

What roles do MSIs play in preparing Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers?

By **Conra D. Gist, Travis J. Bristol, Leslie T. Fenwick, & Chike Akua**

Minority-serving institutions (MSIs) refer to historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs); Latinx-serving institutions; tribal colleges and universities; and Asian American, Native American, and Pacific Islander (AAPI)-serving institutions. Though they are commonly grouped together — largely due to the shared federal designation they were given under the Higher Education Act of 1965 — they differ from one another in a number of ways. For instance, HBCUs tend to be much older than the other three kinds of institutions, most of them dating their origins to the 19th century. Also, whereas HBCUs and tribal colleges and universities were created to serve specific populations (Black Americans and Native Nations, respectively), that is not true of Latinx- or AAPI-serving institutions (traditional colleges and universities at which Latinx or AAPI students make up significant percentages of the enrollment).

These differences notwithstanding, each institution shares an important feature: Every year, they produce a large (often the largest) share of the nation's college graduates from each of these four communities (National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education, 2008; Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2019), even though many of them have far smaller endowments, and far fewer resources, than their predominantly white counterparts (Merisotis & McCarthy, 2005). In short, many of these institutions have long played an outsized role in the preparation of Professionals of Color — including K-12 teachers. Though they accounted for just 16% of all degrees conferred in 2014, they accounted for 27.9% of degrees conferred to Asian American students, 44% of degrees conferred to Latinx students, and 33% of degrees conferred to Black students (Gasman, Castro Samayoa, & Ginsberg, 2016).

MSIs' historical traditions and contemporary practices

could have much to teach us about effective ways to recruit and prepare Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and AAPI educators. Unfortunately, there are very few systematic studies on this topic, and even fewer studies that have been conducted by researchers who appear to have a deep knowledge about and nuanced understanding of minority-serving institutions (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019; Petchauer & Mawhinney, 2017). Eight recent studies highlighted in the *Handbook of Research on Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers* (Gist & Bristol, forthcoming, 2022) expand the research base in this area.

What the recent research shows

Emery Petchauer and Lynette Mawhinney Gachoki investigate the overall role that MSIs play in teacher education and the value they bring to the work. Drawing on an analytical framework that has been termed *the new institutionalism* (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991), their study focuses on what goes on “under the hood” of these teacher education programs, reviewing not just their explicit curricula and resources but also their origins, the ways in which their missions have evolved, the sorts of informal professional networks they've created, their commitment to advising and supporting their students, their academic standards and expectations, and so on. Teacher education programs at MSIs, they conclude, are a valuable if overlooked reservoir of knowledge about how best to meet the needs and cultivate the strengths of prospective Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers.

Kimberley Edelin Freeman and colleagues interviewed Black science and mathematics teachers who had graduated from HBCUs to gauge how their pathways into teaching might have been influenced by attending this sort of institution. The HBCU graduates reported that they had a

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particularly strong sense of self-efficacy as undergraduates, that they were regularly provided with culturally responsive pedagogy, and that they had a strong sense of identity as science or math majors (which then led them to become interested in teaching, in part because of the intense demand for science and mathematics teachers in many school districts). Notably, they also described their HBCUs as playing a major role in their science and mathematics education and a much smaller role in their teacher education — most of them (16 of the 20 teachers interviewed) majored in a science- or math-related subject in college and then went on to obtain a teaching license through a master's degree or alternative certification program. If resources were invested in expanding enrollments in HBCUs' undergraduate math and science programs, the researchers conclude, this would likely result, over the long term, in a greater number of Black math and science teachers working in U.S. schools.

Diane Nevárez explores how frameworks that value Latinx teacher candidates' cultural and linguistic resources position the candidates to better support the educational success of their Latinx students. Her findings indicate that Latinx-serving institutions can serve Latinx candidates by

recognizing and developing their cultural wealth within their communities and by considering the intersections between their personal and professional identities. This work must be consciously and intentionally integrated into the structure of teacher education programs through course offerings, curricula, and fieldwork experiences that are informed by critical, asset-based theories and pedagogies.

Govinda Budrow examines how inclusive teacher education at a tribal college and university uses a curriculum shaped by Ojibwe knowledge and ways of being (such as living in service of community and teaching spiritual lessons via storytelling) to honor and support Indigenous students from prekindergarten through college. A complicated and painful history with education, as well as issues of invisibility, has produced a difficult relationship between U.S. public schools and Indigenous communities. Intentional design and responsible partnerships are necessary to create new connections in which education acts as a system of support rather than a system of assimilation and an act of war. Reclaiming education as Indigenous is essential.

The role and importance of these types of frameworks are further described in two additional studies, both of



Research topics to explore

- The efficacy of minority-serving institution educator preparation program engagement in school-based interventions.
- Within-group ethnoracial examination of how Teacher Candidates of Color and Indigenous Candidates are prepared at individual MSIs, as well as across-group examination of candidates' experiences at MSIs of various sizes, geographic locations, and demographic makeups.
- The pedagogical practices of MSI teacher educators.
- The types, nature, and efficacy of MSI partnerships with educational agencies (i.e., schools, districts, and state education agencies).
- The impact of MSIs on teacher retention, placement, persistence, and advancement and student academic and nonacademic outcomes in K-12 schools.
- How the teacher education outcomes of MSIs nestled in large public university systems compare with those of other universities within the system.
- The leadership role of MSIs in various educational research and funding agencies.
- The advocacy and leadership roles played by Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers who graduate from MSIs.

which originate in the United States' largest producer of Latinx teachers — the state of California. Maria Oropeza Fujimoto and colleagues explore the interrelated systems of support among the various Latinx-serving institutions of higher education and identify issues and policy recommendations that work toward diversifying the educator workforce. Secondary outcome data from K-12 school districts and the California State University System, a large Latinx-serving public university system, can be used to understand the distinct role that such institutions play in graduating Teachers of Color to serve California schools. Frameworks that address critical policy (Rodriguez, 2013) and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) can help the education community reconceptualize the production of and investment in Latinx teachers and the role of policy in growing the limited pipeline of future Latinx teachers. This research expands our knowledge of the impact of Latinx-serving institutions on the larger issues of teacher shortages and graduate student diversity.

Luz Y. Herrera and colleagues feature a comparative case study of Latinx-serving institutions within the university system and explore the role of funding in program designers' ability to foster reflective, critical, and community-committed teachers. This study traces a grow-your-own model of teacher preparation in two Latinx-serving institutions and highlights the importance of the confluence between macro ecosystems (e.g., diversity policies that support and articulate the value of reflective, critical, and community-committed teachers) and micro ecosystems (e.g., local teacher programs designed to prepare such teachers at universities) to sustain such models.

In contrast to the focus on Latinx teachers, a study by Xue Lan Rong and colleagues considers the persistent trend of shortages of minority teachers in general, and of Asian teachers in particular, over the last four decades. When examining the patterns within and severity of the shortages, the researchers find that the shortage has been consistent across U.S. states and regions, as well as more or less consistent across disciplines and types and grade levels of schools. The researchers suggest innovations and reforms to increase the number and percentage of Asian teachers in K-12 schools, such as purposefully transforming white-oriented teacher education curriculum to address the struggles and strengths of Asian American teachers. However, they also assert that recent data offer little reason for optimism about improvement in the near future. The steady decline of prestige and wealth associated with the teaching profession will continue to discourage Asian professionals from going into teaching, regardless of the institutional context in which teachers are prepared and the policies formulated to attract them.

Finally, a study by Deena Khalil and colleagues, describes how an established partnership between an HBCU and several middle schools played a crucial role in designing pre-college science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) programs. The study also highlights the role of Teachers of Color in preparing the next generation of STEM Professionals of Color. A unique feature of this research-practice partnership is its use of the same race-conscious institutional, curricular, and instructional strategies that HBCUs use when fostering student engagement in STEM disciplines. The study highlights how, by using these race-conscious approaches that focus on community cultural wealth, HBCU teacher educators and STEM Professionals of Color successfully increased the self-efficacy of Teachers and Students of Color while also cultivating among them an interest in teaching and learning STEM disciplines. The authors emphasize the need to extend the boundaries of formal K-12 learning spaces to the broader HBCU community. Further, they suggest that virtual collaborations show promise for facilitating partnerships among HBCUs, community members, and school stakeholders to empower minoritized communities' participation in STEM education and professions.

What we don't know yet

The recent research in this area has begun to broaden the body of knowledge about how MSIs can support the recruitment, preparation, and retention of Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers while, at the same time, highlighting the challenges facing such institutions. Many questions remain to be explored, though, about the ways in which MSIs have or have not addressed other challenges teachers face along the teacher development continuum.

For instance, we still know little about the ways in which these institutions have partnered with school districts, recently or over the long term, to strategize about the professional development, retention, mentorship, human resource development, and induction challenges teachers may face on entering schools (Waite, Mentor, & Bristol, 2018). And despite their potential to address the teacher diversity challenge, minority-serving institutions typically operate with limited resources. Finally, although many of these institutions are distinguished in their commitments to Students of Color and Indigenous Students, there remains a concern about these programs becoming siloed from other types of institutions, in particular Research I universities, further complicating their visibility and capacity as leaders in diversifying the educator workforce.

Implications for policy and practice

- Take lessons from minority-serving institutions to tailor program design, faculty practices, and preparation curriculum to serve the academic, psycho-socio-emotional, community, and professional strengths and needs of Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers and support their commitments to justice in K-12 education.
- Minority-serving institutions should support Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers after graduation through school placement, induction, mentorship, and professional development to enhance student academic outcomes; student nonacademic outcomes (such as a reduction in disciplinary recommendations), and teacher professional outcomes (such as retention).
- Embed minority-serving institutions in networks with Research I and top-10 public and private universities in ways that strengthen the institutions' ability to provide timely resources and knowledge capital to support Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers. ■

Research studies to conduct

- *Interpretive studies:* Researchers can develop ethnographies, case studies, focus groups, and other methodological tools to investigate the pedagogical and leadership practices of effective MSI faculty and MSI Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers. They can examine partnerships between MSI educator preparation program partnerships and schools and districts with a majority of students who share a racial or ethnic match with the MSI, and they can look at the formation, function, and structure of MSI educator preparation and teacher development networks.
- *Design-based studies:* Working with researchers, MSI faculty can develop culturally responsive, critical, decolonial, and justice-oriented interventions for Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers in induction, mentorship, pedagogy, leadership, and professional development to support growth in the engagement and learning of both students and teachers.
- *Effect studies:* Researchers can examine the number of preservice Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers in various MSIs, differentiating by program type (alternative certification, grow your own, traditional) and content area, exploring correlations with certification exam scores, student debt, curriculum and pedagogy supports, and attrition rates. They can examine the number of Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers who graduate from different MSI pathways and content areas, exploring correlations with type of school placement and working conditions, retention and persistence, and the impact on academic and nonacademic factors and outcomes. Large data sets collected at the district, state, and federal levels are recommended for these studies.

Example: If the problem of practice is the limited number of teacher graduates from Latinx-serving institutions being hired and supported in high-performing schools, then the partners may come together to develop interpretive studies to understand the barriers, and based on the findings, advance theories of change and intervention studies to expand teaching opportunities for graduates of these types of schools. Given the infrastructure challenges that MSIs often face, developing networked improvement communities of Latinx-serving institution partners would support the implementation of this type of research project.

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