Campus Ethnic Diversity Methodology

Students at schools that place high on these lists are most likely to encounter undergraduates from different racial or ethnic groups.

By Robert Morse Sept. 8, 2015 | 9:44 p.m. EDT + More

College-bound students who believe that studying with people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds is important will want to consider campus ethnic diversity when choosing a school.

To identify colleges where students are most likely to encounter undergraduates from racial or ethnic groups different from their own, U.S. News factors in the total proportion of minority students – leaving out international students – and the overall mix of groups. Our index measures the probability that any two people chosen at random from a given school are of different races or ethnic groups.

International students are not counted because colleges do not report each student's ethnicity separately; they only report that those students are not from the U.S. The enrollment and ethnicity data are drawn from each institution's fall 2014 total undergraduate degree-seeking student body – full and part time – as reported to U.S. News.

The ethnic categories we use in our calculations are non-Hispanic African-American; Hispanic; American Indian; Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian; Asian; non-Hispanic white; and multiracial (two or more races). Students who did not identify themselves as members of any of the above demographic groups were classified by U.S. News as whites who are non-Hispanic for the purpose of this calculation.

Our formula produces a diversity index that ranges from 0 to 1. The closer a school's diversity index number is to 1, the more diverse the student population. In other words, the closer the number is to 1, the more likely it is for students to run into others from a different ethnic group. Conversely, the farther away from 1 a school's diversity index is, the more likely it is that any student that another student meets will be of the same ethnic group.

Schools whose enrollment is made of up of mostly one ethnic group will not score highly using this ethnic diversity index measure because students are highly unlikely to encounter others from different ethnic backgrounds. For example, historically black colleges tend to score very low on this measure since their student bodies are made up of predominantly one ethnic group.

The basis for this methodology was created by Philip Meyer and Shawn McIntosh and was referenced in the article "The USA Today Index of Ethnic Diversity," published in spring 1992 in the International Journal of Public Opinion Research.

IV-11