Merit and Diversity for Better or Worse

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ENGLN 1121: College Writing and Critical Reading

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March 9th, 2025

Can companies and universities truly balance diversity and merit? The debate over diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) versus merit (MEI), excellence, and intelligence (MEI) in both professional and academic settings continue to spark a meaningful and well overdue discussion with a variety of opinions and experiences. In "Diversity vs. Merit: You Agree More Than You Think," Callum Borcher's (2025) dives into the complexities of this debate in the workplace. Opinions viewing merit (MEI) as a "racist dog whistle" to considering diversity (DEI) as "sidelining" white men. Also highlighting polarized views and room for potential for common ground. Also, the article "Ending Affirmative Action Harms Diversity Without Improving Academic Merit" by Jinsook Lee (2024) examines the impact of ending affirmative action on diversity and academic merit in college admissions.

I agree with the authors that the debate between diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and merit, excellence, and intelligence (MEI) is not as simple as it seems. By having open conversation and understanding, institutions can aim for a balanced approach that addresses the challenges of maintaining both diversity and merit. This essay takes a closer look at the debates surrounding issues, how policy change affects diversity and merit, and my personal perspective as a future business professional. I'll discus the balance between opportunity and fairness in the professional and academic settings.

Many of these topics hold significant importance to me due to my academic choice major in Human Resource Management. As a future professional in the field, I will be at the forefront of efforts to create balance and fairness in the workplace. My role will involve reviewing applicants, and I aim to ensure that no applicant if left wondering why they were or were not selected for a position. It is crucial to me that individuals do not feel like a mere "diversity hire" or believe they were denied an opportunity due to an oversaturation of employees with similar

backgrounds. For example, the assistant city manager in Texas who shared his experience of applying for over 200 jobs with few interviews (Borchers, 2025). He was one of four finalists for a city-manager position in Kansas but suspected that the process was determined to end with a woman or person of color getting the nod. However, upon following up, he discovered that the job went to a fellow white man who was clearly the most qualified candidate. Manager said, "Proof that sometimes when you think the narrative is one thing, it might not be so." This story points out the importance of transparency, understanding and trusting in the hiring process, ensuring that all applicants feel fairly considered and that merit remains a central idea. I agree that trust in process is essential but it can be challenging for many to fully believe in it given its history of unfairness. Ideally hiring decision should be made without discrimination or bias ensuring equal opportunity for all candidates. Today, various laws exist to prevent nepotism and favoritism reinforcing the principle that hiring should be based on qualifications rather than personal connections. These legal safeguards help promote transparency and fairness fostering a more at equitable workplace

In addition, today's hiring and college admissions processes leverage advanced technology tools, such as applicant tracking systems and AI-powered solutions. While these innovations streamline tasks for those managing these processes, it is crucial to monitor these algorithms closely. Without proper oversight, these systems can introduce biases and may not accurately reflect candidates' skills and experiences. But what if we removed the race data from these algorithms?

Lee et al. (2024) writes, "We find that any given policy has a high degree of arbitrariness (i.e. at most 9% of applicants are consistently ranked in the top 20%), and that removing race data from the ranking algorithm increases arbitrariness in outcomes for most applicants."

meaning that the consistency and reliability of the ranking algorithms are significantly compromised. This increased impulsiveness suggests that without race data, the algorithms may fail to accurately assess the qualifications and potential of candidates, leading to unpredictable and inconsistent outcomes. Consequently, this can result in unfair advantages for some applicants and disadvantages for others, ultimately worsening the existing inequalities in the admissions process.

I believe that discussions on diversity equity and inclusion and merit excellence and intelligence would be significantly less heated discussion if we took the time to thoughtfully consider our perspectives and the tone we use while being mindful of the impact on all individuals involved negative conversation surrounding these topics can influence personal views and lead to premature conclusions about DEI's efforts. For example, Francis Driscoll, a 29-year-old recruiter turned oyster farmer, suggests that DEI efforts aim to push white men out of the workforce. He explains that a manager told him the company needed to hire "fewer Brads and Chads," which he interpreted as fewer white men (Borchers, 2025).

Francis's experience points out the misunderstandings that can arise in the DEI verses MEI debate. He acknowledges that the intent behind DEI efforts may be to address past wrongs, but sometimes it leads to perceived discrimination. This highlights the need for better communication and understanding of the true goals of DEI.

In conclusion, the DEI vs. MEI debate is complex, with polarized views and significant implications for both academic and professional settings. Borchers' (2025) article and the study

by Lee et al. (2024) underline the importance of embracing open dialogue and understanding to navigate this difficult issue. Jinsook Lee (2024) writes, "The impact of excluding race data from applicant ranking algorithms" in college admissions highlights the broader problems of policy changes on diversity and merit. By realizing the true goals of DEI and addressing misunderstandings constructively, institutions can work towards a balanced approach that upholds both diversity and merit. Ultimately, the key to resolving this debate lies in seeking common ground and promoting constructive conversations that bond the divide.

Many of these topics and conversations surrounding diversity equity and inclusion are what inspired my academic pursuit of human resource management initially I believed that being a person of color totally equipped me to promote equality in the workplace. I thought I was exempt from discriminating against others since I belong to a group historically affected by systematic racism however I have come to realize that it's not the case to affectively promote equality and fairness I must do more than just accompany a hiring position as a person of color. It is essentially that I continuously educate myself and ensure that the systems I implement do not create biases

Balancing Diversity and Merit may seem like a "rock in a hard place". But there is always room for improvement. By taking the time to thoughtfully consider our choices so that everyone has a fair chance to succeed.

References

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https://doi.org/10.1145/3689904.3694706