

# Minding the Attainment Gap: A Classroom Level Approach

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“Race is an issue we have never been at ease with and, given our nation’s history, this is in some ways understandable. . .If we are to make progress in this area, we must feel comfortable enough with one another and tolerant enough of each other to have frank conversations about the racial matters that continue to divide us.”

-Eric Holder, U.S. Attorney General  
March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2009

What I appreciate about my job.

# The Data

**Table 1: Enrollment and Graduation Rates Are Up for All Students at Four-Year Colleges and Universities**

Fall Undergraduate Enrollment			
	Black	Hispanic	White
2009	1,271,636	949,304	5,928,302
2010	1,337,325	1,053,700	6,058,845
2011	1,379,680	1,158,268	6,090,212
09-11% Change	+8.5%	+22.0%	+2.7%
Six-Year Graduation Rate			
	Black	Hispanic	White
2009	39.1%	48.7%	60.8%
2010	39.5%	50.1%	61.5%
2011	39.9%	51.0%	62.1%
09-11% Change	+2.0%	+4.7%	+2.1%

Source: NCES (December 2012). Enrollment in Postsecondary Institutions, Fall 2011; Financial Statistics, Fiscal Year 2011; and Graduation Rates, Selected Cohorts, 2003-2008, First Look (Provisional Data); NCES (March 2012). Enrollment in Postsecondary Institutions, Fall 2010; Financial Statistics, Fiscal Year 2010; and Graduation Rates, Selected Cohorts, 2005-2007, First Look; and NCES (February 2011). Enrollment in Postsecondary Institutions, Fall 2009; Graduation Rates, 2003 & 2006 Cohorts; and Financial Statistics, Fiscal Year 2009, First Look.

**Aurora University Enrollment and Graduation Rates**

Fall Undergraduate Enrollment			
	Black	Hispanic	White
2009	224	375	1868
2010	250	456	1891
2011	250	513	2003
09-11 % Change	+11.6%	+26.9%	+7.2%
Six-Year Graduation Rate			
	Black	Hispanic	White
2009	29.5%	37.8%	56.9%
2010	45.9%	54.3%	55.6%
2011	24.1%	41.0%	49.1%
09-11% Change	-18.3%	8.5%	-13.7%

# Macro-level Interventions

- K-12 re-structuring that includes college prep and financial aid education.
- Investing in k-12 and higher education student services.
- Linking college funding to completion rates.
- Strengthening financial support.
- Pro-active re-enrollment strategies.

# Micro-level Approach

- Identity-Based Motivation Theory
- Critical Race Theory

# Identity-Based Motivation

- Identities are constructed by context.
- People prefer identity-congruent over identity-incongruent situations.
- Reaction to difficulty influenced by level of congruence.

“This is important” ↔ “This is not for me”

# Tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT)

- Race and ethnicity always matter.
- White privilege is defined as the opportunity to ignore race.
- Places race at the center of any system.
- Rejects colorblindness.
- Racial aggression occurs mostly in subtle form.

# Microaggressions

## Definitions:

- Microaggression – Brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults that potentially have harmful or unpleasant psychological impact on the target person or group.



# Microaggressions

## Examples in the classroom:

- Continually mispronounce or avoid pronouncing more unfamiliar names.
- Schedule exams or projects on cultural holidays.
- Communicating lower expectations for students from particular groups.
- Differentiated level of praise for correct responses based on student groups.
- Assigning projects that ignore differences in socioeconomic status.
- Indicating an assumption about someone's socioeconomic status.
- Act of surprise when an assumed commonplace reference is unknown.
- Discouraging students from working on projects that explore their own identities.
- Assume a Latino/a student speaks Spanish.

# Guiding Questions

Examine all aspects of your course through a racial lens

- Who are your students?

# Guiding Questions

Examine all aspects of your course through a racial lens

- How do you make your course part of the students' in-group?

# Guiding Questions

Examine all aspects of your course through a racial lens

- What do students assume about your identity/possible bias?

# Guiding Questions

Examine all aspects of your course through a racial lens

- How do students know they can talk openly about the course and their identity?

# Classroom Level Interventions

- Lead with racial identity awareness.
  - “What I appreciate about my job” exercise.
  - Note racial/ethnic back ground of relevant scholars
  - “\_\_\_\_\_ is for everyone”
- Give the student identity-course material intersection a name.
  - “Hitting home”
- Develop examples, projects, exercises that acknowledges race and culture.

# Course-Culture Integration Exercise

- Consider your family-of-origin:
  - Education history
  - Race/Ethnicity
  - Social-Economic class
- How does this course fit?
  - Education history
  - Race/Ethnicity
  - Social-Economic class