Texas' Declining Diversity of the Undergraduate Class, 2015-2022: A Critical Policy Analysis of anti-DEI Legislation in the 88th Session of the Texas State Legislature

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Executive Summary

Purpose of Our Study

In this critical policy analysis, we report on DEI programs, the positive impact they have on all students, and the importance of a diverse faculty and student body. We provide data on hiring, access, and graduation rates that reveal the failures of higher education institutions to learning environments for systematically marginalized students with a particular focus on Texas. Furthermore, graduation rates among students of color will display the barriers they face in college. Failure to meet the needs of students of color is already a primary issue among Texas universities, and this report seeks to bring to light the additional and damaging effects that removing DEI initiatives and resources could have on Texas students and faculty. Policy recommendations are outlined in the concluding section of this policy analysis.

Our Approach

The Integrated Postsecondary Education System (IPEDS) is a higher education database provided by NCES (National Center for Education Statistics) and was utilized to draw from 32 higher education universities in Texas (see Table 2). These universities include public, four-year institutions, not including community colleges or medical schools. Data represent undergraduate students who are degree-seeking, first-time students belonging to the 2015 cohort. Faculty include those who are tenured and tenure-track (T&TT).

Key findings

- Empirical data reveals that Texas higher education institutions are systematically excluding Black and Latin* students. Out of 32 higher education institutions analyzed, 20 are failing to graduate, even half of Black and Latin* students.
- As of 2020, at the University of Texas at Austin, the number of White faculty (1,284) was 13.5 times the number of Black faculty (95) and 8.2 times the number of Hispanic faculty (156).
- Hispanic faculty-to-student ratios highlight notable disparities at the University of Texas at Austin, Texas A&M, and the University of Houston and have not improved between 2015-2020.
- Enrollment of Black students remains consistently lower than Hispanic and White students at the University of Texas at Austin, Texas A&M, and the University of Houston between 2015-2020.
- Graduation rates among 32 of Texas' higher education institutions reveal that many Black and Hispanic students are missing some vital resource(s) that would help push them to graduation.

Note on Latinx Terminology:

Throughout this policy analysis, we utilize the term Latin* to encompass Hispanic, Latinx, and Latine (Salinas and Lozano, 2021) and are used interchangeably to stay true to the literature cited. However, it is important to note that racial and ethnic labels are social and power constructs that deeply affect entire communities (Flores, 2021; Revilla, 2000). As a power construct, the term Latinx is a settler-colonial term rooted in white supremacy logic (Flores, 2021). In fact, a Pew Research Center (2013) survey found that collectively individuals do not have a preference for the terms "Hispanic" or "Latinx." Expanding on the insights of critical scholars, it is argued that Latinx conceptually and theoretically is a verb and not a noun (Beltran, 2010; Pelaez Lopez, 2019). Thus, within this paper, we conceptualize Latin* as shared culture imagined community, and collective power.

Introduction

On February 13, 2023, Dan Patrick announced his top priorities for the 2023 legislative session, which included but were not limited to banning Critical Race Theory in Higher Education, banning "discriminatory" diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies in higher education, and eliminating tenure at general academic institutions (Lieutenant Governor of Texas, 2023). Additionally, in that same month, Gardner Pate, Chief of Staff for Governor Gregg Abbott, announced via memos to state agencies and public universities that the administration's intentions to ban the "innocuous-sounding notation of DEI" because they "have been manipulated to push policies that expressly favor some demographic groups to the detriment of others" (McGaughty, 2023; McGee, 2023). As a result, over 180 higher education bills have been filed thus far in the 88th Texas legislature, which convened on January 10, 2023, and will end on May 29, 2023. Currently, one prominent bill has moved forward with the Texas legislature process, Senate Bill 17, see Table 1 for details.

Table 1

Texas Legislature Anti-DEI bill

Bill Number	Details	Action
SB17	Bans DEI policies and programs; prohibits DEI statements in admissions, employment, and promotion; bans DEI offices and employees; requires a no-hire list to be maintained of employees violating this section and requires termination of an employee that violates this section for the second time, and prohibits students, staff, and faculty from being on a President search committee.	On Friday, April 7, 2023, at 1 am, the Senate subcommittee on higher education voted Y: 4 and N:1 to recommend SB17 to Senate Public Education Committee. On Wednesday, April 19, 2023, the Texas Senate chamber passed Y:19 and N:12 On Thursday, April 20, 2023, the Texas House chamber received SB17 from the Senate.

All data derived from the Texas Senate online database senate.texas.gov

In this vein, due to Texas Gov. Greg Abbott's office memo, Rider 186, SB17, and SB18, several Texas universities have decided to pause or stop DEI initiatives. The University of Texas systems and Texas A&M systems have announced that DEI initiatives will be paused (Cruz, 2023), and the University of Houston system has decided not to use DEI initiatives in hiring or promotion (Colvin, 2023). Due to DEI rollbacks, the Texas Black Caucus, NAACP, LULAC, and Black Brown Dialogues on Policy, students, and marginalized communities organized together to strategize. As such, the collective decide to hold a press conference at the Texas capitol on April 4, 2023, to bring attention to the anti-DEI legislation (Black Brown Policy, 2023). Gary Bledsoe, President of the Texas NAACP, said in the press conference held on April 4th that "make no mistake these bills are anti-Black and anti-Latino" and added that "the intent of state leadership in pushing these bills is to establish a permanent underclass of citizenship for Black and Brown people without regard to your talent or education" (Belt, 2023).

Context

The Texas population is overwhelmingly Black and Latin*. According to the United States Census (2022), 13.2 percent of the Texas population identifies as Black making it the highest Black population by state in the United States. The U.S. Census (2022) also cites that 40.2 percent of the Texas population identifies as Latin*–making it the second largest population behind California. In other words, most of the U.S. population is estimated to be majority people of color, while the white population is on the decline (U.S. Census, 2020). As such, we observe the Texas legislatures working overtime to maintain white power in public higher education to make sure higher education continues to be white.

The State of DEI

DEI programs are vital components in higher education that offer numerous benefits to all students, regardless of race, ethnicity, and gender (Cumming et al., 2023; Stout et al., 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). DEI creates a higher education culture and environment where individuals from diverse backgrounds and experiences can come together to exchange ideas, collaborate, and learn from each other (Cumming et al., 2023; Stout et al., 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). In a diverse environment, students are exposed to different ways of thinking and ideas, which can lead to enhanced critical thinking skills and cross-cultural empathy (King, 2022; Thomas, 2022). Thus, DEI initiatives provide students with a better understanding of the modern world and prepare them for success in an increasingly diverse society. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board has recognized the importance of DEI initiatives, and despite this importance, it has not received much attention in higher education institutions (Fincher et al., 2010).

A diverse and well-supported faculty and staff is vital to establishing equity and inclusion on campuses (Cumming et al., 2023; Muñoz et al., 2017; Stout et al., 2018). In fact, the more racially and ethnically diverse a faculty is, the more likely students from underrepresented identities are to graduate (Aud et al., 2011; Smith, 2005; Stout et al., 2018). Two studies found that when students from a range of racial and ethnic backgrounds are present on campus, it provides the opportunity for students to experience the relational discontinuities and cognitive dissonance critical to cognitive development

(Chang, Astin, & Kim, 2004; Gurin et al., 2002). Promoting DEI creates a sense of belonging and inclusion for all campus community members, resulting in improved student retention rates and employee satisfaction (Tuner, 2021; Swanson, 2022). However, "just increasing the racial/ethnic diversity on campus while neglecting to attend to the racial climate can result in difficulties for students of color as well as for white students" (Hurtado, 1999). As such, universities must build the infrastructure to retain the students of color they recruit.

<div align="center">**Data Sources**</div>

The Integrated Postsecondary Education System (IPEDS) is a higher education database provided by NCES (National Center for Education Statistics) and was utilized to draw from 32 higher education universities in Texas (see Table 2). These universities include public, four-year institutions, not including community colleges or medical schools. Data represent undergraduate students who are degree-seeking, first-time students belonging to the 2015 cohort. The percentage of students who graduated are those who completed their degree within 150% of the normal time, meaning within 4-6 years after initial enrollment in 2015. The total number of students per university who graduated and graduation rates by race/ethnicity subgroups are included. Each graduation percentage is based on those who graduated divided by those who initially enrolled in 2015 and repeated based on those who graduated within each subgroup (for example, Black students in each university who graduated) divided by the initial number of Black students enrolled in 2015. A limitation of using this dataset is the exclusion of any students who might have dropped out from the time of enrollment until graduation, so the final percentage is reflective of any reason for not graduating that could include a lack of retention.

Patterns reveal how universities have been failing students of color relative to white students in Texas universities. Specifically, out of the 32 schools, 11 universities (34.3%) have White students graduating at a lower rate than the total students, while 15 universities (46.9%) have Black and Hispanic students graduating at a lower rate than the total students and 29 schools (90.6%) are failing Black or Hispanic students where the graduation rate is lower than the total. Regardless of any potential reason for students of color not graduating, it is the job of these universities to provide the proper resources to retain them until graduation. The data show a pattern of universities better retaining and graduating their White students versus their Black and Hispanic students.

Table 2
Graduation rate of 2015 cohort in 2020 by race/ethnicity in 32 public Texas universities

	Total Students Graduated (%)	Black Students Graduated (%)	Hispanic Students Graduated (%)	Asian Students Graduated (%)	White Students Graduated (%)
Angelo State University	43	36	37	56	48
Lamar University	37	26	38	56	45
Midwestern State University	46	33	41	60	53
Prairie View A & M University	42	42	40	30	26

Sam Houston State University	55	47	56	76	57
Stephen F Austin State University	52	46	52	56	55
Sul Ross State University	26	23	26	0	27
Tarleton State University	46	30	38	73	50
Texas A & M International University	48	33	45	50	42
Texas A & M University-College Station	73	79	68	76	75
Texas A & M University-Commerce	42	34	40	21	51
Texas A & M University-Corpus Christi	34	22	35	39	34
Texas A & M University-Kingsville	42	26	43	33	46
Texas A&M University-Texarkana	23	20	20	0	25
Texas Southern University	22	21	24	29	23
Texas State University	54	46	52	53	59
Texas Tech University	62	58	57	65	64
The University of Texas at Arlington	49	39	47	59	47
The University of Texas at Austin	86	78	80	91	86
The University of Texas at Dallas	70	63	65	78	66
The University of Texas at El Paso	40	20	39	62	35
The University of Texas at San Antonio	50	54	51	49	47
The University of Texas at Tyler	41	30	42	56	50
The University of Texas Permian Basin	39	25	44	57	33
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley	46	82	45	61	38
University of Houston	59	52	55	68	56
University of Houston-Clear Lake	48	53	42	46	52
University of Houston-Downtown	27	23	28	26	30
University of Houston-Victoria	21	16	25	14	17
University of North Texas	56	58	59	40	58
University of North Texas at Dallas	35	33	34	50	33
West Texas A & M University	44	26	39	38	50

Due to recent changes in DEI initiatives, The University of Texas at Austin, Texas A&M College Station, and the University of Houston were selected to examine the faculty-to-student ratio

within race/ethnicity subgroups from 2015-2020. The range of years (2015-2020) was selected to encompass the time in which the 2015 cohort was enrolled at each university. Data gathered included the number of tenure and tenured-track (T&TT) faculty members for a given academic year, as well as the number of full-time undergraduate students enrolled for each academic year. A faculty-to-student ratio of 1 to 1 ratio would indicate that each student in the given group has a unique faculty member in the same group. Ratios are calculated by dividing the number of students by faculty members within each group (Black, Hispanic, and White).

The University of Texas at Austin

In 2015, The University of Texas at Austin had 1 Black faculty member for every 4 Black students, 1 Hispanic faculty member for every 15 Hispanic students, and 1 White faculty member for every 2 White students. By 2020, the ratio of all faculty to students remained consistent. However, it is important to consider how the Hispanic faculty-to-student ratio reveals a disparity in faculty representation for Hispanic students. Between 2015-2020, the number of Black students remained consistently low (see Figure 1). Additionally, the number of Black students enrolled remained consistently lower than White and Hispanic students. In 2015, the number of White students enrolled (3,196) was 9 times the number of Black students enrolled (355), 1.9 the number of Hispanic students enrolled (1,710). In 2020, the number of White students enrolled (2,761) was 6.6 times the number of Black students enrolled (418) and 1.1 times the number of Hispanic students enrolled (2,417).

Figure 1
Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity at The University of Texas at Austin from 2015-2020
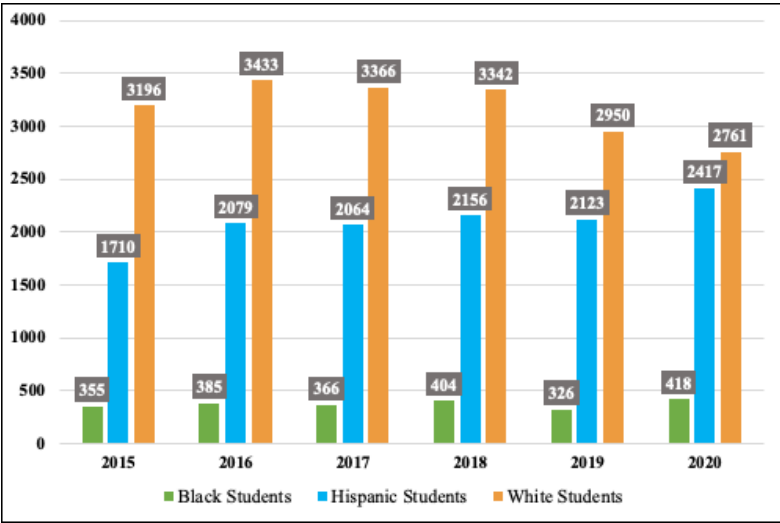
Figure 2 below shows the distribution of full-time faculty by race/ethnicity from 2015-2020 for The University of Texas at Austin. The number of Black and Hispanic faculty remained consistently lower than White faculty from 2015 to 2020. In 2015, the number of White faculty (1,396) was 17.7 times the number of Black faculty (79) and 12.5 times the number of Hispanic faculty (112). In 2020, the number of White faculty (1,284) was 13.5 times the number of Black faculty (95) and 8.2 times the number of Hispanic faculty (156).

Figure 2

Tenured and Tenure-Track Faculty by Race/Ethnicity at The University of Texas at Austin from 2015-2020
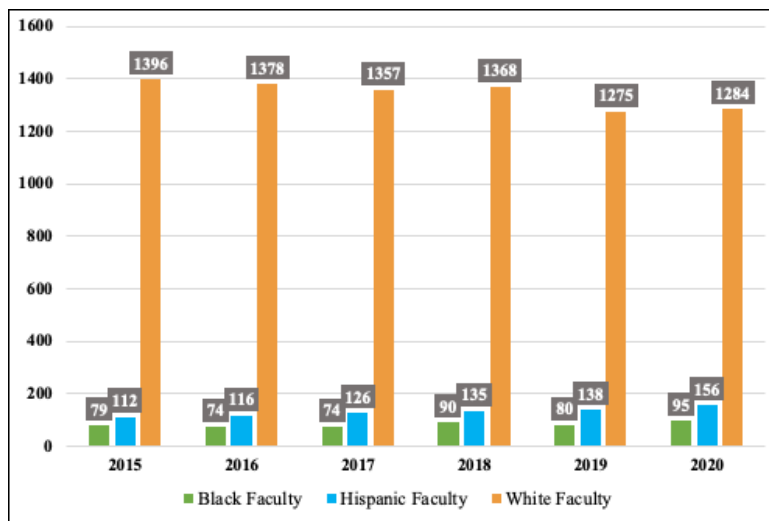
Texas A&M University

In 2015, Texas A&M University in College Station had 1 Black faculty member for every 5 Black students, 1 Hispanic faculty member for every 22 Hispanic students, and 1 White faculty for every 4 White students. By 2020, there was 1 Black faculty member for every 3 Black students, 1 Hispanic faculty member for every 21 Hispanic students, and 1 White faculty member for every 4 White students. Similarly to The University of Texas at Austin, all faculty-to-student ratios remained consistent between 2015-2020, however, the ratio of Black faculty to students became worse (from 1:5 to 1:3). The Hispanic faculty-to-student ratio also reveals a disparity in faculty representation for Hispanic students. Overall, the number of Black students remained consistently low between 2015-2020 (see Figure 3). Additionally, the number of Black students enrolled remained consistently lower than Hispanic and White students. In 2015, the number of White students enrolled (6,260) was 16.8 times the number of Black students enrolled (373) and 2.4 times the number of Hispanic students enrolled (2,567). In 2020, the number of White students enrolled (6,208) was 25.2 times the number of Black students enrolled (246) and 2.2 times the number of Hispanic students enrolled (2,779).

Figure 3

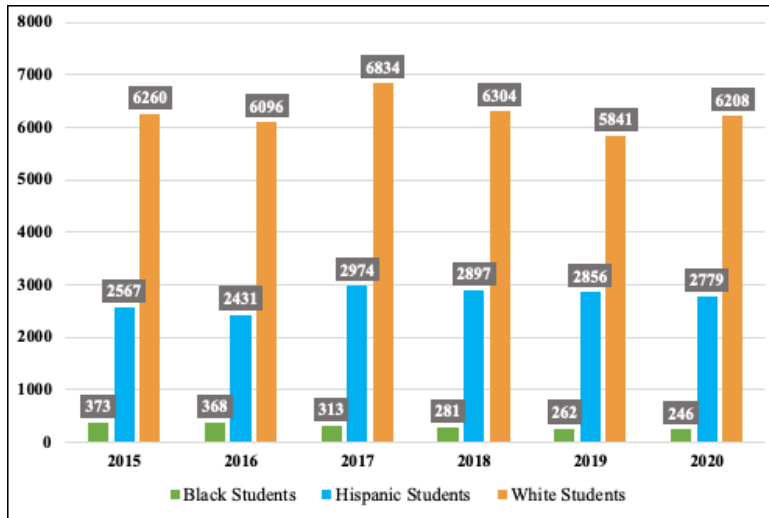*Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity at Texas A&M University from 2015-2020*

Figure 4 below shows the distribution of T&TT faculty by race/ethnicity from 2015-2020 for Texas A&M. The number of Black and Hispanic faculty remained consistently lower than White faculty from 2015 to 2020. In 2015, the number of White faculty (1,383) was 20.6 times that of Black faculty (67) and 12.3 times that of Hispanic faculty (112). In 2020, the number of White faculty (1,242) was 16.8 times that of Black faculty (74) and 9.6 times the number of Hispanic faculty (129).

Figure 4

Tenured and Tenure-Track Faculty by Race/Ethnicity at Texas A&M University from 2015-2020
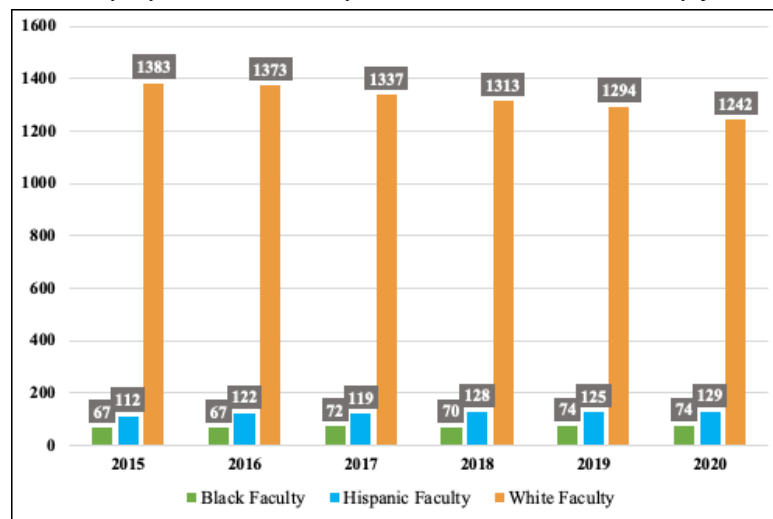
University of Houston

In 2015, the University of Houston had 1 Black faculty member for every 11 Black students, 1 Hispanic faculty member for every 17 Hispanic students, and 1 White faculty member for every 1 White student. Similarly, to The University of Texas at Austin and Texas A&M, all faculty-to-student ratios

remained consistent between 2015-2020, however, the ratio of Hispanic faculty to students became worse by 2020 (from 1:17 to 1:22). The Hispanic faculty-to-student ratio also reveals a disparity in faculty representation for Hispanic students. Overall, Black students enrolled remained lower than Hispanic and White students between 2015-2020. In 2015, the number of White students enrolled (883) was 2 times the number of Black students enrolled (437). The number of Hispanic students enrolled in 2015 (1,261) was 2.8 times the number of Black students enrolled (437). In 2020, the number of White students enrolled (973) was 1.8 times the number of Black students enrolled (535). The number of Hispanic students enrolled in 2020 (1,893) was 3.5 times the number of Black students enrolled (535).

Figure 5

Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity at the University of Houston from 2015-2020
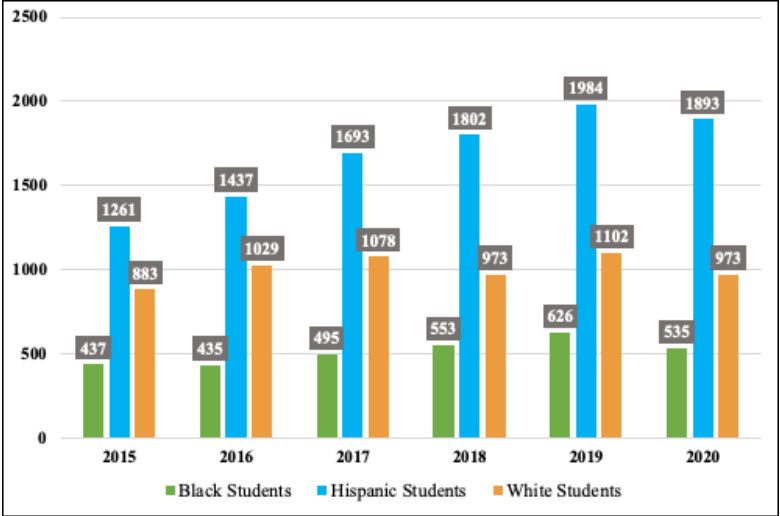

Figure 6 below shows the distribution of T&TT faculty by race/ethnicity from 2015-2020 for the University of Houston. The number of Black and Hispanic faculty remain consistently lower than White faculty from 2015 to 2020. In 2015, the number of White faculty members (625) was 16.9 times the number of Black faculty (37) and 8.8 times the number of Hispanic faculty (71). In 2020, the number of White faculty (575) was 11.5 times the number of Black faculty (50) and 6.5 times the number of Hispanic faculty (89).

Figure 6

Tenured and Tenure-Track Faculty by Race/Ethnicity at the University of Houston from 2015-2020
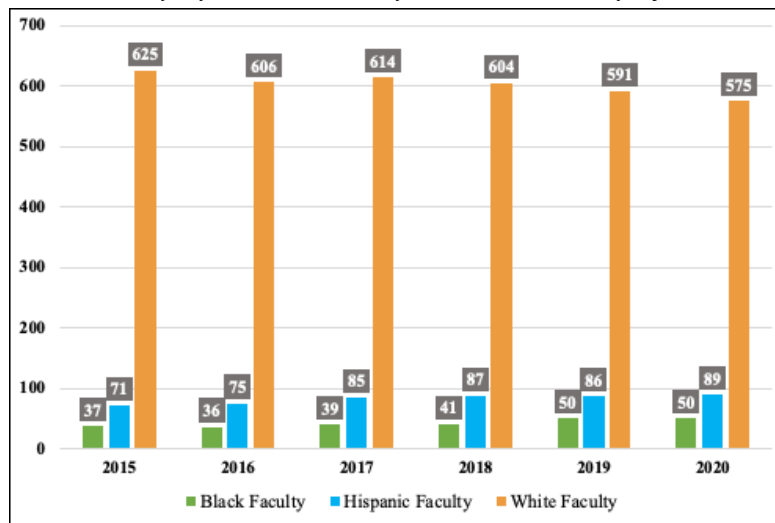

Discussion and Conclusion

Graduation rates among 32 of Texas' higher education institutions reveal that many Black and Hispanic students are missing some vital resources that would help push them to graduation. DEI programs and offices provide students with many resources, including tutoring or mentoring programs, staff support, student organizations, and financial counseling to name a few. While these programs have existed and will continue to exist, Senate Bill 17 would remove DEI programs that are specifically designed for underrepresented and marginalized students. It is important to target the needs of marginalized students because of issues of access to resources, which in turn affects disparities in equity. Equity allows these students to access the proper resources to step through the door of higher education to receive the same opportunities to succeed as other students. Equality assumes that these students were already in the room with everyone else. Taking away DEI programs would be detrimental to students who simply want a chance and the basic right of access to higher education that all Texas students deserve.

DEI programs provide students with the resources they need to succeed, given that many students of color are already being failed organizationally and systematically by their universities. Taking these away is detrimental to all students, including removing the opportunity for exposure and immersion within a diverse setting. Without many DEI organizations, including student organizations, professional organizations, student success programs, and identity based offices (Black Brown Dialogues on Policy, 2023), students would not be able to step into spaces that value and celebrate their cultures and backgrounds. In turn, students would not be able to connect with their true identities, one which is rich with a diverse set of viewpoints that enrich the student body. Students would not be able to connect with each other and share their cultural backgrounds, leaving students without the proper skills to engage in the increasingly globalized world once they graduate from college. Additionally, students would not be able to experience growth in empathy for others and open their own worldviews to their own peers with whom they attend college.

Enrollment trends across the state of Texas from 2015-2020 (see Figure 7) create a display of how its universities are failing students of color by decreasing access. Considering that Texas holds the largest percentage of Black individuals than any other state in the U.S., consistently low enrollment rates of Black students in three major universities that have paused or stopped their DEI initiatives is woefully premature and startling. Additionally, Black faculty are also affected by access issues in Texas universities, and the hiring rates do not seem to be improving even after several years. When the enrollment of Black students is so low compared to White students, and the hiring of Black faculty members is well below that of White faculty members, removing DEI initiatives would only hinder these populations more.

Additionally, despite the increasing number of Hispanic people within Texas, the consistently low number of Hispanic faculty in Texas universities is detrimental to Hispanic students who would benefit from faculty representation. Instead of removing DEI initiatives, universities should audit search committee practices and decision-making processes to ensure the recruitment of Black and Hispanic faculty into Texas universities. Failure of the Texas legislature to see the underlying issue as not caused by the presence of DEI programs and resources, but the need for an increase in access and removal of barriers to people of color to higher universities through DEI initiatives, creates a "chilling effect." The proposal of policies to "address" a problem that is not thereby removing the only thing that could address the real problems is detrimental to Texas' faculty and students. All students benefit from diversity, rendering the approval of these policies shortsighted and irresponsible.

Figure 7

Percentages in Total Population, Population (18-24 years old), Tenured and Tenure Track (T&TT) Faculty, Graduate Students, and Undergraduate Students by Race/Ethnicity: A Comparison between 2015 and 2021 in Texas
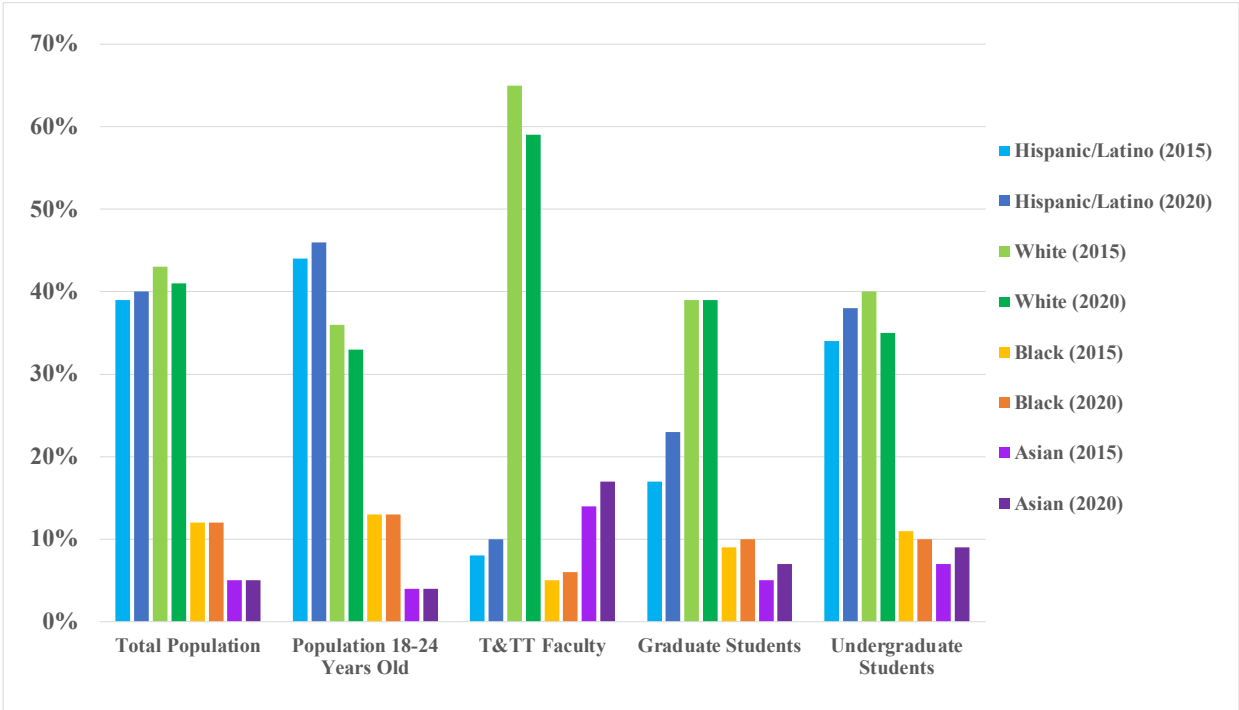
<div align="center">**Policy Recommendations to Texas Legislature**</div>

Recommendation 1: Fund DEI initiatives

Multiple peer-reviewed studies have outlined the positive effects of DEI initiatives, including and not limited to a) increasing student's critical thinking skills (King, 2022; Thomas, 2022), b) diversity in faculty and student population is vital to establishing equity (Cumming et al., 2023; Muñoz et al., 2017; Stout et al., 2018), c) promotes a sense of belonging to all students that results in improved retention rates and employee satisfaction (Tuner, 2021; Swanson, 2022). Therefore, we urge the Texas Legislature not to sign SB17 into law.

Recommendation 2: Allocate funds and resources to equity reports and increase DEI research for Texas higher education institutions

We recommend that the state of Texas allocate funds to understand further the organizational and systematic barriers that do not allow students and faculty of color to be in higher education institutions. The research on DEI initiatives must be updated and further analyzed to understand contemporary issues regarding equity and inclusion across Texas universities.

Recommendation 3: Strong, targeted initiatives for an increase in Black and Latin* students and faculty across Texas higher education institutions

Per our policy analysis, we find that enrollment trends across Texas 2015-2020 universities are not enrolling or retaining Black and Latin* students/faculty compared to white students/faculty, which is problematic, to say the least. As such, the Texas legislature must create targeted initiatives to fix historical and systematic barriers that do not allow Black and Latin* students/faculty to flourish in higher education institutions.

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