Berkeley Center for Studies in Higher Education

Research & Occasional Paper Series: CSHE.5.2024

MOVING BEYOND #GOVERNANCESOWHITE: (Re)Imagining a Demographic Shift in the Future of Boards of Higher Education

June 2024

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ABSTRACT

While current higher education literature stresses the importance of equity, diversity, and inclusivity, these imperatives have been mainly absent from conversations related to boards of higher education. In this paper, the authors present a historical overview of the demographic landscape of trustee boards from inception to the present. Using critical literacy as a methodology, the authors problematize the lack of discourses regarding Board's diversity. The authors juxtapose the longstanding homogeneity of boards with the increasing heterogeneity of higher education students and argue that systemic forms of racism have denied the opportunity to diversify those in charge of making decisions in higher education. Additionally, using the case of California, the authors problematize how diversity gaps in board composition manifest even within one of the most diverse and liberal states in the country. Ultimately, the authors make a case for diversifying the board of trustees as an instrumental step to align with the national push for enhanced diversity and equity in higher education.

Keywords: governing boards, diversity, equity, race, critical literacy

> *The diversity of the people of California has been the source of innovative ideas and creative accomplishments throughout the state's history into the present. Diversity–a defining feature of California's past, present, and future–refers to the variety of personal experiences, values, and worldviews that arise from differences of culture and circumstance. Such differences include race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, language, abilities/disabilities, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status, geographic region, and more.*
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> Regents Policy 4400: Policy on University of California Diversity Statement (amended 2010)

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For those concerned with improving the conditions of racially minoritized communities in higher education, outcries and demands to improve university practices of diversity, equity, and inclusion are nothing new. Despite the continuous growth in student diversity during the 21st century, top decision-makers in higher education remain overwhelmingly unchanged by race and gender (American Council on Education [ACE], 2017; Campaign for College Opportunity [CCO], 2024; Hazelrigg, 2019; Women's Power Gap, 2022). Boards of Trustees (Boards[1]) are not an exception; as such, they are the focus of our discussion within this study.

U.S. governing boards are powerful actors that affect higher education life, culture, and sustainability (Rall et al., 2018). Boards play a significant fiduciary role in institutions of higher education (Hermalin, 2004), are responsible for the welfare of the college or university (Taylor & De Lourdes Machado, 2008), and have the power to shift the higher education landscape through their external influence on state-level policy (Barringer & Riffe, 2018; Morgan et al., 2022; Rubin & Ness, 2021). However, their most critical role is their ability to influence leadership structure through their selection of campus chancellors and presidents (Dika & Janosik, 2003).

Presidents hire deans and faculty, and faculty then recruit graduate and undergraduate students, and together, these processes cause an inexorable domino effect that influences an institution's demographic (Birnbaum, 1990; Kaplan, 2006). As such, boards hold power as gatekeepers to impact diversity on college campuses (Rall et al., 2018, 2020). Researchers have highlighted the potential role of Boards in efforts related to diversity and equity (AGB, 2023; Dominguez, 2023; Rall et al., 2020; Rall et al., 2022). However, it is concerning that research has not further explored this incongruity at the intersection of equity and governance in higher education (Rall et al., 2018; Pusser et al., 2006).

The spheres of organizational theory and business provide useful insights into the debate around the import of Board diversity. Burton's (1991) work highlights the importance of introducing and implementing new perspectives and skills within an organization's governance structure that has historically excluded those perspectives or skills. Accordingly, some scholars question what the optimal composition of a Board that maximizes performance and leads to desirable outcomes can look like (Dalton et al., 1998; Rowlands, 2001). Nevertheless, Board representation in the United States has remained homogenous across gender, race, and socioeconomic status (AGB, 2022; Birnbaum & D'Heilly, 1971).

In what follows, we present public documents related to Board demographics in higher education. To frame our argument, we provide a historical review of governance literature. In doing so, we analyzed the origins of Boards and their changing structure over time. However, our focus was not to provide a detailed historical analysis of board composition but rather to question the prevalence of Board homogeneity at public and private universities since the inception of colonial colleges to our present day. Then, we turn our attention to the scant literature at the intersection of Boards and diversity. Next, we offer national statistics on Boards' composition. Using the case of California, we continue to problematize how diversity gaps in Board composition manifest even among one of the most diverse states in the country. We then use critical literacy as a methodology (Anderson & Irvine, 1993; Luke, 2012) to problematize the lack of discourses in regard to Board's diversity.

In our analysis, we juxtapose the changing demographics of the higher education landscape with the present call for equity in higher education (Rall et al., 2018). In this context, we not only problematize the almost non-existent research focusing on diversity and Boards but also challenge the use of institutional

[1] We use the term "Boards" to include Boards of Trustees, Boards of Regents, Boards of Governors, Boards of Visitors, Boards of Higher Education, etc. We recognize that there are nuances for each of these across higher education, but the focus of the paper is on the general trends that transcend all of these bodies on an individual level.

diversity statements. We expose how diversity statements often "reflect formalized processes that recognize difference, and in some cases, exclusion" (Unagnst et al., 2022, p.28) and can, in turn, perpetuate homogeneity within higher education governance. We conclude this study with recommendations based on our review of the literature at the intersection of diversity, equity, and Board composition.

THE ORIGINS OF #GOVERNANCESOWHITE

Setting Up a White Dominate Governance Through the Rise of Colonial Colleges

Almost 400 years ago, the first example of a higher education governing Board model in the U.S. emerged with the establishment of Harvard College. Initially, the Harvard Board of Overseers was comprised of the governor, ministers, and other state officials—all of them: White males from affluent backgrounds who were tasked with exerting control over university property (Duryea, 1973; Herbst, 1982). By 1650, Harvard's governing model changed to exclude political actors from university matters such as administrative decisions and hiring practices (Duryea & Williams, 2013; Herbst, 1982; Taylor & Machado, 2008). Like Harvard College, emerging colleges also sought to diminish external control over educational institutions. Yale, for example, was the first college to appoint non-academic members to their Board by appointing individuals. Societal titles such as church officials, university donors, and alumni were some of the prevalent pathways into the trusteeship. In the private sector boards are largely self-perpetuating and tied to giving or alumni status (Danton, 1937). In the public sector, governing boards are primarily gubernatorial appointments (Kezar, 2006; Taylor & Machado, 2008).

Regardless of institutional context (public or private), or board appointment type, governing boards have historically been homogeneous with a majority of White male members. Given the socio-political and economic context at this time, it should be no surprise that Board positions were subject to homogeneity in race, gender, and socioeconomic status. However, we hold issue with how Board homogeneity remained a constant factor in university governance even as access to higher education even as higher education became democratized through the introduction of land grant institutions (Rudolph, 1991).

Expanding Access Through Public Universities and the Continuation of a Homogenous Governing Board

Due to the ongoing existence of structural racism and prejudice in the United States, qualified individuals from historically marginalized backgrounds have been left without a chance to receive access to higher education (Bell, 1980, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Malcolm-Piqueux, 2018). The Morrill Act of 1862 and 1890 expanded access to higher education (Rudolph, 1991). However, structural racism enacted through policies and practices—e.g., Jim Crow Laws, separate but equal policies, *Brown vs. Board of Education,* redlining (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Harper et al., 2009; Harper, 2012; Aja & Bustillo, 2015)– restricted the extent to which racially minoritized communities benefited from the democratization of higher education.

These policies not only precluded marginalized communities from forming businesses, participating in politics, and accumulating wealth but also excluded racially marginalized communities from entering higher education (Bell, 1980; 2004). The creation of the GI Bill, for example, made it possible for more White males to enter higher education, but racially minoritized communities, such as Black veterans, were not afforded the same opportunities due to segregation and discriminatory admission practices (Turner & Bound, 2003).

History has shown time and time again how marginalized communities have endured discrimination as they sought to forge a path toward higher education—For an insightful and critical analysis of how racially

minoritized groups have been denied access to U.S. higher education, see Karabel (2006). By the same token, we assert that racially minoritized communities have been left out of the opportunities to govern such institutions, given that higher education creates social networks and promotes access to upward social mobility (Chetty et al., 2017).

The Facade of Board Diversity

Referring to the work of Kerr and Gade, Floyd (1995) notes that the national profile of governing Board members did not achieve substantial diversity—socially, economically, and racially—until the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s. During this period, nationally, only 6% of Board members were African American, 1% Hispanic, and 3% "other". In essence, almost 350 years after the establishment of Harvard College and almost 100 years after the passing of the second Morrill Act, which intended to increase educational access to masses of U.S. citizens, the individuals governing both public and private institutions remained racially homogenous despite a gradual shift in student demographics. Researchers such as Birnbaum and D'Heilly (1971) have argued that the change in demographics in Board composition can be attributed to the inclusion of student trustees as Board members as opposed to changes in the composition laymen Board members.

In 1971, after the inclusion of student trustees into the U.S. model of shared governance, Birnbaum and D'Heilly (1971) attempted to answer the following research question: "Will the inclusion of younger members have any effect upon American higher education?" (p. 575). Birnbaum and D'Heilly used Harnet's (1969) data on university trustees to explore the differences, if any, between the background and attitudes of younger student trustees and their counterparts, the layman trustees. Their findings report that Board members tend to represent a homogenous group. Most, if not all, the diversity in gender, age, socioeconomic status, and political views among members of the Board was found among student trustees (Birnbaum & D'Heilly, 1971).

The usefulness of Birnbaum's and D'Heilly's findings to our work is twofold. First, their study is one of the first bodies of literature to highlight diversity—or the lack of thereof—among members of the Board. Second, this article highlights a trend in higher education governance that still holds to our present day: when excluding student trustees, higher education governance is dominated by individuals from an analogous background (e.g., AGB, 2016; Lozano, 2016).

Without the same access to higher education as their White counterparts, racially marginalized communities have faced significant disadvantages in participating in higher education governance. People of Color have been left without the opportunities or the connections that would grant them access to Board participation (Taylor, 1987). For example, at private universities, Board members are typically university alumni and possess ties with influential corporate and social leaders or bring in sizable donations (Barringer & Slaughter, 2016; Mortimer & Satre, 2007). As self-perpetuating boards, private board appointments fall into the hands of sitting trustees and their networks (Barringer et al., 2019).

Unlike private universities, however, Board members at public universities are not necessarily university alumni. In practice, the trustee appointment process within public institutions bears a distinctly political nature (AGB, 2003; Dominguez, 2023; Davis, 1997). The decision-making authority for selecting trustees primarily rests with governors, state education commissioners, or undergoes an official political confirmation process (AGB, 2020; Minor, 2008). These appointments are heavily swayed by the governor's influence and the political networks of higher education officers, encompassing legislators, staff, cabinet members, and other trustees (Davis, 1997; Dika & Janosik, 2003). Rarely do these appointments undergo thorough vetting procedures (AGB, 2020). Ultimately, appointment to a public Board is predicated on

financial and social ties to political leaders of the state where the institution resides (Mortimer & Satre, 2007; Taylor, 1987; Taylor & Machado, 2008).

Both public and private board appointments have thus become contingent upon educational, social, political, and financial networks (AGB, 2003; Davis, 1997). These precursors have allowed boards to remain under the rule of an elite business class, even a century after Veblen's (1918) warning in *The Higher Learning in America*. Veblen's (1918) book critiqued the composition of early 20th-century higher education governing boards, where members were selected for their financial success. Over 100 years later, we find that social class and economic privilege remain prominent factors in U.S. higher education governance.

Over time, restrictive social networks have hindered board diversification (Barringer et al., 2019; Kezar, 2014; Pusser et al., 2006; Rall et al., 2019). For example, the salience of race and racism in the United States have excluded People of Color from educational, social, political, and financial networks (Ladson-Billings, 2006). The homogeneity of board composition thus becomes an intersectional issue in which class and race influence its diversification (Dominguez, 2023).

ENDURING THE LEGACY OF RACISM AND PREJUDICE IN OUR MODERN BOARD COMPOSITION

Delgado and Stefancic (2001) argue that racism permeates through social structures in the ways society conducts business as usual–this includes Board appointments. Since the inception of Boards, White males who are predominantly business owners or wealthy university alums have dominated the trusteeship (Kaplan, 2004; Tierney, 2006), thus restricting access to governance for racially minoritized communities. Chesler and Crawfoot (1989) put this idea in more straightforward terms when they said that "racism mutes and sometimes obliterates the voices of People of Color in two ways: directly, by denying them access to the institution or to institutional platforms for self-expression, and, indirectly, by having White '"experts'" on People of Color speak for them" (p. 951).

For racially minoritized communities, this has resulted in a denial of being full participants in higher education and their decision-making process. In other words, systemic racism can help explain why aspiring Board members (mainly if they are People of Color who have overcome the barriers of entering the realms of higher education) may be overlooked if they do not have the social and cultural capital to connect them to wealthy donors or resources (Kaplan, 2004). At the Board, practices of structural racism have left us with a system of governance in which racially minoritized communities do not seem to have equitable representation at the university decision-making table.

In what follows, we problematize the lack of diversity in the governance of higher education. In doing so, we present a national snapshot of higher education governance. Then, we present the case of California to illustrate how diversity among the Board is still an area of improvement even among the most diverse states in the U.S. Our purpose is to present the disconnect in demographics between members of Boards and the students served by these Boards.

PROBLEMATIZING THE LACK OF RACIAL DIVERSITY AMONG THE MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Literature suggests that diversity is essential for Board effectiveness (Kohn & Mortimer, 1983; Kramer et al., 2006; Taylor et al., 1991). In 2013, the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB) provided a set of recommendations to governors and legislators in an attempt to help increase diversity among the members of the Board. In this report, AGB urged governors to recruit and appoint members to the Board who demonstrate the "ethnic diversity required to oversee today's increasingly

complex and diverse higher education institutions and systems" (AGB, 2013, p. 2). Echoing these words, the Campaign for College Opportunity (2018) urged "governor[s] to appoint individuals who reflect the diversity of [the state]" (p. 23). However, despite these recommendations, Boards remain White-dominated spaces. In recent years, however, researchers have engrossed concerns over this lack of diversity among members of the Board (AGB, 2013, 2016; Campaign for College Opportunity, 2018, 2022; Dominguez, 2023; Rall et al., 2020).

Table 1: General Racial and Ethnic Makeup of Nonprofit Board/Executive Committee Members in the United States (Non-Higher Education Boards).

Race/Ethnicity	Board Representation of Racial/Ethnic Representation at Nonprofit Board/Executive Committees in the United States
Asian	5%
African American	12%
Latinx	14%
White	68%
Other	1%

Note. This information is about non-profit Boards, not higher education Boards.
Adapted from "The Governance Gap: Examining Diversity and Equity in Diversity and Equity on Nonprofit Boards of Directors. KOYA Leadership Partners." By Brenna, M. D., & Forbes, M. R., 2018, copyright 2018 by the Koya Leadership Partners.
Although this table is not specific to higher education, as we demonstrate in the following sections, higher education boards follow a similar trend when it comes to representing racially diverse communities.

Data on Board composition is difficult to obtain (Ehrenberg, 2004). In Table 1, we highlight data from a study by Breanna and Forbes (2016) in which they examined diversity and equity on nonprofit Boards. Although their data is not specific to higher education governing Boards, one can see the racial disparity in Board composition across all non-profit sectors in the United States. For example, White people composed 68% of Board members in different non-profit sectors. Meanwhile, Latinx, Black, and Asian members correspond to 14%, 12%, and 5%, respectively. Furthermore, Breanna and Forbes (2016) found that 61% of Board members admitted that their Board composition was not representative of the community it served.

Findings by Breanna and Forbes (2016), while not necessarily higher education context-specific, are related to the trends experienced in higher education governance. Parallel to Breanna and Forbes (2016), AGB (2022) noted that in higher education, only 30% of public Boards included racial-ethnic minorities in their Boards. When excluding minority-serving institutions such as Hispanic-serving institutions and Historically Black Colleges, however, AGB asserted that the number of universities that include racial and ethnic minorities falls as low as 15.7% at private institutions and climbs as high as 19.8% at public universities (AGB, 2022).

In an attempt to highlight an ongoing problem of higher education board diversity, Dominguez (2023) juxtaposed AGB's (2022) findings with data on undergraduate enrollments in 2020 to compare the stark demographic differences between the two populations (Table 2). The numbers presented in Table 2 are troublesome—when thinking about issues of access, diversity, and equity—because the current literature

has failed to focus on "those who create and enact policy, the power they possess, and the demographic mismatch between them and the people their legislative activities affect (Rall et al., 2018, p. 267).

Table 2: Racial/Ethnic Board Member Demographics Compared to U.S. Postsecondary Undergraduate Enrollment in 2020

Race/Ethnicity	Representation Percentage		
	Public Boards	Private Boards	Undergraduate Enrollment
People of Color	30%*	17%*	49%
White	70%	83%	51%

Note. *These numbers fall as low as 19.8% at public universities and 15.7% at private institutions when excluding MSIs.
Adapted from "Demographic Comparison of Higher Education Boards to Undergraduate Student Enrollment in U.S. Postsecondary Institutions in 2020." By Dominguez, V. (2023)

The Case of California

Borrowing from the Campaign for College Opportunity (2022), our purpose in this section is to highlight how neither California's Community Colleges (CCC), the California State University (CSU), or the University of California (UC) have a Board composition that is reflective of the racial and ethnic diversity of the state and its student--see Table 3. We use the state of California to contextualize the issue of diversity because of its unique demographics–71% of Californians between the ages of 18-29 are racially/ethnically diverse (Campaign for College Opportunity, 2022).

We start our discussion by highlighting student and trustees' demographics in California's Community Colleges (CCC). Then, we turn our attention to California's State University system (CSU). Finally, we provide further statistics on the University of California (UC) system. It is important to note a distinction in the CCC governance structure. Whereas the governor appoints the UC and CSU Board members, the CCC has both a local Board, appointed by a popular vote, and the Board of Governors, appointed by the governor (Richardson & Martinez, 2009). The following information on the CCC system is based on the demographics of the latter.

TABLE 3: Undergraduate Student Representation in Relation to Board Racial Representation in California Higher Education Public System According to Fall 2021 Enrollment Data

Institution Type	Member Diversity							
	Asian American and NHPI		Black		Latinx		White	
	SR	BR	SR	BR	SR	BR	SR	BR
California Community Colleges (CCC)	14%	8%	5%	25%	47%	25%	24%	42%

California State University (CSU)	16%	19%	4%	13%	47%	31%	21%	38%
University of California (UC)	35%	17%	4%	11%	25%	22%	21%	50%

Note. SR stands for Student Representation; BR stands for Board Representation; AANHPI stands for Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander. Numbers do not sum up to 100% due to our omission of the "Other" category under student and board representation.
Adapted from "Still Left Out: How Exclusion In California's Colleges & Universities Continues To Hurt Our Values, Students, and Democracy." By the Campaign for College Opportunity (2024).

The California Community College (CCC) System. Researchers have highlighted that students from racially marginalized communities (Asian Pacific Islanders, African Americans, and Latinx) are more likely to start their educational trajectory at a community college (Malcom-Piqueux, 2018). According to 2021 enrollment data, the student demographic at The California Community Colleges (CCC) was reported as follows: 5% Black, 47% Latinx, 14% Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI), 14%, 47% Latinx, and 24% White (Campaign for College Opportunity, 2024). Despite a 24% White student population, 42% of the California Community College board seats were occupied by White trustees. An alarming statistic at the CCC and across all three systems, is the low representation of Black, American Indian, and Alaska Native students.

The California State University (CSU) System. At the California State University (CSU) system, the representation of marginalized communities on the Board follows a similar trend to that of the community colleges**.** For example, despite accounting for only 21% of the total student enrollment, 38% of the members of the Board are White (Campaign for College Opportunity, 2024). Latinx students, however, account for 47% of the student enrollment, but they see their representation in the Board of Trustees diminished to only 31%.

The University of California (UC) system. Except for the Latinx community, the underrepresentation among marginalized board members compared to the student population is exacerbated at the University of California (UC) system. When combining all historically marginalized racial and ethnic communities at the University of California (UC) system, these students account for nearly 65% of the total student population. However, once all Board leadership positions in The UC are put together, historically marginalized communities are in the minority despite accounting for more than half the population at the undergraduate student level. To illustrate, despite only accounting for 24% of the student population, according to enrollment data from 2021, Whites accounted for 50% of the University of California Board of Regents despite only making up 21% of the undergraduate population at the University of California. Asian American and AANHPI, Black, and Latinx trustees accounted for 17%, 11%, and 22%, respectively.

Although California's public governing boards have become more diverse over the last ten years (Campaign for College Opportunity, 2018; 2022, 2024), they still do not reflect the student populations they serve, and more work must be done. For example, there is a significant absence in the representation of American Indian and Alaska Native board members within California's public higher education governing boards. The Campaign for College Opportunity has been instrumental in the state of California in raising public awareness, advancing policy advocacy, and putting pressure on the governor to consider the state's diversity and its students' needs.

The center's work, however, is uniquely tailored to address the needs of Californian public education. This section aimed to highlight how higher education representation remains a challenge in one of the most

diverse states in the U.S. (even with a center dedicated to increasing awareness of Board diversity). Issues of representation in public higher education are exacerbated across other states, with many Boards having no racial or ethnic diversity (Dominguez, 2023; Rall et al., 2023). In the following section, we employ Critical Literacy to interrogate how boards in California and across the U.S. remain homogenous despite a call for equity in higher education.

USING CRITICAL LITERACY TO CHALLENGE BOARD HOMOGENEITY

Critical Literacy is a practice that allows the reader to identify the ideologies and purposes of texts. In reading, one can reconstruct the presented ideology (and its resolution) by accepting or rejecting its premises based on life experiences (Cervetti et al., 2001). Social critical theorists use critical literacy in societal groups where power relations are present to challenge the "truths" behind texts. In other words, scholars concerned with social justice and inequality contest the ideas or perspectives propagated by the dominant group (Giroux & McLaren, 1989; Cervetti et al., 2001).

Critical literacy, as a way to contextualize experiences embedded within systems of power, allows us to engage in a discourse that centers issues of equity and diversity among the Board as the direct result of structural racism (Luke, 2012). While we recognize and support the need to enhance diversity in its myriad forms (i.e., race, gender, socioeconomic status), we hone in on racial equity for this paper. We argue that while historically marginalized groups and equity advocates have made significant efforts to diversify higher education's student body, systemic forms of racism have denied the opportunity to diversify those in charge of making decisions at the highest levels of higher education, in this case: Boards.

Diversity Statements

We recognize that Boards operate within university policies and bylaws (Rall et al., 2022). This paper focuses on one type of institutional policy: diversity statements. We chose diversity statements as they are "a prerequisite to comprehensive diversity, equity, or inclusion programs or policies that span the higher education institution and operationalize institutional goals into specific allocations of time, money, staff, research, and so forth." (Unangst et al., 2022, p. 17). Diversity statements have been around for decades, yet they predominantly refer to every university stakeholder but the Board itself. For example, in the same diversity statement which we quote at the opening of this paper, we find the following:

> Commitment to Equal Opportunity: The University of California renews its commitment to the full realization of its historic promise to recognize and nurture merit, talent, and achievement by supporting diversity and equal opportunity in its education, services, and administration, as well as research and creative activity. The University particularly acknowledges the acute need to *remove barriers to the recruitment, retention, and advancement of talented students, faculty, and staff from historically excluded populations who are currently underrepresented*. -Regents Policy 4400: Policy on University of California Diversity Statement (amended 2010)

In this example, while the UC Board of Regents acknowledges the need to improve access and retention for students, faculty, and staff, no mention is given to governing Boards. However, we know that laymen trustees–especially those with 12-year terms–directly influence students, faculty, and staff because it is within the Board's purview to hire institutional chancellors who then appoint provosts, who oversee the faculty. Additionally, the Board has the ultimate power to create and enact bylaws that directly impact institutions. Luke (2012) argues that "critical literacy approaches view language, texts, and their discourse structures as principal means for representing and reshaping possible worlds" (p.8-9).

We must push for diversity not only because it directly impacts who gets a seat at the table but also because it grants access and power to those who write policies that shape the lives of students, faculty, and staff across institutions. Financial aid, admissions, housing, mental health, and healthcare are just some of the few governing areas in which Board members have voting power to change and restructure. Although universities are run on the idea of shared governance, the Board ultimately decides which policies to adopt and amend. For example, the UC Regents' historic vote to end Affirmative Action in 1995, changes in student tuition models over the last decade, and most recently, the end of standardized testing for college admissions. These policies have tremendously impacted historically marginalized groups' access and retention in higher education.

For the CSU system, diversity statements read similarly to the UC. The CSU Diversity website highlights the first three lines of former Chancellor Timothy P. White's 2019 statement on CSU's commitment to inclusive excellence. It reads the following:

> The California State University (CSU) is committed to fostering a vibrant community of *students, faculty, staff, and administrators*, all focused on the many dimensions of student success and academic excellence" -CSU Diversity Website (2023).

When prompted to the Chancellor's complete statement, one can find the following:

> The California State University values diversity and fosters understanding and mutual respect. We are committed to all members of the university community being afforded equitable opportunities to learn, discover and serve, as well as having equitable opportunities for personal development and engagement with others on campus and in the global community. In addition to the importance of this kind of authentic access, we know that academic excellence at the CSU depends on the higher and richer learning that occurs for all students when a university is diverse in its people, programs, and shared ideas. -The CSU Commitment to Inclusive Excellence: Chancellor Timothy P. White (January 29, 2019)

Like the UC, the CSU diversity statement limits the scope of diversity to staff, students, faculty, and administrators. The Board remains excluded from the diversity standards expected of the university community. The statement encourages equitable opportunity for all members of the community. However, the practice of equity at the highest decision-making level is not addressed. The import of Boards and their ultimate control over policies that influence the recruitment, retention, and advancement of students matriculating in higher education remains overlooked.

On the contrary, the Association of Governing Boards for Universities and Colleges' (AGB) statement on diversity highlights the Board's authority to enforce diversity metrics at their institution:

> Governing boards are potent agents who enact institutional policies that have the power to hinder or help historically underrepresented and vulnerable populations in higher education… Boards are accountable for ensuring that institutions adhere to the principles of justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion (JDE&I), the mission of the college or university, and policy implementation that advances the strategic goals of social and justice issues. –AGB (2020)

This statement, however, fails to acknowledge the responsibility of Board's to exemplify diversity and social justice via its composition and practices. Overall, diversity statements have yet to embody concrete diversity standards, or metrics, that extend beyond institutions to the internal operation of Boards. Historically, Boards have failed to recognize how they sustain and perpetuate White privilege embedded within their structure due to a lack of reflection, critical analysis, and interrogation in their operations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

(Re)Imagining Diversity Statements

Diversity statements have been used in U.S. higher education to identify institutional commitments, values, goals, and missions. However, critical literacy scholars argue that due to the racism embedded in U.S. higher education, we must critically examine institutional discourse and "call into question the misalignment between espoused values of inclusion and campus actions" (Unangst et al., 2022, p.27). One way to do so is by analyzing if diversity statements are discussing the history (and institutional role) of oppression, racism, sexism, heteronormativity, etc., or if diversity statements are merely masking systemic inequality by addressing inequity as a thing of the past, or as a phenomenon outside of the institution.

In the case of Boards, their absence in diversity statements alone shows that they fail to recognize their role in perpetuating power and exclusion in higher education. We believe that diversity statements should draw attention to the dismantling of barriers and access (at all stakeholder levels), and thus be used as a tool to educate the public on the history of higher education while also relating specific and actionable commitments to dismantling oppressive forces and supporting equity. We echo the work of Unangst et al., (2022), who argue that "without this critical examination [of diversity statements], diversity efforts become technologies that (re)produce systemic inequities" (p.27).

(Re)Imagining Board Composition

Future work in this area must continue to call out the disparities in the numbers of marginalized populations on Boards and deliberately work to change not only compositional equity but also equity-mindedness meaningfully. The first step in pushing for more diversified Boards is to continue to acknowledge that they are predominantly homogeneous. This requires a continued focus on disaggregated data and research on Boards that we just have not had in the past. The deeply rooted disparities must be advertised and shared widely to inform constituents and those tasked with appointing Board members. We also need further research to identify the implications (not simply numerical diversity) of the inequities in representation (Dominguez, 2023). In other words, how is decision-making impacted by the diversity void on the Board? What are the ways in which Board efficacy might be hindered by the sameness of thought that might come out of the uniformity of race and gender? For example, are monotonous Boards more susceptible to phenomena such as groupthink (Janis, 1971)?

The next step is to interrogate why and how Boards became so monotone. Without questioning the history behind the genesis of Boards and who could (or could not) serve on them, we fail to get at the historical roots that established the structure of exclusion of certain populations on the Board. By unpacking the systemic barriers that continue to shape today's society we can also understand that modern Board composition is not a pipeline issue (ACE, 2017, Women's Power Gap, 2022). Qualifications for service and diversity are not in contention with one another. In other words, the lack of representation on Boards is not an issue of underqualified People of Color. Homogeneity is rather caused by a perpetuation of whiteness masked as an illusion of meritocracy.

Finally, we must reconsider the manner in which individuals are selected for the Board (Rall et al., 2022). Martin and Samuels (1997), citing Cyril Houle, note that "…[A] group of part-time nonspecialist people who behave in idiosyncratic ways are chosen according to no known system of merit ranking (other than, perhaps, wealth or social position) is in full charge of the institution, making basic decisions about its future..." (p. 91). We must correct that. Such power and lack of clear and conspicuous requisites for and processes to a seat at the decision-making table cannot continue to coexist. Governance will indeed remain White if how Boards are appointed or elected to the Board remains rooted in the exclusionary practices embedded in the system of higher education.

Appointments, for example, by governors who, by and large, remain White and male and a process to the Board that is not delineated or known by all continue to limit the possibilities of who can serve. We want to highlight that some Boards demonstrate diversity and have application processes that support more diversity in thought, race, ethnicity, gender, background, etc. (e.g., Hawaii). We should study the lessons we can learn from said Boards (Rall et al., 2022) while recognizing the nuance that distinct contexts bring into consideration. We must push this conversation beyond simply preaching to the choir of diversity, equity, and inclusion proponents in higher education.

(Re)Imagining the Study of Higher Education Governance

One way to expand board research is by incorporating intersectional frameworks and methodologies in the study of governance (Rall et al., 2022). For example, although Critical Race Theory (CRT) originated in legal studies to address the unequal rates of incarceration between Black and white men (Bell, 1995; C. I. Harris, 1993), CRT emerged in education research in 1995 to expose exclusionary practices embedded in educational structures (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Since its inception, CRT has been used as a methodological foundation for both data collection and as a theoretical framework (Bernal, 2002; Duncan, 2005; Solórzano et al., 2000; Tichavakunda, 2024). CRT scholars argue that racism is embedded into social interactions, class structure, politics, and education—and will continue to prevail until its existence is acknowledged (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). One way to do that is to use storytelling and counter-narratives to give voice to People of Color (Bell, 2004). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argue that counter-narratives are necessary to conflict with "unconscious" racism in higher education.

We echo CRT scholarship and argue that, although Board diversity can increase quantitatively, without a qualitative analysis centering on the "voices" of marginalized members, racism will continue to embed itself in Board politics. Only recently has a counter-narrative approach been used in governance scholarship to bring forth historically marginalized perspectives (Dominguez, 2023; Rall & Orué, 2020). We call for this methodological approach because diversity on Boards does not always mean inclusion. Racial identity does not equate to expertise in issues of race, nor does racial identity always correlate to views on issues of race. In other words, numerical diversity alone will not address embedded forms of discrimination that can occur within organizational spaces (Dominguez, 2023). Thus, we recommend a focus not solely on the diversity of U.S. Boards, but also how Boards' address equity introspectively.

Research has shown that issues of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DE&I) are apt to the interpretation of the dominant group (Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015), thus when it comes to issues of racial equity in particular, Boards hold the ability to control the cultural discourse (Wildman, 2005). Cycles of power are sustained and protected because White privilege remains embedded within higher education Boards as it travels "undetected due to the dominant group's control over discourse" (Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015, p.638). By using narratives that have been historically omitted, it is then that we begin to recognize systemic forms of oppression embedded in everyday practices (Bell, 2004).

These narratives can then be used to frame critical discussions directly with Board members and can help them understand not only their role–but also their accountability–in making sure institutions adhere to the principles of their missions and strategic plans (including diversity statements). Board members, who are oftentimes isolated from some of the issues that occur on campuses, must be central to the conversation.

A recent study by Dominguez (2023) contested the traditional White, male-dominated narrative of higher education governance by interviewing Women of Color trustees on public and private Boards in the U.S. The stories documented how racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of discrimination were embedded in the everyday interactions of Boards, and raised concerns over the impact of these internalized cultures on higher education policymaking. The study supports our argument of a need to share CRT scholarship regarding the import and necessity of representation, even at the highest levels of higher education, and in turn, challenge the dominant perspective found in Boardrooms. Governance scholarship should embrace new intersectional methodologies, with a particular focus on historically marginalized voices. Through these new frameworks, we can challenge the "race-neutrality" of today's society that contributes to homogenous board composition.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have highlighted the historical underrepresentation of racially minoritized communities in higher education governance. We provided a review of higher education governance literature by examining the origins of Boards and their lack of changing structure over time. Using the case of California, we continue to problematize how diversity gaps in Board composition manifest even among one of the most diverse states in the country. We then use critical literacy as a methodology (Anderson & Irvine, 1993; Luke, 2012) to problematize the lack of discourses regarding Board's diversity.

Higher education has a history of struggling with equity and inclusion (Stegall, 2016). Within this larger struggle is the shortfall that Boards continue to represent an exclusionary and privileged past despite statements and promises to embrace the nation's diversity. This paper rests on the premise that the individuals at the highest level of institutional leadership, with the most influential decision-making power, are not reflective of the students at the colleges and universities they serve (Rall et al., 2018) – even in one of the most diverse states in the United States (Campaign for College Opportunity, 2024).

This paper is also grounded in the notion that change, albeit often slow, is possible in this area. Progress in student and staff representation nationwide is evidence of such potential. Boards, too, can diversify. We hope to augment the voices and experiences represented on the Boards (Dominguez, 2023; Rall & Orué, 2020) so that Boards are better reflective of higher education and the nation at large, and call for change. Individuals involved in leadership must center on implementing more inclusive and justice-oriented practices within this space (Tapia-Fuselier & Irwin, 2019).

One way Boards continue to uphold homogeneity is through "diversity statements" or policies procured to "resolve" diversity issues by focusing on the institutional stakeholders instead of themselves. To begin a transformation of equity, we argue that diversity "texts" must be reconstructed and reimagined through a critical literacy framework to include Boards and their operation. Diversity statements that do not explicitly address and criticize systems of institutional privilege do not realize the goal of social justice in higher education (J.C. Harris et al., 2016). J.C. Harris et al. (2016) state, "When colleges employ diversity principles to enact access, they typically are not required to interrogate the institutional whiteness prevalent in the structure, practices, and assumptions of PWIs" (p.25). They argue that diversity and

inclusion have become measurable achievements for colleges and universities rather than an equity concern.

For example, today, universities are granted awards, recognition, and praise for becoming "diverse," but the economic benefits gifted, such as grants, are awarded to the institution, not the students (J. C. Harris et al., 2016). Boards must be integral actors in campus diversity efforts if they are to succeed (Wilson, 2016). Yet, the exclusion of the application of diversity and equity to Board members is problematic–it seems as if we consider diversity for every university stakeholder but the Board.

Boards have long been homogeneous due to the embedded forms of racism in U.S. society; this dominant structure has not been challenged due to the belief that individuals who serve on Boards "deserve" to be in their position of power. By legitimizing this power as a form of "meritocracy" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2011), rather than addressing the history of higher education as exclusive of minoritized communities, the notion that Board members remain White, male-dominated, is often ignored. Critical literacy pushes researchers to challenge how information is presented and transform dominant ideologies (Luke, 2012). Furthermore, Critical Race Theory literature argues that society accepts "significant disparities in the life chances of people based on the categorical understanding of race" (Ladson-Billings, 2013, p.39).

Together, these theoretical frameworks centralize how problematic the definition of "diversity" is- particularly when describing Board membership. Board diversity is often constructed as a limited categorical understanding of what "race/ethnicity" can encompass. For example, the Campaign for College Opportunity (2022) report uses only six categorical distinctions (AANHPI, AIAN/Other, Black, Latinx, Multiracial, White) to encompass Board diversity. In the case of AGB (2022), race/ethnicity is grouped into one monolithic category (People of Color). By celebrating or championing racial diversity amongst these categories alone, many underrepresented groups suffer and continue to be historically underrepresented. In a state like California, which houses a highly diverse community, this can be even more detrimental to students who do not have an adequate champion at the table fighting on their behalf.

A focus on the diversity of the Board matters because, as higher education has shown us over the years, White male governors tend to appoint White male Boards, which appoint White male chancellors and presidents, and so on. Refusing to change the representation amongst themselves, traditionally white Boards will govern with a White lens (Dominguez, 2023). They cannot account for the voices of their diverse constituents (Chesler & Crawfoot, 1989) at a time when Boards hold the power to influence the internal (Dika & Janosik, 2003) and external landscape of U.S. higher education (Morgan et al., 2022). In the Case of California, the California Board of Governor's website reads that, "Board members are appointed by the Governor and formally interact with state and federal officials and other state organizations" (2023).

In other words, the CCC Board has direct power and influence of higher education policy in the local and national context. However, as we have presented in our paper, the CCC Board, just as the other two higher education boards in California, remain racially exclusionary in comparison to the state's demographics. We argue, therefore, that without diversification, Boards across the U.S. will continue to control the narratives and values of higher education governance by representing a historically dominant group and closing the doors to the perspectives of those historically underrepresented in the Board room.

In order to change the perpetual racism embedded that shapes the structure of Boards, we must critically unpack and reimagine the mission and culture of U.S. universities. Equity can only be achieved when we accept today's social, political, and economic structures as a result of precedented circumstances and conditions rather than individual resolution. We must address explicitly how a history of White privilege

has placed a handful of individuals in positions of power while simultaneously diminishing the voices of People of Color (Dominguez, 2023; Rall & Orué, 2020).

Moreover, Boards must be redesigned through their selection and composition to increase public trust and meet the needs of their constituents (AGB, 2013). We must explicitly acknowledge that who has a seat at the table is determined by outcomes rather than opportunity–opportunity limited to an elite status that can only be reached after surpassing all obstacles of higher education and gaining social or cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Yosso, 2005).

Knowing that historical reforms have continued to benefit White individuals while minoritized groups are inevitably surpassed, Board appointment processes need to be revisited, or at least considerate of such inequities. The cultural and social capital needed to secure a seat at the table requires overcoming embedded forms of racism throughout the educational pipeline in a political world that claims to be "color-blind."

Like Aho & Quaye (2017), we want to encourage decision-makers related to Boards to "do something that matters, do something that disrupts the status quo, do something that realigns the priorities of our field with the realities of our world, and that gives way to new and more just practices" so that we might see more equitable representation in governance (p. 19). If we desire to change the representation across higher education so that our campuses are not merely more racially diverse but more equitable and more inclusive, we must (re)imagine a demographic shift in the future of Boards and change structures and policies. For actual lasting change to occur with respect to racial equity on campus, we need higher education not to be controlled by #governancesowhite.

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