

Cultivating a More Racially/Ethnically Diverse Psychology Workforce

My candidacy for APA President-Elect presents an opportunity to describe my **longstanding interest in diversifying the psychology workforce**. My commitment to this originated when I was Director of Training in Psychology at Children’s National Medical Center, where we served a widely diverse population (e.g., diversity across race/ethnicity (BIPOC), country of origin, primary language, socioeconomic class) with a majority-white psychology faculty. I had the opportunity to engage on this issue on a larger scale while Director of the Office for Policy and Communications for the Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD). Once again, I was overseeing training (in this case, policy fellowships) and seeking to nurture the careers of racially/ethnically diverse scholars. It was when I was in this role that Congress, federal agencies, and a wide range of science disciplines became increasingly concerned about the under-representation of people of color in science careers.

I became a founding member of the Collaborative to Enhance Diversity in Science, under the leadership of the Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA)¹ and alongside APA and other professional associations

(<https://www.cossa.org/coalitions/diversity/>). During my tenure with this coalition, I **led a survey of professional associations and scientific societies** regarding their level of concern and efforts to enhance diversity in the science pipeline. (Scroll to Appendix E for survey:

https://www.cossa.org/diversity/Diversity_Appendices_D-E.pdf) This

was a piece of a broader effort (workshop, Congressional Briefing) that brought together Congressional staff as well as stakeholders in academia, federal agencies, private foundations, and professional associations. This work was founded on the **principle of *intrinsic value of diversity in the science workforce*** – not merely to represent the demographics of our country but because research has shown that diverse perspectives *improve education for everyone* and aid scientific discovery. Conversations across sectors acknowledged that there are leaks throughout the pipeline from K-12, undergraduate, graduate, post-graduate, and subsequent phases of development in *science* careers.



Leaks in the pipeline are similar for careers in psychological *practice*, both Health Service Psychology (HSP) and General Applied Psychology (GAP). There are issues of discrimination and inequity for educational preparation, access, cost/debt, exposure to roles and role models, interruptions to education, networking, and mentoring. For psychological practice, particularly in HSP, ***compositional diversity plays a critical role for the populations we serve and enhances cultural humility in the profession***. There are downstream implications for those who seek mental health care providers who share their racial/ethnic background, exacerbating disparities in access to culturally competent care. Similar for the pipeline for science careers, the problems are multiplicative, wherein inadequate representation in the profession results in fewer role models and mentors, as well as lack of knowledge

¹ The Collaborative was chaired by Ms. Angela Sharpe, now Senior Director, Congressional & Federal Relations, Scientific Affairs Advocacy at APA.

regarding both the strengths and needs of underrepresented groups, thus perpetuating the leaky pipeline.

I used the term, “cultivation” in the title of this piece deliberately. If we are to diversify the psychology workforce, we will need to ***begin at the beginning and grow opportunities at all points in the pipeline***. APA has longstanding programs to enhance diversity, yet they tend to focus on later phases of education and professional development (e.g., Minority Fellowship Program). I would argue that *we need to start with K-12 education, exposing children and adolescents early to psychology* as a STEM field and to the full range of careers in psychology. We need to better understand the earliest leaks in the pipeline, and reach diverse communities through children’s literature, children’s museums, science museums, and community organizations. We need to partner with elementary school teachers, pre-college psychology instructors, and a corps of psychologists who are able to reach out to communities of children and youth of color in creative ways to expose them to the field (e.g., internships, scholarships, service-learning experiences that fulfill high school graduation requirements). **Children of color will benefit from seeing role models in the profession**, creating mirrors into what is possible as they imagine their own futures. It has been noted that, “you can’t be what you can’t see.”²

We need to support teachers of psychology since they are our earliest ambassadors for diverse students. We should emphasize ***multiple entry points into careers in psychology*** and promote community colleges as but one example. We can partner with other science disciplines and federal agencies to **advocate regarding issues of cost and student debt**. And we must join with universities to **address issues of systemic and structural racism**. APA already has structures in place for members and leaders to support this work (e.g., the Coalition for Psychology in Schools and Education (CPSE), the Council of National Psychology Associations for the Advancement of Ethnic Minority Interests (CNPAEMI)), and we can strengthen and publicize these efforts to maximize impact. If I am elected to serve as APA President, I will build upon my earlier collaborations with other professional associations and federal agencies that share this mission broadly.

It is true that “If you can’t measure it, you can’t improve it.”³ Thus, critical to this work will be the APA Center for Workforce Studies⁴ which can **measure the result of our efforts** in diversifying the workforce. We can take a snapshot of demographics in undergraduate psychology majors, graduates of Masters and Doctoral programs, and in the subfields of psychology now and after a decade of expanded efforts. Repeating demographic surveys recently conducted by the American Psychological Association of Graduate Students (APAGS) and APA governance groups will also help to monitor progress. While we can’t expect to see changes quickly, with time and ***steadfast expansion of efforts across all the points in the pipeline***, we can cultivate a more racially and ethnically diverse psychology workforce and leadership composition in the next generation. We are all ***Better Together***.

² Attributed to Marian Wright Edelman

³ Attributed to Peter Drucker.

⁴ For example, HSP practice: <https://www.apa.org/workforce/factsheets/documentation.pdf>, <https://www.apa.org/workforce/factsheets>; academia: <https://www.apa.org/workforce/publications/academic-psychology>, <https://www.apa.org/workforce/publications/minority.pdf>