

# Why Economic Diversity Matters

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Here are some highlights from this week's *On Hiring and Diversity* newsletter. If you'd like to subscribe, [sign up here](#).

## Why we need to promote socioeconomic diversity.

Sarah Green Carmichael, an editor at the *Harvard Business Review*, recently [talked](#) with Joan C. Williams, director of the Center for WorkLife Law at the University of California's Hastings College of the Law, about her new book, [White Working Class: Overcoming Class Cluelessness in America](#), which examines how class divisions affected the recent election. Ms. Williams contends that liberals have long been hung up on identity and cultural issues at the expense of socioeconomic ones. While she believes that eliminating racial and gender inequality is a good thing — she's a progressive and a feminist, after all — she suggests that there's been a blindness to class inequality, which is alive and growing in America. As one example, she points to a recent [study](#) of fictitious résumés, which found that male law students from privileged backgrounds were far more likely to get callbacks for coveted internships at top law firms than their working-class counterparts were. Socioeconomic bias is all too real, she argues, yet many corporate and college diversity efforts tend to overlook it. It's time to expand diversity programs to include class, she tells Ms. Carmichael.

But wouldn't that divert attention from longstanding structural inequities and important conversations about race, gender, and sexual orientation in America?, Ms. Carmichael asks.

Ms. Williams thinks such fears are both overblown and shortsighted. We've managed to include LGBTQ people in diversity efforts without forgetting about people of color; surely we can do the same with other demographics, she says. What's more, "refusing to acknowledge the existence and the hidden injuries of class" is hurting women, people of color, and LGBTQ people. Just look at the "spike in hate crimes against all of those groups after Trump was elected," she says.

What some might consider [pandering to angry white guys](#), she considers sensible strategizing: Why fuel their

resentment when they could be potential allies? Working-class white men want “good jobs that yield a modest middle-class standard of living. You know what? People of color care about that,” too, she says.

If progressives talk less about PC and more about shared class inequality, white-working-class rancor might evaporate, Ms. Williams suggests. Perhaps; many [studies have shown](#) that people’s racial biases are heightened when economic times are tough. Still, leaders and companies who worry about rising hostility and economic populism might look for ways to make jobs better and more humane, she says. “Getting rid of just-in-time schedules” — which, according to her research, “there’s not much of a business case for” — and figuring out how to “upscale” jobs and bring back full-time work, so Americans can attain “a modest, but stable standard of living,” would be a nice start, she suggests.

According to an [article](#) on Backchannel, some start-ups are doing just that. As companies like [Uber](#) and [Lyft](#) face blowback for “building their business on the backs of contractors,” companies like Instacart and [Shyp](#) are [exchanging their on-demand labor force](#) for “legal peace of mind” and a more traditional work force, writes Miranda Katz, an editorial associate at the online tech publication. Other start-ups, like Managed by Q, an office-management company, are betting that employing full-time workers will pay off in the long haul. They hope that investing in full-timers who are trained and supervised, and offering workers benefits like health insurance and paid leave, will start a virtuous cycle that produces not only happier employees but also more-satisfied customers, Ms. Katz writes. Now, if only [more colleges and universities would do the same](#).

It’s too soon to tell if the strategy will bear fruit, but [research](#) by Zeynep Ton, an adjunct associate professor in the operations management group at MIT’s Sloan School of Management and author of [The Good Jobs Strategy: How the Smartest Companies Invest in Employees to Lower Costs and Boost Profits](#), suggests they might be onto something, Ms. Katz writes.

Meanwhile, according to the *The New York Times*’s third annual [College Access Index](#), socioeconomic diversity is [decreasing](#) at many public colleges in the U.S. — a result, in large part, of state budget cuts and less financial support for low-income students. Some elite institutions, like Vassar College and Princeton University, however, are trying to push the needle the other way.

Princeton was until recently one of America’s least economically diverse colleges, but not anymore. It’s been improving its diversity by recruiting more low-income students, according to a [column](#) in the *Times*: “Only 6.5 percent of the class of 2007 received Pell Grants, which typically go to students in the bottom half of income distribution. The share among the class of 2017 ... is 14.9 percent. The share in both this year’s and next year’s freshman class is 21 percent.”

That’s progress, but it still amounts to a difference of just a few dozen more students per entering class, as Robert Kelchen, an assistant professor of education at Seton Hall University, [observed](#) on Twitter. And while some other elite colleges and universities, like Vassar, Amherst, Harvard, Pomona, and the state universities of North Carolina and [California](#), are following suit, they’re still in the minority. At a time when class disparities seem to be hardening, that’s a serious cause for concern, says David Leonhardt, who edited the *Times*’s economic ranking of colleges. Colleges are pipelines to employment. Without affordable access, many people from disadvantaged backgrounds could be locked out of good jobs and opportunities for a better economic future, he warns.

Of course, even those who find a way in may end up with limited employment options, writes Lauren Rivera, an associate professor of management and organizations at Northwestern University’s Kellogg School of Management, in an [article](#) in the *Harvard Business Review*. The reason? The most prestigious employers still look to a small number of top universities for new talent, thus systematically tilting the playing field toward students from a few schools, explains Ms. Rivera, who’s also the author of [Pedigree: How Elite Students Get Elite Jobs](#). By restricting their recruiting to elite institutions, companies (and [academic institutions](#)) are not only missing out on more diverse and “high-quality, under-utilized talent pools” but also “allocating recruiting resources in an inefficient way,” she suggests. (That’s the conclusion recently reached by Google, which is opening a [pipeline from Howard](#)

**University**.) “Given that the most prestigious schools — from **undergrad** to **law** to **business** — are less likely to offer practical instruction in the skills necessary to perform the jobs that their graduates will soon fill, firms must provide new hires with extensive training,” Ms. Rivera writes.

That’s also why some industries and colleges are warming up to the idea of apprenticeship programs, Scott Carlson writes in an **article** (for subscribers) in *The Chronicle*. Long embraced as a work-force-training method in other countries, apprenticeships might offer a pathway to education and good jobs in the United States for many students, sans the exorbitant debt levels, he writes.

## Short Takes

### **Busting disability myths.**

If colleges want to make good on their diversity promises, they’ll need to stop perpetuating certain tropes, three disability-studies professors write in a column in *The Chronicle*. Treating a student’s disability as “something bad” to be “overcome,” for example, minimizes their experience and puts the “burden of access” on the student, the professors explain. It creates a “hostile environment” in a place that ought to be welcoming, they say. **Here’s their advice** for faculty members on what to say and what not to say when students ask for accommodations.

### **Koch Foundation officer, a critic of Title IX guidance, will join Education Department.**

Adam Kissel, who has criticized federal policy on campus sexual assault, was tapped to serve as deputy assistant secretary for higher-education programs, *The Chronicle*’s Sarah Brown **reports**.

### **Why are schools in progressive college towns beset by racial inequality?**

An **article** from *The Atlantic*’s CityLab suggests that universities might be at fault.

### **Northern Illinois U. used adjunct-hiring policies to give consultants sweetheart deals.**

According to an investigation by the state inspector general’s office, university administrators used hiring policies designed for part-time instructors to skirt competitive-bidding rules and award more than \$1 million in work to five consultants over two years, Peter Schmidt **reports** in *The Chronicle*’.

### **The internet has changed how we network.**

So says an **article** in the *Harvard Business Review*. The hardest part of finding a new job used to be learning about it in the first place; but today it’s standing out from the crowd, the article suggests. That means “workplace ties” now carry more weight than “weak ties” like “the second cousin you ran into at a wedding” or the neighbor you saw at the supermarket, it explains.

### **Elsewhere online ...**

### **Why we need to start seeing the classical world in color.**

Marble statues from in the ancient Western world were painted — often in gold, red, green, black, white, and brown, among other colors — yet museums and art-history books usually display classical white marble sculptures stripped of their color, Sarah E. Bond, assistant professor of classics at the University of Iowa, says in an **essay** on Hyperallergic, an online forum on art and culture. That reinforces the “false construction of Western civilization as white,” she writes.

### **Questions, comments?**

Have a suggestion for the newsletter or a tip or story idea to share? Send it to me at [gabriela.montell@chronicle.com](mailto:gabriela.montell@chronicle.com) or [@GabrielaMontell](https://twitter.com/GabrielaMontell).

