

Contours of the Accreditation Purpose and Process

Making Diversity Matter in a Nonprofit Accreditation Process

*Critical Race Theory as a Lens on the Present
and Future of Nonprofit Education*

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Abstract

The nonprofit sector has a wide and well-documented diversity deficit. As the Nonprofit Academic Centers Council (NACC) considers accreditation, we argue that any accreditation process that seeks to elevate the quality and legitimacy of nonprofit education must place diversity at the center of the process. As educators who are preparing students to study, research, and work in nonprofit and philanthropic organizations, we have an opportunity and a responsibility to address the deficits in our institutions through such an emerging accreditation process. Diversified educational environments have been found to improve outcomes for students and for academic institutions at large, and accreditation may provide important leverage for nonprofit education programs to increase diversity. Yet accreditation alone will not address the long-standing and persistent educational structures, policies, practices, and discourses that contribute to the exclusion and marginalization of diverse students and faculty. Using critical race theory as a lens on the policies, practices, methods, and discourses dominant within nonprofit education today, we also call for sustained critical attention to the ways that identity and power dynamics currently operate within nonprofit education and for the development of strategies and approaches that encourage greater diversity, equity, and inclusion across the curriculum.

Keywords: *diversity; equity; race; critical theory; nonprofit education; accreditation*

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The nonprofit sector has a diversity deficit. Multiple studies have highlighted a lack of racial and ethnic diversity on the staff and boards of nonprofit and philanthropic organizations, gender bias in hiring and compensation in the sector, and little representation among LGBTQ communities and people with disabilities. For example, although people of color represent 36% of the U.S. population and 30% of the U.S. workforce, just 8% of philanthropic organizations, 10% of nonprofit boards, and 11% of nonprofit organizations are led by people of color (BoardSource, 2014; D5 Coalition, 2014). In 2014, GuideStar reported that just 18% of nonprofits with budgets of more than \$50 million had female CEOs in 2013. Although the LGBTQ community represents 5–10% of the population, they represent just 2% of foundation board members (D5 Coalition, 2011). And although 12% of the U.S. population have disabilities, just 1% of foundation board and trustee members are people with disabilities (D5 Coalition, 2011). It is evident that despite representation of people of color, women, LGBTQ, and people with disabilities in the population, the nonprofit sector continues to underrepresent these groups.

As the Nonprofit Academic Centers Council (NACC) considers accreditation, we argue that any accreditation process that seeks to elevate the quality and legitimacy of nonprofit education must place diversity at the center of the process. As educators who are preparing students to study, research, and work in nonprofit and philanthropic organizations, we have an opportunity and a responsibility to address the ways that nonprofit education may be perpetuating the diversity deficit in the sector. Even as we argue that centering diversity in nonprofit education standards is an essential step, we also underscore a call for nonprofit education to move “well beyond a managerial approach” to include a deeper attention to the complexities of identity and power dynamics in the dynamics of volunteering and structuring of nonprofit organizations (Weisinger, Borges-Mendez, & Milofsky, 2016, p. 3S).

Centering Diversity in Accreditation

Diversified educational environments have been found to promote students' openness to cultural, racial, and values diversity (Pascarella, Whitt, Nora, Hagedorn, & Terenzini, 1996); develop students' critical thinking skills (Jayakumar, 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005); enrich the environment for teaching and research; and add to the “strength, productivity, and intellectual capacity” of the institution at large (Women in Science and Engineering Leadership Institute, 2010). By incorporating a wider range of voices and perspectives in undergraduate and graduate nonprofit education, our nonprofit education programs will be better equipped to prepare students to fulfill the promise of the sector and meet the needs of a diverse world. Accreditation may signal the importance of greater diversity in the discipline and may provide leverage for program directors to increase attention to diversity, equity, and inclusion within their programs.

Several disciplinary traditions intersect with nonprofit education, and the respective disciplines have recognized the value of diversified educational environments by centering diversity in their respective accreditation processes. Social work has a long tradition of integrating concerns about diversity, cultural competence, and social justice into its curricular standards. The Council on Social Work Education created a diversity standard in 1986 that mandated that all accredited social work programs “make special, continued efforts to enrich its program by providing racial, ethnic, and cultural

diversity in its student body and at all levels of instruction and research personnel, and by providing corresponding educational supports" (Bowie, Hall, & Johnson, 2011, p. 1082). Public administration scholars have argued that diversity helps to promote democratic citizenship (Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez, 2004; Majumdar & Adams, 2013) and that students' exposure to diverse perspectives helps to enrich their learning experiences and enhances their competence as public service practitioners (Brintnall, 2008; Rice, 2007; Rivera & Ward, 2008). Thus, in its accreditation standards, the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA) emphasizes the diversity of faculty, staff, and students; requires programs to promote a climate of inclusiveness through recruitment, faculty retention, admissions, and student support services; and holds programs accountable for the student competency of "communicating and interacting productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry" (Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation, 2009).

For nonprofit academic programs, accreditation has the potential to encourage diversity in the varied curricula. As a means of certification and distinction that reduces the "structural uncertainties" of the academic market within nonprofit education (Cret, 2011), accreditation may also enable potential students to collect relevant information about the quality and commitment of these programs to greater diversity, equity, and inclusion inside and outside of the academy. As nonprofit programs communicate with internal decision makers, accreditation may operate as a means to make the direct connections between the legitimacy of the field of study and an ongoing commitment to diversity, and to successfully secure the resources they need to make that commitment a reality. Leaders in these institutions may also use the accreditation standards as a "catalyst" as they work with faculty, students, and administrators to center greater attention to diversity in their curricula (Cret, 2011).

However, accreditation alone will not bring diversity to the field of nonprofit education. As Cret stated in his 2011 study of business schools in Europe, accreditation is a "necessary but not sufficient condition to introduce change" (p. 423). The limitations of accreditation are reflected in the research on accreditation policies that include a focus on diversity. In their study of public affairs programs, Majumdar and Adams (2013) concluded that despite the recommendations, the concept of diversity has been "relatively neglected" in the field (p. 218). Similarly, in a study of the effect of diversity standards in social work, Bowie et al. (2011) found that even years after implementation "there has been a systematic lack of meaningful and/or effective efforts to integrate diversity and multiculturalism content into graduate social work curricula" (p. 1099). Progress has been made sporadically, and it has occurred "very slowly" (Bowie et al., 2011, p. 1099).

Beyond Accreditation

If accreditation alone will not address the persistent educational structures, policies, and discourses that contribute to exclusion and marginalization within nonprofit education and in the sector at large, then as scholars we must turn our attention to the complexities of power and identity in the dynamics of volunteering and structuring of nonprofit organizations (Weisinger et al., 2016, p. 3S), extending our focus to the inclusion and full participation of diverse individuals in a group or organization, and to greater equity in the procedures, processes, and distribution of resources within

institutions or systems (D5 Coalition, 2011). Fortunately, we are able to draw on critical perspectives of nonprofit education that encourage us to broaden the focus of our classrooms beyond a narrow set of social concerns and technical skills to a wider range of critical perspectives that equip students to examine knowledge, ethics, and power in organizational goals and practices (Srinivas, 2009); to counter market-based ideology and develop alternatives that emphasize greater diversity of perspective and engagement (Eikenberry, 2009); and to explore the ways that even the most well-intentioned organizations suppress social movements and perpetuate social inequality (Ogbor, 2001; A. Smith, 2007). As Mirabella (2013) argued, we need critical theory as we work with students to become "nimble, agile, creative, and above all, intellectually able" (p. 101).

Here we build and extend on these concerns by using critical race theory to consider the state of nonprofit education in the United States today. We turn to critical race theory as a "powerful theoretical and analytic framework" that allows us to illustrate challenges and opportunities for critical perspectives on diversity and equity inside and outside of the classroom (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004). Rather than viewing the curriculum as neutral or objective, critical race theory posits that race and its intersections with gender, class, language, and immigration status inform curriculum at all levels, from prekindergarten through postsecondary education (Yosso, 2002).

Critical Race Lens on Nonprofit Education

Critical race theory (CRT) is built on the observation that racism is a deeply rooted force in American society, and CRT is so enmeshed in the fabric of social order that it appears normal and natural (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1998). According to Hilliard (as cited in DiAngelo, 2011), racism is the "encompassing economic, political, social, and cultural structures, actions, and beliefs that systematize and perpetuate an unequal distribution of privileges, resources and power between white people and people of color" (p. 56). Race and racism shape institutions and social relations, whether explicitly or implicitly (Omi & Winant, 1986), and result in disparities in health, housing, employment, financial security, incarceration, and education for people of color in the United States and around the globe (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, n.d.).

Within the academy, CRT is also rooted in a "long tradition of resistance" to the unequal distribution of power and resources based on race and other forms of oppression (Taylor, 2009, p. 1). Emerging initially from civil rights litigation, CRT migrated to the field of education and now includes an extensive body of scholarship documenting the effect of race-based inequalities in academic environments. CRT scholars have highlighted processes that hinder the educational pathways of students of color (Savas, 2014; Taylor, 2009), while easing the pathways for White students to receive the highest quality education (Contreras, 2005; W. Smith, Altbach, & Lomotey, 2002). While centering a racial analysis, CRT scholars also focused on the intersections with gender, class, and other forms of oppression and highlighted the ways that difference can be transformed into a source of empowerment and reconstruction (Crenshaw, 2016).

As we consider the implications of CRT for nonprofit education, we begin with a focus on uncovering structures and practices that lead to the exclusion or marginalization of students and faculty of color within nonprofit institutions and programs. As

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scholars in this field of study, we need a fuller understanding of the scope of the problem. Following efforts to document the intersection of race and leadership in the nonprofit sector (Kunreuther, n.d.) and the diversity deficit in philanthropy (D5 Coalition, 2011, 2014), NACC could be a leader in gathering data on student and faculty diversity in nonprofit education programs in the United States and around the world. Yet educators do not have to wait for that data to examine how faculty hiring and promotion, student recruitment, and admissions and financial aid processes may be discouraging or excluding racially diverse candidates within their varied academic programs. They can turn their attention to the stereotypes and biases that may be present in their classrooms, curricula, and programs. When they are hiring and recruiting, who do they envision as the ideal candidate? Which cultural traditions, linguistic practices, and social mores are considered more desirable than others? Do faculty of color have equitable access to mentorship and promotion? Do students of color have equitable access to honors courses, awards, and recognition? As just as important, how are subtler, more implicit forms of racial exclusion operating in nonprofit education programs?

Second, we deploy the CRT scholars' strategy of paying close attention to the dominant racial discourses that circulate within nonprofit management curricula, highlighting the role that language plays in constituting and reproducing hierarchies of social status based on race, gender, and other marginalized identities and validating the assumptions embedded in the ideology of white supremacy over other racialized identities (Flowers, 2010, p. 275). Within nonprofit studies, nonprofit programs have an opportunity to consider how they may be replicating and reproducing racialized discursive practices. As others have noted, nonprofit organizations have a long tradition of drawing from, and at times resisting, a language of deficits to describe the needs of the communities they serve and the need for the services their organizations provide (Breeze & Dean, 2012; Burman, 1994; McCambridge, 2015). A critical race lens asks educators to expose and examine "the hidden curriculum," that is, how stereotypes are embedded and circulated in their own curricula and classrooms (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Margolis & Romero, 1996).

Third, CRT calls for educators to widen the scope of the curriculum to include the experiences and perspectives of marginalized people who have been distorted by the dominant discourse or excluded from the academy altogether (Mazzei, 2007; Yosso, 2002). These distortions and exclusions have a direct effect on students of color who do not see their lives and histories accurately reflected in their academic programs and on faculty who feel unprepared and inexperienced to discuss "the undiscussable," resulting in a culture of "silence and fear" in the classroom (Rusch & Horsford, 2009, p. 303). When issues of race and diversity are addressed within academic programs, the topic is too often limited to single course offerings that are taught by a small subset of the faculty (Diem & Carpenter, 2012; Hawley & James, 2010). As nonprofit education initiates a more intentional focus on diversity and inclusion, the question becomes how to incorporate diverse perspectives across the curriculum by expanding the methodologies that educators embrace (Baumgartner, 2010; Porter, 2013; Preissle, 2006) and the pedagogical approaches that they use (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Misawa, 2010; Torre, 2009). With these shifts, students may become more aware and responsive of the perspectives of marginalized people, expand their tolerance for

discomfort, and participate in “challenging, but necessary, conversations” connecting to issues of racism and other forms of subordination (Rusch & Horsford, 2009, p. 303).

Fourth and finally, we turn our attention to the role of whiteness in the curricula. Here, educators can encourage frank discussion about the structures and processes that reinforce the ideology of white supremacy in the United States (Brodin, 2006; Roediger, 2005). As the cultural practices of whiteness are usually unmarked and unnamed, and white identity is often socially invisible (Matias, Viesca, & Garrison-Wade, 2014), it becomes critical for educators to “trouble whiteness” by helping all of their students to render visible the assumptions and norms that underpin their identities (Gillborn, 2016, p. 45). We recognize that open conversations about race and white identity may be difficult to sustain in the classroom, particularly among White students who have lived in a social environment that protects and insulates them from race-based stress (DiAngelo, 2011; Fine, 1997). To truly diversify the curricula, a wider range of faculty and administrators, White faculty and administrators in particular, will need to take intentional action to educate themselves about their positionality and practice the skills needed to facilitate conversations about what can be “extremely sensitive and often elusive” topics (Ray, 2010, p. 77). Such intentional action will have significant payouts when educators are better equipped to assist their students to “build the stamina to sustain conscious and explicit engagement with race” and other forms of domination and subordination (DiAngelo, 2011, p. 66).

Accreditation and Beyond

We began this paper with the argument that any accreditation process undertaken by NACC must place diversity at the center of the process. We approach accreditation as a process that has the potential to encourage and assist nonprofit academic programs to increase diversity in their curricula. Such a focus is essential to address the negative effects that exclusion, stereotyping, and bias have on students and to ensure that students, campuses, and communities benefit from the well-documented benefits of diversified educational environments (Ganley et al., 2013; Steele & Aronson, 1995).

We acknowledge that centering diversity in nonprofit accreditation is just one step toward diversifying nonprofit education. As Mirabella and Balkun (2011) highlighted, curricular change requires close attention not only to the formal and visible rules, but also to the more informal dynamics underpinning organizational change related to the affective, psychological, social, and political characteristics of each institution. Encouraging faculty, staff, and students to engage in authentic dialogue and sustained study of the role that race and other forms of inequality plays in our classrooms and in the sector will require leadership, awareness, humility, and persistence. Given the disparities that currently exist inside and outside of the academy, we believe our programs need to seize this moment, critically analyze our current practices, and adopt new strategies and approaches that encourage greater diversity, equity, and inclusion in nonprofit education.

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Journal of Nonprofit Education and Leadership

2017 • Volume 7 • Special Issue 1

Editorial Staff	ii
Editor's Notes	
Message From the Special Issue Editor	1
<i>Stuart C. Mendel</i>	
President's Notes	
Message From the NACC President.....	3
<i>Matthew Hale</i>	
Is Accreditation Good for the Field?	
Nonprofit First as Grounding for Nonprofit Studies: Pedagogy, Research, Service to the Community, Accreditation, and National Rankings.....	5
<i>Stuart C. Mendel</i>	
Philanthropy First: Why the Time Is Now to Implement Accreditation for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Academic Programs Around the World	14
<i>Patrick M. Rooney</i>	
A Critical Perspective on Nonprofit Accreditation.....	24
<i>Roseanne Mirabella and Angela Eikenberry</i>	
Between the Disciplines: Accreditation Considerations for Stand-Alone Nonprofit Education Programs.....	32
<i>Robert F. Ashcraft</i>	
An Integrated Approach to Nonprofit Management Curriculum: Implications for Accreditation	41
<i>Steven Rathgeb Smith</i>	
Accreditation: Seven Perspectives From Outside Academia	47
<i>Norman A. Dolch</i>	
Accreditation of Nonprofit Certificate and Degree Programs—Caveat Emptor: Why Public Administration May Not Be The Best Fit.....	52
<i>Jennifer Alexander</i>	
Contours of the Accreditation Purpose and Process	
Making Diversity Matter in a Nonprofit Accreditation Process: Critical Race Theory as a Lens on the Present and Future of Nonprofit Education.....	59
<i>Maureen Emerson Feit, A. Emiko Blalock, Khanh Nguyen</i>	
NASPAA: The Public Administration Process and Approach Toward Accreditation.....	69
<i>Kathleen Hale</i>	
International Perspectives on NACC Accreditation.....	78
<i>John Casey</i>	

International by Design: International Accreditation Perspectives for Nonprofit Management Education.....	84
<i>Marco Tavanti</i>	

Accreditation and International NGOs: Issues and Challenges.....	98
<i>John Hailey</i>	

Moving Across Academic Disciplines: The Opportunities and Challenges of Operationalizing Competency-Based Design	105
<i>Susan Tomlinson Schmidt and Dorothy Norris-Tirrell</i>	

A Framework for Accreditation

Curriculum Mapping Models and Other Processes That Might Work for Nonprofit and Philanthropy Accreditation.....	111
<i>Heather L. Carpenter</i>	

A Template for an Accreditation Process for University-Based Nonprofit and Philanthropy Programs	118
<i>Renée A. Irvin</i>	

Summation

A Position Paper on Accreditation on Nonprofit/Philanthropy University Curricula	126
<i>Matthew Hale and Renée A. Irvin</i>	

Author Guidelines	138
Guidelines for Program Administration Manuscripts	140
Guidelines for Case Studies	140
Book Review Guidelines.....	141