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**Modeling the Effects of a Diversity Course on Students'
Preparation for a Diverse Democracy**

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In order to prepare students to live and work in a pluralistic society, institutions of higher education have undertaken and continue to create numerous programs and initiatives to increase students' engagement with social diversity. In turn, these programs help students learn the knowledge and skills necessary to function effectively in our increasingly diverse and complex society. The Association of American Colleges and Universities (1995a) reiterates this message in their American Commitment's Initiative, which states that today's college students "must learn, in every part of their educational experience, to live creatively with the multiplicity, ambiguity, and irreducible differences that are the defining conditions of the contemporary world" (p. xxii). Although written with a sense of urgency, in light of the events of September 11th and the concomitant increase in racial and ethnic tension felt most acutely by middle-eastern students, this statement takes on an increased sense of immediacy.

Although many institutions of higher education have increased the structural diversity on their campuses over the last several decades, the society at large has actually increased its racial and economic segregation (Gurin, 1999). Consequently, students frequently enter relatively diverse college environments from highly segregated high schools (Orfield, Bachmeier, James, & Elite, 1997). Evidence suggests, however, that engagement with diversity on college campuses significantly increases the chances that a person will choose to live and work in a diverse environment, thereby minimizing the resiliency of the segregation trend (Gurin, 1999).

One of the important locations of students' engagement with diversity is the college classroom. The classroom environment offers potential opportunities for students to learn to negotiate and communicate across difference, while overcoming the inherent challenges in working with diverse groups. Evidence is mounting (see Gurin, 1999) that by incorporating diversity into the curriculum, through both content and structured interactions among diverse

peers, students are more likely to increase, among other things, the complexity of their thinking and their willingness to engage current social problems.

The dilemmas and challenges we face as a nation and world are complex and multifaceted, requiring a citizenry willing to raise social awareness, improve social conditions, and volunteer their time toward social causes. The purpose of this study is to test a model of the relationships between students' enrollment in a diversity course, their interactions with diverse peers, and the importance they place on social action engagement.

Review of the Literature

The conceptual framework developed for this paper is based a set of simple relationships played out over two periods of time (the specific model, see Figure 1, is described in more detail in the next section). Specifically, we hypothesize that by enrolling in a diversity course, students are more likely to have “positive” interactions with diverse peers. Furthermore, we contend that both enrollment in a diversity course and higher levels of positive interactions with diverse peers will increase the level of importance students place on social action engagement. The following review of the literature summarizes the previous research that shaped our understanding of these relationships.

Diversity Courses

For the purposes of this study, diversity courses are those courses that have content and methods of instruction that are inclusive of the diversity found in society. Examples of such courses can be found in departments such as women's or ethnic studies and/or listed under an institutions “diversity” general education requirement.

Diversity courses are, in part, intended to meet the challenge of preparing students to be effective citizens in a diverse society by encouraging interaction with diverse peers and

promoting what we call democratic engagement. Higher education institutions nationwide have made a commitment to teaching cultural pluralism as an important component of the undergraduate curriculum (Olguin & Schmitz, 1997). This commitment is evidenced by reports indicating that 63% of campus mission statements reference diversity as an educational goal (AAC&U, 1995b). In addition, Levine and Cureton (1992) report that nearly 50% of campuses have ethnic and women's studies programs, and Humphreys (2000) reports that 62% of campuses have or are in the process of developing a diversity requirement. Although these courses vary in many aspects, most introduce content and methods of teaching that are intended to expose students to multiple perspectives on issues, teach them to think more complexly, and actively engage them in social issues such as oppression (Adams & Zhou-McGovern, 1994; Banks & Banks, 1995; Tatum, 1992).

Diversity Courses and Learning

Many studies link diversity courses with different learning, civic, and multicultural outcomes. Astin (1993a) and Villalpando (1994), for instance, found that ethnic studies courses, cultural awareness workshops, cross-racial socialization, and discussing racial issues were associated with widespread beneficial effects on a student's academic and personal development, regardless of the student's race. Furthermore, enrollment in an ethnic or women's studies course was shown to be positively associated with gains in learning outcomes such as complex and socio-historical thinking (Gurin, 1999), developing critical perspectives (Musil, 1992), foreign language skills (Astin, 1993a, b) and critical thinking (Gurin, 1999, Hurtado, 2001a; Tsui, 1999). Enrollment in these courses was also shown to predict positive changes in civic outcomes, include promoting racial understanding (Astin, 1993a; Gurin, 1999; Milem, 1994), interpersonal skills (Hurtado, 2001a), and participating in a community action program (Gurin, 1999). In

addition, taking a diversity course is related to multicultural outcomes such as reducing prejudice (Chang, 1999), increasing cultural awareness (Astin, 1993b; Gurin, 1999; Hurtado, 2001) tolerance (Hurtado, 2001a), and awareness of inequality (Lopez, 1993).

Of those studies identifying the link between diversity courses and civic outcomes, only a small subset (e.g., Gurin, 1999; Hurtado, 2001a) include measures that examine students' level of involvement with social issues and problems. The Gurin (1999) study is particularly convincing, as its findings were consistent across several different national and institutional data sources. Additionally, the large sample sizes used and the ability to control for student background characteristics and other confounding variables are strengths of these studies. It is important to note, however, that these studies are rarely based in classrooms and, therefore, only address the cumulative impact of diversity courses. A necessary complement to the studies above are classroom-based studies that investigate the influence of particular diversity courses on similar student outcomes.

Classroom-based Studies

Only a limited number of classroom-based studies exist that report results specifically from diversity or diversity-related courses. Of these, most reported changes in students' attitudes and beliefs. For example, studies found that diversity courses positively influenced students' racial attitudes (Bakari, 2000; Tran, Young, & Di Lella, 1994), comfort dealing with diversity (Barry, 1996), beliefs about cultural diversity (Moore & Reeves-Kazelskis, 1992; Pedras, White, & Schmidt, 1996; Torok & Aguilar, 2000), empathy (Carrell, 1997), cultural sensitivity (Bakari, 2000; Nel, 1992), and attitudes toward multicultural education (Adler, 1998; McMahon, 1999; Olmedo, 1997).

While the consistency found among the classroom-based studies (almost all report positive effects) is encouraging, the limitations of these studies are noteworthy. Most notable are the lack of comparison groups and the absence of gender and ethnic diversity among participants, which restricts the usefulness of these results beyond the particular course being studied. Furthermore, previous studies mainly focus on education courses and use cross-sectional sampling techniques, thereby lacking a control for the selection effect. That is, particular students with predispositions toward these outcomes often take diversity courses as a matter of choice and preference.

Researchers have identified that students' predispositions tend to be accentuated in college (Feldman & Newcomb, 1969). Students intentionally choose which college to attend, develop peer groups based on mutual interests, and enroll in courses that are interesting to them, resulting in the accentuation of particular attitudes, beliefs, and experiences. Astin (1993b), for example, found that gender differences on a range of attitudes tend to be accentuated—not diminished—during the college years. Unless students intentionally expose themselves to diverse groups, courses, and experiences, differences between students based on their initial proclivities will likely be accentuated in college. For this reason, the strength of our study is to control for this selection behavior and accentuation effect utilizing measures that predict diversity course enrollment: students' predisposition to place importance on social action engagement, previous exposure to diversity courses, and prior interactions with diverse peers.

Interactions with Diverse Peers

Building on a long line of research demonstrating the positive effects of intergroup contact (e.g., see Allport, 1954; Amir, 1976; Cook, 1984; Pettigrew, 1991), a much smaller number of studies (Gurin, 1999; Hurtado, Engberg, Ponjuan, & Landreman, 2002) have

established that interactions with diverse peers predict democratic outcomes like social action engagement. In addition, there is a growing body of research linking intergroup relations programs with social action engagement (see Hurtado, 2001b; Zúñiga et al., 1995). Although this research rarely, if ever, contains measures of students' interactions, interaction with diverse peers is a required component of such programs and is consequently assumed to be a factor in producing the outcomes.

One of the notable aspects of the work by Gurin (1999) is that both the quality and quantity of students' interactions with diverse peers are used. Gurin's results suggest that the amount of interaction as well as both positive and negative quality of interaction influence outcomes such as active thinking and citizenship engagement. In an earlier study on the data used for our current analysis, the quality of students' interactions, particularly the positive quality, significantly predicted the importance students place on social action engagement (see Hurtado, Nelson Laird, Landreman, Engberg, & Fernandez, 2002). In addition, that analysis identified relatively high positive correlations between the amount and quality of students' interactions with diverse peers. For these reasons, our current analysis focuses specifically on the positive quality of students' interactions with diverse peers.

Conceptual Framework

Based on our review of the literature the following conceptual framework was developed (see Figure 1). The model explains the connections between enrollment in diversity courses, positive interactions with diverse peers, and the importance students place on social action engagement over time. At Time 1 (the beginning of an academic term), the model examines the connection between the number of previous diversity courses students have taken, the amount of positive interaction students report having with diverse peers at Time 1, and the importance

students place on social action engagement at Time 1. At Time 2, the models examines the relationships between enrollment in one of the diversity courses, positive interactions with diverse peers at Time 2, and the importance students place on social action engagement at Time 2.

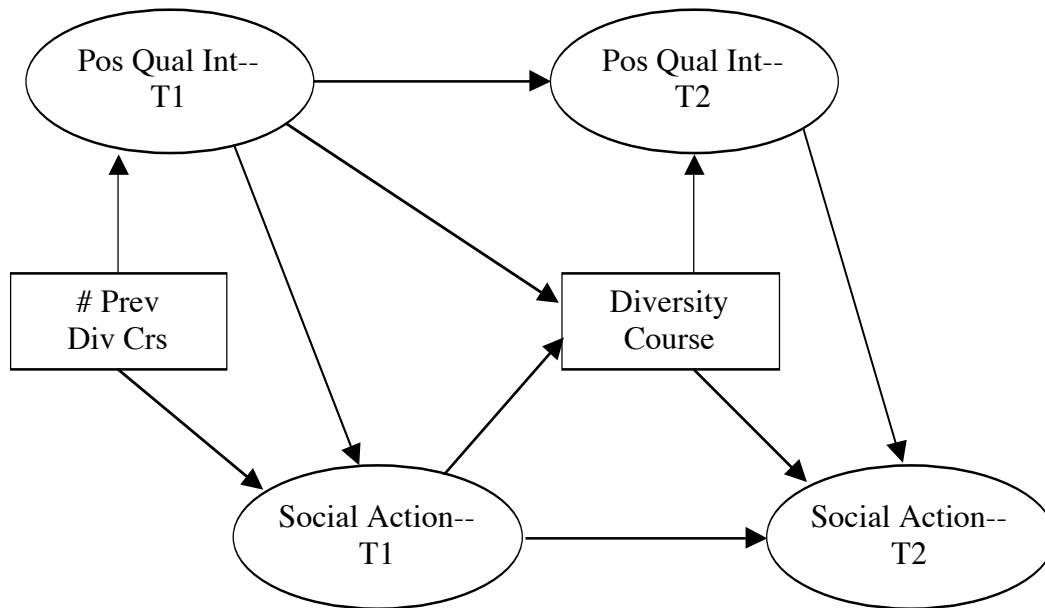


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Methods

Data Source

The data in this study came from the *Student Thinking and Interaction Survey (STIS)* of college students, which was developed as part of a larger national research project titled *Preparing College Students for a Diverse Democracy*. The survey was designed to assess students' cognitive and social development in the classroom over one term with an emphasis on the mediating effect of students' interactions with diverse peers. A flagship university in the Northeast was chosen for this study based on its interest in implementing additional classroom-based studies and assessing the impact of diversity courses.

Three different courses were selected for this study: a general education course that met a campus-wide diversity requirement; a women's studies course; and an introductory management class. The general education course was designed to foster structured interactions among diverse students and to teach students about diverse groups of people. The faculty in charge of this course maintained control over course enrollment, thereby ensuring a mixture of students from different social identity groups. The women's studies course involved significantly less-structured attention to the diversity of students in the classroom but included content related to diversity issues. The introductory management course had no specific attention to diversity in the classroom as defined by either structural diversity or the content of the class.

For the purposes of this study, we decided to treat students from the general education and women's studies courses together as students enrolled in a diversity course. We rationalized this decision based on the structural and/or content diversity emphasized in both of these classes as well as the larger sample size this created for our statistical analyses.

Instructors and students volunteered to participate during the Spring 2001 semester and each faculty member gave homework points to encourage participation. In consultation with instructors and teaching assistants, it was determined to distribute the survey during class time, although students completed the survey on their own time. The STIS was administered to students during the 2nd week of class and again in the 12th week of the semester. Response rates for the diversity and management classes are shown in Table 1.

Sample

Of the 504 students who completed the pre-test (which included specific questions on students' background characteristics), 35% were first year students, 30% were second year

Table 1
Response Rates for STIS at Time 1 and Time 2

Course	Number Enrolled	Pre-STIS	Post-STIS
Diversity	363	311	267
<i>Response rate</i>		85.7%	73.6%
Management	345	193	193
<i>Response rate</i>		55.9%	55.9%
Total	708	504	460
<i>Response rate</i>		71.2%	65.0%

students, 23% were third year students, and 12% were in their fourth or more year. Female students represented 67% of the sample. The sample was predominantly white (72%); students of color represented 28% of the sample (Asian=11%; African American=7%; Latina/o=3%; and Multiracial=7%). The mean self-reported high school grade point average for the sample was 3.3 (based on a standard 4 point scale). Approximately 39% of the respondents were enrolled in a course to meet a general education requirement, 37% were enrolled to meet a requirement of a major/minor, and 23% were enrolled as an elective.

Measures

In order to evaluate the influence of a diversity course on the importance students place on social action engagement, two latent constructs (positive quality of interaction and social action engagement, each measured at the beginning and end of the term) and two observed variables (previous diversity courses and current course enrolled in) were used in developing a structural model.

The social action engagement construct was composed of 7 items that reflected three main themes: creating social awareness, volunteering for a cause, and working to eliminate poverty. Students were asked to rate each item on a four-point scale from “not important” to

“essential.” Previous studies (see Hurtado, Engberg, Ponjuan, and Landreman, 2002) suggest that these items represented a single construct that could be tested by confirmatory factor procedures. In order to create more stable parameter estimates and a more optimal variable to sample size ratio, items were categorized into 2- and 3-item parcels (see Bagozzi & Edwards, 1998; Bagozzi & Heatherton, 1994). Parceling is a proven technique to reduce bias in the estimates of structural parameters and results in better fitting solutions (Bandalos, 2002).

The positive quality of interaction construct measured how often students’ interactions with a group other than their own were based on sharing their personal feelings, working effectively through conflict, and having meaningful discussions about race outside of class. Students were asked to rate each item on a five-point scale from “not at all” to “a great deal.”

The number of previous diversity courses taken by a student was an exogenous variable that consisted of the total number of courses students took in women’s studies, ethnic/cultural studies, general diversity issues, intergroup dialogue, and service-learning prior to enrolling in the diversity or management class. Students rated each class on a four-point scale from “none” to “three or more” and the total from each class was used as a measure of exposure to previous diversity courses. The course variable was an endogenous, dichotomous variable that was coded “0” for the management course and “1” for the diversity course. A full description of all observed variables used in the model is presented in Appendix A. Additionally, Table 2 provides means and standard deviations for all the observed variables in the model.

Table 2
Means and Standard Deviations for Variables in the Model

Name	Time 1			Time 2		
	Var #	Mean	SD	Var #	Mean	SD
<i>Diversity Courses</i>						
Number of previous diversity courses	V1	4.33	2.83			
Enrollment in a diversity course	V8	0.57	0.50			
<i>Positive Quality of Interaction</i>						
Shared personal feelings and problems with diverse peers	V2	3.22	1.35	V9	3.27	1.33
Worked effectively through conflict with diverse peers	V3	2.63	1.35	V10	2.62	1.32
Had meaningful discussion outside of class with diverse peers	V4	2.66	1.45	V11	2.91	1.37
<i>Importance of Social Action Engagement</i>						
Parcel 1 ^a	V5	2.91	0.67	V12	2.91	0.67
Creating awareness of how people affect the environment		2.61	0.78		2.63	0.77
Promoting racial tolerance and respect		3.22	0.77		3.17	0.79
Speaking up against social injustice		2.90	0.84		2.93	0.83
Parcel 2 ^a	V6	2.57	0.71	V13	2.58	0.68
Contributing money to a charitable cause		2.47	0.78		2.50	0.74
Volunteering with community groups or agencies		2.67	0.83		2.67	0.81
Parcel 3 ^a	V7	2.57	0.79	V14	2.69	0.76
Working to end poverty		2.74	0.87		2.82	0.81
Using career-related skills to work in low-income communities		2.41	0.87		2.55	0.84

^a Item parceling (combining items by averaging the scores of several related items within a scale) was used for the latent construct Importance of Social Action Engagement to take advantage of the benefits of parceling (see Bandalos, 2002).

Analyses

The principal analytic techniques used in this study consisted of confirmatory latent-variable structural modeling using the EQS statistical software program (Bentler, 1995). Structural equation modeling allows for the simultaneous estimation of hypothesized regressions using an estimated covariance matrix and generates goodness of fit measures to evaluate the overall fit of the proposed model. Thus, structural equation modeling provides several advantages over traditional path analysis, including the assessment of the overall fit of a hypothesized model and the ability to take into account measurement error to obtain more precise coefficient estimates.

We relied on the reporting guidelines suggested by Raykov, Tomer, and Nesselroade (1991) and reported the goodness of fit measures known as the Normed Fit Index (NFI), Non-normed fit index (NNFI, which is also known as the Tucker-Lewis Index or TLI), and the Comparative Fit Index (CFI). Further, we followed Boomsma's (2000) recommendation to include the misfit index known as the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). Current standards for determining acceptable fit suggest that fit indices should exceed .90 and RMSEA scores should be equal to or below .10.

Our analyses were based on pairwise covariance matrices, a choice predicated on earlier studies that show pairwise matrices produce similar results as listwise matrices without significant losses in statistical power (Vinokur & Schil, 2002). We began by using confirmatory factor analysis to test our measurement model and determine how well observed variables and their corresponding latent construct fit the data. Next, we tested the full structural model and examined the corresponding goodness of fit and RMSEA indices. In accordance with the principles of modeling longitudinal data (see Kline, 1998), we included measurement error

correlations between each pair of Time 1-Time 2 observed variables. Additionally, we imposed equality constraints on the factor loadings of each repeated measure. We examined both the Wald and the Lagrange Multiplier tests to determine whether any modifications were needed and found no theoretical basis to make any changes. Finally, we examined the significance of each of the structural paths as well as data on the direct, indirect, and total effects for all of the variables in the model.

Limitations

A limitation of this study is its reliance on self-reported data to model change in students' dispositions to engage in social action. While there are many disadvantages to using self-reported data for this purpose (e.g., social desirability of answers can influence results), the higher education research community currently lacks widely used objective measures of civic engagement. Rather than relying solely on administrative assumptions about how students develop these skills, self-report data provides a viable alternative for informing decision-making in higher education. Subsequent work with these data is also planned to explore the link between our own survey measures and more widely adopted measures on standardized instruments (e.g., Defining Issues Test of moral and ethical development).

Limited data was gathered on the individual pedagogical styles of the faculty members teaching the classes used in this study, apart from what the students reported about their own classroom experiences. Consequently, readers should use caution when making judgments about other contexts based on the results of this study. This was a preliminary study, however, and its purpose was to explore whether a diversity course was more conducive in fostering diverse interactions and as a result, preparing students to become engaged citizens. In the future, a

mixed method study employing both quantitative and qualitative methods may capture the effects of differences in teaching methods and styles.

Finally, it should be noted that background variables, such as gender, race, and grade point average were not used in this study. A previous study using the same data set (see Hurtado, Nelson Laird, Landreman, Engberg, and Fernandez, 2002), however, found that, for the most part, these variables only indirectly influenced social action engagement at Time 2 through the pretest measure. In addition, the inclusion of single indicators in a structural model can cause model identification problems. Consequently, we chose to leave these variables out of the analyses. Future work will address the effect of background measures by examining the relative fit of our proposed model across different social identity groups. Such analyses were beyond the scope of the current study.

Results

The results for the measurement model suggest an excellent fit between the data and our two latent constructs (quality of interaction and social action engagement). The chi-square statistic is 136.75 ($df = 46$, $n=559$, $p<.001$), and the fit indices are NFI=.96, NNFI=.96, CFI=.97, and RMSEA=.051. Table 3 shows the standardized parameter estimates (factor loadings) for each observed variable that was regressed on its respective latent construct. Additionally, Table 3 contains the r-square for each observed variable to latent construct relationship, which indicates the amount of variance explained in each factor by its corresponding observed variable. Freely estimated parameters were all highly significant ($p<.001$), confirming the hypothesized factor structures and providing an empirical justification for proceeding to our full structural model.

Table 3
Standardized Parameter Estimates within the Measurement Model

Factor	Time 1			Time 2		
	Var #	Loading	R ²	Var #	Loading	R ²
Positive Quality of Interaction:	F1			F3		
Shared personal feelings and problems with diverse peers	V2	0.83	0.69	V9	0.87	0.76
Worked effectively through conflict with diverse peers	V3	0.70	0.49	V10	0.68	0.46
Had meaningful discussion outside of class with diverse peers	V4	0.81	0.66	V11	0.85	0.72
Importance of Social Action Engagement:	F2			F4		
Parcel 1	V5	0.74	0.54	V12	0.72	0.51
Parcel 2	V6	0.73	0.54	V13	0.75	0.57
Parcel 3	V7	0.87	0.76	V14	0.92	0.84

Note: R² refers to the amount of variance accounted for in a factor by a particular indicator.

$\chi^2(46, n=559)=136.75$, NFI=.96, NNFI=.96, CFI=.97, and RMSEA=.051

The relationships between the observed variables to latent constructs are also important to examine as they demonstrate the relative strength among the different factor components. In the positive quality of interaction construct, for instance, both sharing personal feelings and having meaningful discussions about race produce stronger associations and explain more variance than working with conflict. Furthermore, these relationships become stronger over time while the working with conflict association decreases over time. It may be that students are still learning how to negotiate difference and that the benefits of working through conflict are realized more slowly than other quality attributes.

In terms of the social action engagement construct, the working to eliminate poverty parcel shows the highest association and increases the most over time. It may be that many students feel their education and future degrees will allow them to make the most substantial contributions to their communities. In this regard, focusing on one's career may seem like a

more meaningful and feasible goal toward improving impoverished communities than creating awareness or contributing money to a cause. Many students may be struggling financially or simply feel that the time commitment necessary to create awareness is too taxing given their current course loads.

Table 4 shows the parameter estimates and significance levels for each of the direct and indirect paths in the structural model. Figure 2 provides a more complete schematic that includes the paths for errors and disturbances as well as the covariances among error terms over time. Results indicate that the proposed structural model fits the student data quite well. The chi-square statistic is 197.75 ($df = 67$, $n=559$, $p<.001$) and the fit indices are NFI=.95, NNFI=.95, CFI=.97, and RMSEA=.058. Thus, our model presents an appropriate and meaningful depiction of how students' exposure to diversity courses influences the importance they place on social action engagement.

Examining the social action engagement construct at the Time 1, both the positive quality of interactions at Time 1 ($b=.29$, $p<.001$) and the number of previous diversity courses ($b=.20$, $p<.001$) produce significant, direct effects. While the direct path for quality of interaction is somewhat stronger, the number of previous diversity courses has an additional indirect effect ($b=.20$, $p<.001$), suggesting an accentuation effect whereby prior exposure to diversity courses predisposes students to value the importance of social action engagement. This effect is made clearer in that enrollment in a diversity course further reinforces students initial commitments to social action, although the direct effect remains small ($b=.08$, $p<.05$).

Previous exposure to diversity courses is also an important predictor of the positive quality of students' interactions with diverse groups ($b=.29$, $p<.001$). It appears then that learning about diverse groups, engaging in intensive dialogues across difference, or serving

Table 4
Standardized Parameter Estimates for the Structural Model

Effects	Regression Weight
Direct effects on:	
Importance of Social Action Engagement (Time 2)	
Positive Quality of Interaction (Time 2)	0.11**
Enrolled in a diversity course	0.08*
Importance of Social Action Engagement (Time 1)	0.67***
Positive Quality of Interaction (Time 2)	
Enrolled in a diversity course	0.10**
Positive Quality of Interaction (Time 1)	0.62***
Enrolled in a diversity course	
Importance of Social Action Engagement (Time 1)	0.20***
Positive Quality of Interaction (Time 1)	0.02
Importance of Social Action Engagement (Time 1)	
Positive Quality of Interaction (Time 1)	0.23***
Number of previous diversity courses	0.20***
Positive Quality of Interaction (Time 1)	
Number of previous diversity courses	0.29***
Indirect effects on:	
Importance of Social Action Engagement (Time 2)	
Enrolled in a diversity course	0.01
Importance of Social Action Engagement (Time 1)	0.02*
Positive Quality of Interaction (Time 1)	0.23***
Number of previous diversity courses	0.21***
Positive Quality of Interaction (Time 2)	
Importance of Social Action Engagement (Time 1)	0.02*
Positive Quality of Interaction (Time 1)	0.01
Number of previous diversity courses	0.19***
Enrolled in a diversity course	
Positive Quality of Interaction (Time 1)	0.05**
Number of previous diversity courses	0.06***
Importance of Social Action Engagement (Time 1)	
Number of previous diversity courses	0.07***

Note. N = 577; * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

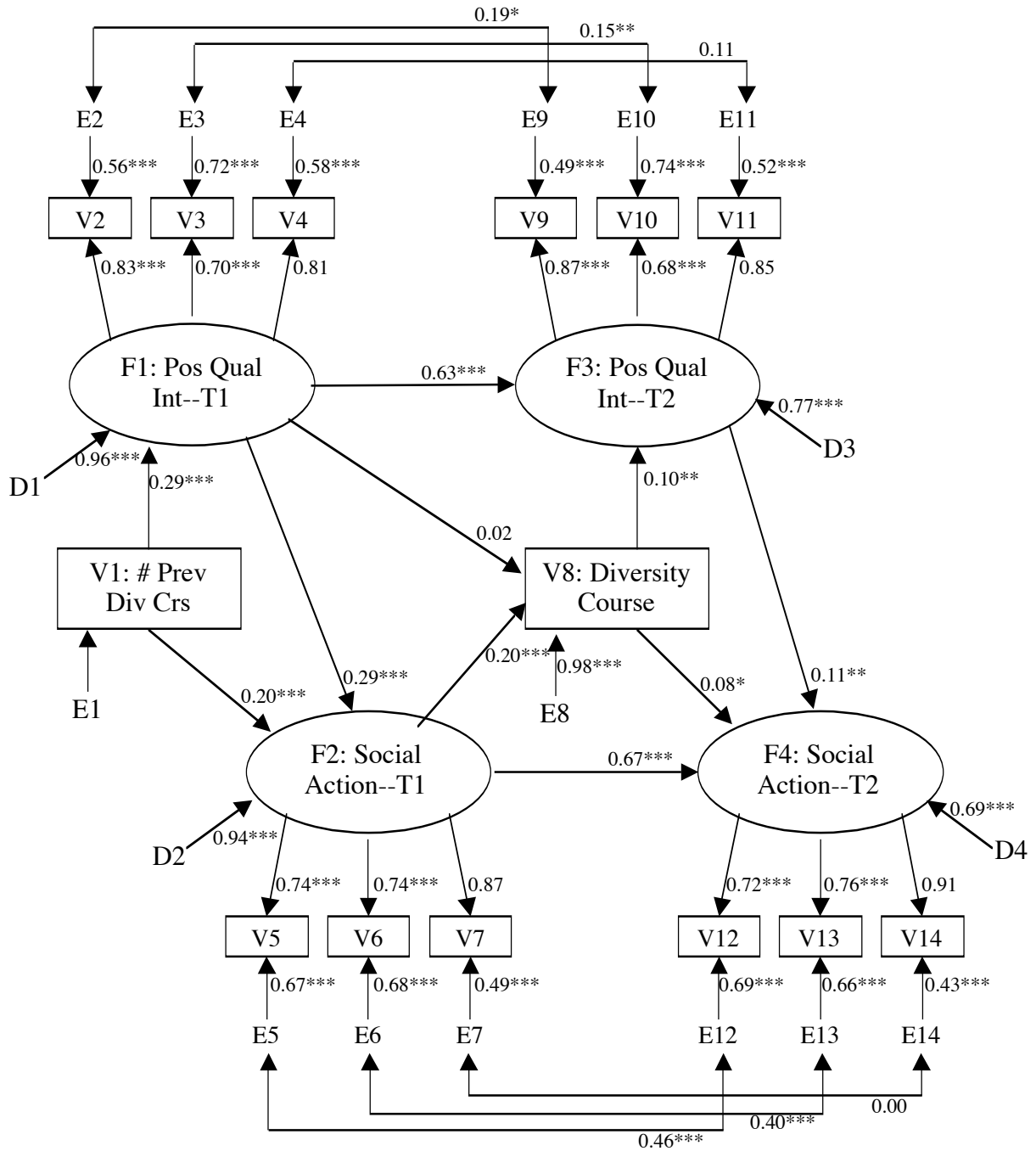


Figure 2. Summary of the standardized path coefficients for the full structural model. $\chi^2(67, n=559)=197.75$, NFI=.95, NNFI=.95, CFI=.97, and RMSEA=.058. Significant levels are indicating by the following: * $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$, *** $p<.001$. Factor loading from V4 to F1, V7 to F2, V11 to F3, and V14 to F4 were all fixed to one.

different communities promotes the level of positive interactions students experience with diverse groups. This initial predisposition toward positive interactions, however, does not directly affect ($b=.02, p>.05$) whether a student was enrolled in a diversity course. Rather, it was students' predisposition toward social action engagement that produced a significant, direct effect ($b=.20, p<.001$) on their choice to enroll in a diversity course. It should be noted, however, that students' positive interactions with diverse groups did indirectly ($b=.05, p<.01$) affect their decision to take a diversity course. Furthermore, exposure to previous diversity courses also indirectly ($b=.06, p<.001$) affects enrollment in a diversity course. Thus, enrollment in a diversity course is primarily mediated by students' initial commitments to social action engagement and reinforced through prior learning and interaction experiences with diverse peers.

As expected, the strongest paths in the model were between Time 1 and 2 measures of the positive quality of interaction and social action engagement. Yet, even after controlling for students initial proclivities, we still see a significant effect of diversity courses ($b=.08, p<.05$) and positive quality of interaction ($b=.11, p<.01$) on the importance students place on social action engagement at the end of the term. Furthermore, enrollment in a diversity course serves to increase the amount of positive interaction students have with groups different than their own ($b=.10, p<.01$), creating an additional, indirect effect on the end of the term social action engagement measure. Overall, our model accounts for over 52% of the variance of the importance of social action engagement at the end of the term. Clearly, if we wish to promote the development of more socially aware and socially active students, incorporating both diverse content and promoting increased, positive interactions among diverse student groups must become integral components of the learning process.

Discussion

This study makes several important contributions to our understanding of how diversity courses influence students' interactions with diverse peers and the importance they place on social action engagement. The results demonstrate that enrollment in a diversity course is a positive, significant determinant of the quality of students' interactions with diverse peers. Furthermore, a diversity course transforms students' experiences with diverse peers into an increased commitment to social action. As such, diversity courses are preparing students for the inherent challenges that await them as they enter an increasingly diverse workforce. Bikson and Law (1994), for instance, report that the business community is currently looking for future workers with the skills to work effectively in groups with colleagues of diverse backgrounds. Diversity courses are working to achieve this goal by teaching students skills that translate into more open and meaningful interchanges with diverse peers. Additionally, these courses teach students important skills in negotiating and communicating across difference—skills necessary in a workforce that values collaboration and dialogue among diverse team members.

Diversity courses also influence students' commitment to social action engagement. This outcome seems especially important given the growing public disaffection toward civic engagement (Putnam, 2000) and students' excessive individualism and lack of accountability toward one another (Halstead, 1999). Barber (1997) insists that creating responsible citizens is a task "colleges and universities can be expected to undertake, for it reflects nothing more than a recognition of and recommitment to the traditional ideal of education as preparation of young people for civic life in a free society" (p. 228). According to Newman (1985), the crisis in education is less about declining test scores and more about the failure "to provide the education for citizenship that is still the most important responsibility of the nation's schools and colleges"

(p. 7). Furthermore, Checkoway (2001) suggests that the decline in civic engagement is embedded in the multiple systems and levels of many institutions of higher learning, including classroom pedagogy that no longer incorporates the development of civic competencies. Thus, diversity courses seem an appropriate and available solution for institutions interested in improving their students' commitment to the larger public good.

This study also demonstrates an accentuation effect (Feldman and Newcomb, 1969) in that students with previous exposure to diversity courses were more committed to social action and experienced more positive interactions with groups other than their own. Yet, even after controlling for students' prior exposure and experiences, we still evidence a significant effect for enrollment in a diversity course. This is an important finding and speaks to the necessity of a continued emphasis on curricular transformation within higher education. Although the inclusion of both knowledge and support for diversity is evident in ethnic and women's studies programs, co-curricular academic support programs, and multicultural programming (Trevino, 1992; Munoz, 1989, Peterson et al., 1978), this study provides empirical support for the continued inclusion of diverse perspectives in classrooms across campus. The accentuation effect uncovered in this study points to the continued learning students glean from both diverse course content and structured classroom interactions with diverse peers. Future studies will examine more closely the development of democratic outcomes in courses that focus on diverse content (as seen in the women's studies course) versus those courses that include both structured interactions and diverse content (as seen in the general education class).

Implications for Research and Practice

To our knowledge, this study is the first in the field of higher education to use structural equation modeling to examine pre- and post-test classroom-level data from diversity courses.

Although there are some limitations to using structural equation modeling (e.g., the inclusion of numerous variables is more problematic than in regression analyses), we feel it has proven to be a powerful technique for examining classroom data. Unlike regression analyses, we were able to account for indirect effects. In addition, we were able to examine measurement error and the overall fit of our model, which are strong advantages over regression and path analysis. Future studies with suitable data at the classroom level should consider using structural equation modeling for their analyses.

While the college curriculum has become more representative of America's cultural legacies over the last three decades, "the college peer group constitutes the place where students gain experience, experiment, and learn how to negotiate differences in backgrounds and perspectives that are an inevitable part of contemporary society" (Hurtado, 1999, p. 26). As educators, we need to continue to explore ways to take advantage of the potential for learning from peers. The results of this study suggest that the creation of classroom structures, content, and pedagogy that encourage multicultural understanding and maximize the benefits of positive interactions with diverse peers are important components of realizing the power of peer-to-peer learning. This, however, requires action by faculty and instructors. It is likely that many instructors will need assistance in making these changes especially in preparing to facilitate the dialogues that transpire within an increasingly diverse campus community. If the result of these changes, as our results suggest, are citizens and leaders more engaged in social action, the pain and discomfort that may accompany change should be worth it.

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Appendix

Description of the Items/Variables Used in the Model

Name	Description/coding	Time measured
<i>Diversity Courses</i>		
Number of previous diversity courses ^a	Continuous (range, 0 – 15)	1
Enrolled in a diversity course ^b	0 = No, 1 = Yes	1
<i>Positive Quality of Interaction</i>		
Shared personal feelings and problems with diverse peers	1 = Not at all to 5 = A great deal	1,2
Worked effectively through conflict with diverse peers	1 = Not at all to 5 = A great deal	1,2
Had meaningful discussion outside of class with diverse peers	1 = Not at all to 5 = A great deal	1,2
<i>Importance of Social Action Engagement</i>		
Creating awareness of how people affect the environment	1 = Not important to 4 = Essential	1,2
Promoting racial tolerance and respect	1 = Not important to 4 = Essential	1,2
Contributing money to a charitable cause	1 = Not important to 4 = Essential	1,2
Speaking up against social injustice	1 = Not important to 4 = Essential	1,2
Volunteering with community groups or agencies	1 = Not important to 4 = Essential	1,2
Working to end poverty	1 = Not important to 4 = Essential	1,2
Using career-related skills to work in low-income communities	1 = Not important to 4 = Essential	1,2

^a Students indicated the number of courses taken in prior terms that focus on Women's Studies, Ethnic/Cultural Studies, General diversity issues, opportunities for intense discussion across difference, or serving a community in need. Their answers were summed to create this variable.

^b Students enrolled in one of the two diversity courses being studied received a 1 on this variable whereas students in the management course received a 0.