusion issues impacts student perceptions and overall campus climate (Love, 2009). It is urgent to examine the experiences of faculty in addressing diversity issues and their decision-making process when incorporating multicultural competence into interactions with students. This study will contribute to the research in faculty development by examining the experiences of faculty as they work with an increasingly diverse student population at HBCUs. Examining the experiences of HBCU faculty members will provide insights into institutional culture and the decision-making process of faculty members.

The purpose of this study is to analyze faculty experiences related to diversity with a particular focus on why and how faculty choose to become multiculturally competent with a specific interest in classroom practices and student advising relationships.

Methods

Prior to the undertaking of the research described herein, the < institution name > Institutional Review Board approved the study protocol and all participants provided written informed consent prior to their participation.

Because the objective of this study was to understand the experiences of faculty members and their decision making impetus to engage with multicultural competence in a variety of educational settings, qualitative work is the most appropriate research paradigm. According to Bernard and Ryan (2010), the purpose of engaging in a case study is to get an in-depth understanding of a program or organization. Yin (1984) defines case study research method as, "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used" (p. 23). Case study research is ideal for gaining insight into the change of an individual during some program or experience (Patton, 2002). The importance of the social context of case study research is continued in Glesne (1991), who reminded that in case study research the data collected are grounded in a real-life situation and socially constructed. Creswell and Poth (2017) highlighted that the case study reports the examination of a bounded system. For this study it was important to understand the socially constructed systems that existed at HBCUs and how that affected faculty members.

Purposeful sampling is the deliberative selection of

participants to gather information that cannot otherwise be gathered from other choices (Maxwell, 2005). The primary concern is not to generalize the findings of the study to a larger population, but to maximize the discovery of the issues and nuances under study (Anderson et al., 2010). The first goal of purposeful sampling is the attempt to achieve representativeness or typicality. In this case, that meant the search for the typical faculty member in colleges of agriculture at HBCUs. The second goal of purposeful sampling is "to establish comparisons to illuminate the reasons for differences between settings or individuals" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 90). For this study, participants will have the shared experience of the college and institution, but they have differences that are compared as well. The intentionality of purposefully sampling participants who have differences in degree attainment, location, and career trajectory to the professorate allows for rich data.

The population of the study was faculty from colleges of agriculture at 1890 Land Grant Universities who were interacting with undergraduate students as a significant portion (more than 50% of appointment) of their responsibilities for at least one year; and were willing to speak thoughtfully about their experiences with diversity. Four faculty members, both male and female participants were interviewed. Participants also shared multiple racial identities (Table 1).

Interviews were transcribed, and the transcripts were reviewed using open coding strategies espoused by Bogden and Biklen (1998). Institutional websites, policy manuals/documents, and similar documents were reviewed for triangulation purposes. The second step, the creation of categories, was completed by rereading the subtext openly to define the major content categories that emerged from the reading (Lieblich et al., 1998). The newly developed categories were then labeled. The third review of the transcripts involved placing the subtext derived from step one into the categories created and named in the second phase (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The last level of the data analysis concluded the exploration of the data (Leiblich et al., 1998).

The trustworthiness of this study was established using the tenants of credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability espoused by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Credibility was established through member checks and peer debriefs. Transferability was established by collecting detailed data in context and providing a thick description of the population, as suggested by Erlandson et al. (1993). Confirmability was achieved through maintaining protocol and reporting findings to participants and peers as recommended by Lincoln (2001). Dependability was reached via an audit trail, as recommended by Bowen (2009).

Results

For participants at HBCUs, the story of becoming multiculturally competent fell into two distinct themes, the strategies they used and the lessons they learned.

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Table 1.

1890 Participants

Pseudonym	Discussed identities	Type of Undergraduate institution	Type of Graduate institution	Experience working with students prior to the current role	Tenure track	Length of time in role
John	African American/ Male	HBCU	PWI	None discussed	yes	24 years
Lisa	African American/ Female	HBCU	HBCU	TA experience	yes	11 years
Greg	African American/ Male	HBCU	PWI	None discussed	yes	5 years
Mary	African American/ Female	HBCU	PWI	Advising	no	1 year

Strategies

The autonomy to address multicultural competence contributes to the effectiveness of these faculty members. The strategies they chose are suited to their strengths and situated in the context of the institution where they work, centered on how faculty worked with students outside the classroom. Mary and Greg both noted that an individualized approach to working with students concerning diversity was impactful. Mary shared how she specifically worked with two students in an effort to support their success. She noted that individualizing support for students was important.

...when I am interacting with the different diversity of students, I have to be mindful of whom I'm talking to and understand their culture. If I'm dealing with an African American student the conversation can go one way. If I'm dealing with a Caucasian that same conversation may go different. So I do have to [be mindful of diversity]...

Greg shared a similar sentiment of the individualization in supporting students. He noted learning from students by listening to them. Greg used the intellectual exchange between himself and the students as a method of developing multicultural competence.

I think through different meetings with students. I've reviewed some grants, or I was on an external review board for some grants at XXX, and it was for minorities. And so I got to meet with those students and hear how they learn differently and think about things differently and how if they didn't have support at that program at XXX, they probably wouldn't be in graduate school. That's another way that really made me know that you really have to be cognizant of people from different places.

Continuing in the vein of individualization, John spoke about how he attempts to let students know that he understands some portion of the student culture. This attempt to make students feel more comfortable in the classroom or outside of it creates that sense of home spoken about by Lisa and Mary in this study.

Even in the classroom, I let them know that I know something about their culture or where they're from, and that makes folks feel good when you do that. It makes certain that you can stay away from ... the stereotypes that might be associated with that

culture or that religion. And so again it makes them more relaxed and more comfortable interacting with you as a professor or as an advisor or as a mentor.

While the strategies used when students are at the institution are essential, John also shared the strategy he uses when going into the recruitment process. John shared that he is open about bringing in any and all types of students but is aware that he will more than likely get more African American students. With that knowledge he adjusts the recruitment efforts to educate parents in the process.

First place, I usually get to know the parents when I'm trying to recruit them into the program. Our program used to be named Biological and Agriculture Systems Engineering, but we dropped Agriculture because of the negative stigma that's attached to the word. Since the majority of our students are African American, and I know being from the South and growing up in the South, even when you get a student interested in coming in this type of engineering, you have to educate the parents that this is an engineering program and not about farming. And so that's one reason.

John clearly understands the cultural knowledge and awareness needed to work with potential students during the recruitment process and possesses the skill to use it.

These three components of multicultural competence are integral when successfully operating in situations that related to diversity. Lisa used the same components in the classroom as she addressed gender. Lisa shared in the discussion around gender in her classroom that she attempts to address it only as a genetic construct. She discussed the rationale that some abnormalities or diseases are chromosomal, so they use X and Y to have the discussion. Lisa shared outright that she was aware the gender conversation was more in-depth and had implications outside the classroom that could affect students, but this was her attempt at delineating the difference.

This one class that I teach discusses diseases, and we discussed intrinsic and extrinsic factors that could lead to those diseases. I sort of tell them up front. So when we're in class, and we're talking male/female, we're talking two Xs, and an XY. We're not talking about gender. Someone might be more prone to this disease because they carry a Y-chromosome. That's what we're talking about,

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not just how you identify with yourself.

While Lisa was knowledgeable about the issues around gender and aware of how gender factors into her curriculum, she was unsure about her skill. That uncertainty in an appropriate way to address the topic was a concern for Lisa. Regardless, Lisa chose action; her strategy was to take on the subject matter head-on using what she did know. For Lisa, that strategy will persist as she works through her own multicultural competence, or when an intervening lesson occurs.

Lessons Learned

History can often be the best teacher; we repeat behaviors that are successful and alter those that are not. Faculty, in their teaching role, rely on learned lessons as a method of changed behavior and it makes sense that this was a driving force for action. The lessons shared by participants centered around three ideas; perspective, a means to address preconceived notions, and being better prepared for the future.

Here participants shared that they were able to develop a different viewpoint on multicultural competence and what that looks like moving forward. Mary noted it taught her to be a better manager and supervisor and highlighted practically how that knowledge will help advance their career.

It gave me a better perspective of how to work with [multiple cultures] and to learn from [them]. It was a great learning experience for me, and it taught me to be a better supervisor and a better manager so that as I move up in my career, I would know how to relate to all cultures versus just being monopolized by one culture.

Mary discussed the direct causal relationship between her multicultural competence and her strengthened perspective and career success. Lisa went a step further to elaborate that a broader view helps her navigate the HBCU campus.

I think it's given me a broader view and probably being open to this whole multicultural and diversity. The need to understand that everybody comes to the table with their own thoughts and ideas based on where they come from, their experiences in the world, and the things that they value, either culturally or within their family context. I guess just being open to that and, of course, trying to get ... them to see that when you leave these walls, this is comfort for you, but you need to be open to other cultures, and other foods, and other ways of thinking, and how enriching that is.

John shared his approach to combating preconceived notions about his academic ability. He did note that this approach is best used where there are right and wrong answers.

Excellence is your best weapon. Sometimes the professor wants you to get in a debate with them and say why I should be here and blah blah blah, and I'm just as smart as the rest of them. But since engineering is an objective type tier, if I got the same answers that other students got, they can't

give you a lower score.

John's experience in combating preconceived notions about his performance in the classroom taught him that excellence was the answer. While that did not stop the microaggressions and overt attacks, it did serve as his defense. As John moved out of his role as a student into his role as a faculty member, the lessons did not stop. Greg and John both shared stories that centered multicultural incompetence. Both participants noted that while their initial actions were not ideal, they wanted to be more prepared for the future. Greg recounted a situation with a woman who identified as Muslim.

And I'll tell you another time where [I was ignorant], or I just wasn't paying attention. I had a meeting with another faculty member here at [XXX], and he had a Muslim student in his lab, who was a female, and I went to shake her hand. And she wouldn't shake my hand. And at first, I'm like, "Huh?" And then it dawned on me, like oh, I got to remember just because I'm in the US, [XXX] has changed, we have different people from different cultures and I didn't want to basically come off the wrong way or treat somebody in a manner they feel that they shouldn't be treated.

The learning happened for him almost instantaneously. Greg shared that learning permeates relationships with students and faculty members. For him, the learning was in the reflection. John reflected on his career and exposure to different cultures along the way. He noted that being able to use the knowledge and awareness of other cultures allowed him to make others around him feel more comfortable. This concept was woven throughout the interview with John and the overall experience of the HBCU.

...having worked with so many faculty members from different cultures and nationalities and religion and stuff. As everybody knows, we live in a global society. By knowing about other cultures ... it makes you better prepared to deal with students and realize you know beforehand that they are from different religions or different backgrounds and just knowing something about those cultures can make a difference in your relationship with the students and make them feel comfortable. That you respect them and respect where they're from and their nationality and their race and all of that.

The lessons that John took away from his diversity experience allowed him to better connect with his students and enhance the experience that each participant noted as making them feel welcomed and at home.

Discussion

Regarding the journey to multicultural competence with faculty members in this study, two factors dominated the conversation; risk in the strategy used and continual evolution.

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Strategy Used

For participants in this study the cultural risk of addressing diversity-related issues was minimal, as a majority of the student population is African American, but the fact remains that these faculty members still considered the risk in how they addressed these topics as an impetus for action. Direct incorporation of multicultural competence into the curriculum was a sticky point for participants. They attempted to do so in ways they feared could still bother students and were also unaware of how to properly do it. Brayboy (2003) and Moore and Toliver (2010) both noted faculty of color are often expected to address diversity issues actively. This study shows that while this group of faculty may be willing to address these issues, they still struggle with the skill component in addressing issues unrelated to race. While risk assessment was a component in the incorporation of multicultural competence, faculty still attempted to bring it into the classroom which is in line with Stringer (2014) who acknowledged the increase of faculty recognizing the importance of inculcating multiculturalism into classrooms. Faculty members at HBCUs in this study seem more comfortable in possibly getting it wrong than not addressing it at all.

While incorporating multicultural competence into the curriculum may not be a skill honed by these faculty members here, they were more confident in exhibiting their multicultural competence in one-on-one settings and by creating a sense of belonging for their students. Participants noted they are more likely to engage in one-on-one encounters to help students inside or outside the classroom. This strategy extended to the recruitment process as well, with Participants noting the best means of recruiting students was to understand the culture of that student which speaks to the obligation of institutions of higher education to embrace diversity and work to accommodate the array of individuals that (potentially) will walk through our doors and eventually, become our students and alumni (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995).

The participating faculty members at HBCUs in this study are expected to address diversity and that expectation, regardless if they get it wrong, opens the door for conversation. In spite of the risk, faculty consistently chose to engage. Understanding this culture is the first step in creating more inclusive spaces everywhere. If faculty feel safe enough to try, we may well have moved past the need for multicultural competence into the implementation phase. Now, teaching practical skills for how to incorporate multicultural competence is easier than attempting to convince faculty of the need and becomes ingrained in the culture. When departments make multicultural competence incorporation an expectation, faculty can start the socialization process (Banks, 1993).

Continual Evolution

The second impetus for addressing the inclusion of multicultural competence was the constant evolution of the participants. The participants encountered situations where they, themselves, learned a lesson either through

confrontation with a lab-mate or a misstep in a cultural interaction. The lessons participants took away from these interactions influenced the way they chose to engage in future situations, inspiring them to not only learn more but engage in ways that were more appropriate for the population with whom they were working, in turn continually evolving into a more multiculturally competent professional (Pope et al., 2004).

Clearly, even these faculty members in this study at HBCUs are questioning if they get it right all the time. These faculty are more comfortable engaging in conversations, even if they get it wrong. Participants are willing to address some diversity issues with their multicultural competence, but when other subjects arise, they are less likely to do so. This is indicative of the literature around HBCUs that shows they are racially inclusive but, conservative as it relates to gender expression and sexuality (Richen, 2016). It is also clear that these participants are more likely to act in a situation if they can do so in a way that is more comfortable for them. In this case, that is addressing the student in a one-on-one basis as opposed to infusing multicultural competence into the curriculum. Lastly, because faculty are looking to evolve, if they get it wrong, the lessons that were derived from diversity centered encounters become an impetus for future change. The propensity to change and grow is the cornerstone of the educational system. For these faculty, the acknowledgment that they too can still learn and grow only fortifies their central idea that everyone can learn and implement that learning.

Summary

This study provided insight into faculty and staff experiences with diversity and the inclusion of multicultural competence into their experiences with students at HBCUs. This study also provided similar insight into the impetus for their decision making involving the same constructs. Based on the findings, we offer suggestions for future research, and practice, based on the initial assumption that one wants to be more multiculturally competent.

This research has furthered the conversation around diversity experiences and explores the decision-making impetus for the incorporation of multicultural competence as a means to address diversity-related issues in the classroom, during advising, and during one-on-one interactions. With a clearer picture of the impetus for this behavior, we can further explore the removal of boundaries or creation of similar situations for other faculty to see if the inclusion of multicultural competence becomes more natural and/or more common amongst vital faculty.

As universities and departments recruit for more structural diversity, faculty must be prepared to support these students. Faculty should preemptively engage in efforts that will encourage a more inclusive nature. Existing programs such as safe zone training, Green zone training, UNDOCUally training, IBUDDY international buddy program, and TITLE IX training can support this effort.

Throughout this study, it was mentioned that faculty do not know how to incorporate multicultural competence into their curriculums in a practical way. Faculty should

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also participate in continued training on how to integrate multicultural competence into their disciplinary content. This could be done with a departmental representative being trained intensively and contextualizing the knowledge to take back to the department. While the acquisition of the skill does not guarantee incorporation, it does remove a perceived barrier for these vital faculty members.

Considering the intellectual exchange between faculty and students and the noted knowledge acquisition that comes from that engagement, the administration should provide tangible incentives for faculty who work with students in a way that reflects multicultural competence. The collaboration benefits the student as they learn the practical skills of lab work and research and also increases student satisfaction with the university while encouraging cultural and intellectual exchange between faculty and students.

The recommendations for research and practice across HBCUs are notable, but if we do not take action in some form or fashion, we leave a generation of students to continue to engage in a system that was not built for them or their success. Vital faculty members across both institutional types are ready to affect change and help where they can, but without change on a large scale at the same rate of increasing student identities entering the university we will fail — making the need for further research and a change in practice indispensable.

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