

# Campus diversity important predictor of interracial friendships

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One of the hopes of having diverse campus environments is that the daily interaction with students from different backgrounds will promote interracial understanding and friendship. A new study in the journal *Social Science Quarterly* found that campus racial and ethnic diversity is important in predicting friendship heterogeneity, and that minorities have higher predicted friendship diversity than whites.

Mary J. Fischer of the University of Connecticut used data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Freshmen to examine how college characteristics, social distance felt toward other groups, and precollege friendship diversity affects the formation of interracial friendships in the first year of college. The sample consisted of nearly 4,000 white, black, Hispanic, and Asian college students from 27 different colleges and universities.

Results showed that exposure to greater diversity will result in more cross-group friendships for all students. The ability of the study to control for students' prior interracial experiences and attitudes rules out the argument that it is purely selection that drives choice in interracial friendship formation.

As school diversity rises, predicted friendship diversity also increases, although whites still have lower predicted levels of friendship diversity than minorities. However, this relationship shifts as schools become more diverse, with whites having nearly as diverse friendship networks as minorities on the most diverse campuses.

"This research provides evidence of the social benefits of assembling a diverse student body, particularly for white students, and can add to the debate over the continuation of affirmative action policies," Fischer concludes.

Source: Wiley

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