Toward Ending the Monolithic View of “Underrepresented Students”: Why Higher Education Must Account for Racial, Ethnic, and Economic Variations in Barriers to Equity

Robert McGuire
June 2022 for ASU REMOTE
“Reporting numeric data in the aggregate constitutes a malpractice as it hides significant inequalities across groups. [Underrepresented minority] promotes color-blindness; it contravenes the principle of critical race consciousness that is essential to achieving equity in higher education. URM blinds us to the monumental differences in the circumstances that turned Blacks, Hispanics, Asian-Americans, and American Indians into URM’s.”

- Estela Bensimon, “The Misbegotten URM as a Data Point”
The work in progress

- What does disaggregated data show about how barriers to equity in higher education vary for specific student populations?

- Populations of interest: Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Asian American and Pacific Islander, poverty-affected, and first-generation students

- Goal of the report is to advance intersectional and data-informed conversations about equity in digital learning

- Process: Literature review + original interviews with experts including students, educators, and researchers
Student data is rarely disaggregated. (But not never.)

The disaggregated that does exist goes only so far. (i.e. columns on white students, Black students, and “other minorities.”)

Even less disaggregated data for digital learning.

Student data tends to be limited to inputs and outputs. (i.e. admissions and commencement) There is little disaggregated data about student experiences of barriers to equity while in college and of what works.
Some disaggregated data

American Council on Education's *Race and Ethnicity In Higher Education, 2019* and *2020 supplement*

[https://www.equityinhighered.org/](https://www.equityinhighered.org/)
Also of interest

AIHEC AIMS
American Indian Measures of Success database
Managed by The American Indian Higher Education Consortium

http://www.aihec.org/our-stories/measuresSuccess.htm

SEARAC/IHEP
“Everyone Deserves to be Seen:” Recommendations for Improved Federal Data on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders
The Southeast Asia Resource Action Center and the Institute for Higher Education Policy

Why does disaggregation matter?

› Illuminate group heterogeneity
Why does disaggregation matter?

- Illuminate group heterogeneity
- Illuminate students’ assets
Why does disaggregation matter?

- Illuminate group heterogeneity
- Illuminate students’ assets
- Illuminate overlooked barriers to equity
- Enable intersectional analysis
- Enable localization
- Illuminate systemic inequities and enable institutional transformation that centers equity
There is a perceived tension between data and personalization.

Institutions must better understand patterns of lived experiences and also make space to understand students individually.
Two early findings

Students value safe space to address issues of identity

Students value compassion and kindness
Broad agreement that it’s counterproductive to treat all minoritized and poverty affected students as a monolith and agreement that their experiences of barriers to equity vary. But there is not enough disaggregated data to show comprehensively how those variations are at work.

Advancing equity efforts will depend on better disaggregated data and on creating systems and cultures to understand students individually.

Interviews start to illuminate the question to show:
- student heterogeneity
- student assets
- unanticipated barriers to equity
- what’s locally relevant
- the institutional role in systemic inequities

In summary . . .
Thank You

Robert McGuire
robert@mcguireeditorial.com
@robertwmguire

Patricia O’Sullivan, Content Manager, Every Learner Everywhere
posullivan@wiche.edu
Toward Ending the Monolithic View of “Underrepresented Students”: Why Higher Education Must Account for Racial, Ethnic, and Economic Variations in Barriers to Equity

Robert McGuire
June 2022 for ASU REMOTE