Improving Cultural Diversity in U.S. Higher Education: General Perspectives

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Abstract: This paper examines how professors in U.S. higher education can improve cultural diversity in their classrooms. It is a well-known fact that faculty can prepare for cultural diversity by putting multicultural modules in their curriculum. Yet, to effectively transform the classroom, professors must first recognize that students not only come from several ethnic backgrounds, but also from different cultures, age brackets, and other groups. Hence, it is the authors' objective to explain how multiple cultural diversity training approaches can be implemented in higher education. For example, professors could cater their teaching styles to meet the needs of underrepresented groups of students. This could be done by following the diversimilarity approach. Diversimilarity involves recognizing and appreciating what different groups collectively share while blending in with the mainstream culture. This approach likely demands the reformation of pre-existing courses.

Keywords: Cultural Diversity, Diversimilarity, Ethnicity, Higher Education, Professors, Students, Technology, United States

1. Introduction

This paper examines how professors in U.S. higher education can improve cultural diversity in their classrooms. It is a well-known fact that faculty can prepare for cultural diversity by putting multicultural modules in their curriculum. Yet, to effectively transform the classroom, professors must first recognize that students not only come from several ethnic backgrounds, but also from different cultures, age brackets, and other groups. Hence, it is the authors' objective to explain how multiple cultural diversity training approaches can be implemented in higher education. For example, professors could cater their teaching styles to meet the needs of underrepresented groups of students. This could be done by following the diversimilarity approach. Diversimilarity involves recognizing and appreciating what different groups collectively share while blending in with the mainstream culture. This approach likely demands the reformation of pre-existing courses. The topic of cultural diversity training in U.S. higher education is important because, as various cultural groups continue to increase diversity, major demographic changes are taking place in America (Morey, 2000). These changes in education stress the fact that universities

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have no choice but meet the concerns that differences bring (Williams, 2013).

This paper begins with a description of diversity and the implications it has imposed on students and faculty over the years. Some common themes addressed include racial differentiation, educational outcomes, the psychological moratorium, and the color-blind effect. Then, the paper shifts to discuss several ways of fostering cultural diversity in the classroom by bringing attention to multigenerational students; developing self-efficacy through literature and writing; adopting diversimilarity through technology; and using additional teaching innovations (e.g., showing movies) to help students seek similarities among their differences and, above all, foster academic participation and motivation. This paper ends with a discussion that also includes suggestions for future research.

2. Diversity Defined

Diversity is a phenomenon whereby differences are envisioned and accepted through the process of mutual cooperation and commitment of a cultural community (Cross, 2004). It involves not only racial minorities but Whites as well. In fact, many U.S. college administrators have considered social change, national origin, financial standing, and perspectives as other significant types of diverseness (Berrey, 2011). As such, the primary objective of diversity enhancement is to endorse a sense of cohesion by providing individuals the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of today's society (Higgs, 1996). This makes diversity a positive issue in that people can share equal rights by eliminating biases through cross-cultural engagements. However, culture can negatively illuminate diversity. What this implies is that social problems are not racially induced; rather, culture is what divides and redirects a person's racial, ethnic, or religious experiences (Cohen, 1998). Such factors are shaped by socialization; they also determine how relationships form and influence people's choices, alternatives, and prospects (Cannon, 1990).

Yet, diversity does not have the same meaning for people across the globe. In fact, there is no structural foundation that claims cultural variety derives from any particular entity – whether it be one's parents, education, church affiliation, or technological impacts (West, 1994). From this vantage point, the issue lies on how society will meet the demands of a growing melting pot. According to the U.S. Bureau of Consensus (2000), by 2040, approximately 55% of ethnicities in the United States will consist of Blacks, Natives, Asians, and Latinos. Brown (2004) recommends that universities adopt effective guidelines for counting minorities so that value-inclusive initiatives become apparent. Looking at what happened at the University of Michigan in 2003, a brochure called "The Educational Value of Diversity" excluded campus programs regarding students of different races (Berrey, 2011). This is why it is important to discuss the overall essence of diversity in higher education, the problems it has imposed, and how educators can cultivate diversity in their classrooms.

3. Cultural Diversity in Higher Education

Cultural diversity in education is a serious task for U.S. universities because it renders significant questions concerning social justice, fairness, and human capital. College life is typically all-inclusive; it offers a prolific opening for undergraduates to study culture as a main priority (Day & Glick, 2000). Nevertheless, looking at America's racial history, students cannot maintain contact with minority group members just by going to a nationally diverse institution. Neither can they ensure that bigotry will diminish. For that

reason, consistent intergroup communication is vital to promote cross-cultural engagements on campus. Such relations consist of casual dialogues, regular contact in residential hallways, school activities, and public events (Antonio, 1999). More notably, research shows that the effect of this racial/ethnic mixture on learning outcomes derives mainly from the commitment students take towards peer cooperation in relaxed campus settings and college classrooms (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, & Allen, 1999).

4. Educational Outcomes

Diversity embraces active reasoning in addition to academic participation and motivation. Here, students develop perspectives, pride in citizenship, and multicultural comprehension to attain values concerning equality. Scholars note that these characteristics are imperative for growth (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002). To this point, Erikson (1946) suggests that identity matures the most when young adults are given a psychosocial moratorium. This is where students switch back and forth between social roles while contemplating on prior experiences before committing to new philosophies, interactions, and other claimed titles (Erickson, 1956). By the same token, identity also involves staying true to one's self and being able to share that self with others. Yet, not every college is on the same page with executing this function. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) explain that higher education can be more effective if its social ambiance differs from one's accustomed environment or social upbringing. Having a mixed setting inspires intellectual research and future opportunities. That is why sameness obstructs individual effort and conscious reflection – thereby making diversity inclusion at the university more problematic (Gurin et al., 2002). Unfortunately, Western prestige (e.g., power to impress) and discrimination have interfered with this development.

5. White Prestige and Minority Perceptions

In the beginning, U.S. higher education was intended for rich men whose relatives paid for their college tuition. Campus grounds steadily became notorious for their lack of color as White male middle-class mentality moralized individualism and rivalry – a circumstance inflexible for those with different mores (Watson et al., 2002). Today, Western academia are still marked by narrow-minded foundations and their understated treatment towards those not in the leading culture (Cary, 2004). McIntyre (1997) found that many Whites have feared the idea of losing something in exchange for making things equal for people of color. This ideology views the minority as the Other, or "anyone who is not white, male, heterosexual, Christian, and without disability" (Brown, 2007, p. 22). As a result, many undergraduates on largely White campuses have felt left out (Hurtado, 1992).

Indeed, according to one recent study, White professors agreed that their stereotypes and biases exaggerate the way they behave towards their students (McKenzie, 2009). Similarly, many professors use the color-blind effect, which postulates that race is not indicative of one's character (Lewis, 2001). Yet, it deviates from thinking about race and culture to focusing only on the student. This creates isolation in the classroom as activities ignore the cultural experience and needs of minorities (Castro-Atwater, 2008). Students of color, specifically African Americans, are more likely to sense a lack of appreciation from faculty members. They may also believe the university is not really dedicated to diversity and such objectives are only evaluated by what the institution thinks (Brown, 2007). In particular, it was assumed that enrollment

was intended to increase the number of underrepresented groups on campus, not the university's sincere interest in providing learning opportunities (Hutchinson & Hyer, 2000).

6. Pathways to Creating Cultural Diversity in the Classroom

Facing the obstacle of conformity to the status quo and mainstream culture calls for a change in thought. Perhaps, this can be understood through general rules and employment practices that are profound to the requests of diverse people. Faculty can prepare for cultural diversity by putting multicultural modules in the curriculum. This will help minority students gain the skills and self-efficacy they need to succeed academically while feeling included (Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn, & Terenzini, 1996). Of equal necessity are first-hand standards for human proficiency and social engagement (Schneider, 1997). By fostering a multigenerational atmosphere, self-efficacy though literature and writing, and a diversimilarity approach – defined later – through technology, educators can achieve this objective.

7. Fostering a Multigenerational Atmosphere

To effectively transform the classroom, professors must first recognize that students not only come from several ethnic backgrounds, but also different ages and financial circumstances. Looking at first generational college students (FGCS), social economic status (SES) has been a contributing factor to why their truancy rates are greater compared to richer undergraduates whose parents went to college as barriers to FGCS success (Ishanti & DesJardins, 2002). Research has pointed to pre-entry barriers, such as lack of parental concern and educational guidance due to inexperience (Fann, Jarsky, & McDonough, 2009), low levels of inspiration and self-worth due to role expectations (Prospero & Vohra- Gupta, 2007), and poor pre-college preparation (Oakes, Rogers, Lipton, & Morrell, 2001). Some FGCS are also much older, have longer commutes, and juggle between family and job obligations. For example, knowing that Hispanic culture values sympathy, respect, and household dependence, professors could invite parents to the classroom. By letting parents know they have full access to their children, students can build personal qualities that enhance academic achievement (Hayes, Blake, Darensbourg, & Castillo, 2014).

Furthermore, professors must avoid grading students based on their circumstances by clearly communicating class objectives; no assumptions should be made (Ishanti & DesJardins, 2002). Some suggestions include making syllabus descriptions less traditional and presenting course expectations aloud to stress the work ethic needed to stay ahead of schedule. In application, instead of describing what a course will deal with, describing why certain themes will be investigated can help increase the students' enthusiasm. Forming questions like "What makes someone American?" raises their awareness to the point of wanting to provide a response ("Explanations," n.d., p.1). Not to mention, delivering thorough feedback on assignments one on one, as well as swapping standardized tests for small group activities also benefit FGCS and minorities (Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007). Besides breaking large tasks into smaller components, Simon (2014) proposes that the Think-Pair-Share strategy helps students derive an answer in groups of two so not one person is singled out if they reply incorrectly.

More effectively, however, studies show that developing interpersonal relations with professors from the beginning can be just as vital for undergraduate attainment; they can embolden research opportunities (Sedlacek, 1983). By acknowledging academic talents and guiding students through the research process,

they can establish a sense of empowerment by noting their self-authorship. In fact, students who took interest in publishing papers, going to conferences, and assisting their peers in learning procedures, felt more confident in subjects like math, science, engineering, and technology. They also gained more momentum towards pursuing a graduate degree or doctoral studies in the long term (Russell, Hancock, & McCullough, 2007).

8. Developing Self-Efficacy Through Literature and Writing

Introductory courses are not always easy to teach by using standardized Western textbooks. Thus, diversity needs may be met through the study of alternative texts (Brandon-Falcone, Benson, Eiswert, & Winter, 1994). The goal here is to make sure that students are able to interrelate with what they read. This does not mean remembering dates, people, themes, novelists, jargon, or features of specific legendary factions, but rather comparing one's experience. Critical literacy defies White prestige to find alternatives for individual and social progress. It reconsiders the world through terminologies – linking the political, civic, secluded, international, local, economical, and instructional, so that students can establish a change in mind and support integrity to replace injustices (Shor, 1999).

As an illustration, educators from the Mexican American Studies Program in Tucson, Arizona used the book titled Rethinking Columbus to describe the understated standpoint behind the Taino Native Americans. The goal was to implant cultural self-love and self-esteem among Mexican American students. By getting them to see the moral of the story in terms of sociopolitical costs and authoritative formation, resentment for other cultures was not sacrificed (Baxley & Boston, 2014). Here, professors use classroom discussions to expose their students to characters who share similar experiences while contemplating angles usually avoided in traditional curricula. As students become more familiar with the script, they can start articulating writing topics (Brandon-Falcone et al., 1994).

As such, knowing that too many freshmen undergrads fail their beginner's English class, one possible solution would be to incorporate an experiential curriculum. As the name insinuates, students are called to verbalize and rewrite their pasts and visualize what results generate from their diverse personal and shared histories. The goal is to involve writers in considering how language gives contour to group interactions (Kells, 1999). This curriculum style is based on the principle that culture and history link a student's identity to writing practices where materials focus on ethnolinguistic uniqueness and semantic attitudes. It tries to embrace the flaws in common-sense intuitions. Having an accrued and adopted angle, ideology surrounds one's historical creation and present-day depictions. Therefore, writing can help students bring out their beliefs and reflect on the issues imposed by society (Fairdough, 1992).

Observing what professor Kells (2002) did in her first year English Composition class, she had students watch documentaries, respond to questions through cooperative group work, and jot down individual opinions in writing logs. After playing the Chicano (Mexican American) film Taking Back the Schools, she noticed patterns of rage and astonishment among several take-home journal entries. For instance, one set of respondents incisively spotted that "history is made by those who write it" (p. 61). This wakefulness proves that history is flexible, oratorical, and verbally fabricated. Remarkably, another reoccurring theme was that most writers had no clue what the 1960s Chicano movement was (Kells, 2002). In a nutshell, the Chicano movement involved challenging Mexican stereotypes, reinstating their land endowments,

expanding farming and voting rights, and improving literacy rates. It mainly exemplified the work divisions occurring in South Texas (Navarro, 2014).

Since this period of time, higher education has largely repressed the Mexican American workforce. Through excessive observation, market breakdowns, class categorization, and information tracking, they have been ostracized socio-politically and economically. What is more is that Mexican-born populations have embodied a Southwest fallback for more than 100 years (Acuna, 1988). Kells (2002) recorded one student angrily saying:

> We don't study this movement because discrimination still exists. Many white people don't think our history is important so that's why we go throughout our education learning about George Washington and other whites only (p. 61).

Texts like these may not adequately solve all racial tensions, but they begin to show how students seriously partake a step closer to liberation through dialogue. This kind of writing practice can enable students if it permits them to efficaciously challenge the systems that marginalize them (Fairclough, 1992). Identifying the persistent social inequalities of today and the past – like Mexican American college students have done with the Chicano civil rights movement – helps students recognize that civil rights transformation is not a static development. It is the encumbrance of every cohort – the unfinished mission of American civic presence (Kelly, 1999).

On the other hand, when it comes to engaging in the composition process, many minorities feel that being multilingual keeps them from writing with confidence or taking a larger part in a group project. This is why having interpersonal conversations about their writing abilities helps educators comprehend their level of comfort and what needs to be improved. Once professors determine this, they can cater their teaching style based on students' performances and perception of the writing assignments (Nielsen, 2013). Using a deeper learning method, students can acknowledge the significance of a topic by relating it to something they already know while forming one sentence to one paragraph summaries. This not only shows whether concepts from class notes and textbooks are being grasped; it also leads to the critical thinking practice of examining texts and pulling clarifications based on rationality (Brent & Felder, 1992).

In line with these contentions, when language is applied merely for the purpose of reiterating instruction, it is conveyed as an abnormal development. In other words, language does not propagate for the genuine desire of expressing vibrant feelings and beliefs, which impairs the liberty to use it contextually (Shor, 1999). Therefore, students who speak English as a second language (ESL) may turn and ask their professors to check their grammar. To avoid doing it for them, the Writing Center at the University of North Carolina suggests teaching proofreading stratagems; ask questions regarding all of their worries; request an explanation of their project; clarify ambiguous ideas; restate the clarifications for comprehension; give new vocabulary words; and recommend several grammar choices ("Just Grammar," n.d.).

Yet, professors must watch out for students who over-rely on word processors for grammar corrections. Studies show that grammar checkers only catch about one third of all mistakes found in academic papers (Vernon, 2000). Consequently, these forms of correction may fortify skill deficiencies through improper

and distorted feedback. This gives students who lack grammar comprehension a misleading sense of satisfaction about exactness. Instead of using computers from a critical stance, they are seen as a consultant more than a tool. As technologies become more widely available, it is imperative to monitor how they are used and how they help learners utilize grammar checkers effectively (Bean, 2002). One challenge involves working with African American undergraduates who use African American vernacular English (AAVE) as part of their everyday language (Richard & Labov, 1999). They usually assume that, by removing the green and red lines as quickly as possible, they will retrieve more accuracy. Some students even ignore the lines altogether and believe that re-reading will do the trick (Bean, 2002). Unfortunately, writing instructors cannot distinguish these arrangements if class and culture build limits that encumber one's forethought or exhausts them with faulty judgments (Rose, 1989).

As a solution, Bean (2002) had her African American students tell a story using their own dialect after interviewing a member in the family or community. Then, she asked them to transcribe their story into academic writing by examining how it served the community in some way. This involved noticing common slang terminologies, such as "dawg," "tight," "awesome," "dweeb," or "yo" (Bean, 2002). By developing this linguistic mindfulness – a consciousness that lifts self-confidence using verbal expressions – students can see how rhetoric makes an impact when they go through the writing process. This is where grammar checkers reduce the debate between being right or wrong. They become an instrument to service students who need to write in a certain type of English (Fowler & Villanueva, 2002).

However, to avoid depending on a program's standard setting, students should first write a rough draft without the corrector because it tends to impede their ability to think coherently (Bean, 2002). Once they flesh out all ideas in writing, they must then choose their audience and the formality of the paper (e.g., social sciences, humanities, and natural sciences). Using custom style, they can decide what specific kinds of errors should be identified (e.g. finding contractions or sentences with improper citation of transitions). Programs like WordPerfect also have features that detect things like consecutive nouns or prepositional phrases (Vernon, 2000). Most importantly, it is the teacher's responsibility to reiterate such grammar mistakes in the classroom, especially commons that link to transitions and conjunctions. Bean (2002) advises that students work on a rough draft via hard copy to reduce all errors. This entails doing exercises like underlining and circling each conjunction to see if they actually separate two independent thoughts (Fowler & Villanueva, 2002). Together, these strategies can make grammar checkers work more resourcefully for all students having trouble learning proper English.

Last but not least, some figures of speech may invoke positive feelings for academic writing. Wan Wan (2014) found that ESL students in graduate school used metaphors like "writing as a tour" to make sense of inscriptions that pervaded their mental capacity. It broaden their horizons to higher level thinking about how they wrote while becoming more open to writing practices. From an educational stance, using powerful metaphors to describe and engage in writing serves its advantage as an effective teaching tool (Wan Wan, 2014). Yet, more visual approaches are needed for a classroom who aspires for cultural diversity.

9. Adopting a Diversimilarity Approach through Technology

Diversimilarity involves recognizing and appreciating what different groups collectively share while blending in with the mainstream culture (Ofori-Dankwa & Bonner, 1998). Implementing the diversimilarity approach in the classroom could demand the reformation of pre-existing courses. A class about American diversimilarity would classify various ethnic groups in the United States and scan some shared features through race and ethnicity, as well as substantial distinctions of each group (Takaki, 2008). This concept can also be applied to immigrants. For instance, judgments against Irish immigrants in the early 1900s were somewhat alike to what the Asians and Africans encountered later. Although the Irish were not subjected to anti-immigration or Jim Crow laws, symbols that recited "No Irish need apply" were comparable to symbols that recited "Whites only" (Ofori-Dankwa & Lane, 2000, p. 498). For professors to bring this paradigm aboard, the Center for Excellence and Teaching (2010) advocates incorporating equal amounts of diversity among the three main learning styles – auditory, visual, and tactile.

Applying these basic tenets using technology and mass media can engender more effective higher learning in the classroom. "Transformative learning" and "critical media literacy" are not just buzzwords, but indicators of a ground-breaking system still unknown in the academia (Tisdell, 2008). Critical media literacy elevates people's awareness about current events with the graphical messages they receive through mass media networks and TV. The goal is to analytically consider one's expectations and cultural beliefs and find new ways to interpret them (transformative learning) (Natharius, 2004). This is what makes online learning platforms like EduBlogs, Facebook, Secondlife, Twitter, and Wikis effective because they each create a space where everyone can post his or her opinion without physically hurting someone's positive face. They not only encourage active dialogue, but they also provide a more interactive manner that advances student-teacher relationships with countless ways of expanding course materials (Williams & Jacobs, 2004).

Looking at blogs – websites where one can inscribe and post about any topic chronologically from any location and time – users can interchange thoughts and disclose their experiences. Here, students can present their own perspectives and debate what things mean by getting more time to do so outside the time limit of face-to-face meetings (Jonassen & Reeves, 1996). Unlike the privacy and user limitation of online school discussion boards, blogs are open to the public and are accessible for data sharing even after a course is over. Some authors even claim that blogs help reverse plagiarism issues because writers recognize that readers may use websites to see if someone's work is original (Oravec, 2003). Students may also write better if they know their content will be public. In a similar vein, they can regain participation points from being silent in class discussions through online participation, especially if they are "stigma conscious" as a minority (Repman, Zinskie, & Carlson, 2005).

In particular, when dialogue seems unrelated to an Asian student or pointless to their culture, or if they cannot manage to express their feelings genuinely, blogs allow them to see how their identity can be shared with Westerners (Chen, 1994). For instance, if a professor creates a post about his or her perception of group communication, Asian students may improve their comprehension of group discussion and assimilate by looking at the underlying cultural diverseness. More so, studies show that since their culture puts more prominence on after-class consultation, teachers must cater to their needs by ensuring they have complete confidentiality via private messaging. Western students could also alter their online behaviors

and discuss how to include their Asian peers more efficiently. In practice, reflecting on a current event or movie like Gran Torino – where Korean War veteran Walt Kowalski changes his prejudice mannerisms as he engages with the Hmong neighbors next door – can help foster diversimilarity (Eastwood, 2008). The storyline suggests that as interpersonal conflicts unfold, people need to make more precise acknowledgments and connotations of other people's actions. They also need to decipher, infer, and become confident with various conflict vernaculars (Wilmot & Hocker, 2011). Coming from a collectivistic culture, this means a lot to them because peer support plays a role in what one is willing to contribute (Tatar, 2005). When in doubt, a rule of thumb is to value longer pauses when turn taking. It is an Asian custom during communication, whether online or face-to-face (Jones 1999).

Movies are incredibly beneficial as learning tools because they integrate a mixture of stirring graphics, noises, and texts that stress multiple levels of literacy to their audience (Tisdell, 2008). After watching a movie like Brokeback Mountain, students may become more open minded regarding homosexuality – although many opponents say movies prompt violence, sexual immorality, and favor the majority by mimicking affairs regarding class, gender, and race (Dimitriades & McCarthy, 2000). By way of contrast, viewers in several studies who watched films like Crash and Philadelphia spotted hegemony's role in the media and reversed it by either relating to the characters, internalizing their own prejudices, or perceiving other cultures in a brand new light (Tisdell, 2008). This is why it is vital for professors to facilitate debates by probing questions and indicate that everything in the media continuously depicts demographic characteristics, regardless of whether it only shows White people. An exposé is an exposé (Dass-Brailsford, 2007). Hence, working in a diverse classroom with a variety of cultural viewpoints and comprehension methods, media has the ability to stimulate the auditory, visual, and tactile into one cohesive whole.

10. Discussion and Future Research

What this paper has demonstrated is that cultural diversity can be improved in U.S. higher education if professors cater their teaching styles to meet the needs of various underrepresented groups of students. As we have seen, cultural diversity involves not only ethnic groups, but also groups of various ages, financial circumstances, and so forth. The main goal of diversity enhancement is to endorse a sense of cohesion by providing individuals the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of present-day society. Cultural diversity in education can be a formidable task for U.S. universities because it renders significant questions concerning social justice, fairness, and human capital. Nevertheless, having a mixed setting inspires intellectual research and future opportunities. This is why sameness can easily obstruct individual effort and conscious reflection.

Facing the obstacle of conformity to the status quo and mainstream culture calls for a change in thought. This can be enacted by recognizing their cultural affiliations; instilling motivation through alternative assessments and research opportunities; imparting self-confidence through literature and writing; and using mass media and movies for critical reflection and mutual understanding. All in all, the relationship between a student and an educator can be life-changing, and we need more role models and mentors for students to aspire and live up to. Yet, there must be a way to keep diversity in U.S. higher education a top priority, as it is an urgent matter and a worldwide issue. We are facing ethnic struggles, wars of ideology, prestige, municipal turbulence, and national encounters, which helps reevaluate how diversity has

incorporated deep international repercussions (Smith, 2009). To provide today's educators with the skills they need to deal with adversity in their classrooms, the authors recommend using training manuals on diversity education that offer techniques for syllabus engagement. From there, culturally engaging face-to-face and online classroom activities, as well as mass media and movie examples need to expand upon the principles of this literature.

For future research, it would be useful to examine how college professors can learn additional diversity programming and opportunities for better-quality student-teacher interaction. One way to accomplish this is by having professors participate in student-oriented events and interact with student organizations – examples of the latter are African American student groups, Hispanic clubs, and so forth. Such higher involvement with students would likely broaden professors' perspectives (by building relationships outside their classrooms) and, by extension, create more supportive environments in college classrooms themselves. It is the authors' hope that this paper has offered constructive recommendations to enhance the education of all students in U.S. higher education.

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