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Underrepresented students experience more racial discrimination at low-diversity institutions, according to study

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Race continues to be a significant issue on campus, as evidenced by the upcoming Supreme Court case, *Fisher v. the University of Texas at Austin*, which questions the use of race as one of many factors in undergraduate college admissions in the United States. The court will hear oral arguments for this affirmative action case on October 10, 2012, which will have implications for how campuses achieve diverse learning environments.

Underrepresented college students at low-diversity institutions reported more incidents of stereotyping, discrimination and harassment on campus. African-American students reported incidents to a campus authority at the highest level (22.7 percent) compared to all other underrepresented students (13.7 percent) according to data from the [Diverse Learning Environments Survey](#), a national survey designed to help campuses evaluate their campus climate, institutional practices and student outcomes. While most incidents go unreported, the survey shows that more students reveal these experiences when asked about specific overt and subtle forms of discrimination on campus.

The survey is part of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), which is administered nationally by the [Higher Education Research Institute](#) (HERI) at [UCLA's Graduate School of Education & Information Studies](#).

“Students experience more incidents of stereotyping and discrimination in low-diversity environments, and it doesn't completely disappear in high-diversity environments, though it occurs at a significantly lower rate,” says Sylvia Hurtado, director of the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA and lead author of the research brief, [“The Climate for Underrepresented Groups and Diversity on Campus.”](#)

“It’s important that colleges are aware of their campus racial climate and the specific challenges that their underrepresented students face. Improving the diversity of a campus is a first step, followed by working to improve interracial relations to build students’ skills for citizenship in a multicultural society,” Hurtado says.

While discrimination and stereotyping come in many forms, underrepresented students reported that verbal comments are the most prevalent form. Almost two-thirds or 60.4 percent of underrepresented students reported being the target of verbal comments in low-diversity environments, and this is higher among African-American students at 67.2 percent.

Underrepresented students at low-diversity institutions also reported higher rates of feeling excluded from campus events and activities. One in five African-American students and 30 percent of Latino/a students felt some level of exclusion on even the most diverse campuses. However, when there was greater representation of underrepresented students on campus, these students reported lower levels of exclusion, proving that diversity is a key component to a healthy campus climate.

Findings at a Glance:

- Only 13.7 percent of all underrepresented students reported racial incidents to a campus authority
- 32.4 percent of underrepresented students at low-diversity institutions reported discrimination in the form of offensive visual images
- Students in the most diverse college environments reported more confidence in their social and cognitive skills for participation in a diverse workforce as compared to students at low-diversity institutions

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