

College Students' Classroom Preparation for a Diverse Democracy

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The Association of American Colleges and Universities (1995) 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). In preparing students to live and work in this pluralistic society, institutions of higher education have undertaken numerous initiatives to increase engagement with social diversity. However, many national experts point out that our nation is actually increasing in racial and economic segregation despite increases in structural diversity on campuses across the nation (Gurin, 1999). In addition, the striking demographic trend in metropolitan areas of the United States is the intensification, not the diminution, of racial residential segregation (AAC & U, 1995b). Students are, therefore, likely to enter college from highly segregated high school environments (Orfield, Bachmeier, James, & Elite, 1997). For many students, college provides them with their first encounter with cultural differences and the opportunity to interact with diverse peers. The college classroom is a key arena where knowledge about diversity in society and the underpinnings of contemporary social problems can be discussed. College is also the time when students begin to make firm commitments, forming a foundation to take action for social justice. The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the role the classroom plays on students' interactions with diverse peers and their larger commitment to social justice goals.

Review of the Literature

Empirical analysis measuring the educational benefits of diversity suggest that diversity experiences during college have significant effects on the extent to which graduates live racially and ethnically integrated lives (Gurin, 1999; Humphreys, 1997; Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Through these opportunities students are able to practice and develop skills

needed to live effectively in a diverse world. “The current challenge, then, is to help students develop ways of making meaning that enable them to meet the expectations necessary to function as effective citizens in today’s complex culture and society” (King & Baxter Magolda, 1996, p. 169). The challenge is also to create opportunities where meaningful interaction among diverse individuals and learning from these interactions can take place.

Diversity courses are, in part, intended to meet that challenge by encouraging interaction with diverse peers and promoting actions for social justice. 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, 1995, p. x) and 22% have valued models for multicultural studies (Olguin & Schmitz, 1997). 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 constitute a variety of forms, most introduce content and methods of teaching that are intended to expose students to multiple perspectives on issues and to help students learn ways of making meaning based on those multiple, possibly conflicting sources (Adams & Zhou-McGovern, 1994; Banks & Banks, 1995; Tatum, 1992). Little is known, however, about the degree to which these courses effect students’ interactions with peers from cultural backgrounds different from their own or how these courses effect their commitment to taking action for social justice.

Many studies link diversity courses with several learning, civic and multicultural outcomes. Astin (1993a) and Villalpando (1994) found that emphasizing multiculturalism through ethnic studies courses, cultural awareness workshops, cross-racial socialization, and

discussion of racial issues were associated with widespread beneficial effects on a student's academic and personal development, regardless of the student's race. Taking 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, 2001; Tsui, 1999). Enrollment in these courses was shown to predict positive changes in civic outcomes that include promoting racial understanding (Astin, 1993a; Gurin, 1999; Milem, 1994), interpersonal skills (Hurtado, 2001), 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) and increasing cultural awareness (Astin, 1993b; Gurin, 1999; Hurtado, 2001) tolerance (Hurtado, 2001), and awareness of inequality (Lopez, 1993). The large sample size used and the ability to control for student background characteristics and other confounding variables are strengths of these studies. It is important to note that these studies are not based in classrooms per se, and are, therefore, only suggestive of the impact of diversity courses.

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. Studies found that diversity courses positively influenced such things as students' racial attitudes (Bakari, 2000; Tran et al., 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; McMahan, 1999; Olmedo, 1997).

These classroom-based studies on diversity courses all report positive effects on students' development. While the consistency of this result 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 used 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. Concomitantly, researchers have identified that students' predispositions tend to be accentuated in college (Feldman & Newcomb, 1969). This happens because students select particular colleges to attend, select peer groups with mutual interests, and select courses that are interesting to them. Unless students intentionally expose themselves to diverse groups, courses and experiences, the differences between students in their predispositions can be accentuated in college. For example, Astin (1993b) found that gender differences on a range of attitudes tend to be accentuated—not diminished—during the college years. For this reason, the strength of our study is the control for this selection behavior and *accentuation effect* utilizing a range of measures that predict predisposition to take responsibility for social action, as well as a control for initial position at the beginning of the semester to gauge increases in valuing the importance of taking social action by the end of the term.

This study reports preliminary findings from a larger classroom-based study and focuses on the effects courses have on students' interactions with diverse peers. The classroom-based study we conducted assessed the change in students' interaction with diverse peers during their enrollment in two types of classes: diversity courses and an introductory management course.

Our research adds to the body of work on diversity course outcomes by addressing the issues raised by cross-sectional and single course sampling, participant homogeneity and the tendency of existing measures to ignore the quality of interaction with diverse students. Given that many institutions have adopted curriculum transformation projects, this study adds much needed empirical evidence to support the assumption that diversity courses increase students' interactions across difference and commitment to engage in social justice activities. Through peer interactions, "positive" and/or "negative," students exhibit the willingness to take action in uncomfortable and difficult situations, which is an important part of closing equity gaps in society.

Methods

Data Source

The data utilized in this study are drawn from the *Student Thinking and Interaction Survey* (STIS) of college students, which was developed as part of a larger national research project titled *Preparing 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 diversity course that met a campus-wide diversity requirement; an introductory management class; and a women's studies course. The diversity course was structured to foster diverse peer interactions as the faculty in charge maintained control over course enrollment. The women's studies course involved significantly less-structured attention to the diversity of peers in the classroom but

included content diversity. The introductory management course had no specific attention to diversity in the classroom as defined by either student enrollment or the content of the class. For the purposes of this study, we decided to treat students from the education and women's studies courses together as students having taken 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.

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

Course	Number Enrolled	Pre-STIS	Post-STIS
Diversity	363	306	266
<i>Response rate</i>		84.3%	73.3%
Management	345	190	191
<i>Response rate</i>		55.1%	55.4%
Total	708	497	457
<i>Response rate</i>		73.2%	65.7%

Sample

Participants in the analytical sample included 316 college students of which 36.4% were first year students, 26.9% were second year students, 24.4% were third year students, and 12.3%

were in their fourth or more year. Female students represented 67.7% of the sample. The sample was predominantly white (74.4%); students of color represented 25.6% of the sample (Asian=17.1%; African American=6.6%; Latina/o=3.3%; and Multiracial=6.6%). The mean self-reported high school grade point average for the sample was 3.31 (based on a standard 4 point scale). Approximately 74% of the respondents reported that their racial composition of friends was all or mostly white, with 19.9% reporting half white and half people of color and 11% reporting all or mostly people of color. Finally, 42.1% of the sample reported they were involved in extracurricular activities. Table 2 depicts selected sample frequencies for both the management and diversity courses.

Table 2.
Selected Sample Frequencies by Class

	Management	Diversity
Female	47.1%	80.4%
Students of Color	25.4%	25.8%
First Year Students	16.4%	49.0%
“A/A-” grade point average	32.8%	42.0%

Measures

A scaled index of multiple items was used in this study to measure students’ beliefs in the importance of taking action for social justice (see Table 3 for a list of individual items). The dependent variable was one of several measures developed in an earlier study to monitor students’ preparedness for entering a diverse democracy (see Hurtado, Engberg, Ponjuan, Landreman, 2002). The items reflect the extent to which students value the importance of taking personal responsibility for such things as the environment, promoting racial tolerance, volunteer work, and using their talents to aid low-income communities.

Table 3.
Factor Loadings and Reliabilities for Dependent Variable

Factor and survey items	Factor Loading	
	Time 1	Time 2
<u>Importance of taking action for social justice</u> ¹ (alpha = 0.87 at Time 1 & 2)		
Creating awareness of how people affect the environment	0.63	0.64
Promoting racial tolerance and respect	0.66	0.66
Contributing money to a charitable cause	0.62	0.64
Speaking up against social injustice	0.77	0.71
Volunteering with community groups or agencies	0.67	0.69
Working to end poverty	0.79	0.79
Using career-related skills to work in low-income communities	0.75	0.80

¹ Component items were measured on a 4-point scale where “Not important” = 1 to “Essential” = 4.

Table 4 and Table 5 depict the variable names, means, and standard deviations for each of the variables used in the analyses. The independent variables include students’ background characteristics, academic self-confidence, involvement in co-curricular activities, reasons for taking a diversity or management course, and expected grade in the class. In order to capture the amount of interaction students had with students of color (SOC) different than themselves and with white students, we used two separate measures. In creating the first measure, we used both a three-item scale for students of color (amount of interaction with African American, Asian, Latina/o, and Native American students excluding students’ self-identified race) and a four-item scale for white and Multiracial students that included all four racial groups (see Table 4 for information about the second measure). Additionally, two separate indicators were used to measure both the positive and negative quality of students’ interactions with diverse peers. Thus, the study provided both frequency of interaction measures as well as measures of the quality of interactions that students had with diverse peers (both prior to course enrollment and during course enrollment).

Table 4.
Variables for Analysis (Time 1)

Variables	Mean	SD	Alpha
<u>Dependent Variable</u>			
Importance of taking action for social justice (7-item scale; Range 1-4)	2.70	0.61	0.87
<u>Independent Variables</u>			
<i>Background</i>			
Sex (1= male, 2= female)			
Race (0= white, 1= SOC)			
Age	20.22	2.52	
Racial composition of HS (1=all white, 5=all students of color)	2.01	0.96	
High school GPA (1=D, 4=A)	3.31	0.50	
Academic self-confidence (7-item scale; Range 1-5)	3.83	0.57	0.78
<i>Campus Experience</i>			
Year at institution (Range 1-5)	2.13	1.06	
Involvement in frat/sor activities (1=Not at all, 4=Substantially)	1.56	0.91	
Involvement in political activities (1=Not at all, 4=Substantially)	0.42	0.49	
Number of diversity courses (Range 0-15)	4.34	2.81	
Reason for taking course (1=required, 2= elective)	1.21	0.41	
<i>Amount of Interaction</i>			
With different SOC (3-4-item scale; Range 1- 4)	2.38	0.60	
With white students (1=No interaction, 4=Substantial interaction)	3.79	0.56	
<i>Quality of Interaction with Diverse Peers</i>			
Positive quality (4-item scale; Range 1-5)	2.77	1.12	0.83
Negative quality (2-item scale; Range 1-5)	1.85	1.01	0.83

Table 5:
Variables for Analysis (Time 2)

Variables	Mean	SD	Alpha
<u>Dependent Variable</u>			
Importance of taking action for social justice at Time 2 (7-item scale; Range 1-4)	2.73	.61	.87
<u>Independent Variables</u>			
<i>Pre-test</i>			
Importance of taking action for social justice at Time 1 (7-item scale; Range 1-4)	2.70	0.61	0.87
<i>Experiences During Term</i>			
Course (0=Management, 1=Educ or WS)	0.61	0.49	
Expected grade for course (1=D, 4=A)	3.44	0.49	
Increased level of extra curricular activities (0=no, 1=yes)	1.42	0.49	
<i>Amount of Interaction</i>			
With different SOC (3-4-item scale; Range 1- 4)	2.56	0.65	
With white students (Range 1- 4)	3.79	0.52	
<i>Quality of Interaction with Diverse Peers</i>			
Positive quality (4-item scale; Range 1-5)	2.91	1.04	0.80
Negative quality (2-item scale; Range 1-5)	1.97	1.09	0.85

Analyses

Descriptive analyses were first used to examine the frequencies, means, and standard deviations of all of the variables in the study. Crosstabulations were then conducted to compare the frequencies of several variables between the management and diversity courses. T-tests were used to determine whether there were significant differences between the diversity and management classes (along select variables) and between the means of the outcome (students' assessment of the importance of taking social action) measured at the beginning and end of the semester.

Two separate multiple regression analyses were employed to understand significant influences on the dependent variable at the beginning (Time 1) and end (Time 2) of the semester. In the first regression model, the dependent variable (Time 1) was regressed on three blocks of independent variables: student background characteristics, college experience variables (e.g., involvement, previous diversity courses taken), and the interaction variables (both quantity and quality). The rationale for this ordering was to first control for background characteristics as these tend to be highly correlated with specific outcomes and are major influences on student change (see Astin, 1984; Weidman, 1989). College experience variables were entered next as these experiences are likely precursors to the final block of interaction measures. Moreover, both students' characteristics and college experiences contribute to the "selection effect" that influences both course selection and predispositions on the dependent variable.

The second model regressed the dependent variable (Time 2) on three blocks of independent variables: the importance of taking action for social justice at the beginning of the semester, the course-type and course experience measures; and interaction variables. We first controlled for the Time 1 measure of the dependent variable, as the short length of the semester suggests a high degree of predictability among the dependent measures. Next, we added variables related to the course experience and course-type as we were interested in understanding the differential course effect and believed this would influence the final block of interaction variables. The final block included both quantity and quality measures of students' interactions with diverse peers during the semester.

Limitations

A limitation of this study is its reliance on self-report data to measure growth along the dependent variable. There are many disadvantages to using data for this purpose, including the possibility that student perceptions may not be a true reflection of their behaviors and beliefs.

The higher education research community, however, currently lacks widely used measures of the skills and dispositions necessary for preparing students to become engaged citizens. 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. The results of the study, therefore, may not be readily generalizable to other classroom contexts. 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.

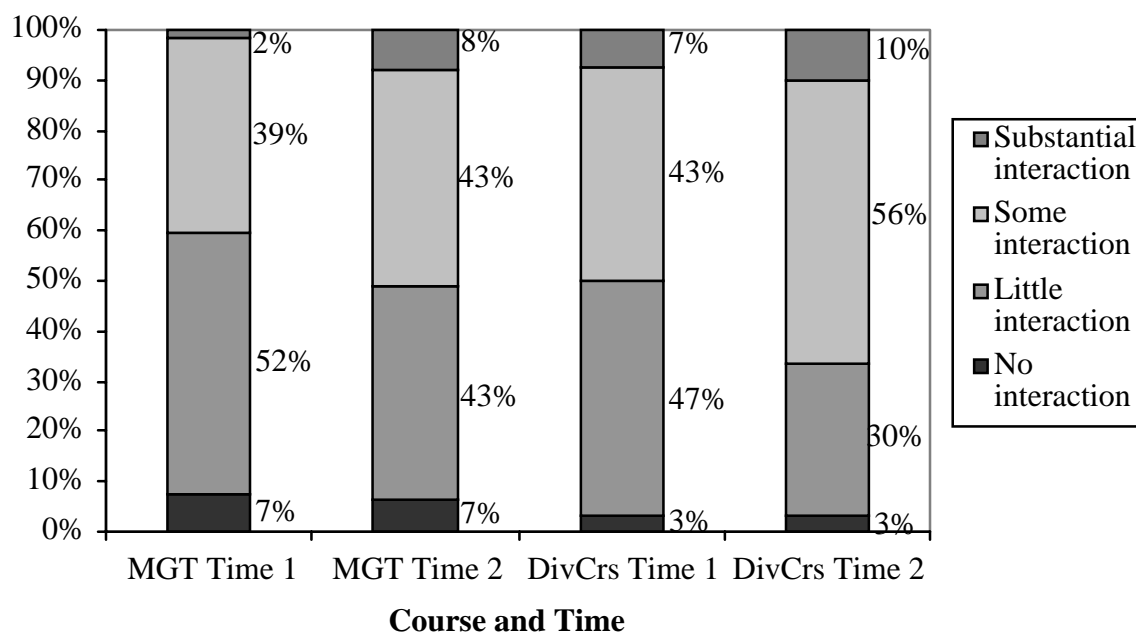
Results

Interaction Measures

As we expected, students in the diversity courses reported higher levels of interaction with students of color (mean = 2.45) than did students in the management course (mean difference = 0.18, $t = 2.61$, $p < 0.01$). At the beginning of the semester 41% of the students in the management course reported some or substantial interaction with students of color, whereas 50% of the students in the diversity courses reported interacting with students of color at similar levels; percentages at the end of the semester were 51% and 66%, respectively. As this suggests,

the average amount of interaction with students of color increased significantly in both courses (management mean difference = 0.18, $t = 3.32$, $p < 0.01$; diversity courses mean difference = 0.18, $t = 4.33$, $p < 0.001$). As expected, the increase for the diversity courses was higher (16%) than in the management course (10%).

Figure 1: Amount of Interaction with Students of Color

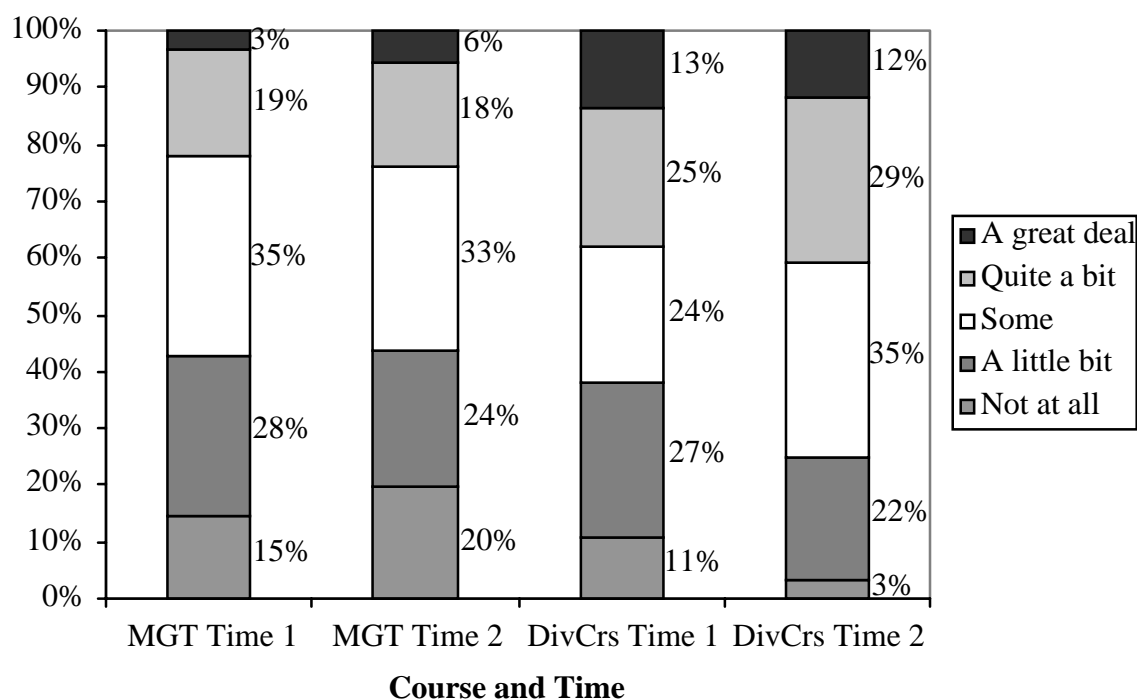


This study was conducted on a predominantly white campus and as such, we expected most students to report high levels of interaction with white students. Our results supported this hypothesis in that, at the beginning of the semester, students in the management and diversity courses reported substantial interaction with white students (mean = 3.79 on a 4-point scale). Also, as would be expected, differences between the courses and from the beginning to the end of the semester in regard to interaction with whites were not significant.

As Figure 2 indicates, students in the diversity courses report higher frequencies of positive interactions than students in the management course. Mean scores regarding the amount

of positive quality interaction at the beginning of the semester for management (2.60) and diversity courses (2.88) students were significantly different ($t=2.17, p<.05$). Fifty-seven percent of management students reported some to a great deal of positive interaction, a percentage that did not change over the course of the semester. In contrast, 62% of students in the diversity courses had some to a great deal of positive interaction with diverse peers. This increased to 75% by the end of the semester. Comparing mean scores from the beginning and end of the semester for positive quality of interaction with diverse peers indicate that no significant change occurred for management students whereas students enrolled in diversity courses showed a significant increase from 2.88 to 3.11 ($t=3.12, p<0.01$).

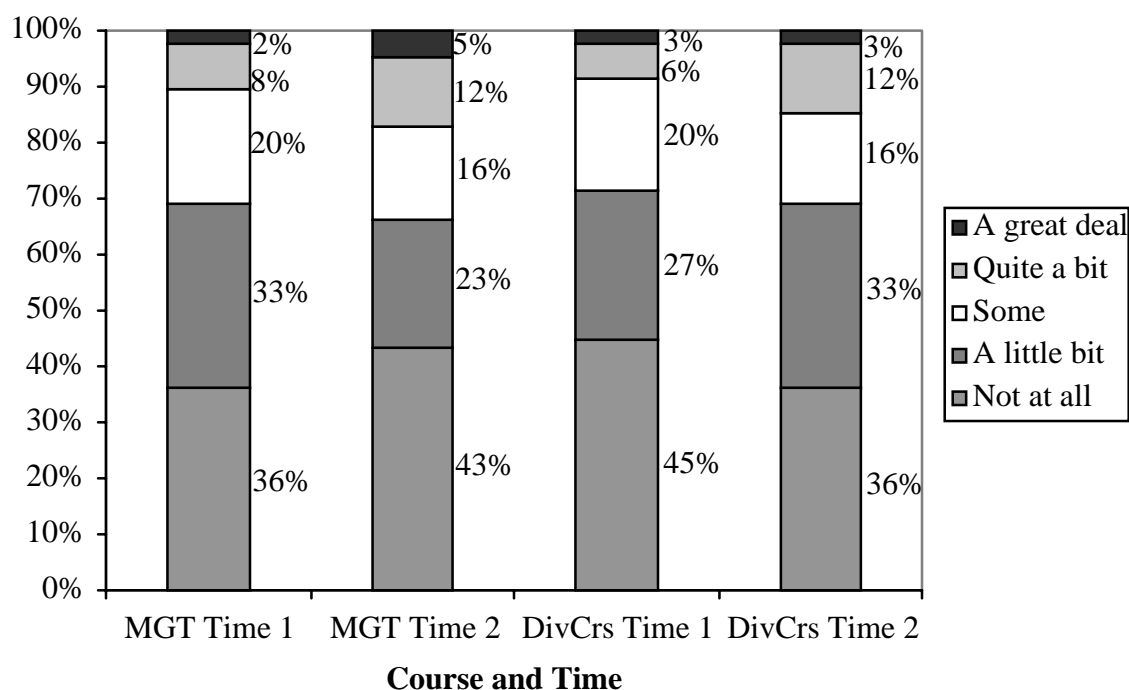
Figure 2: Positive Quality of Interaction



Interestingly, t-test results indicate that diversity course students also experienced an increase in the negative quality of interaction with diverse peers over the course of the semester (mean difference=0.17, $t=2.04, p<.05$), whereas students enrolled in the management course

showed no significant change in the amount of negative quality of interaction they encountered. Although the percentages reported in Figure 3 present a more complex picture than the t-test results, the percentage of diversity course students reporting quite a bit or a great deal of negative interaction increased from 9% at the beginning of the semester to 15% at the end of the semester. This finding suggests that diversity courses provide the intellectual space for students to engage in controversial issues and conflicting viewpoints. We will return to this finding in the discussion section.

Figure 3: Negative Quality of Interaction

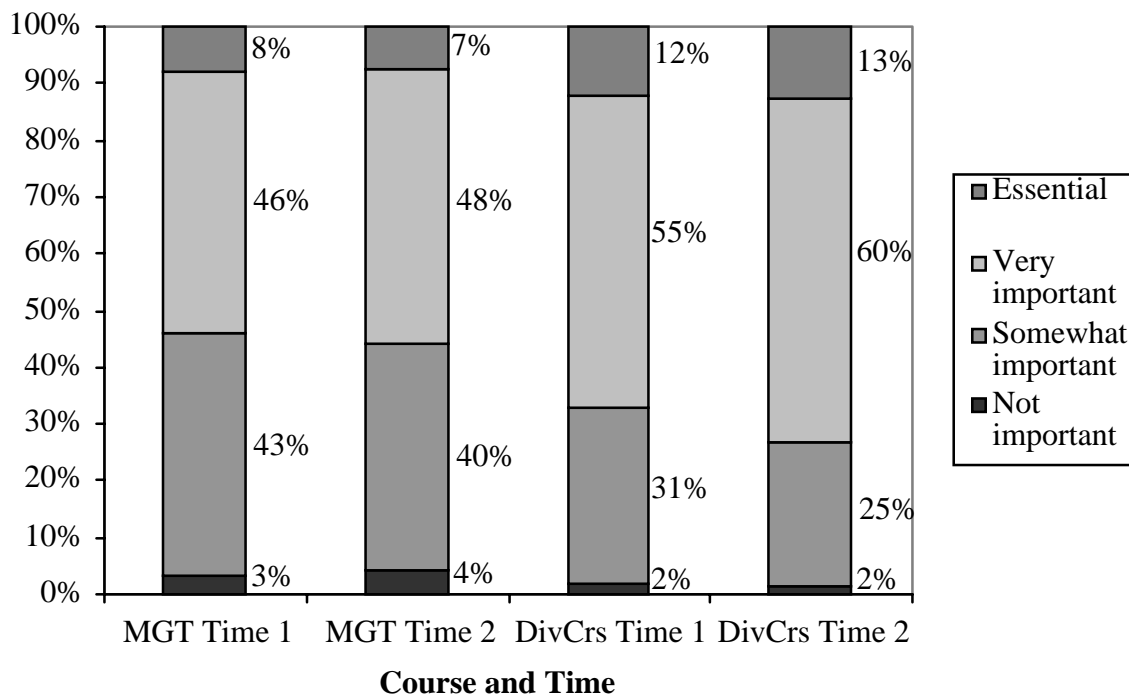


Importance of Taking Action for Social Justice

At the beginning of the semester 54% of students enrolled in the management course and 67% of students enrolled in diversity courses indicated that taking action for social justice was very important or essential. Mean scores from the management course (2.59) and the diversity course (2.77) indicate that students in the diversity courses began the semester with a slightly

greater belief in the importance of taking action for social justice (mean difference=.18, $t=2.59$, $p<.01$). At the end of the semester, management students' scores showed no significant change on the dependent variable. However, the mean score for students enrolled in diversity courses showed a significant increase by the end of the semester (mean difference = 0.07, $t=2.10$, $p<.05$). The t-test results also suggest that there are important differences between the students who enrolled in the diversity courses versus the management course that should be controlled for in order to better understand the effect of enrolling in a diversity course.

Figure 4: Importance of Taking Action for Social Justice



The importance of taking action for social justice is intended to measure students' willingness to act and initiate change in society. Our regression analyses (see Tables 6 and 7), suggest that several background characteristics, campus experiences, amount and quality of interaction, as well as taking a diversity course significantly influence students' beliefs about the importance of taking action for social justice.

Using a model that included background characteristics, campus experience, amount of interaction, and quality of interaction, we were able to explain 25% of the variance in the importance of taking action for social justice at Time 1 (see Table 6). In effect, this model accounts for students' characteristics and predispositions at the beginning of the semester.

The number of diversity courses taken in prior semesters is the strongest positive predictor of the dependent variable ($\beta = 0.19, p < 0.01$) implying that taking diversity courses increases the level of importance a student places on taking action for social justice. Along with the t-test results, this strongly supports our hypothesis that enrolling in one of the diversity courses in our study will positively influence the level of importance students place on taking action for social justice and foreshadows the results presented in Table 7.

In further support of our hypotheses, both positive quality of interaction and negative quality of interaction are predictors (positive and negative, respectively) of the importance of taking action for social justice. As we might expect, the frequency of interaction with students of color was significantly correlated with the dependent measure in Time 1 ($p < .001$). This relationship changes by the final step of the regression, however, indicating that it is not so much the frequency of interaction with diverse peers but the quality of interaction that is most important to students' commitment to social action upon course enrollment.

In addition, our regression results show that, prior to the course enrollment, taking action for social justice was generally of greater importance to women and students of color than their classmates on this predominantly-white campus. Other positive predictors include students' academic self-confidence and involvement in political activities. In contrast, high involvement in fraternity or sorority activities is a negative predictor, indicating that interaction with peers similar to oneself is associated with and may shape low interest in taking action for social justice.

Table 6.
Regression Results—Importance of Taking Action for Social Justice (Time 1)

	r	B	Beta	
<i>Background</i>				
Sex (1=male, 2=female)	0.23***	0.24	0.18	**
Race (1=white, 2=SOC)	0.13**	0.21	0.14	*
Age	0.02	0.01	0.05	
Racial composition of HS	0.15**	0.03	0.04	
High school GPA	0.15**	0.08	0.07	
Academic self-confidence	0.18**	0.14	0.13	*
<i>Campus Experience</i>				
Year at university	0.02	-0.04	-0.06	
Involvement in fraternity/sorority activities	-0.14**	-0.11	-0.16	**
Involvement in political activities	0.14**	0.10	0.12	*
Number of diversity courses	0.25***	0.04	0.19	**
Reason for taking course (1=required, 2= elective)	0.07	-0.04	-0.03	
<i>Amount of Interaction</i>				
With different SOC	0.23***	0.10	0.10	
With white students	0.01	0.04	0.03	
<i>Quality of Interaction with Diverse Peers</i>				
Positive quality	0.24***	0.08	0.14	*
Negative quality	-0.05	-0.12	-0.19	**
(constant)		0.49		
Multiple R		0.50		
R squared		0.25		
Adjusted R squared		0.21		
Standard Error		0.55		
F		5.65***		
N		266		

* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Before moving on to the next regression, it is important to highlight that the variables in this model (Time 1) have indirect effects on the dependent variable in the second model (Time 2) through the inclusion of the pre-test. So, although variables like sex, race, number of previous diversity courses, and students' interactions before the course are not included in the second model, their influence is accounted and controlled for through the taking action for social justice variable measured at the beginning of the semester (Time 1).

In analyzing students' responses at the end of the semester, the first block in the regression, containing only the pre-test, accounted for 47% of the total variance. This effect remains strong and significant as each additional block was entered. In the final model the pre-test was by far the strongest predictor ($\beta = .63, p < .001$) of the dependent measure (Time 2). Entering the course variable explained an additional 2% of the total variance, increasing the explainable variance to 49%. The remaining blocks account for an additional 2% of the variance bringing the total variance explained to 51%.

After controlling for the pre-test, students enrolled in the diversity courses still demonstrated significantly higher interest in taking action for social justice than students in the management course. Similar to the results for the dependent variable (Time 1), the amount of interaction with students of color is significantly correlated with the dependent measure (Time 2, $r = .23, p < .001$), but diminishes to non-significance by the final step of the regression as a result of variance shared with the (positive) quality of interaction with diverse peers. Thus, controlling for predispositions, again we show that the quality of interaction with diverse peers is increasing students' value of the importance of taking social action. We also see in this regression that the inclusion of several interaction measures weakens the effect of diversity course enrollment—not a surprisingly result in light of the relationship between the diversity courses and their role in

increasing student interaction with diverse peers discussed earlier. This confirms bivariate results with statistical controls, indicating the effect of enrollment in a diversity course as well as experiences with diverse peers that have a decided impact on changes in students' commitment to personally engaging in social action to improve society.

TABLE 7
Regression Results—Importance of Taking Action for Social Justice (Time 2)

	r	B	Beta	
<i>Pre-test</i>				
Importance of taking action for social justice (Time 1)	0.69***	0.63	0.63	***
<i>Experiences During Term</i>				
Course (0=Management, 1=Educ or WS)	0.24***	0.12	0.09	*
Expected grade for course	0.16**	0.09	0.07	
Increased level of extracurricular activities	0.05	-0.02	-0.01	
<i>Amount of Interaction</i>				
With different SOC	0.20***	0.02	0.03	
With white students	0.06	0.01	0.01	
<i>Quality of Interaction with Diverse Peers</i>				
Positive quality	0.28***	0.09	0.15	**
Negative quality	0.02	-0.04	-0.07	
(constant)		0.40		
Multiple R		0.72		
R squared		0.51		
Adjusted R squared		0.50		
Standard Error		0.43		
F		39.69***		
N		310		

* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Discussion

This study makes several important contributions to the literature on diversity and civic outcomes among college students. The results indicate that despite students' predispositions, diversity courses have a positive effect on the quality and quantity of students' interaction with diverse peers and the importance they place on taking action for social justice—crucial components for moving toward eradicating social inequities. After controlling for confounding variables that account for the differences among students who select these courses, it is clear that students enrolled in the diversity courses are more likely to show increases in valuing the importance of taking action for social justice than students enrolled in the management course. It was more than course content, however, that accounted for these differences. This study demonstrated that the nature of the course matters. Simply sitting in the same classroom with a diverse peer is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the outcome we studied (as both the management and diversity courses had the same percentage of students of color). Nor does frequency of interaction with students of color produce the same, or as powerful, results as shaping the quality of interactions that students' experience with diverse peers. Courses that intentionally increase the level of interaction among peers and are attentive to the quality of their interactions contribute to students' ability to transform their experiences with diverse peers into an increased commitment to social justice.

A second important contribution is that the study acknowledges and demonstrates an “accentuation effect” (Feldman and Newcomb, 1969) whereby students who enter with a commitment to social justice tend to be women, students of color, and students who have already taken other diversity courses. Therefore, the control for this predisposition at the beginning of the semester was critical to understanding the type of interactions in classrooms that result in

actual increases in commitment to social justice. Moreover, the curriculum and experiences in a diversity course serves to reinforce initial commitments, as we might expect from an accentuation effect. It is interesting to note that despite the fact that sororities and fraternities have service activities, these students who frequently participated in these organizations were less inclined to have adopted a social justice orientation regardless of the number of diversity courses they have taken or their social background. We believe this suggests that homogeneous peer groups may have an equally powerful influence as diverse peer groups on individuals, but with significantly different effects on student values. It is an area for future study and development in the research literature.

Implications for Practice

Higher education institutions face two broad challenges: 1) to create educational practices that encourage constructive interactions and learning across lines of conflict or potential conflict; and 2) to facilitate greater social awareness and democratic participation among students so that they can positively influence intergroup relations (Zúñiga, Nagda, & Sevig, in press). The presence of structural or content diversity necessitates a reassessment of what skills are needed to negotiate conflict in the classroom. Faculty members, therefore, must make a commitment to mediating conflict and creatively addressing difference within the classroom in order to create learning environments that address these challenges. Instructors must create classroom spaces where students can learn about their own and others' social identity groups, bridge differences between groups and develop positive approaches to conflict. Examples of teaching strategies that help create these classroom environments include creating intentional dialogue components, establishing process guidelines for discussion, facilitating

group commitments for civil discourse or incorporating reflective opportunities such as journal writing or assignments that draw from course discussions.

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 maximize the potential for learning from peers. This can be accomplished through the creation of classroom structure, content, and pedagogy that encourages understanding and interaction as well as ensure instructors are prepared to facilitate the dialogues that transpire within an increasingly diverse campus community. By creating intentional pedagogies that foster diverse interactions, we also prepare students for their roles as engaged citizens and social change agents in a diverse democracy.

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