

Study finds link between 'critical mass' and respectful racial climate

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UCR students create a sense of community on campus.

(Phys.org) —A new study by William Kidder, assistant provost at UC Riverside, analyzed surveys from nearly 10,000 African American and Latino undergraduates and concluded that universities that maintain higher levels of "critical mass" have African American and Latino students who are more likely to feel respected on campus.

The study, "Misshaping the River: Proposition 209 and Lessons for the Fisher Case," was published this week in the *Journal of College and University Law*, a peer-reviewed journal at the University of Notre Dame Law School. The study compares 2008 through 2011 student survey results at the University of Texas at Austin and other leading U.S. research universities.

On the campuses with more African Americans in the student body, including UT Austin and UC Riverside, between 72 and 87 percent of African Americans felt students of their race were respected on campus. By contrast, on the campuses with fewer African Americans in the student body, including UC Berkeley, UCLA and UC San Diego, between 32 and 71 percent of African Americans felt respected on campus. Latino undergraduates were also more likely to feel respected on the university campuses where there were higher levels of diversity.

Kidder found that in 98 out of 98 head-to-head comparisons, the campuses where African Americans were 5 to 10 percent of the student body had more favorable survey results regarding students feeling respected as compared to the less diverse campuses where affirmative action was banned.

During oral argument in *Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin*, Justices discussed "[critical mass](#)" and "racial isolation" dozens of times, including Chief Justice John Roberts' pointedly asking, "How am I supposed to decide whether you have an environment [with] particular minorities who don't feel isolated?" A ruling is expected soon.

The racial interactions on campus can be influential in [academic success](#), according to Sylvia Hurtado, professor at UCLA and Director of the Higher Education Research Institute.

"Lower racial diversity not only results in increased reports of campus

incidents but members of underrepresented groups and majority students show lower scores on college outcomes as a result of negative cross race encounters."

The full article is available at papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2123653

Provided by University of California - Riverside

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