According to *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education*, “the work done on the grounds of colleges and universities has a big impact on society, from medical breakthroughs to mass adoption of social change.” Those social changes can range from eliminating the wage gap and reducing discrimination to making the U.S. more competitive in the world market.\(^{10}\) Experiencing learning in more culturally diverse settings also better prepares students for a globalized workplace.\(^{17}\)

However, many schools still struggle with increasing diversity on their campuses. Despite wide-scale efforts to improve ethnic diversity, African Americans and Hispanics are more underrepresented at top colleges than they were 35 years ago.\(^{1}\) Schools looking to create more racially diverse classes must recognize that not only do these students have lower high school graduation rates than white students, they also pursue higher education at lower rates.\(^{16}\) Six-year college completion rates for African American and Hispanic students are lower than those for whites and Asians, presenting yet another challenge in maintaining diverse campuses.\(^{4}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SHARE</th>
<th>HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES 2014-2015 (^{16})</th>
<th>COLLEGE ENROLLMENT RATES OF 18-24 YEAR-OLDS FOR 2016 (^{14})</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/ Pacific Islander</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaskan Native</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>19%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Diversifying institutions that were never designed to be accessible to everyone is hard work. So, too, is thinking and acting systemically. Many of the norms and practices people encounter in day-to-day organizational life are raced and gendered and heteronormative in ways that are beyond individuals’ awareness.”

Frank D. Golom
Assistant Professor of Applied Psychology at Loyola University Maryland
For many colleges and universities, the diversity discussion extends beyond race and ethnicity to encompass socioeconomic background, gender identity, sexual preference and more. Developing an environment where members of each group feel welcomed and valued in the community requires focused efforts.

One component in creating campuses that better reflect the composition of society as a whole is a well-planned strategy to recruit and retain students across a variety of backgrounds. A number of schools have seen remarkable growth in diversity on campus by changing their admissions criteria, according to Emilie Cushman, CEO and founder of Kira Talent. “This needs to come from a bigger, school-wide commitment to diversity. Just one person pushing this forward won’t be enough,” she said. Cushman pointed to specific policy changes, such as Harvard and Northwestern Law expanding to allow GRE test scores from applicants as well as the LSAT or DePaul University’s switch to evaluating noncognitive traits through essay questions, as examples of changes that can improve diversity.

In the last fifty years, campuses have become less white and less male: the percentage of Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander and African American students has been growing steadily, though African American and Hispanic students remain underrepresented. Female students now outnumber males, and the percentage of first-generation college students has dropped from 40% at the start of the 1970s to less than 20% at the end of 2016. International students account for about 5% of U.S. higher education enrollment now, rising from 110,000 in 1967 to 1.18 million in 2017. As you rethink your recruiting practices to serve an increasingly diverse society, keep in mind the following eight tips to build a better, more diverse class.
WHAT DOES DIVERSITY LOOK LIKE FOR YOUR INSTITUTION?

What is the current composition of your student body? What about the faculty, staff and administration? What perspectives are missing? Why is it important to you to attract students from a particular group? Recent court decisions on how colleges can use race in admissions and acceptance clearly show that diversity initiatives must somehow align with the school’s overall mission. Linking your recruiting practices and diversity goals to your mission will help you demonstrate that diversity is a part of your organization’s overall culture — not an afterthought.

TYPES OF DIVERSITY

- Socioeconomic
- Academic discipline
- Geographic
- Racial/ethnic
- Physical disability status
- Religious
- Gender
- LGBTQ+
Focus on sustainable growth in diversity that aligns with your mission. If you’re a small institution that primarily attracts students from the local area, it’s likely that the composition of your student body reflects that community. If not, recruiting students from backgrounds that let you more accurately mirror the region from which you draw is a good place to start.

Consider whether certain populations of students will require additional campus resources or support services. Before focusing recruiting efforts on a specific group, ensure you can effectively meet their needs. For example, if you have limited housing on campus, before focusing on recruiting international students, consider whether you will give them priority on-campus housing or assign a resource to help international students find places to live while attending your school.

Pay attention to trends — both institutional and broader — in setting your diversity goals. Be prepared to pivot in response to changes that may impact your ability to attract students from a particular group. As a case in point, some schools that attract international students from countries included in recent travel bans did so by broadening their geographic focus in recruiting efforts to ensure they could maintain a certain number of international students.

Many students from traditionally underserved populations need additional financial aid to afford college. One study reported the percentage of students with zero expected family contribution (EFC) — an indicator of high financial need — as 47% for Hispanic students, 60% for African American students and 37% for Asian students, while only 29% of white students have zero EFC. The same study found more than 80% of Hispanic, African American and Asian students have a gap between their financial need and grants and scholarships, compared with 71% for white undergraduate students.

To increase diversity, schools must be willing to adjust their financial aid awards as well as their admissions practices. Even schools that cannot substantially increase their own financial aid offerings for minority students can waive application fees and campus visit requirements, provide information...
about relevant scholarships and grants to assist these students in financing their degrees and find other ways to reduce costs.

Many first-generation students and students from low-income backgrounds are still not applying for post-secondary education, Cushman explained. “This might be because students do not have the support at home or in their schools to apply, or the money for application fees and campus visits, or the time it takes to get a degree because they need to start working sooner to support their families,” she said.

### EXPECTED FAMILY CONTRIBUTION (EFC)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hispanic students</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gap between financial needs, grants &amp; scholarships</td>
<td>80%</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>African American students</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>47%</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Asian students</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>37%</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White students</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29%</td>
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### LEVERAGE THE BENEFITS OFFERED BY PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

Organizations like the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), the American Psychological Association (APA) or the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) offer many benefits to members, including Centralized Application Services (CASs™). Participating in a CAS can extend your reach and connect you to a broader pool of applicants who have already identified an area of study.

Joining the APA’s PSYCAS™ allowed the University of La Verne to increase their number of applicants from out of state by 21%, said Program Chair Jerry Kernes. “As an APA-accredited program, we have to show deliberate work towards diversifying our applicant pool. It’s not good enough just to say we have a diverse student body. We have to show that we’re working to attract applicants with unique perspectives,” he said. The CAS for graduate psychology programs had the added benefit of improving access to data about applicants, such as gender, geographic area and other diversity factors, allowing the program to make more strategic enrollment and recruiting decisions.
Our data on recruiting suggest that many colleges and universities systematically focus off-campus recruiting visits on affluent, white communities. These data suggest that colleges aren’t doing everything they can to recruit diverse students… The question is whether they are ignoring poor communities and communities of color that have large numbers of high-achieving students. Our limited data on high school-level academic achievement (number that pass state assessments) suggests they are.”

Ozan Jaquette
Assistant Professor of Education at the University of California, Los Angeles

Recruiting students from less-represented countries can provide an opportunity for schools working to expand diversity. With the majority of international students coming from China, India, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Canada, Vietnam and Taiwan, regions such as Latin America, Europe and parts of the Middle East hold students willing to study in the U.S. with little understanding of how to apply. Providing a checklist or roadmap walking these students through the application process can make it easier for them to apply — and help them feel like your school understands their needs.

When recruiting closer to home, a recent study determined that many schools appear to prioritize wealthy high schools, with many visiting high schools where the average family income is in excess of $100,000, while skipping nearby high schools where average family income is around $60,000 to $70,000. The study suggests that recruiting visits favor those who attend high schools where family income is high, and these high schools are likely to include more white students than the population as a whole. Colleges are more likely to skip recruiting visits to schools where white students are in the minority, with many visiting a disproportionate number of private high schools.

Students from rural school districts offer another underserved population from which colleges can attract a more diverse applicant pool. A recent study by the National Student Clearinghouse found that nationwide, 59% of rural high school grads go on to college the following fall semester, compared to 62% of urban and 67% of suburban graduates.

62% of urban graduates and 67% of suburban grads. More than a quarter of the students enrolled in rural high schools are students of color. Developing pipeline programs, where students from a particular high school or district visit a college campus for mentoring, workshops or special programs, can introduce potential applicants to a college.
More than seven million students in the United States are enrolled in rural school districts — about 15% of all public school students. Almost half of those rural students hover near or below the poverty line, and not all of them are white. More than 25% are children of color, according to a report by the Rural School and Community Trust.³

In addition to rural high schools, admissions staff may focus outreach on high schools with no counselors. School counselors play an important role in increasing college enrollment rates, yet close to 1.6 million high school students attend schools with law enforcement officers, but no guidance counselors — and students of color have less access to counselors focused on preparing students to enroll in college.²² Establishing partnerships with high schools that lack guidance counselors can support diversity recruiting efforts.
In Fall 2017, more than 150 National Association for College Admissions Counseling (NACAC) member schools offered test waivers and deadline extensions to international students impacted by natural disasters and test cancellations. Schools acknowledged that requiring SAT or ACT scores for international students added another hurdle to an already complex application process. Many institutions opted to forgo this requirement rather than risk a reduction in the number of international student applications.

Eliminating test scores may increase diversity from other types of applicants as well. In an interview with The Chronicle of Higher Education Joanne Berger-Sweeney, president of Trinity College, explained, "If you look at a lot of data, there's a suggestion that SAT and ACT scores correlate very highly with socioeconomic level and with a non-diverse population, in particular. So as we remove barriers like test scores, we believe that we will allow a lot of smart kids who might not be as well prepared for SATs to come to the college."6

Cushman pointed out that prospective students who need to work 60+ hours a week to make ends meet are going to have a more difficult time making the time required to study for an exam like the GMAT, GRE or MCAT than a student who can take time off to study or afford an expensive test prep or admissions consultant. Policies such as legacy admissions and favoring students who have demonstrated interest by visiting campus can also unfairly work against certain students. "Students are getting 'bonus points' in their applications at many schools for having parents that attended the institution or for having completed a campus visit. Both of these policies are disadvantaging a specific subset of students," said Cushman.

Focusing on holistic application review is another way colleges can foster more diverse admissions policies. The first thing that comes to mind may be art schools that require auditions or portfolios to help evaluators assess whether a student may be a good fit, but there are many other ways to expand the review process to build a broader picture of each applicant.

Robert Ruiz, Liaison’s vice president of strategic enrollment, explored different methods of holistic application review during his 25 years in admissions and enrollment management. Most recently he served 10 years as the...
Director of Admissions at the University of Michigan Medical School, where he used an application review model that considered candidates’ experiences and attributes as well as academic metrics.

“The Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) has guidelines for evaluating applicants that combine a broad set of criteria to consider how each student may contribute value as a medical student and a physician. Many studies have identified traits such as compassion, honesty and humility as crucial for physicians, and you simply can’t assess whether an applicant possesses those characteristics by looking at test scores and transcripts,” Ruiz said.

**ENSURE CONSISTENCY IN THE PROCESS**

Holistic admissions solution provider Kira Talent has identified common inconsistencies in application review that can impact outcomes. Providing clear guidelines on how to assess prospective students is a crucial — and often overlooked — part of the process. For example, without a rubric defining how a student may exhibit strong leadership, one reviewer may use different criteria than another.

The same number of reviewers should evaluate each applicant. If one applicant is interviewed by four reviewers, while another is reviewed by just one, the second candidate may be at a distinct disadvantage — especially if bias comes into play. In situation one, there will be discussion and commentary from the group of four, while in the second scenario, only one reviewer’s opinion determines the applicant’s fate.12

Cushman said the team at Kira encourages admissions teams to have a minimum of two sets of eyes on each applicant. “We ask schools to introduce more reviewers to help reduce the likelihood that any personal biases have a significant impact on an admissions decision.”

The method of review matters as well. A student who comes in for a half hour face-to-face interview may be seen more favorably than one who conducts a phone interview with a poor connection. If one student is given 15 minutes while another is given 30 minutes for an interview, that may yield an unfair advantage if the inconsistency isn’t factored into the students’ evaluations.
Provide bias training to the faculty and admissions professionals who evaluate applications. This includes self-reflection exercises designed to reveal each evaluator’s inherent biases and frames of reference. In addition to biases centered around race, gender, appearance and socioeconomic factors, a number of cognitive and behavioral biases can also influence how a reviewer regards an applicant. Support your current reviewers with tools, resources and training that helps them make better decisions.

At a minimum, Kira staff recommend taking the following steps to lessen the impact of groupthink:

- **Conduct independent reviews** — have committee members formulate and document their own opinions prior to discussion.
- **Gate feedback** until all reviewers have submitted written feedback and recommendations to limit opportunities for other committee members to influence a decision.
- **Create rubrics** to calculate numeric averages.
- **Structure your admissions discussions** to avoid opening up a free-for-all conversation where the loudest voice in the room wins.

“When reviewers assess an applicant in Kira, they all evaluate on a consistent rubric and cannot see the reviews of any of their peers beforehand to prevent groupthink bias,” Cushman said. “We’ve also introduced reviewer analytics so that teams can see if, among their small team or their dozens of alumni reviewers, anyone’s evaluations are trending particularly high or low. Admissions directors can use this data to help identify where discussion and training are needed.”

Tools like competency-based evaluations, timed video assessments and software that permits each reviewer to provide feedback in privacy can make the evaluation process fast, efficient and fair.
Beyond ensuring consistency in the process and educating reviewers about potential biases, rethink review committees to include a broader perspective. Consider models that let you engage people outside of your institution to help you identify the best-fit students. For example, in evaluating prospective physicians, wouldn't feedback from nurses, med techs, PAs and actual patients give you a more complete picture? Or having applicants for school counseling programs undergo review by classroom teachers, school administrators and parents—the people who will actually work with your graduates?

Traditionally in medical schools, candidates have faced one-on-one interviews. In 2002, staff at McMaster University in Canada developed the multiple-mini interview, called the MMI, to better assess non-cognitive skills, such as interpersonal skills and ethics. The MMI typically consists of 6 to 10 short interviews that revolve around a specific scenario.

According to the AAMC, "Schools using the MMI format believe it produces a more reliable assessment of a candidate and limits interview biases due to the number of interactions. Because students interact with multiple interviewers in multiple assessments over the course of the MMI, opinions of a single interviewer are not over-emphasized. The MMI allows applicants multiple opportunities to showcase their skills throughout the interview, unlike the traditional one-on-one interview." ²

As of January 2018, at least 40 medical schools have adopted to MMI or a hybrid variation.²¹

Ruiz saw using a variant of the MMI at University of Michigan Medical School as a way to increase diversity among reviewers. "As admission director, it was incumbent on me to be more inclusive not only in the students we were seeking but in the individuals who were doing this review. To expand and diversify the group of candidates, but not diversify and expand the group of reviewers, is unlikely to yield any positive outcomes. Transitioning to a hybrid model of the MMI allowed us to expand the group of individuals participating in the assessment process while leveling the
playing field, being fairer to those students seeking admission,” said Ruiz. “We were able to successfully create multiple instances for the student to demonstrate his or her talents, competencies and capabilities, as compared to the traditional one, two or three person-on-person interviews. As we know relative to research, the more instances you can create, the more likely you are to get better data and find best-fit students,” Ruiz added. “We were in a position to make more thoughtful, deeper decisions.”

**HOW LIAISON CAN HELP**

Developing a diverse student body takes time and effort, and it starts with changing admissions and recruiting policies and practices. Attracting students from a wider range of backgrounds will allow your university to develop classes that better reflect the world we live in. When we eliminate bias and develop more inclusive admissions and review processes, we’re one step closer to building a better class.

At Liaison, we are dedicated to helping our partners streamline their processes and introduce a holistic approach to application review. To this end, we’ve partnered with over 40 professional associations to launch CASs that bring admissions offices an improved way to recruit, enroll and admit best-fit students while saving money and better allocating staff resources each admissions cycle.

Each CAS offers a single application portal, which benefits applicants by:

- **Streamlining the process** for researching and applying to multiple programs of interest.
- **Offering a modern application** experience that guides them through the application process.
- **Providing 24/7 access** to real-time application status updates.

Our CASs add participating schools and programs to a global education marketplace, benefiting admissions offices by:

- **Driving awareness of programs** through a streamlined application process and communication tools that enable targeted, personalized communications to prospective applicants.
• **Decreasing time to decision** by providing a processing team to scan transcripts and package application components as an extension of admissions staff.

• **Providing insight into enrollment trends and performance** on campus through robust analytics and reporting tools.

**Our CASs benefit educational disciplines as a whole by:**

• **Collecting and delivering consistent, actionable data** about global, discipline-wide enrollment and recruitment trends.

• **Facilitating enrollment projections** to help guide creation of data-driven recruitment strategies.

• **Creating an opportunity to share best practices** for building a better class, and ultimately a better workforce.

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Learn more about joining our CAS community at liaisonedu.com.

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**ABOUT LIAISON**

For more than two decades, Liaison has streamlined the process by which higher education institutions manage their application processes and market their programs to prospective students. More than 31,000 programs on over 1,000 campuses nationwide reach prospective students, minimize administrative tasks and create exceptional experiences for applicants across the full enrollment cycle — from first interest to first day on campus — through our admissions management and enrollment marketing solutions. Across our Centralized Application Services (CASs™), we process over 2,500,000 applications per year.
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