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One Step Toward Excellence and Inclusion:

Grading Top Sociology Graduate Programs' Training on Race and Gender

To determine if academic excellence and inclusion can be pursued simultaneously in higher education, we are first required to ask if top universities are serious about being inclusive and, if they are, what they are doing to ensure their academic departments, among other systemic structures, reflect those goals. For graduate schools, one key goal should be training their students academically on issues of race and gender. If we expect to create a higher education that values both excellence and inclusion, then this needs to be evident in the courses offered in our departments, which illustrate to students what is valued by their departments and discipline.

This research project contributes to that effort by assessing sociology departments, because this discipline expressly purports to study how people interact in groups (American Sociological Association, 2010), including racial and gender groups, yet sociological study in the United States has historically failed to adequately address the issue of race in its programs (McKee, 1993; Steinberg 2001, 2007). Our research question was: Among top-ranked PhD granting sociology departments, to what extent do programs offer their graduate students training in race and gender? By following how we have begun to answer that question in this project, which is part of a larger study assessing[1] sociological departments on issues of race and gender, our hope is to illustrate how sociology departments, and other academic departments more broadly, may also begin answering how they are training their graduate students in these areas.

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[1] Assessments in higher education on diversity and inclusion tend to be of the university as a whole (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998; University of California "Achieving a Culture of Inclusion" Self-Assessment Tool, 2006; VRMU Diversity and Inclusion Self-Assessment, 2016) or the progress of university diversity committees (NACE Diversity and Inclusion Self-Assessment).

Methods:

The research team used the US News Report "Best Graduate Sociology Programs" list, which, while described as a top 50 list, actually included 57 colleges and universities, as our corpus. The team divided those 57 institutions amongst themselves. Of the 57, 54 either had enough information listed on their websites or responded to our inquiries for more information. Degree requirements and course descriptions were saved in a spreadsheet to organize the data and were subsequently ranked according to difficulty level to be trained in race and gender, respectively. Each member of the team independently coded the data set with the color system described below, which matched with only two instances of mismatch out of the 54 universities, which were resolved by the PI. Programs were coded (Saldaña, 2016) with a green light if they evidenced that studying race or gender issues in sociology is not only possible, but well-supported; a yellow light if it would be logistically complicated to study race or gender in this program; and a red light if it would be exceedingly difficult to study race or gender in this program. Indicators for adequately training students in race or gender included: if courses in either topic offered in the past two years[2], number and frequency of those courses, if those courses were electives, if those courses were offered in the department or from outside departments, if there were any required courses on race or gender, and if there were comprehensive or qualifying exam areas in either topic.

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[2]In the list, most coursework was limited to the first two years.

Findings:

Race	Results
Green Light	8/54, 14.8%
Yellow Light	24/54, 44.4%
Red Light	12/54, 22.2%

Gender	Results
Green Light	10/54, 18.5%
Yellow Light	38/54, 70.3%
Red Light	6/54, 11.1%

While the spread between both sets, race and gender, is similar, there are still double the amount of "red light" programs for race, and that negative weight bears out in the other categories. What follows are brief descriptions of representative red, yellow, and green light programs.

Green Departments

One Northeastern university is a representative example of a "green light" school, in the race category, primarily for offering an Africana Specialization option, which provides both coursework and structural support for studying race.

A public university in the Pacific Northwest is a representative example of a "green light" school, in the gender category. The primary factors for this designation were a) the descriptions of two required theory courses include feminist theory and b) multiple options in the pool of required seminars are explicitly about gender.

Yellow Departments

A university in the Southeast is representative example of a "yellow light" school, in both the race and gender categories by offering several course offerings in race or gender, yet they are all electives, and only 6 course hours are allotted for taking elective courses. Thus, the most they could take are two courses, which many students may split by taking one on race and the other on gender.

Red Departments

A public Midwestern university is a representative example of a "red light" school, in the race category. Primary aspect that contributed to this coding was: no courses on race were offered in the 2013/14 school year, according to their departmental website.

Another public Midwestern university is a representative example of a "red light" school, in the gender category, for similar reasons. It has not offered courses on gender (or race) since at least the 2015/15 school year, which is the farthest back the website displays.

Conclusions:

From the above findings, one key issue is the lack of plentiful and varying courses on race and gender, which point to two primary suggestions: there need to be more faculty able and willing to confidently teach these courses, and both department and university leaders need to prioritize providing these courses. It is important to note, however, that these codes are not a guarantee of the quality of the experience students will have while they study these topics at any university. The findings herein, however, provide a process by which we can begin to assess other academic departments on their offerings and academic training on race and gender, while

also pointing us toward specific questions to ask in surveys and interviews, thus enabling us to craft more precise instruments. With the results of these assessments, departments can begin targeted work toward ensuring their already excellent academics are extended into practical steps to achieve the diversity and inclusion goals of their department, university, and academic associations.

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