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Race on Campus

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OCTOBER 25, 2022

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From: Adrienne Lu

Subject: Race on Campus: Why Diversity Training Often Doesn't Work

Welcome to Race on Campus. Many colleges rely on diversity training as a mainstay of their commitments to diversity. But do such programs actually help to improve diversity? Our Adrienne Lu spoke with two professors who undertook a comprehensive study of many kinds of diversity efforts at corporations. They shared their recommendations for how colleges can improve diversity among their faculties.

If you have ideas, comments, or questions about this newsletter, write to me:

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Beware Anti-Bias Training

If your college offers diversity training, the sociology professors Frank Dobbin and Alexandra Kalev have some bad news for you: Those programs typically aren't effective at improving diversity and may even backfire.

Dobbin, a professor at Harvard University, and Kalev, an associate professor at Tel Aviv University, studied federal work-force data from more than 800 companies employing eight-million workers over 30 years and concluded that many of the strategies firms rely on to diversify workplaces — and in particular, the management — aren't effective. Their findings are detailed in their [book](#), *Getting to Diversity: What Works and What Doesn't*, published last month.

While researchers have known for years that anti-bias training, for example, doesn't measurably change levels of bias in people, Kalev and Dobbin set out to study diversity efforts more comprehensively and find strategies that do work.

“The goal of this very comprehensive long-term research was indeed to be able to provide some hard science, hard evidence about what works and what doesn't by comparing different approaches,” Kalev said.

Kalev and Dobbin said that there has been slow progress diversifying the managerial ranks of corporations, as well as the faculty ranks at universities, particularly for Black and Hispanic men and women. Asian Americans are somewhat better represented in both corporations and colleges, but they're still not represented equally with white employees who have the same education levels.

“I don’t see a faculty coming to look like the student body any time soon, which is too bad, because one of the reasons we’re interested in tackling diversity is we know that students who are in programs where there are fewer faculty who look like them are much less likely to succeed and less likely to persist in the program and graduate, and less likely to succeed in their chosen fields,” Dobbin said.

Regarding specific diversity efforts, the researchers found that most anti-bias training aimed at individual employees not only fails to increase diversity in management but can actually activate biases and prompt employees to be resentful or even angry.

On the other hand, diversity training that takes a more positive spin, by emphasizing that employees and managers can improve workplace inclusion, was more successful at raising the number of minority employees in management. The researchers found cultural inclusion training, which works to improve communication and collaboration, to be more effective than training focused on legal compliance and avoiding lawsuits, for example.

Dobbin and Kalev advocate that systems for hiring, mentoring, training, and work-life balance be opened up as much as possible. Companies and colleges should take steps to expand who is recruited, trained, and promoted, they said. Instead of relying on professors’ friends and peer networks when recruiting faculty or graduate students, for example, colleges should broaden where they look for candidates.

Dobbin said he has suggested to several universities that they go to historically Black colleges to recruit for their Ph.D. programs, and he has always faced resistance.

“People say, ‘Well, I don’t think we’ve ever had a physics graduate student from Howard University or from Morehouse or Spelman,’” Dobbin said. “And I’m like, ‘What does that tell you?’”

Colleges should also consider improving the work-life accommodations that women and people of color tend to need more, the researchers said, but in ways that are open

to everyone. That strategy worked well at Deloitte, the global financial-services firm, which increased the number of women at the partner rank through measures such as allowing employees to choose when they came up for promotion for partner and offering more mentoring and training opportunities.

In an academic setting, that could mean extending the tenure clock so that people can have more time at home with their children for a year or two when they are young, for example. If the approach worked well at Deloitte, Dobbin said, “Why wouldn’t we be doing that to keep our star women on as tenured faculty members?”

Kalev and Dobbin are now studying the impact of specific diversity policies at about 600 large universities from 1993 to 2016, using federal data. One [study](#) from that data found that the Covid pandemic led universities to hire fewer minority faculty members, with public institutions and research universities making the biggest cuts.

“In times of crises, often decision makers make more conservative decisions,” Dobbin said. “It is still considered to be more conservative to hire white men for faculty positions, because it was kind of the traditional thing to do. We really can’t come up with another explanation for it.” —*Adrienne Lu*

Read Up

- For *The New York Times Magazine*, Bronwen Dickey [tells the story](#) of a 14-year-old girl killed in the 1985 police bombing of a Black religious group in Philadelphia. How her bones ended up in a University of Pennsylvania anthropology class is still in dispute.
- In Mexico, a growing social movement is [challenging the notion](#) that the country doesn’t have a problem with racism. Activists are calling attention to the ways Mexican society privileges its wealthy, light-skinned elite. (*Los Angeles Times*)
- Following protests calling for racial equity in 2020, the Pennsylvania State University committed to opening a Center for Racial Justice. Faculty members

are [raising alarms](#) after learning that the university has not allocated funding for the center. (*Spotlight PA*)

—*Fernanda*

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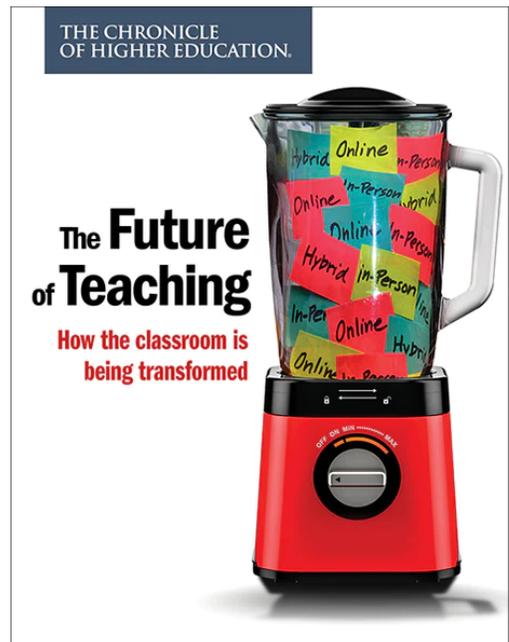
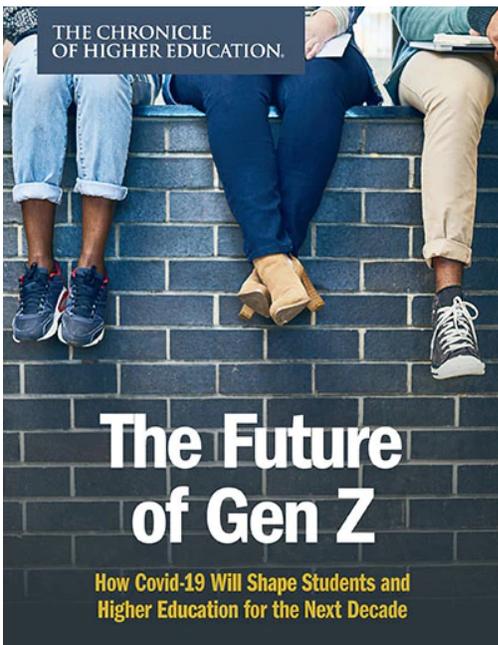
DIVERSITY, EQUITY, & INCLUSION



Adrienne Lu

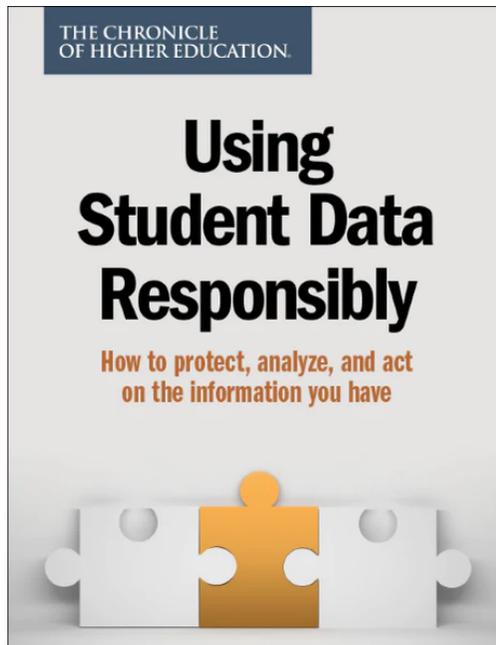
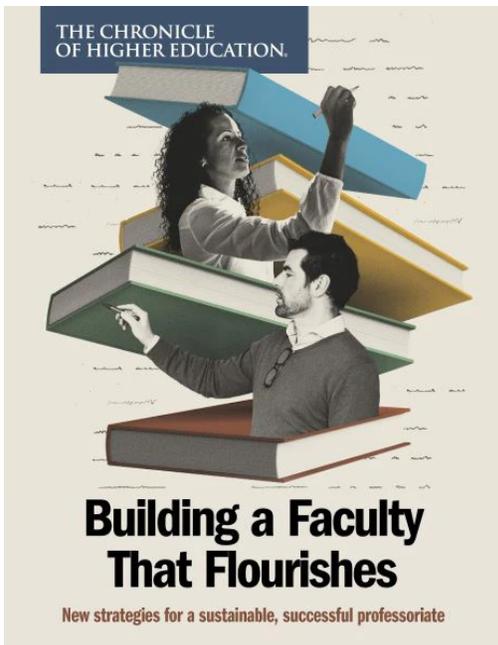
Adrienne Lu writes about politics in higher education and students — with a focus on underrepresented students. She can be reached at adrienne.lu@chronicle.com or on Twitter [@adriennelu](https://twitter.com/adriennelu).

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