

The Inclusion Imperative in Higher Education

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Good morning! Thank you to Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs Barbara Lee for her gracious invitation to greet you and open our symposium this morning. Thank you also to Isabel Nazario, Yvonne Gonzalez, and Glenda Daniel, who have worked to ensure that this day runs smoothly. I am very grateful for their assistance and I am happy to be here.

This is an exciting and inspiring time to be at Rutgers. Across the university, new research centers and initiatives are joining existing programs to create a thriving intellectual community for all of us. This gathering of the second annual Diversity and Inclusion Symposium is a part of that wave. Today, you will hear from researchers throughout the university system whose groundbreaking work has as its cornerstones equity, justice, and access. In education, health care, economic development, innovation, and work, Rutgers researchers are – and this is no exaggeration – literally changing the way we think and talk about diversity and inclusion. Our colleagues are thought leaders, and we should celebrate their interventions.

And yet, while we celebrate their achievement, we should ask whether we are satisfied. Are we doing enough? Is Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, living up to its potential as an institutional leader on issues of diversity and inclusion. This is our challenge. I am here to suggest that there remains work to be done, and each of us – whether students, faculty, staff, or administrators – has a role to play.

I have taken inspiration for these remarks from Stephen Frost's 2014 book *The Inclusion Imperative: How Real Inclusion Creates Better Business and Builds Better Societies*.¹ In this work, Frost argues that “diversity is a reality; inclusion is a choice.”² In other words, diversity and inclusion are distinct phenomena. “Diversity,” as most of us understand it, refers to difference. Those individual attributes that make up “diversity” may be religious, geographic, racial or ethnic, sexual orientation, ability, socioeconomic, political, or gender identity. By these metrics, Rutgers is a leader, and our achievements have garnered national recognition. Last fall, Rutgers-Newark was ranked #1 among national universities on the *U.S. News* “diversity index.”³ We have a diverse student body and we are working toward a more diverse faculty. Among the 20 four-year universities with the largest instructional staffs and the eight Ivy League universities, for example,

¹ See generally STEPHEN FROST, *THE INCLUSION IMPERATIVE: HOW REAL INCLUSION CREATES BETTER BUSINESS AND BUILDS BETTER SOCIETIES* (2014).

² ID. AT 83 (2014).

³ *Campus Ethnic Diversity: National Universities* (2014), at <http://colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-colleges/rankings/national-universities/campus-ethnic-diversity>

Rutgers has the highest percentage of minority faculty.⁴ Among that same group, Rutgers ranked third for the highest percentage of women faculty. We have woman- and LGBT-identified people and people of color in leadership positions across the university system. We have a diverse staff, employing people throughout the state, and the university's employees travel near and far to come here to work.

And this is a good thing. Diversity in higher education is held out as a worthy goal on the grounds that diverse universities offer different perspectives, different life experiences, and that this "difference" helps to create a more well-rounded student body. Those well-rounded students then become well-rounded citizens. University presidents often tout each year's new incoming class as "our most diverse yet," extolling the virtues of having students from several (or nearly all) of the 50 states, as well as numerous foreign countries.

But when it comes to our students, little attention is paid to these diversity goals beyond the admissions stage. As Ronald Shaiko, of Dartmouth College, has argued, "the benefits of diversity do not spontaneously arise merely from the presence of a varied student body."⁵ This is especially true at large public universities. Here, as elsewhere, young people will cluster around that which is familiar to them. In a state like ours, one that is still struggling with stark residential and educational segregation, that means students are likely to cluster around others who look like them and who have shared their experiences. School segregation in New Jersey is so severe that researchers here at Rutgers' Institute on Education Law and Policy has termed several of the state's schools "apartheid schools."⁶ These are schools where fewer than 1% of all students are white.⁷ While only 8% of the state's schools fall into this category, those schools hold more than a quarter of all the state's black children and 13% of its Latino children. An additional 21% of all black students in New Jersey attend what the Institute terms "intensely segregated schools," where less than 10% of all students are white. In other words, more than 47% of all black students in New Jersey attend schools where, according to the Institute, "they

⁴ *Just How Few Professors of Color Are at America's Top Colleges? Check Out These Charts*, MotherJones.com, Nov. 23, 2015, at <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2015/11/university-faculty-diversity-race-gender-charts>.

⁵ Ronald Shaiko, <http://chronicle.com/article/Admissions-Is-Just-Part-of-the/139637>

⁶ NEW JERSEY'S APARTHEID AND INTENSELY SEGREGATED URBAN SCHOOLS: POWERFUL EVIDENCE OF AN INEFFICIENT AND UNCONSTITUTIONAL STATE EDUCATION SYSTEM, *available at* <http://ielp.rutgers.edu/docs/IELP%20final%20report%20on%20apartheid%20schools%20101013.pdf>.

⁷ NEW JERSEY'S APARTHEID AND INTENSELY SEGREGATED URBAN SCHOOLS: POWERFUL EVIDENCE OF AN INEFFICIENT AND UNCONSTITUTIONAL STATE EDUCATION SYSTEM, *available at* <http://ielp.rutgers.edu/docs/IELP%20final%20report%20on%20apartheid%20schools%20101013.pdf>.

basically have no contact or interaction with white students.”⁸ This structural and demographic reality - this educational apartheid - does not lend itself to diversified experiences once our students arrive on campus.

And, they have arrived. Every year, universities are required to report diversity data to the National Center for Education Statistic, a branch of the federal Department of Education. Last year, Rutgers had roughly the same number of students of color as white students (about 43% of all students self-identified as students of color; and another 43% identified as “white”). But I have to ask: Is this diversity represented in the classroom? What about in student social spaces (fraternities and sororities, for example)? Student clubs? Athletics, other than football, basketball, and track-and-field? Where, on this campus, is that statistical diversity reflected?

Because of this, I would caution us against becoming comfortable with statistical diversity. We should be asking how the university can unite our students across their differences toward some common purpose. Here at Rutgers, we have an exceptional opportunity to become a leader in this area. **We can choose inclusion.**⁹ This idea has been echoed by Dick Edwards, Chancellor at Rutgers-New Brunswick. In a recent interview, Edwards observed that diversity is only part of the goal; we must be looking to incorporate inclusion and interaction. These comments were reiterated in the announcement late last year by Rutgers Newark Chancellor Nancy Cantor regarding the new Rutgers Newark Commission on Diversity and Transformation. This is also the charge for the university’s new Task Force on Inclusion and Community Values, and the Committee on Enslaved and Disenfranchised Populations in Rutgers History.¹⁰ The committee’s mission includes recognizing and memorializing the university’s connections to American chattel slavery. But, as someone who has studied and written about slavery for nearly 20 years, I wonder whether we will be satisfied with mere recognition and memorialization? Or will we seek to educate our students about that history? Will this initiative suffer from the dissent of those who do not recognize its value, or will we be brave about the historical and contemporary legacy of slavery at this university. Moreover, if we fail to involve our students in this work – not merely as invitees to events, but as researchers and analysts – then we will have missed an opportunity to foster genuine interaction and educational exchange over these issues. The history of slavery, like the history of the Age of Exploration or the History of the Crusades or the History of the Holocaust, is not reserved for those presumed to have some lineal connection to its horrors. Inclusion and interaction are critical here, too.

If we fail to choose inclusion, then our omissions will teach our students that inclusion is less important than tokenism. We will teach them that it is a worthy goal to have women

⁸ ID. AT 6.

⁹ Shaiko suggests that universities create what economists call a “choice architecture” to “nudge” students into interactions outside of their comfort zones.”

¹⁰ McCormick Interview, at <http://news.rutgers.edu/qa/new-brunswick-chancellor%E2%80%99s-new-initiatives-aim-advance-inclusion-and-re-examine-rutgers-roots/20160330#.VwCIIxIrKL9>.

in the boardroom, for example, even if those women are not seated in positions of power. Our omissions – in other words, what we don't say – themselves form a curriculum about our priorities. What "hidden curriculum" are we transmitting to our students about diversity and inclusion? What values and norms are we elevating here?

An inclusive community has value for all of its members. I see this value as accruing on three different planes – in university admissions, in faculty and staff hiring and promotion, and in the classroom. Regarding admissions, I reject the fallacy that non-discrimination and inclusion of underrepresented groups necessarily requires discrimination toward overrepresented groups. This belief in "reverse discrimination" is at the root of the "he took my spot" argument that has pervaded the last 38 years of Supreme Court jurisprudence on whether and how public universities consider race or ethnicity in the admissions process. Diversity and inclusion is, however, not a zero sum game. And, even, if it were a zero-sum game, there is no justifiable reason for that game to always favor majority students.

I, for one, am not convinced that college admissions can ever be "color blind." Not because I believe "color blindness" – as it is advocated by some – lacks societal value. Researchers determined more than 25 years ago that the SAT suffered from embedded racial bias.¹¹ If the primary measure of "merit" for college admissions in this country is itself biased, then college admissions can never be "color blind." The same is true for graduate and professional school admissions. If equity is one of our goals, then how much weight (if any) ought be given to the results of such exams?

Regarding our faculty ranks, there is still work to be done. For example, we may be operating under the presumption that because Rutgers ranks first among the largest universities on the percentage of faculty of color at the university that we don't have a diversity problem in our faculty numbers. But, a closer look at the numbers says otherwise. On our Camden campus, for example, fewer than 3% of all faculty are Latino. The Rutgers FactBook reports that there were only six (6) Latino faculty at Camden's campus this year, across six different schools. There were ten (10) Black faculty on the same campus.

Obviously, we have work to do. Some of that work will be in the recruitment space (from candidate pipeline development to strategic position announcement to offer extension and acceptance). Some of that work will also be in the retention space. In the past three years alone, I have seen seven faculty of color leave the tenured and tenure-track ranks at Rutgers-Newark. That can't be the best we can do. It simply cannot.

In the classroom, we have even great opportunities to pursue genuine inclusion. What do I mean by inclusive teaching and scholarship? As educators, we stand in positions of great power. We are often the first line of information for our students. They may come to us with opinions, but we have access to information (to data) that can change their minds. Results from a recent study tracking implicit bias among medical students at one

¹¹ See James CROUSE & DALE TRUSHEIM, *THE CASE AGAINST THE SAT* 38–39 (1988).

of the nation's top medical schools are instructive here.¹² Disturbingly, more than half of a sample of white medical students and residents endorsed false beliefs about biological differences between blacks and whites, including such ridiculous statements as “black people’s skin is thicker than white people’s skin” (58%) and “black people’s blood coagulated more quickly than whites” (39%).¹³ And those students who held these beliefs consistently underprescribed pain medication to black patients presenting with identical symptoms to white patients. For me, this is evidence of a breach of our duty to educate, and to use the information at our disposal to challenge our students’ preconceptions about the world.

This is an immense power. I encourage you to think of the classroom as a laboratory. In this space, we are able to test theories and confirm results. We are able to be flexible and creative – in fact, the laboratory requires us to be flexible and creative. If we were to think of our classrooms as laboratories, what would that mean for our teaching? For one, it would mean that our teaching would seek not only to build masters of content, but also to introduce students to different epistemologies – different ways of knowing. This is how we get students to critically examine what they believe to be true. If our students make it through these halls without regularly and routinely questioning the world they thought existed, then we have not done our work. This focus on critically examining our own perspectives can undergird our diversity and inclusion aspirations.

Does the diversity rationale make its way into our classrooms? How many of us are providing our students with the tools necessary for them to be competitive professionals in a global marketplace? Or, have our classrooms simply validated their own tendencies to cluster around familiarity? Are we regularly presenting our students with challenges to mainstream or baseline thinking? Or, are we structuring our pedagogies to simply reinforce what students already believe they know. This is especially relevant in the digital age, where information dispersal can be the cause of so much information degradation.

At the law school, for example, I teach a course on incarceration and offender reentry. There is no book for this course – because none exists – and I elected to assemble more than 1,000 pages of material for students to use as a course reader. These materials include judicial opinions, journal articles, monographs, transcripts from testimony before federal and state agencies and legislative bodies, news articles, audio recordings, court filings, autobiography, film, and interactive media tools. In effect, I am introducing them to different ways of knowing and thinking about the universe of issues surrounding incarceration in this country. For example, I want my students to give as much (if not more) weight to the narrative accounts of incarcerated people as they do scholarly

¹² See Kelly M. Hoffman, *et al.*, *Racial bias in pain assessment and treatment recommendations, and false beliefs about biological differences between blacks and whites*, 113 PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA 4296 (2016), available at

<http://www.pnas.org/content/113/16/4296.abstract>.

¹³ *Id.*

accounts of incarceration. In other words, I want to elevate the testimonials of incarcerated people to the status of “course text.” This rethinking of the “text”, for me at least, is a work-in-progress, and one that I admittedly have to work on, but I’m embracing this challenge (and, along the way, hopefully teaching these future lawyers that much of what they think they know about prisons is simply false). This is what inclusion in the classroom can look like.

In order to foster more inclusive classrooms, we can also take steps to encourage active and constructive participation from all students. In order for this to be effective, though, we must work to create a classroom environment that respects even unformed and inarticulate views. Faculty may unintentionally privilege more articulate students over less articulate students, perhaps because students in the latter group may require more time to respond to questions or prompts. The same may also be true for ESL students. But their participation and inclusion signals value to others, and we must make the effort. For those of you who are faculty, ask what inclusion might look like in your classroom.

This is also how we foster diversity and inclusion research and scholarship. We should be thinking about how to elevate diversity research to the mainstream. We are hearing today from experienced data collectors, who are seeking to solve problems through traditional and nontraditional research methods. **This is not fringe or merely autobiographical or “me-search” work.** And, accordingly, we should give some thought to how research in diversity and inclusion is valued at the tenure and promotion review. I see this Symposium as an unparalleled opportunity to educate ourselves about the rigors of diversity and inclusion research. This research can change how we think about issues as interdisciplinary as school segregation and the provision of mental health and homelessness services. Rutgers has an opportunity to lead the way in all of these areas and our colleagues ought to be commended for their impactful work. In other words, we should see this as an opportunity to reframe how we think about “success.” We should be thinking about definitions of success that extend beyond mere publication placements. The reality is that when your work is at the vanguard, its value may be not be readily apparent – and we must fight the urge to discount excellent work simply because it does not fit traditional or long adhered-to models of scholarly production.

Achieving excellence in diversity and inclusion does not require that we are blind to our differences. I would suggest that this is an opportunity for us to be brave about our differences. Difference can be difficult, and diversity can be messy. But let that not dissuade us. We have a more diverse student body and administrator and faculty corps than ever before. We have cutting-edge, change-the-world research happening right here on our Rutgers campuses. We have an assembly of some of the best and brightest and most capable. What can we do to ensure that the persistent legacies of exclusion and entrenched structural disadvantage do not forever hobble our students’ (and our own) abilities to achieve?

I am also honored to be here, and it is fitting that this event is being held this day, as today is also Jackie Robinson Day, a day of recognition by Major League Baseball of the career and life of Jackie Robinson. Sixty-nine years ago, April 15, 1947, was opening day

of Robinson's first season in the league – his first day in the majors. Today, on ballfields across the nation, all uniformed players, coaches, and umpires will be wearing Robinson's number (#42) in honor of him. Today, I, too, am wearing #42. Nearly twenty-five years ago, I became forever linked to the life's work of Jackie Robinson when I was awarded a college scholarship by the Jackie Robinson Foundation (established the year after Robinson's death by his widow, Rachel). That scholarship made it possible for me to attend the college of my choice, and set me on the path from Chicago's South Side to this podium. In the years after leaving baseball, Jackie Robinson used his stature as an icon to pressure presidents, politicians, and business and religious leaders to support full integration for black Americans. Robinson was effectively calling for a commitment to inclusion. Integration, like "diversity," is merely the first step – inclusion is where the hard work lies, and its time is now. Our students are demanding inclusion – there are students publicly demanding inclusion and transparency on campus right now – and we owe it to them and the nation to take them seriously.

I look forward to discussing these issues over the course of the day with you. Thank you and have a productive day!