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## COMMENTARY

# Silos of Academe Thwart Diversity on Campuses

By JUAN E. GILBERT

Although I am a computer scientist, I have been involved with issues of diversity for many years. I developed an online gamelike environment to teach inner-city kids algebra, using culturally relevant learning technologies, and I have applied data-mining techniques to help universities admit diverse classes without relying on just one criterion, such as race. I have also worked with programs designed to diversify and broaden participation in computer science.

It is often the case that researchers in the STEM fields — science, technology, engineering, and mathematics — have little to do with diversity or underrepresentation. But I am particularly interested in human-centered computing, or applying computer science directly to human issues like diversity. That interest has led me to work with people in other disciplines, and in doing so, I have made interesting discoveries.

After meeting with various medical and business professionals, and attending a workshop on diversity sponsored by the American Bar Association, I realized that those fields have the same diversity or underrepresentation issues as we in the STEM disciplines do. That was an eye-opening moment for me because I had always thought that the other professions did a good job of including women and members of minority groups. After all, you can turn on the television and see African-American doctors, lawyers, and businesspeople. On the other hand, I had never seen an African-American computer scientist until I was in my late 20s.

But not only do the numbers show that other fields have the same problems of underrepresentation as the STEM disciplines do; the discussions about diversity are similar, too. For example, just as my colleagues debate the ability of the GRE to measure an applicant's aptitude, lawyers, businesspeople, and doctors ask the same questions about the LSAT, the GMAT, and the MCAT.

I had a similar revelation when I read Peter Schmidt's article in *The Chronicle* on June 13, about the annual National Conference on Race and Ethnicity in American Higher Education. The article referred to a talk given by Evelyn Hu-DeHart, director of Brown University's Center for the Study of Race and Ethnicity in America, in which she pointed out that few presenters at the conference were top-level college administrators or trustees, or professors from fields other than education, psychology, and ethnic studies. I was stunned to find that this year's meeting was the 21st annual conference. How could I just be learning about the meeting, given that I have done so much work on diversity in higher education?

I called a few of my colleagues in STEM fields, education, and the social sciences who are involved in research on diversity or efforts to increase it. None of my STEM or social-science contacts knew about the conference, but my friends in education did. Most of them didn't attend it, though: They said it was for diversity officers.

It is clear that diversity research and programs take place within specific academic disciplines, or "silos." We don't reach beyond our own silos enough to know that colleagues in other silos are wrestling with similar issues and ideas.

Solving the growing problems of underrepresentation and lack of equity in higher education, and society in general, needs a multidisciplinary approach. Bringing together a diverse group of researchers and practitioners from law, business, STEM, education, the humanities, and so forth — perhaps at a national conference — would result in better ideas, programs, research agendas, and ultimately solutions.

We all know that our nation is becoming more diverse by the minute. As the current majority becomes a minority, how will we make education more accessible and increase equality on our campuses? I don't have the answers. Maybe some of you do, but I wouldn't know, because you are probably not in my academic silo.

That situation has to change. As William B. Harvey, chief diversity officer at the University of Virginia and president of the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education, said in the June 13 article, "We cannot do this work alone."

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