

A CASE STUDY OF THE CONSTRAINTS TO DIVERSIFY A
STUDENT BODY AT A SMALL LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE

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On my honor
I have neither given nor received
unauthorized aid on this thesis.

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Abstract

This paper explores the modern and annual constraints that small, liberal arts institutions face when attempting to create a diverse student body. Research suggests that institutions have historically employed recruiting programs that were biased against certain underprivileged and minority populations, creating an overtly homogenized campus as a result. This case study highlights the tools that Colorado College employs, (or has re-developed) in response to the societal demand for diversity in higher education. Using a largely qualitative approach, eleven individuals with major positions in either the Colorado College Office of Admissions or other roles in student life were interviewed. Messaging tools such as pamphlets, campus tours and prospective student information sessions were also examined. Results indicate that incorporation of more diversity requires 1) contextualization, 2) rationalization and 3) greater capital spending.

Introduction

This paper examines structural pressures that small liberal arts institutions face to diversify a student body while balancing other traditional challenges of creating a class. “Diversity” for the purpose of this study is multi-faceted, denoting any measurable difference from the majority that pervades a student body. Many times the literature uses “diversity” to denote racial difference, and in many instances to describe anything that is “not white” (Weiss 2016). Though similar thinking may be used in this paper, it is important to note that many of the following schools discussed in this paper are predominantly white institutions, therefore the use of the term “diversify” might sometimes serve to indicate a movement away from that. Similarly, due to the inherent selectivity associated with expensive tuition, a large number of students of these institutions come from affluent backgrounds, therefore *socioeconomic* diversity is also a principal aspect of the term. The traditional measures of diversity for institutions include students of color, minorities and underprivileged populations, and it is understood that the cultural capital found in these types of students sufficiently adds value to an education (Johnson 2011).

The literature examined in this paper stresses the growing importance of exposure to diversity for future generations of students by exploring the point in which enrollment and ethnicity merge (Steinberg 2002). Similarly, literature on the physical processes implemented by each institution that allow them to achieve a more diverse student body have also informed this paper (Alon 2013 and Oaks 2000). There appears to be somewhat of a void in the intersection of the two bodies of knowledge, with no full fleshing-out of the *incorporation* of diversity to admission systems that have historically relied on quantified and measurable methods to select students (Hirschman, Berrey and Rose-Greenland 2016). It seems as if one body of knowledge stresses the societal need for social change in higher education, whereas the other critiques the processes and methods used to attend to the need. In one piece, this case study of Colorado College links this disparity and is organized to explore first the conceptualization of merit across diverse communities and the

methods of standardization employed by institutions to augment accessibility. Furthermore, it will explore the intricate to macro-level economic constraints of higher education with regards to financial aid and the “price tag” of education. Results are intended to inform the departments that shape the student body and provide context to a highly complex issue.

The literature review is organized first to provide a background of the history of diversity in higher education and the previous regimes that tended to be biased against individuals from lesser-privileged backgrounds. Secondly, the review intends to highlight how admission officers handle (or handled) the task of diversifying a student body in response to growing research advocating for its societal benefit. In order to do so, this review will examine how different types of schools amend their processes, as well as highlight the unique circumstances and “solutions” that different schools employ.

Literature review

In recent decades college admission committees have been tasked with re-tooling and re-rationalizing the mechanisms for creating each upcoming class of students to fit a system more conscious of the need to diversify (Berry, Hirschman, Rose-Greenland 2016). Research attests to the educational and societal benefits of having a diverse student body, however dissemination of the intricate processes that different types of institutions employ have gone fundamentally unexplored (2016). Private liberal arts colleges have approached the process of diversification in more refined ways than larger state schools because of their more intimate classroom sizes and high percentage of on-campus residents (Crutcher 2016). According to Crutcher’s study, millennial students have notably less empathy than students of previous generations, and they are maturing during a time where development of multicultural understanding, engagement and responsibility is crucial for future success. An examination of decades of admissions statistics, William Bowen and Derek Bok (2000) found that of the schools engaged in “four decade-old efforts” to engage and recruit students of color and other minority populations had succeeded in producing individuals of the highest caliber, such as doctors and lawyers, and even noticed a sizable increase in the black middle and upper classes.

Engaging students of color has measurable benefits for an institution, but the actual recruitment side is focal struggle for many colleges (Ispa-Landa 2015). Ispa-Landa contends that the systems of enrollment in higher education have historically relied on quantifiable measures such as GPA and SAT scores to heavily inform what each student class will look like each year. Civil Rights activists during the 50s and 60s argued that quantification of an individual’s merit to this degree perpetuated inequality in the educational system, and contended that meritocratic systems benefitted the white-affluent groups that possessed the resources to fit desired criteria (Bennett 2016). Admission researchers point out that although the systems were inherently unequal, the continual upkeep and operation of educational institutions is reliant upon the tuition money paid by the affluent communities

(Spencer 2015). Spencer's research argues that there will always exist a "financial threshold" that is put in place to ensure that an institution has the financial wherewithal to operate each year. This is to say that an institution of higher education must rationalize financial limitations with emerging societal needs. Models of rationality have always existed in college enrollment, but as schools continue to try and appeal to a broader spectrum of students, admissions officers are constantly pressured to reassess their devices for enrollment.

History of Diversity in Higher Education

It was during the Civil Rights movement that the need for fundamental changes to the U.S educational system were stressed, which led to legislation such as the US Civil Rights Act of 1964 that maintained that universities and other organizations could no longer legally discriminate based on race. One product of the Civil Rights Act was the emergence of affirmative action in college admission: an idea designed to support the recognition of race as a tool in evaluation and selection (Romero and Fuentes 2013). Affirmative action programs have also been highly contested in recent decades, and some researchers argue that affirmative programs are rooted in the same classifying ideologies that place unfair value on one group at the expense of another, complicating the already difficult task of allotting financial aid and filling a fixed amount of classroom seats (Johnson 2011). Affirmative action as a policy continues to bring up many areas of debate, as evident in the 1978 court case *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (Stokes and Lawson 2003). The case examines the use of racial quotas in the admissions selection process by arguing that affirmative admissions constitute a constitutional violation. Allan Bakke, a seemingly over-qualified white applicant to the Berkeley medical school was denied on account of the limited number of seats still available that were reserved for minority students. Stokes and Lawson (2003) summarize the hearing:

The Supreme Court rules in favor of Allen Bakke, asserting that the universities' two-race based admission tracks, one for black, the other for white applicants, constitutes a violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the U.S Constitution. From this point, the Court additionally finds it necessary to disallow the Equal Protection Clause to perpetuate racial supremacy at its onset.

Affirmative action as a practice was not "disallowed" following this case, but the ruling forced many institutions to redevelop their programs that previously consisted of two distinct admissions processes: one for white applicants and another for minority applicants. Newer forms of affirmative action remain staples in selective college admissions, and allow colleges to consider race and ethnicity a "plus" to an application if they like (Steinberg 2002).

Small liberal arts schools maintain that affirmative practices of racially based support in the admissions process ultimately satisfy and address certain societal needs. Rucker C. Johnson (2011) asks if schools can level the intergenerational

playing field by way of exploring various educational policies that are loosely based on affirmative action ideologies. His research found that students that were exposed to more diversity and difference achieved higher levels of success. Even more notably, “the narrowing of the achievement gap and the increased success of black Americans did not have any negative effect on white students on any metric.” Bowen and Bok (2000) concluded that although it may seem like a major social justice issue, both students of color *and* their white counterparts benefitted from interacting with minority students on campus and residential areas. In recent years, studies are beginning to highlight that success of *all* students studying in fields such as demography, law, occupations, urban sociology and planning, sex roles and social inequality, and education is inextricably linked to the presence of diversity on campus (Camacho and Gaytán 2014). Unlike large schools like University of California Medical School, smaller, competitive liberal arts institutions continue using affirmative action and consider race to be a “hook” on a student’s application (Bollinger 2002).

Higher Education as a Meritocracy

When colleges begin the discussion of diversity, directors of admission face an ethical dilemma of assigning value to an incredibly eclectic applicant pool. Higher education researcher Bruce Alberts (2015) sees the role of admissions as a science, but acknowledges that there will always exist some sort of criticism for how decisions are made. First, he explains that while the methodology of college admissions is less quantified than it was in the 1950s, systematic measures such as Grade Point Average (GPA), standardized test scores (SAT and ACT), as well as common application and interview assessments are necessary as reliable predictors of collegiate readiness, intelligence and success (Alberts 2015 and College Board 2015). The problem that schools are continually encountering is an annual reproduction of the status quo, rather than achievement of social change.

As Oaks and Rodgers (2000) caution, successful social change lies in the contextualized interpretation of merit. They maintain that millennial students are under the misconception that in order to impress an admissions team, they must appear more “meritorious” than the competition. Sociological research continues to critique the processes of a meritocracy because the cultural capital found in white and affluent communities tends to *appear* meritorious, acting on paper as a form of natural intelligence rather than as a product of social privilege (Jackson and Reynolds 2013; Roper 1966). Remarking on the increasingly competitive nature of college admissions, Oaks, Rodgers and Lipton (2000) highlight the mechanisms of privilege in selective college admissions:

As we extend our academic support programs to underprivileged communities, advantaged communities will begin even earlier. As we make SAT prep programs more widely available, advantaged families will seek more intense and longer-lasting preparation. As we increase our hands-on assistance with preparing disadvantaged minorities for college applications,

advantaged parents will increasingly turn to private college counseling services. The result will be an ever-escalating standard for eligibility.

College admission has become empirically more selective in recent years, especially in private schools where applications have nearly doubled in the last decade (Strayhorn 2011). Using Weber's Iron Cage of Rationality as our theoretical framework, it becomes clear that the need for efficient and rational quantification to some degree persists. A retooling of what constitutes "merit" is necessary, and warrants a largely qualitative approach. Just as important is the degree of practical quantification if schools wish to attend to the traditional pressures of creating a class. The college-bound environment is more competitive than it ever was in the past, and it almost appears as if competition creates more inequality than is intended (Symonds 2006).

Programs and Pipelines

Because underprivileged communities tend to lack the resources to find and compete for many elite colleges, institutions are feeling more pressure each year to establish pipelines that directly access and attract a broader range of students (Oaks 2000). Small, selective schools are aware of the unique pressures to create small classes, and have developed programs and models designed to reach out to underprivileged and diverse communities. Coming from an ethnic or diverse background certainly stands out on an application but academic achievement is never overlooked (College Board 2015). Larger schools such as the University Schools in California, tend to work with larger and more generalized pools of applicants than a small, liberal arts school, but their approach plays a large role in understanding the required mechanisms of change (Blandizzi 2013). Admissions officers at the University of California Los Angeles were the first of many schools, through an exercise of extreme transparency, to disseminate the formation of "asset based community programs" used to construct each upcoming class (Oaks 2000). The first step in many cases requires what they call "student-centered approach," that consists of targeted efforts and collaboration with teachers to identify students that demonstrate higher degrees of potential. These students receive private support from members of the UC Outreach staff to help them become more "competitively eligible" in the admissions front. Trained UCLA undergraduates called "fellows" (typically students of color) will accompany the staff to college workshops in lesser-privileged communities. The goal of the fellows is to access "optimal learners in less than optimal schooling systems" (2000) and standardize the resources for competition.

Hirschman, Berrey and Rose-Greenland (2016) look at "holistic admission policies" at larger institutions such as UCLA in an effort to make the evaluation process less mechanically quantified and more attractive to a broader spectrum of communities. They found that systems of quantification were more likely to satisfy the financial needs of an institution, for example the quantification of eligible students capable of paying full price of admissions, but had a difficult time predicting future academic achievement and socially driven senses of belonging.

Their work helped inform many of the processes at the University of Michigan by emphasizing the need for a contextualized evaluation system for underprivileged communities that evaluated promise in relation to the applicant's community rather than to the merits of other high schools. Such a change required more staff members in the admissions office, but in turn the school observed a notable increase of minority applications and acceptances.

Smaller schools tend to adhere to more definitive methods of recruitment due to the inherently small class of students accepted each year. Colby College, a small liberal arts institution in Waterville, Maine, has adopted the Posse Program as a way of satisfying their unique barriers to diversify (Boyle 2003). Founder Deborah Bial says that the program was designed to recruit students with extraordinary academic and leadership abilities but might otherwise be excluded from traditional college enrollment as a result of their background or socioeconomic status. With help from the Posse Foundation, "students are recruited and selected from urban public schools, with the colleges assisting in the final selection of each school's 10-student 'posse.' Students are provided with mentoring and training for success, both before and after graduation" (Bial 2003). Successful Posse programs seek to mitigate some of the social discourse associated with placement of underprivileged students with large proportions of affluence by stating that each "Posse" must contain 10 students of similar backgrounds. Perhaps more so than larger schools, small selective schools have more pressure to cultivate a certain social strata because social structures tend to overlap more within smaller proximities (Ispa-Landa and Conwell 2015).

Through the Posse Program, it is clear that integration to a campus is another variable that admissions committees must consider, and in the case of many small schools for example, it is the first generation students of color that feel the least sense of belonging (Asakawa 2016). As Ispa-Landa and Conwell (2015) argue, affirmative action programs are efficient at recruiting a larger number of diverse students, but it is incorporation and acceptance *on* campus that deserves re-tooling." Historically, the ways in which institutions have dealt with this problem tend to vary. Some institutions have adopted a discourse of "colorblindness" that inherently treats any recognition of racial categories as direct indicators of racial discrimination (Ispa-Landa and Conwell 2015). Some schools have even offered to remove racial identifiers and questions about race and identification from their application forms (Johnson 2011). Though institutions have managed to recruit in different ways, the largest barrier to entry remains a question of money.

Cost of Diversification

The reality for many colleges and universities is that the fundamental systems in place to educate each student come with a lofty price tag. A common question that is inevitably asked at the beginning of each fiscal year is "how much can we afford to spend on our new class?" (Kane 1995). This is to say that very rich schools tend to be more generous to students due to the fact that their budget for financial aid is larger, allowing them to arrange certain financial accommodations for a student that shows particular promise or talent (Hill, Tiefenthaler, and Welsh

2014). Anthony Marx, former president of Amherst College, found that recruiting talent for smaller schools would require more money and space, and might displace some of their high performing affluent students (Symonds 2006). Symonds explains that Marx's main regime changes created 120 new slots to the school to be reserved for low income students, an incorporation of Quest Bridge programs, more counselor visits to identify the most talented students of color, and a campaign to raise 120 million dollars. "The way institutions finance a change like this is with alumni contributions" said Marx. Marx's efforts were obviously met with much criticism that contended, "If Amherst lets in more low income students, we risk the school's reputation" (at the time number 2 ranking nationally). Many professors and parents feared that since many low-income students, regardless of intelligence, tend to arrive from substandard schooling systems, they will likely require extra help to be competitive; help that might diminish the attention given to their more affluent counterparts. According to the U.S Department of the Treasury, only 11% of U.S students scoring at "elite college standard" for the SAT are in the bottom 40% family income brackets, (while 75% reign from the top)(Symonds 2002 and U.S Dep of Treasury 2015). Because Amherst is inherently smaller than a state school, the direction Marx needed to take regarding affirmative action required a class-based approach rather than race-based approach.

In smaller schools like Amherst and Colorado College, it is also important to note that the tuition cost of full pay students is still subsidized to some degree (Hill, Tiefenthaler, Welsh 2014). This is to say that the "sticker price" shown to families is less than the actual cost required to educate each student. Full pay tuition is rarely sufficient to subsidize the students on financial aid, let alone to fully cover the cost of the ones paying it (2014). "Over-subsidizing" complicates the jobs of admissions coordinators by adding a variable of uncertainty. In order to cover the full cost of education, smaller, more selective schools rely heavily on endowment earnings, donations and gifts, and federal funding, as well as returns from other miscellaneous investments (Trostel 2000). As Trostel explains, though institutions have stable models of prediction, each revenue stream brings with it a certain level of uncertainty that will often pit safety against generosity. Uncertainty in the applicant pool is directly affected by uncertainty in the financial sector. Institutions understand that they *must* admit a certain amount of full pay students each year, but similarly are cognizant that not every student that receives an admission letter will accept it (Strayhorn 2011). According to the Naviance College Readiness Database (2016), high school graduating classes of 2014, 2015 and 2016 have applied to an average of thirteen schools, up from seven just a decade ago. Mitchell Stevens in his study of *Economics of Higher Education* (2010) outlines the dilemma: "more than ever, enrollment officers are feeling pressure to 'over-accept' students for their upcoming class because they know that their institution is just one of many other schools on a student's wish list." Year to year, schools are preparing to yield an average of 40-60% of accepted students, so schools must be willing to accept more students than they can actually take, and make more promises than they are likely able to make (Symonds 2002 and U.S Department of Treasury 2015).

i) Discussion

The literature on the notion of diversification identified two major ideas that deserve additional exploration and research. First, both social and financial conditions appear to be different from school to school. This is to say that the “solution” for Amherst might not be the same as the solution for Colorado College. The culmination of ideas begs the question: How has Colorado College re-tooled over the years to satisfy the institutional need for diversity? Second is the matter of social change versus social reproduction. Sociological literature and research constantly assess the effectiveness of the mechanisms for change and seek to understand the governing dynamics that separate different populations. Historically, institutions of higher education evaluate and produce students of similar caliber because the mechanisms of admission tended to favor a narrower spectrum of students. Admission officials in higher education are trying to merge the affluent and non-affluent, privileged and underprivileged, same and different populations for the collective benefit. Results will highlight the measures of diversification and their perceived effectiveness at accomplishing that goal.

Methods

This project is a qualitative case study of Colorado College’s approach to reconciling the increased focus on cultivating a diverse student body, and a close examination of the process of rationalizing the formation of a class each year.**

Data were gathered through interviews with nine major personnel affiliated with the admissions office of Colorado College, and the data gathered is sufficient to generalize to the processes of admissions as a whole at Colorado College. Interview subjects were selected in accordance with the hierarchical layout of the Colorado College admission office, starting at the top. Jill Tiefenthaler, president of Colorado College, was asked fundamental questions about her role in cultivating the new standard for diversity at Colorado College. Mark Hatch-vice president of enrollment, was interviewed after to see how the programs and methodologies of president Tiefenthaler are executed throughout the admission office. A number of Mr. Hatch’s employees, called “admission directors and counselors,” were subsequently interviewed regarding the challenges and limitations that they face when reading a prospective student’s application, and how enrollment rationale operates when attending to the social demands of diversification and inclusion. An interview with Dr. Paul Buckley, Vice President of the Butler Center which focuses on diversity and inclusion, served to highlight some of the challenges that minority students face both in the college search process as well as in their adaptation to the social climate of the school. Jim Swanson, director of financial aid, provided the financial barriers of the school. Athletic Director Ken Ralph was also interviewed to look at athletic processes and how they fit it with formation of a class. A number of low-level, student employees of the admissions office-called admission fellows were also interviewed to see how the regime functions on the fringes. Additional subjects that

are unaffiliated with Colorado College such as Peter Heidekoper, Vice President of the Posse Program were also interviewed to provide contextual information.

Other data sources included my ethnographic position as an admission fellow, literature such as Butler Center and financial aid information pamphlets, group campus tours and information sessions for both casual visitors and exclusive groups like Quest Bridge and Flyin tigers. Tour guides and session leaders understood my ethnographic position and were aware of the use of voice recording software.

All interviewees were notified of the use of voice recording software, and the recordings were then transcribed and coded for data that were separated into one of three categories: programs and pipelines, believed and observed values of diversity, and modern economic limitations. All interviews were semi-structured and done in person. Each interview lasted anywhere from thirty to ninety minutes. Each participant was a trusted, full time (fellows were part-time) employee of Colorado College or their respective institution to ensure internal validity. None were asked any question that they felt uncomfortable answering and could choose to end the interview at any point.

Note** The term “class,” for the sake of this project and subsequent interview formats, refers to the total number of students in a given academic year, ordered by grade, and not to a specific academic course. To avoid this common misconception, it was explained to all the interviewees before the interview that “creating a class,” did not mean “creating a course,” but rather, “selecting the next generation of Colorado College students.”

Results

Introduction

The office of admission alone employs thirty-eight workers (twenty two full time directors and counselors and sixteen part time student fellows). It is important to note that once the final admittance decisions are made, these employees will have had input from over fifty external individuals from various departments such as coaches in athletics, analysts from the office of financial aid, members of the Buckley Center and it’s various student programs, and as of recent years, professors. The results section is set up in a fashion similar to the progression of the methods section, but will often refer to quoted material up and down the hierarchy of admissions for context. Positions of higher power tend to respond in more holistic terms, informing much of the “History of the Regime” section as well as the “Creating a Class” section. Because this paper intends to analyze the specific implementations of rationalized change, each section will try to inform as best as possible how the mission of the higher-ups is executed from top to bottom. Various other players with distinct roles in the process were interviewed and will be included as a part of the flow of results.

The most important discovery made through the interviews highlights the interconnected, and in some ways bureaucratic nature of Colorado College admissions. Primarily, the office of the president informs and employs the jobs necessary to, per the school's mission's statement, "provide the best liberal arts education to a vast array of individuals across the globe." Interestingly, a bi-directional nature exists that allows subsidiary roles in the process to equally inform the offices of the president in the same way. In fact, every department that has a say in student life, ranging from financial aid office to the center of diversity and inclusion, has its own idea of how to reconcile the task of diversification and class creation. These positions were put in place to separately reconcile each of the variables that complicate the final enrollment decisions, and it is the culmination of these roles that represent crux of change. In its most general sense, it is the culmination of input from each of these positions on campus that has allowed Colorado College to rationally reconcile the task of diversification in the past decade.

History of the Regime

Rationalization of the college admissions process has changed dramatically over the years, and according to Mark Hatch, vice president of enrollment, the school's most notable change came in the waning months of 2008 where the entire institutional regime transitioned to accommodate a broader range of students. The financial crisis of 2008 was a marked hardship for the pursuit of diversification because less fortunate students stopped seeking a college degree and institutions were less able to afford financial support. The changes that needed to happen had to occur on a departmental level, and one product of the adaptation was a school-wide collaboration effort. "We relied more on the specific needs of the departments to find students, and looked for students that fit as many [requirements] as possible" said Mark Hatch. Presumably, because of the increased level of selectivity during a financial recession, schools found it necessary to measure student value in a new way. A new method for evaluating students, so to speak, was likely an element of the transition to a reformation of the student body. "Since [President Tiefenthaler] came into office, the number of students of color increased from 17% to 25% in just seven years... part of it came from our recruiting changes and program [re]developments]" says Mr. Hatch. Two major "diversification changes" in CC history came in 2003 and 2008. In 2003, Colorado College created a "fly-in" program that paid for talented students of color to come to the school to be interviewed and learn the tools to become competitively eligible for the school. Colorado College partnered with Quest Bridge in 2008 as a way of quickly rationalizing the unknown population of talented students by identifying the *most* talented minority or students of color, and of whom had the highest likelihood of choosing CC. Because the high demand for diverse students is becoming so apparent, outreach programs are annually implemented to fit new developments in college accessibility. Little that was comparable in effectiveness to Quest Bridge existed before this for CC.

Programs and Pipelines

Before 2008, the methods for finding and recruiting students of color, minority students, and students from underprivileged communities were largely reliant upon counselor visits to known feeder schools and dealt with a comparatively limited number of potential applicants. In 2012, Quest Bridge released a “matching program” that helped identify talented students and match them to schools online based on their preference, eliminating travel costs and allowing for more effective use of recruiting time. Though anyone can apply to receive a quest bridge scholarship, upwards of 75% of Quest Bridge finalists to Colorado College are students of color or below the median household income line, and remains one of the biggest contributing factors to the 8% increase in students of color, explains Cari Hanrahan, director of the Quest Bridge program at CC. “A compelling applicant for Quest Bridge is a highly talented student from an underachieving or underprivileged community, or from a low socioeconomic background.” Though the program is somewhat revolutionary, the problem for small, private selective schools like Colorado College remains that all major competitive institutions, public and private, now use Quest Bridge or some comparable system to diversify their campus with minimized risk. Economically, the supply of talented and diverse students is now even more accessible for elite institutions, therefore Colorado College finds itself fighting for the same students as the “name brand” schools like Harvard, Yale, and Princeton.

As a result, fragments of the old regime persist in Colorado College admission, and jobs such as messaging, marketing and other outreach programs remain crucial in competing with name brand schools. “My job is much more than Quest Bridge. I find talented students through speaking directly with high school counselors, through Kipp programs and Scholars of America. I also have to make sure that these programs are preparing students to succeed at Colorado College,” says Cari Hanrahan. Colorado College continues to fly in prospective student and is now hosting the largest groups that the school has ever seen. The 86 students in the “Flyin Tigers” 2016 program were given workshops in college essay writing and general interview experience. The idea behind these programs centered on a new approach that gives prospective students the understanding of *how* to compete, rather than expecting them to compete on their own merits. Leah Fugere, assistant director of admission spoke about her role in the recruitment process: “I am constantly on the phone with High Schools, and my email inbox is comprised of [probably] 99% high school students and counselors.” This type of personal recruitment is consistent with Oaks, Rodgers and Lipton’s (2000) description of the ever-increasing competitive environment in selective colleges, as well as a recognition of Hirschman, Berrey and Rose-Greenland’s (2016) appeal for a more qualitative search for talent. As a way of combating that, Ryan Walsh, senior assistant director of admissions explains “we will never dock you points for a bad SAT score or poor GPA alone if you come from a community that hasn’t prepared you to do so. We want to see that you’re taking the most challenging path that your school offers.”

i) Discussion

It is important to note that the admission fellows are tasked with interviewing these prospective students, searching for fit, passion and anything akin to the values of Colorado College. Fellow DeAira Hermani explains “these students tend to have much richer experiences to draw upon...they would make great peers at this school but it is important to give them the tools to get them here.” The old regime had pipelines and programs and practiced vetting of applicants in some equitable degree, but the change to what we can see today highlights the logic behind the rationalization. In order to make college more accessible to high school students, high school students theoretically had to become accessible themselves. Colorado College had to take deliberate action to locate talented students and literally pay for them just to consider Colorado College. The logic of Colorado College suggests that the cultural capital found in these diverse students is valuable enough for the College to rationalize implementing overtly aggressive programs to yield them. It is interesting that many of the pleas to accept diversity in society today loosely revolve around empathy. College Admissions appear to be well past empathizing because in a lot of cases, they are willing to be extremely generous to diverse populations. Cari Hanrahan even admitted that as schools start looking for more underprivileged students, messaging has to shift from ‘why should we subsidize your education,’ to ‘how much *can* we subsidize in order for you to choose CC?’” In other words, this societal need has become an institutional must.

Contextualization of Merit

In an effort to evaluate these particular populations, one of the last aspects of these funded recruiting programs requires a re-rationalized assessment of social and academic readiness. The center for diversity and inclusion is the main voice in this movement, and the primary goal is to ensure that all students feel a sense of belonging on campus. The Butler Center works to engage students of color in both enrollment and social integration to campus. Dr. Paul Buckley, director of the Butler Center says “though undoubtedly talented, the students that purport the least sense of belonging on the CC campus are first generation students of color... admissions might have a difficult time finding these students, but we have a difficult time providing an environment where they can feel successful.” The “CC Demographics” pamphlet given to every admitted student purports that about sixty six percent of students are white, just over half of students are full pay and just seven percent of students are first generation. Among students of color, it is reasonable to believe that a social disconnect might exist between varying student groups, and is a notion confirmed in Asakawa’s (2016) study of belonging at Colorado College.

Another task that a small liberal arts admissions committee faces must revolve around perceived fit. “Fit is a difficult word because it implies that there is a certain mold that you must adapt to. That is not the case at CC,” claims President Tiefenthaler, rejecting a characteristic of homogeneity as a descriptor of the student body. Counselors find it hard to understand what the modern social structures look

like from the student perspective, so CC relies on the admission fellows for input of this nature. Because one of the core responsibilities of fellows is to interview prospective students, fellows are trained to not ask about academic information or anything that one could see on a transcript. This is an extremely qualitative approach, and the information is used to make important decisions. Often times this proves very beneficial to students struggling to compete with their traditionally affluent counterparts. Most notably, amendments to the interview format have been some of the major installments to the diversification development just in the past year.

With help from previous fellows, Joel Fischer-Katz, Senior Admission Fellow, spearheaded a new interview renovation “leveling the playing field.” Joel says, “we found that the most successful interviewees tended to be the ones who had the resources to afford interview counseling or interview coaches...they tended to answer all the questions perfectly. We had to think of questions that couldn’t be rehearsed.” Paul Buckley even added, “The first thing that needs to be understood is that ‘merit’ is socially constructed. The people in power have historically all been educated and rich, so they decided that success ought to resemble how an educated rich person usually achieves success.” The other issue is that many students of color from underprivileged backgrounds have never heard of CC, let alone have the wherewithal to understand the importance of an interview. Drawing upon data from four years of applications, fellows found that 73% of all students that interviewed on campus were white, and of that population, 61% were FAN (not receiving financial aid). Additionally, data suggested that interviewing correlates with a better performance within the applicant pool (Fischer-Katz and Ishida 2016). Just this discovery alone was instrumental in understanding how the admission process was inherently biased against students of color.

i) Discussion

All interviews highlight the value of accessibility in higher education as an important device in normalizing, as well as broadening future applicant pools. Research in just the past year shows that the systems already in place are inherently biased towards certain populations. Both Mr. Hatch and President Tiefenthaler alluded to progress toward decomposing the traditional college student, especially in the last few years, implying an angling away from traditional social reproduction. During Fellows training, fellows were asked to “draw the stereotypical CC student,” the message being of course to resist the inclination to favor students that look like everyone else on campus. From the ground up, the re-tolling efforts teach admissions personnel to look at diversity in a different way that is more receptive to difference. Even though this is something that just happened in recent years, simple departmental realization of the processes that are homogenizing student bodies are clearly the first step toward diversification on that front.

Constraints to Diversity

Though social change is undeniably important, social reproduction is difficult to avoid, let alone rationalize. On average, CC annually accepts 12% native Colorado students, 25% students of color, 10% international, and 7% first generation. Mr. Hatch notes that a lot of these numbers every year are decided through historical data that help establish models of likelihoods for yield rates, full pay students and trusted reservoirs of talent, and for the most part rarely deviate from Spencer's (2015) financial threshold of higher education. Mark Hatch touched on the issue of thresholds, saying that he receives pressures from various departments to enroll students that fill certain institutional needs. For example, being an athlete is certainly another type of "hook" on an application and roughly 16% of all acceptances *must* be athletes. Ken Ralph, athletic director of Colorado College, described a year where he struggled to find enough athletic recruits to replace a graduating class. "During that year I advocated for lacrosse players to be valuable to the school" (perhaps more than others?). President Tiefenthaler remarks on this process: "this is how we are seeking to diversify. The school needs piano players, physicists, lacrosse players because they each bring valuable perspective into the classroom...we rely on the professors to tell us what is missing, or what can be improved each year."

Though schools have adopted a certain individualized and contextualized method of finding applicants as demonstrated in subsequent paragraphs, Weber's Iron Cage ultimately governs much of the initial selection process. Ryan Walsh calls the application process on the college end the "paradox of higher education," supporting what Oaks (2000) calls the intersection of quantitative and qualitative evaluation. He describes that many of the "new" ways of evaluating in higher education require overgeneralization with certain individualized tactics. Ryan also adds "of course every student is a unique individual and would likely bring something of value to this campus, but certain thresholds, GPA for example, require over-generalization that place students above or below a certain line." The reality that many students face is that poor scores in high school or standardized testing tend to correlate with poor performance at the college level. Lack of quality education in primary schooling systems is a large constraint to diversity.

i) Discussion

In nearly every small, liberal arts institution, every application file will undergo some sort of generalization that determines acceptance or denial. Two distinct insights appeared in this section: first, how certain historical benchmarks constrain the degrees of freedom with which students of color can operate. President Tiefenthaler stresses that constraints in the application process are informed by personnel across the board, not just the higher ups in charge of the ultimate decisions. Coach's needs to fill athletic spots are constraints to diversity. Promising 10% of spots to international students takes seats away from domestic students of color. The system that Colorado College has in place represents a demarcation of diversity and limits any singularly overt progress in a given year.

The second insight is that schools appear to be looking at these “requirements” in largely generalized ways, and later use individualized, qualitative measures once the pool has been narrowed a bit. No process exists that is more “rational” than this, but further rationalization would likely require more staff members and continued amendments to the process that most institutions cannot yet afford.

Cost of Diversification

The section is the same here as in the literature review because to some people, that’s what diversity is, a *cost*. Financial constraints seem to govern every decision of admission. Though paraphrased a bit, every interview said the following to some degree: “College access in every sense of the word requires money.” President Tiefenthaler views tuition money not as a revenue stream but as a future expense. “We must rely on full pay students to help subsidize our athletes, Quest Bridge students, and other students seeking some sort of aid, and that is hardly enough as it is, let alone for the funding of clubs, organizations and various aspects of student life.” When asked about her essay “*The Economics of Higher Education*,” President Tiefenthaler confirmed that the “sticker price” listed on the financial aid pamphlet of \$66,433 is less than the actual cost of \$82,636 to educate every student. The additional costs are satisfied through generous alumni donations, endowment spending and large-scale fundraising efforts (Hill, Tiefenthaler, Welsh 2014 and Symonds 2002). The reason schools are asking for more money each year to diversify, as well as other ventures that cost money, could help to explain why the price of selective liberal arts schools is on the rise (Roper 2016).

Colorado College is aware of the financial burden it might be asking some applicants to carry, which is why the school agrees to meet 100% of demonstrated need, calculated by the office of financial aid. “We will never ask you to pay anything that we think you cannot afford,” says Jim Swanson, director of financial aid. Similar to the processes of admission itself, determining aid packages functions as a pseudo-qualitative and quantitative hybrid, utilizing both overgeneralization as well as selective “fine tuning.” Swanson maintains “there is a lot of back and forth between us [financial aid] and the office of admissions but ultimately we never exercise preference. We work to determine the cost that the school is able to pay on selected students and let admissions make the final decisions.”

President Tiefenthaler admits that even before admissions can start making their decisions, the school needs to know how much money they have to work with. “Currently 9% of our alumni give back...we want that number much higher if we expect to accomplish what we want to accomplish,” which is becoming a fully need-blind institution. Jim Swanson estimates that given the total valuation of Colorado College and future earnings, the school is about one third of the way to that goal. The number of financial aid yes (FAY) and financial aid no (FAN) students on campus has gradually evened out over the years, and is nearly 50/50 at this point. Barring any financial downturn in the near future, money concerns will likely be at the forefront of the rationalization process in the future.

i) Discussion

After interviewing with the Office of Financial Aid and President Tiefenthaler, it was clear that financial concerns mitigated any overt progress. The feeling portrayed by both parties was “we provide what we can.” An institution with a degree of self-interest is likely not going to burden itself with generous financial aid packages, so the particular choices that CC makes are even more important if a student is seen as a future investment. Members of the Office of Admissions find that the hardest part of their job is telling families that they have to pay a certain amount, or else they can’t be accepted. “Our net price calculator is very reliable, almost in a brutally honest way” says Jim Swanson, “parents never like to hear that they must pay more than they are willing.” This is almost an ethical dilemma as much as it is a financial one. Juxtaposed to the aggressive (and expensive) Flyin Tigers program in the previous section, the process of allotting financial aid appears to be much more rationalized and concrete. This is to say that in order to “start the process,” schools might need to act aggressively to make Colorado College appeal to more students in the beginning. Balancing aggression with rationality, and then rationality with honesty appears to be the focal point in the financial aid department.

Conclusion

This paper seeks to merge two distinct bodies of knowledge about the societal need for a diverse campus and the retooling of the processes that sought to achieve it. Through this case study of Colorado College, a few notable findings emerged that informed the mechanisms of enrollment in a sociological way. First, there doesn’t appear to be one iron-clad definition of what diversity ought to look like, nor is there solid understanding of how to integrate students of color and other traditional measures of diversity to the campus in a perfectly efficient way. Colorado College appears to understand this, and takes measures to attack the homogenizing nature of college admissions. Again, the regimes that existed in the past were compelled to cultivate diversity, but the implementation of the programs were more effective at social reproduction rather than social change. Sociological literature and research constantly assess the effectiveness of the mechanisms for change and seek to understand the governing dynamics that separate different populations.

This study could potentially serve as a continued plea for empathy in the offices of admission across the board. It can inform many of the roles in the admission office and highlight important areas for future development. This study could also serve to encourage more alumni contributions, because it truly seems that financial limitations are the largest barrier to entry that both students and colleges face today. In such a progressive school like Colorado College, re-tooling in messaging, contextualizing merit, and general empathy will continue to progress in a positive way. Financial issues on the other hand are extremely volatile, and govern the effectiveness of the former. Admission officials in higher education will continue to merge the affluent and non-affluent, privileged and underprivileged, similar and different populations for the collective benefit. These results intend to highlight

current measures of diversification and their perceived effectiveness at accomplishing that goal.

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