



Society of Indian Psychologists

Pamela Deters, President
Jacqueline Gray, President Elect
Mark Daniels, Past President
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Patricia Alexander, Treasurer

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March 3, 2011

Charlotte Kuh, Ph.D.
Deputy Executive Director
Policy and Global Affairs Division and
Director, Assessment of Research Doctorate Programs
The National Academies
500 5th St. NW, Rm. 557
Washington, D.C. 20001

Dear Dr. Kuh:

We are writing in support of the Asian American Psychological Association. We agree that the underrepresentation of minority groups in doctoral programs is a serious policy problem. There are not easy solutions to fully address the needs of all minority groups. We appreciate the NRC's efforts to address minority representation.

The current approach makes the erroneous assumption that all scholarly disciplines are the same in their representation of minorities and in their diversity. A field-specific consideration of minority representation and diversity would be much more useful than treating all fields as if the representation is constant across them. Indeed, generalizing the overrepresentation of Asian Americans in some fields to all fields of doctoral study masks the fact that Asian Americans are not overrepresented in all fields. One of these fields is psychology, a relatively large area of doctoral study across universities. If Asian Americans are excluded from diversity counts for accreditation purposes and from recruitment goals in psychology, this could have unintended consequences. Excluding Asian Americans as minorities from the NRC rankings also could have a broader deleterious effect on other fields in which Asian Americans are underrepresented. If the NRC truly believes that the underrepresentation of minority groups in doctoral programs is a serious policy problem, we ask that you consider the policy and social implications of not carefully examining the complexities of underrepresentation, diversity, minority status, discrimination, and the potential for making Asian Americans and others invisible, because that is what the current approach does.

While relative representation should be a consideration in solving a serious policy problem, it should not be the sole consideration in determining minority status. As we have explained before, even in fields in which Asian Americans are apparently overrepresented, their cultural backgrounds and experiences of discrimination are different than those of European Americans, as well as other cultural groups. Perceived cultural differences often lead to



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discrimination and exclusion of Asian Americans and others in academic settings, such as leadership opportunities. Moreover, the psychology literature shows very clearly that discrimination has deleterious health and mental health effects regardless of how well a group is represented. An exclusive focus on the academic achievements of Asian Americans may overlook their other needs as a minority group.

We encourage the NRC to consider field-specific minority representation and diversity, and to continue to monitor its definitions of diversity and the effects of such definitions across cultural groups and institutions.

Sincerely,

Pamela B. Deters, Ph.D.
President, Society of Indian Psychologists