

**The Myth of “Faculty Diversity”  
in Sociology, Political Science and Chemistry  
Departments on the West Coast**

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April 2, 2015

\*This paper was prepared to partially fulfill requirements to Oregon State University’s URSA (Undergraduate Research, Scholarship and the Arts) U-Engage program, which generously funded this study. In addition, I would like to thank Dr. Dwaine Plaza (Oregon State University, Sociology) for mentoring me through my first undergraduate research project, as well as OSU’s Department of Sociology for funding my presentation and travel expenses at the Pacific Sociological Association’s annual meeting in Long Beach, California.

### **Abstract**

This study aimed to investigate if diversity exists among faculty members in (20) twenty universities in sociology, political science, and chemistry departments situated in a variety of cities on the American West Coast. By conducting a content analysis composed of official university websites and individual Curriculum Vitae, each listed faculty member was coded for age, biological sex, and race. It was determined that even though there has been a large push in American universities to increase faculty diversity in all academic departments, the majority of these departments are comprised of white males over 45 years of age. Universities with smaller student populations have higher levels of faculty diversity than those in urban environments. The results suggest the need for universities to re-evaluate their hiring and retention practices in order to mirror their goals, creating a community of faculty diversity.

*Key words: age, biological sex, chemistry, department, diversity, faculty, political science, race, sociology, university*

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Across America, institutions of higher education have designated a language of diversity within mission statements and diversity strategic plans as a way of indicating their commitment to hiring faculty of diverse backgrounds (Brayboy and McKinley 2003). For many reasons, university officials believe that in order to promote a comfortable and diverse learning environment, a department’s faculty members must strive to equally represent both biological sexes as well as a variety of ages and races across all areas of study (Conklin and Robbins-McNelsh 2006). Though attaining faculty diversity in high education is an articulated goal of many universities, tenure and tenure-track faculty members remain to be predominantly white, middle-aged, and male (2006).

#### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The concept of diversity has multiple dimensions encompass not only actions of acceptance and respect, but also understanding of unique backgrounds and the recognition of individual differences (Hofstede 2001). The absence of a concrete definition for *diversity* makes it difficult for academics to measure levels within institutions. To accurately measure diversity may be to control for, “race, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical ability/disability, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies” (Queensborough 2014). How a university measures *diversity* within its mission statement or diversity strategic plan can represent all of or a few of the previously listed dimensions. Levels of diversity are related to, but nonetheless different from, specific measurements of race, sex, or age among faculty members (Queensborough 2014). Though there is no single agreed-upon definition of diversity,

many researchers define the word as meaning inclusion, tolerance, and acceptance of differences (Hofstede 2001).

A university’s level of faculty diversity is not only related to their own definition(s) of diversity, but can also be related to the community setting in which a university is located. Cities with higher populations tend to have increased levels of diversity within their faculty (Duranto and Puga 1999). Because of this trend, universities in urban environments are assumed to represent higher levels of faculty diversity when compared to universities located in suburban and rural communities. Also, urban universities are likely to adopt liberal ideologies which place emphasis on attracting scholars from a range of diverse backgrounds in an attempt to represent the diverse community in which they reside. Smith, Turner, Osei-Kofi and Richards (2004) have found that urban universities are more aggressive in hiring underrepresented faculty members when compared to their suburban and rural counterparts.

Despite the recognition that there are low levels of diversity among university faculty members, few researchers have yet to address this concern through research. The evidence as to the direction and stability between high levels of faculty diversity and community setting is positively correlated when used to control for an “urban” variable. However, when community setting is used to control for other variables, the relationship between urban, suburban, and rural environment of the university does not appear to have a consistently positive relationship with high levels of faculty diversity (Smith, Turner, Osei-Kofi, Richards 2004).

However, in a re-creation of their study encompassing more than 300 university mission statements, Hartley and Morphew found that universities with a smaller student demographic boasted intricate mission statements outlining specific goals and intentions the university aimed to overcome while supporting and recruiting students and faculty of diverse backgrounds (2006).

Logically, it would be safe to assume that universities with a higher population of students would boast longer mission statements, however, missions hailing from smaller universities tend to allow for greater explanation of the plans a university has to allow for diversity within its university, while larger institutions tend to provide a vaguer and less wordy statements (2006).

It is widely assumed that urban universities are more likely to have high student populations because universities with more students tend to be in urban areas (Smith, Turner, Osei-Kofi, Richards 2004), but it is possible that the relationship between levels of faculty diversity and university environment can be somewhat due to the university’s student population. Many universities who are in urban areas tend to boast high student populations, which may explain for why suburban and rural universities have high levels of faculty diversity; suburban and rural universities typically have higher levels of faculty diversity when compared to those in urban areas (Hartley and Morpew 2006).

## RESEARCH DESIGN

The data for this study comes from a non-random sample of (20) universities on the West Coast, including the states of California, Oregon and Washington. The sample was derived using a non-random selection method whereby the twenty schools were included in the sample if they were geographically located on the West Coast. This sample was also intentionally selected because they satisfied a quota sample of being located in rural, semi-urban and urban areas. Another consideration was if schools were measured as large (>10,000 students and above) or small (<10,000).

The study is based on carrying out a content analysis of both visual and written images on the web sites of sociology, political science, and chemistry departments. The coding criteria for this content analysis was derived from each of the (20) university’s web sites. Using faculty

pictures and Curriculum Vitae, each individual on a university’s Sociology, Political Science and Chemistry department “Faculty Page” underwent the manifest coding technique which placed each faculty’s physical attributes into three categories, based on a nominal scale. Throughout the study, I utilized a written and visual content examination approach, where our analysis was based on individuals presenting as a particular sex and race, and age was determined based on graduation years presented in faculty CVs.

## METHODS

Faculty members were first coded for age (>45 years old or <45 years old), using a written content analysis methodology. Next, faculty were coded using a visual content analysis methodology for race (White American or Of Color), where “Of Color” refers to anyone not born as a White American. Finally, faculty were coded for biological sex (Male or Female) using the visual content analysis methodology. Because my goal was to compare faculty diversity rates within urban institutions and semi-urban/rural schools, two separate tables were created to show the variances between each community’s diversity levels.

Before moving to the results of this study, it should be mentioned that “high level of faculty diversity” is defined as having an equal or high percentage mixture of faculty members who are female, of color, and under 45 years of age. Institutions with “low levels of faculty diversity,” on the other hand, are characterized as being predominantly white males over 45 years old. These three characteristics which are set to define low and high levels of faculty diversity are derived from the principle that age, biological sex and race are the most noticeable characteristics about university faculty members.

Although conducting inter-coder reliability tests would have proven valuable to this study in regulating coding bias, there was not adequate time, nor funding to allow for such a process.

In future research, it would be helpful to the researcher if each university made every faculty member’s picture and CV available for appropriate coding in the sake of time and accuracy.

RESULTS

Figure 1. Measure of Diversity in Chemistry Departments

College	Student Population	Chemistry Departments					
		M	F	>45	<45	Of Color	Total
Seattle University <sup>1</sup>	4,666	40%	60%	47%	53%	20%	15
Gonzaga University <sup>2</sup>	4,896	59%	41%	88%	12%	35%	17
Southern Oregon University <sup>3</sup>	5,302	57%	43%	71%	29%	29%	7
Central Washington University <sup>3</sup>	10,423	69%	31%	63%	38%	44%	16
Eastern Washington University <sup>3</sup>	11,678	80%	20%	80%	20%	27%	15
Western Washington University <sup>2</sup>	14,026	87%	13%	68%	32%	13%	38
Stanford University <sup>3</sup>	18,136	76%	24%	70%	30%	22%	37
California State University, Fresno <sup>1</sup>	20,295	69%	31%	64%	36%	49%	45
Portland State University <sup>1</sup>	22,613	72%	28%	62%	38%	34%	29
University of Oregon <sup>2</sup>	24,473	82%	18%	64%	36%	10%	28
Oregon State University <sup>3</sup>	25,648	75%	25%	69%	31%	45%	64
San Jose State University <sup>1</sup>	25,862	41%	59%	73%	27%	59%	41
Washington State University <sup>3</sup>	27,642	84%	16%	92%	8%	24%	38
University of California, San Diego <sup>1</sup>	28,731	84%	16%	71%	29%	45%	58
California State University, Long Beach <sup>1</sup>	30,474	67%	33%	77%	23%	54%	39
San Diego State University <sup>1</sup>	32,759	81%	19%	81%	19%	23%	26
University of California, Berkeley <sup>2</sup>	36,204	81%	19%	84%	16%	37%	83
University of Southern California <sup>1</sup>	41,368	85%	15%	73%	27%	46%	48
University of California, Los Angeles <sup>1</sup>	42,190	82%	18%	90%	10%	39%	87
University of Washington <sup>1</sup>	43,762	86%	14%	78%	22%	46%	37

Size of University Undergraduate Population: ■ Small ■ Medium ■ Large    Setting of University<sup>\*</sup> 1 Urban (250,000+) 2 Suburban (55,000-249,999) 3 Rural (0-54,999)    \* Based on city population

Figure 2. Measure of Diversity in Political Science Departments

College	Student Population	Political Science Departments					
		M	F	>45	<45	Of Color	Total
Seattle University <sup>1</sup>	4,666	63%	38%	50%	50%	38%	8
Gonzaga University <sup>2</sup>	4,896	70%	30%	70%	30%	10%	10
Southern Oregon University <sup>3</sup>	5,302	100%	0%	57%	43%	0%	7
Central Washington University <sup>3</sup>	10,423	70%	30%	80%	20%	30%	10
Eastern Washington University <sup>3</sup>	11,678	67%	33%	100%	0%	22%	9
Western Washington University <sup>2</sup>	14,026	47%	53%	37%	63%	47%	19
Stanford University <sup>3</sup>	18,136	83%	17%	90%	10%	15%	59
California State University, Fresno <sup>1</sup>	20,295	73%	27%	80%	20%	20%	15
Portland State University <sup>1</sup>	22,613	71%	29%	68%	32%	32%	31
University of Oregon <sup>2</sup>	24,473	65%	35%	57%	43%	35%	23
Oregon State University <sup>3</sup>	25,648	64%	36%	45%	55%	18%	22
San Jose State University <sup>1</sup>	25,862	65%	35%	62%	38%	31%	26
Washington State University <sup>3</sup>	27,642	79%	21%	72%	28%	10%	29
University of California, San Diego <sup>1</sup>	28,731	77%	23%	77%	23%	33%	57
California State University, Long Beach <sup>1</sup>	30,474	73%	27%	69%	31%	23%	26
San Diego State University <sup>1</sup>	32,759	79%	21%	81%	19%	29%	48
University of California, Berkeley <sup>2</sup>	36,204	75%	25%	90%	10%	25%	81
University of Southern California <sup>1</sup>	41,368	72%	28%	83%	17%	25%	53
University of California, Los Angeles <sup>1</sup>	42,190	85%	15%	82%	18%	29%	65
University of Washington <sup>1</sup>	43,762	71%	29%	76%	24%	38%	55

Size of University Undergraduate Population: ■ Small ■ Medium ■ Large    Setting of University<sup>\*</sup> 1 Urban (250,000+) 2 Suburban (55,000-249,999) 3 Rural (0-54,999)    \* Based on city population

**Figure 3. Measure of Diversity in Sociology Departments**

College	Student Population	Sociology Departments					
		M	F	>45	<45	Of Color	Total
Seattle University <sup>1</sup>	4,666	50%	50%	100%	0%	7%	14
Gonzaga University <sup>2</sup>	4,896	45%	55%	91%	9%	27%	11
Southern Oregon University <sup>3</sup>	5,302	22%	78%	67%	33%	22%	9
Central Washington University <sup>3</sup>	10,423	50%	50%	85%	15%	10%	20
Eastern Washington University <sup>3</sup>	11,678	78%	22%	89%	11%	33%	9
Western Washington University <sup>2</sup>	14,026	56%	44%	69%	31%	13%	16
Stanford University <sup>3</sup>	18,136	67%	33%	87%	13%	24%	46
California State University, Fresno <sup>1</sup>	20,295	52%	48%	69%	31%	24%	29
Portland State University <sup>1</sup>	22,613	52%	48%	56%	44%	20%	25
University of Oregon <sup>2</sup>	24,473	59%	41%	81%	19%	26%	27
Oregon State University <sup>3</sup>	25,648	47%	53%	74%	26%	11%	19
San Jose State University <sup>1</sup>	25,862	55%	45%	55%	45%	52%	42
Washington State University <sup>3</sup>	27,642	46%	54%	69%	31%	12%	26
University of California, San Diego <sup>1</sup>	28,731	62%	38%	28%	72%	21%	47
California State University, Long Beach <sup>1</sup>	30,474	35%	65%	47%	53%	35%	17
San Diego State University <sup>1</sup>	32,759	69%	31%	87%	13%	27%	45
University of California, Berkeley <sup>2</sup>	36,204	45%	55%	81%	19%	40%	53
University of Southern California <sup>1</sup>	41,368	48%	53%	73%	28%	38%	40
University of California, Los Angeles <sup>1</sup>	42,190	68%	32%	89%	11%	27%	66
University of Washington <sup>1</sup>	43,762	65%	35%	90%	10%	25%	71

Size of University Undergraduate Population: ■ Small ■ Medium ■ Large      Setting of University\* 1 Urban (250,000+) 2 Suburban (55,000-249,999) 3 Rural (0-54,999)      \* Based on city population

**DISCUSSION**

*There are Significant Differences in Levels of Faculty Diversity as Observed between Small, Medium, and Large Universities*

This point can be illustrated in a case study between Seattle University and the University of Washington – both urban schools in Seattle, WA, but with different sized student populations; both universities are in urban cities, but their levels of faculty diversity are strikingly different. Averaged among chemistry, political science and sociology departments at the smallest school in our study, Seattle University’s faculty is dominated by a 51% male population, 66% over 45 years of age, and only 21% total faculty of color. Alternatively, University of Washington (the largest school in our study) averages a faculty demographic with 74% male, 81% over 45, and only 31% total faculty of color. Through this case study, it can be observed that diversity is not determined by how large of city an institution is in, but rather, is associated with a school’s size. Commitment to developing this diversity, however, is not determined by the size; it is

representative of intentional and pro-active administration policies along with a commitment to diversity from faculty members.

*The Tendency to Employ More Males than Females is Not Unique to a University's Size, but Rather, Departments Themselves*

Across all school sizes, there tends to be a balanced male-to-female ratio among sociology departments (with the exception of a few outliers). Political science and chemistry faculties, on the other hand, tend to be majorly male-dominated – no matter the size of a university. While comparing averages among the three university sizes, it appears that there is little variation when it comes to age. Among small universities, 71% of faculty members across the three disciplines are older than 45 years, medium universities boast a 73% of faculty members older than 45 years old, and large schools have a 72% average. This percentage is often high among all school sizes due to the low amount of PhDs pursued by graduates.

*Large Universities Appear to Have a Higher Percentage of Racial Diversity Compared to All University Sizes, but Not By Much*

Averaged between the three academic departments, small schools average 28% faculty of color, medium schools boast 25%, and large schools rounds out to 34% of racially diverse faculty members. The tendency for larger universities to have higher racial diversity can be attributed to the assumption that these schools have larger faculty sizes than small and medium schools. In sum, regardless of a school's setting, virtually all (20) schools studied on the West Coast are not very diverse – they are mainly composed of white males over 45 years of age. One may logically assume that there would be high levels of diversity in urban schools where it would easily find a population of "diverse" people, but it appears that these diverse individuals are not getting hired into faculty positions (Smith, Turner, Osei-Kofi and Richards 2004).

*Political Science Departments Show the Lowest Levels of Diversity*

Typically, these departments are comprised with 72% of males, 76% over the age of 45, and a meager 27% of these faculties are of color. Sociology departments, on the other hand, have been observed to boast the highest levels of faculty diversity. On average, 57% of each university’s faculty is male, 75% of faculty are 45 years of age or older, and 27% of individuals are of color. Though the age and racial diversity is consistent with both political science and chemistry faculties, sociology demonstrates the highest male-to-female percentage – averaging almost 20% better than chemistry and political science departments on the West Coast.

*One Reason We See Low Levels of Diversity At Large Universities is Because There is a Large Push to Bring in the “Biggest” Names for Scholars*

Typically, these (white and male) recruits successfully came through the pipeline of the American education system, they have less difficulty securing university-level jobs because they are armed with excellent records (boasting degrees from prestigious schools). Because these individuals are heavily recruited by universities, this leaves slim room for prospective faculty members who have had a difficult time navigating the education pipeline. Ultimately, this predominance of White Euro-American males in university faculty positions can be attributed to the unsuccessful navigation of the American education system by notoriously unrepresented individuals (mainly, females of color) (Smith, Turner, Osei-Kofi and Richards 2004).

*Levels of Faculty Diversity are Not Determined by Student Population, but Rather, by Administrative Policy*

In order for universities to observe a rise in their levels of faculty diversity, they must adopt pro-active hiring policies which will have an intentional representation of gender, race, social class, sexuality, and ethnicity. These diversity policies are determined by university

administrators and existing faculty (typically Chairpersons and Heads of Schools); these individuals have the ultimate say in who is hired after a search is done. Ultimately, in the conscious minds of individuals, their conscious or unconscious bias may potentially affect the final outcome of who gets the job. In other words, they may conduct a world-wide search of applicants, but the final candidates may be a clone of themselves (typically, white males).

## CONCLUSION

Despite university efforts to strengthen faculty diversity in the past ten years, appears to be a lack of evidence that these goals are having much effect in chemistry or political science departments on the West Coast. Unlike the prediction made by Smith, Turner, Osei-Kofi and Richards (2004) that urban schools would be more diverse, my study concluded that larger universities on the West Coast are not necessarily more diverse than smaller schools – it was a mixed finding. Generally, these two departments are dominated by white men over 45 years of age, which speaks to the tendency for (particularly) young females of color to pursue PhDs in these departments, as well as university hiring practices.

The issue of age diversity is prevalent due to the fact that older faculty members are not retiring at the traditional age of 65, thus back-logging a tenure track line. Consequently, many young faculty members with PhDs are hired as adjunct/contingent faculty, but without tenure. This is one reason why many departments look “older” – this pipeline in departments is a result of younger people with qualifications to teach at a university level, but cannot benefit from tenure track jobs. Additionally, the majority of faculty members of color tend to be international faculty, not “traditional” American minorities. Based on information collected from faculty member’s Curriculum Vitae, it appears that the majority of international faculty were born in and received education outside the United States.

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