

WHY SOCIAL SCIENCE ?

Because Social Science Helps Us Enhance Diversity in the Interest of Positive Societal Outcomes

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As demographics of the American population shift and global interconnectedness expands, it has become increasingly important for public policymakers, and others making consequential decisions in society, to understand the impact of diversity and inclusion. Social scientists have empirically demonstrated that diversity supports positive societal outcomes—from productive workplaces to effective educational institutions and a strong scientific enterprise.

Social science research not only helps us to understand that there is value to diversity and inclusion, but also how we can enhance diversity and inclusion. An extensive sociological literature on mentoring, for example, demonstrates empirically that the most effective interventions for under-represented racial/ethnic minority scholars are based on a combination of instrumental and psycho-social mentoring. The first type focuses on giving scholarly career advice and resources, and the second focuses on fostering emotional support and well-being. Studies also indicate that the mentoring process facilitates the growth of social networks, which are strong predictors of career success and satisfaction. Mentoring happens effectively one-on-one, but diversity and inclusion are further strengthened with communal mentoring using these networks.

Several types of organizations and institutions are well-positioned to respond to this knowledge, and many disciplinary societies have been leaders in this regard. The American Sociological Association (ASA), for example, started its Minority Fellowship Program (MFP) 44 years ago and has since then had more than 500 Fellows. This program was originally developed to address the severe under-representation of faculty of color at a time when campuses were becoming more diverse. Over time, an emphasis has been placed not only on supporting doctoral students to completion of the Ph.D., but also on creating networks that help support sociologists of color throughout their careers. This evolution has been a direct response to the research evidence demonstrating the importance of social networks. This fellowship program has created a community of hundreds that has developed relationships within and across annual cohorts spanning more than four decades. The program has significantly increased diversity and inclusion in the discipline of sociology, which

includes representation of scholars and teachers of color on campuses and in disciplinary association leadership as well as more diverse perspectives in disciplinary scholarship.

While MFP and other programs at ASA and across disciplines have been successful in making the scientific enterprise more diverse and inclusive, there is certainly more that can be done. As such, we continue to study this issue. ASA, for example, is currently working on a major research initiative to study the factors that influence Ph.D. career trajectories of under-represented racial/ethnic minority faculty in both sociology and economics. This project is a multi-method examination of not just where these faculty members are currently employed and how productive they have been, but also how they perceive support and resources from colleagues both within and outside of their own departments.

Why Social Science? Because it helps us understand the importance of diversity and inclusion. And it helps us understand how to enhance diversity and inclusion.



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