Students Underrepresented in Psychology Graduate Programs

The undergraduate student body in the U.S. continues to grow increasingly diverse. In 2013, the National Center for Educational Statistics reported that 53% of undergraduate students in the U.S. were White, 19.6% Hispanic, 13.1% Black, 6.5% Asian. Between 2000 and 2017, Hispanic student enrollment more than doubled and Black student undergraduate enrollment increased by roughly 147%. These encouraging statistics are on par with the enrollment trends in the undergraduate psychology major at the University of Maryland, which very closely matches the national trend. However, despite the fact that diverse students are choosing psychology as an undergraduate major, a striking trend of underrepresentation of diverse students continues to exist at the level of graduate studies in psychology. This disparity is evidenced by the National Science Foundation’s 2017 report which stated that Black and Latina/o students represented only 5.8% and 7.3% of doctoral degree recipients in psychology, respectively.

The continued lack of racial and cultural diversity among doctoral-level psychologists poses a potentially serious threat to the field of psychology. Doctoral degrees afford access to academic positions, the ability to produce knowledge through research, and entry to leadership positions that influence and shape the field. As the American population quickly continues to become increasingly diverse, the racial and cultural homogeneity among psychologists limits the field’s ability to evolve in the ways necessary to competently serve the needs of the majority of Americans. Moreover, many individuals who need psychological services may not have access to interventions from psychologists who serve their communities well (Bersoff, 2013).

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