

Inclusive Classrooms at Historically Black Colleges and Universities: The Need for Faculty Development

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Abstract. In the 21st century, colleges are encouraged to promote diversity among the students and faculty in the classrooms. This will ensure that the learning environments are safe spaces which celebrate and support all students and multicultural perspectives. Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) like other institutions must find ways to address issues of bias that are perhaps inherit in multicultural environments. Classroom that create inclusive climates and pedagogical approaches can improve academic and social development among college students. Higher education leadership must be understanding and willing to address the impact of unconscious or implicit bias in the academic community and realize that it is not a choice but a requirement for faculty on college campuses be trained to avoid biased behaviors.

Keywords: Implicit bias; teacher preparation; multicultural; inclusive classrooms; Historically Black Colleges.

Introduction

All universities should encourage faculty to create inclusive classrooms where they actively strive to engage equitably with diverse students who may vary considerably along many factors (religion, race, gender, nationality, SES, first-generation, political alignment, etc.). To date most of the literature in regard to implicit bias and inclusive classrooms were written in regard to Predominately White Institutions (PWIs). There is a paucity of research examining implicit bias, its impact on faculty, and students who attend Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). This paper discusses how one University worked to promote increased faculty awareness, developed and implemented training workshops to increase awareness of implicit biases to enhance student learning and success in multicultural environments.

There is a need for HBCU faculty to have an awareness of implicit bias in the classroom and beyond the classroom. Administrators should recognize the importance of inclusivity in effective teaching and student learning and provide faculty with various pedagogical approaches that are an effective part of an inclusive classroom.

Universities and colleges must work to increase diversity and ensure that they prepare students for intellectual and social success. Every day, faculty are responsible and encouraged to broaden students' intellectual abilities, in and out of the classroom. Extensive research on the beneficial effects of faculty development and inclusive classroom instruction has been conducted with faculty teaching at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). However, there is scant information on these types of initiatives that promote inclusive classroom teaching practices at HBCUs.

A series of workshops were developed to advance knowledge and understanding of how faculty development programs that encourage inclusive classroom techniques can be institutionalized to help all faculty, especially those in STEM fields, make a permanent beneficial change to their teaching.

Border Impact

This project will contribute to the knowledge base of activities that enhance faculty development and student learning. This project addresses a crucial and very important issue in higher education, that has not been extensively explored or addressed on the campuses of HBCUs. These series of faculty development workshops entitled Inclusive Classrooms for the University (ICU) serve as a foundation for the development of future programs and curriculum addressing this important area in education. These workshops and associated research have the potential to impact similar institutions of higher learning (ex. HBCUs.). They encourage faculty to foster an inclusive classroom climate that encourages the academic success of students who feel marginalized as well as students overall. The end results can help universities implement sustainable environments and academic culture that encourage acceptance of differences as well as inclusion through clearly defined classroom strategies to enhance and support diversity. This type of environment establishes the greatest contributions from all members of the academic community.

The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU, 2016) suggested that there is a need for faculty to create an environment of inclusion by promoting and valuing multicultural perspectives, interjecting diversity into the syllabi, maintaining an awareness of classroom dynamics by focusing on how students are progressing (engagement, and classroom morale) during the learning experience. The ability for faculty to identify implicit biases, respond to, and understand these challenges will determine the best outcome for all involved.

Creating Inclusive Campus Communities

HBCUs play a unique role at institutionalizing diversity and inclusion into the greater campus culture. HBCUs are diverse, and tend to report greater racially

diversity than PWIs. HBCUs have a long and valuable history of educating students of all racial backgrounds (Gasman, Lundy-Wagner, & Ransom, & Bowman, 2010; Brown & Ricard, 2007). Gasman (2013) suggests that:

“some people may worry that the changing composition of HBCUs and this endangers the very aspect of these institutions that makes them unique; and others argue that diversity makes these institutions stronger, by fostering mutual respect and an appreciation for Black culture among a broader population.” (Gasman, 2013, p.6).

Further, Greenfield (2015, p. 7) asserted that:

“not only do individuals diverge in terms of their own definition of racial identity, but the multiplicity of additional identity markers also serves to disrupt any assumptions of a singular Black identity. While both might be Black, the gay middle-income student from the suburbs typically brings a far different set of needs, interests, and experiences than the heterosexual, inner-city, first-generation student-athlete – and the intersections of identities produce unique constellations of racial identity salience for both individuals.” (Greenfield, 2015, p. 7)

HBCU campuses are not void of interracial tensions, such as, colorism, sexual orientation, classism and others. Therefore, HBCUs are challenged to find ways to address issues of bias.

The classroom setting is often the environment where overt and subtle bias takes place. The National Science Foundation (2009) reported that college campuses are more diverse, and more women are enrolling. Inclusive classrooms are critical, since college campuses are likely the prime time and environment for personal exploration, development of students' identities and sexual identities (Renn & Bilodeau, 2005). According to the Association of American Colleges and Universities (2016) several professional organizations have statements on professional ethics that mandates faculty maintain and promote impartiality, avoid harassment and discrimination practices in the classroom. The Association of American Colleges and Universities (2016) reported that it can be damaging to student success if negative implicit biases are present in the classroom and learning process.

Understanding and addressing the impact of unconscious or implicit bias in higher education is not a choice but a requirement for faculty on college campuses. Implicit bias is learned attitudes and beliefs that govern our unconscious interpretations and perceptions of others' behaviors, and choices (Staats & Patton, 2013). Various researchers suggest that biases (positive and negative assessments) are stealth, and generally fall outside of our consciousness, which makes implicit biases difficult to identify and subsequently difficult to control (Blair, 2002; Rudman, 2004a; Kirwan, 2017). Implicit biases are unique and differ from known biases, in that individuals may manage the impact of known biases by concealment from others, and/or transparency via sharing imperfections to fit into the current guidelines for

social and political appropriate behaviors (Nosek, et al., 2007; Rutland, Cameron, Milne, & McGeorge, 2005).

Dasgupta (2013) suggested that implicit bias is a virus that infects individuals with no regard for race, creed, or color. Implicit biases operate below an individual's level of awareness. The etiology of the biases is based in an individual's lived experiences which lead to their subsequent attitudes and beliefs about race, ethnicity, culture, age, and appearance (Kirwan Institute, 2017).

Unfortunately, implicit biases can affect the perception and working relationship between faculty members and students as well as impair student academic performance (Anderson-Clark, Green, & Henley, 2008). Implicit biases can lead to incorrect assessment of student ability (2008). Student performance is impacted by the unconscious biases of faculty, whether it is positive and/or negative assessments of student potential (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1963; Killpack & Melon, 2016). It is extremely important for faculty to know how to handle incidents of bias in the classroom. Boysen, Vogel, Cope, and Hubbard (2009) stated that overall, college instructors are facilitators in the classroom environment. The instructors are responsible for promoting a safe environment that includes respect for diversity as well as using incidents of bias as classroom teachable moments.

Faculty at all universities should be encouraged to create inclusive classrooms and recognize the intention is to broaden and enhance the learning experience for the students. These classrooms should foster an environment where they actively strive to engage equitably with diverse students who differ considerably along factors such as religion, race, gender, nationality, SES, first-generation, sexual orientation, etc. The University of Michigan, Center for Research on the Learning and Teaching website (2016) defines inclusive classrooms, generally, as emotional safe, collaborative learning environments in which instructors and students share the responsibility to promote expression of diverse perspectives across all cultural groups. Further, in these classrooms, the idea is to promote differences and conceptualization of ideas and course content through multicultural viewpoints. According to Saunders and Kardia (2016) presentation of course content in best practice will include strategies to reduce marginalization experiences for students. Further, to increase student awareness, in that students are encouraged to consider other experiences and values which also drives ideas, conceptualization, and perspectives that may be different from their own. In addition, instructors are encouraged to develop learning environments that include diverse instructional modalities in an effort to promote academic success for different types of student learner (Saunders & Kardia, 2016).

The University of Michigan, Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (2016) website states that classrooms that are inclusive provide environments with particular characteristics, specifically characteristics such as thoughtfulness, mutual respect, and academic excellence. These characteristic for inclusion are

valued and promoted in the classroom as well implemented and modeled by the instructor.

According to the Cornell Center for Teaching Excellence (n. d.) website, faculty should use inclusive pedagogies because at times faculty may defer to ideology that promotes classroom which are cultural neutral. There are times, instructors perhaps may ignore cultural dimension in an effort to minimize anxiety among students and instructors. The consequence is that student may struggle to ignore their sociocultural identities, which may prove harmful to student academic success. It is important that faculty employ the pedagogical strategies in the classroom that reflect an understanding of social identity development. This is important so that they can foresee any issues that may arise in the classroom and be proactive about their resolution (Ambrose, Bridges, DiPietro, & Lovett, 2010). As faculty work to create safe, inclusive classrooms, they should consider several factors of influences, for example, the syllabus and course guidelines, course content, class preparation, their own classroom behavior, and their knowledge of students' backgrounds and skills (Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching, 2018).

Killpack and Melon (2016) proposed that unexamined biases in institutions of higher learning can prevent diverse students from reaching their full potential, particularly in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Furthermore, ongoing implicit bias discussions, and trainings as well as group and self-assessment of competencies are salient pathways to continue faculty professional development. These implicit bias discussions allow and encourage faculty to drill down into topics that perhaps make individuals feel uncomfortable. A sense of discomfort is inherent in discussion that require the faculty member to focus on their own implicit bias, lived experience of privilege, and how instructors may facilitate stereotype threat in the classroom (Killpack & Melon, 2016). The Association of American Colleges and Universities (2017) has proposed an Inclusive Excellence model to guide institutional change. This model includes assessments of the success of diversity and inclusion efforts as the new strategies and behaviors are meaningfully integrated into the measurements of the academic quality of the institution. Multiple researchers have encouraged that in order for colleges and universities to achieve inclusive classroom excellence, these colleges and Universities should intentionally invest in and organize inclusivity efforts. The latter will shift a campus climate and culture to safe space that values cultural diversity (Bauman et al., 2005; Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005; Williams, Berger, & McClendon, 2005).

Spreading the Knowledge

According to the Carnegie Mellon University, Eberly Center for Teaching Excellence and Educational Innovation (2015) website,

“In order to create an inclusive classroom, instructors must first become aware of biases they themselves may hold about their subject matter, discipline, and students. Everyone—regardless of their background, political ideology, or identity—has unconscious biases. The first step in

controlling the effects of bias is awareness that we have these assumptions about others. Even if you think you aren't biased, you may hold assumptions about students learning behaviors and capability for success in the course which are tied to student's identity characteristics and/or backgrounds."

A few research studies assert that learned implicit bias associations can be reversed and lead people to treat others fairly (Blair, 2002, Blair, Ma & Lenton, 2001). To date most of the literature in regard to implicit bias and inclusive classrooms are written in regard to predominately white institutions. Very little research exists and compounding the lack of research is the that the research fails to examine the effects of implicit bias its impact on students who attend HBCUs. On HBCU campuses, researchers have created workshops to explore prevalence of implicit bias and predominate types of biases, increase faculty awareness, and to reduce the negative effects of implicit bias on student success.

Inclusive Classrooms for the University (ICU)

When people hear the term ICU, the term and first impressions are not usually associated with implicit bias or perhaps more likely associated with the hospital, intensive care unit (ICU), a unit that provides intensive medical treatment. These workshops are intended to open the eyes of participants and help faculty "see or C" individuals who may experience implicit bias and understand implicit bias, specifically the importance of inclusive classroom environments (I See You). These trainings are conducted with new hires and tenured track faculty. The faculty are encouraged to update the curricula as well as implement inclusive classrooms strategies into their current classroom discussions and activities.

University departments, such as working with the Chief Diversity Officer, Office of Academic Affairs and Department of Human Resources are helpful to identify new hires, tenured track faculty and all other faculty (adjunct, trainees, etc.) for participation in the implicit bias workshops. Upon completion of the workshops, faculty will receive certificates of completion. Faculty are also encouraged to attend campus and community diversity seminars throughout the course of the academic school year. The seminars were designed to expose and increase awareness about diversity topics that were and continue to remain salient in HBCUs and deep south environments. Diversity seminar topics include the influence of poverty (e.g., education obtainment, criminal justice, healthcare, etc.) gender (e.g., leadership, pay equity, healthcare, etc.), culture (e.g., cultural identity, norms, values, etc.), black men (e.g., education, employment, political viewpoints, criminal justice, family, masculinity, etc.), and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender issues (education, equality, marriage equality, healthcare, etc.).

The goals of the workshops were to raise HBCU faculty awareness of the implicit bias in the classroom and beyond the classroom. Faculty were asked to identify implicit biases which influence the classroom environment. They were encouraged to recognize their own beliefs towards inclusion and examine how it may impact their instructional methods. Faculty were encouraged to discuss the

impact of individual self-identity and worldview on his/her learning or on his/her ability to teach diverse students. The purpose of the latter is to help faculty recognize the importance of inclusivity in effective teaching and student learning. Outcomes included the ability to explain the consequences associated with the lack of inclusivity or the presence of implicit bias and the impact on student learning. Faculty were able to explain the benefits of an inclusive learning environment and the positively impact student learning as well. Faculty learned about various pedagogical approaches that were an effective part of an inclusive classroom. They learn to develop strategies about creating an inclusive classroom and its importance to the academic community. This led to the enhancement of the faculty members' ability to consciously identify implicit bias and acquire new instructional knowledge that may create an inclusive campus community.

Implicit Association Tests were used by faculty during the workshops. Recent research has suggested that assessments of these types (IATs; Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998; Greenwald, Nosek, & Banaji, 2003) examining implicit bias and prevalence among individuals (Killpack and Melon, 2016, p.4). The IAT, a computer based assessment, required the individuals to quickly identify association between concepts (e.g., black or white) and a judgement or stereotype (e.g., good or bad). Individuals are encouraged move as quickly as possible to avoid filtering their response or changing their response to a more social acceptable response. Implicit biases are demonstrated as the individual associations indicate a preference for stereotypical pairings of objects (e.g. a black person is associated with bad or a white person is associated with good) or a person may demonstrate different bias if they demonstrate a preference for stereotypical incongruent pairings (black and good; or white and bad; Killpack and Melon, 2016). The IAT assessments were opportunities for faculty to feel uncomfortable during discussion of their IAT assessment report, especially if the IAT report suggest a negative implicit bias. During the workshop, faculty members were provided strategies for using their uncomfortable experiences to help students move through incidents of implicit bias in the classroom as well as help the faculty identify the characteristics of a safe space that were helpful for them to move through the uncomfortable situation.

Conclusion

HBCUs face a number of challenges, one challenge is for the university to remain an affordable and equal education option for students pursuing higher education. Many HBCUs have been challenged to increase enrollment of non-Black/African American students, to improve institutional quality, and refine the unique function of the HBCU experience (Hall & Closson, 2005). As Closson and Henry (2008) poised HBCUs policies and projects should be multifaceted to recruit, and retain students as well as encourage inclusion, yet remain focused on the cultural foundations and the mission to serve the Black community. Jackson State University (JSU) is in a distinct position to conduct research on classroom inclusion and faculty development in regard to biases. As the only "Urban University" in the state of Mississippi, JSU has a unique mission of serving to educate highly motivated students from diverse backgrounds. In JSU

community, original research and hands on learning are integrated into demanding academic programs.

This current project adds to gaps in the literature in regard to classroom inclusion and faculty development resources in regard to biases at HBCUs. These series of workshops can help universities strengthen the climate and create a culture of inclusion for all faculty. It allows for the creation of preclusive university operations, policies and practices, which supports all facets of diversity and ensures that all members of the academic community are making quality contributions.

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